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# Response to Japanese College EFL Learners' Difficulties in SLA

Toshihiko KOBAYASHI

The purpose of this paper is three-fold: one, to investigate and identify the difficulties faced by Japanese college students, two, to investigate and identify their questions raised in the course of studying English as a foreign language, and three, to discuss the background behind their problems with learning. Based on the author's own experiences both as an ESL/EFL learner and ESL/EFL instructor, he offers a range of pedagogical suggestions. A total of 273 students at two Japanese colleges, both national and private, were asked to point out their own broad problem areas and particular difficulties in their learning of English. The collected responses were sorted according to skill areas such as speaking, pronunciation, listening, writing, reading and vocabulary. The data suggest that the majority of the students who responded feel less confident in listening and speaking; they also feel that it is difficult to improve indicated skills. The results furthermore indicate that most of the respondents are lacking in a clear idea about how to improve the skills areas they assume to be undeveloped.

**Key Words:** SLA, learning, teaching

## INTRODUCTION

English "education" in Japan has traditionally been identified with English "teaching" and thus teachers have been concerned mostly with "how to teach," rather less with "how to learn." The linguistic

approach to language learning, which pays little attention to the learner's cognitive domains, has directed the attention of teachers almost exclusively to classroom management or what they should do in the classroom. This approach ought to have been revised in the 1960s, and should have led to the collapse of contrastive analysis theoretically supported by structuralism and behaviorist psychology. It seems, however, that the outdated approach still survives among conservative Japanese teachers of English who are easily tempted to correct all the errors students commit as soon as they detect them in an attempt to avert the formation of bad habits. Such an improper feedback to L2 learners' output will inhibit, discourage or even threaten them.

Since, in post-war Japan, English is established as one of the most important school subjects, testing, which is largely used to screen students for the benefit of administration, features as one of the strongest incentives for language learners. At the same time, English has been one of the most important entrance examination subjects and is administered by almost all universities and colleges in Japan. To break this traditional system, however, a notable and even revolutionary challenge was announced in 1996 by Tama University: to drop English from the list of subjects required in its entrance examination. The university president Clark (1996: 29) is candid enough to maintain that the more Japanese students study English for entrance examinations, the less conversational ability they will have. Some critics suspect, though, that the university is merely trying to secure a good number of applicants to cope with the reduced population of 18-year olds in this nation.

After being admitted to college, however, Japanese college students tend to lose their motivation to continue to learn English. Predominantly, they have been instrumentally motivated to seek tem-

porary shelter at college before they are fully accepted into a rapidly changing and even stressful society.

Upon entering college or university, and recognizing the importance of English as a tool for international communication, many students feel that they would like to have a good practical knowledge of English, with more product-oriented oral skills. It would be difficult to encounter a student who wishes not to be a good speaker of English, although he/she is not necessarily ready to make an effort to learn the most widely used international language.

In response to criticism often voiced by the business community as well as the learners themselves, English teaching in Japan is asked to make drastic changes in both educational syllabi and teaching methods. The changes grow more conspicuous, as is evident from the introduction of Oral Communication classes at high school and the increasing number of colleges which are introducing listening comprehension tests as a part of their entrance screening procedures.

In an attempt to grasp the real picture of the situation surrounding the environment in which the Japanese learn English as a foreign language, a notable comprehensive survey was conducted by the Research Group of the English Language Teaching Survey of Japan, Keio University, in 1990. The poll shows that 34.6 percent of the university students surveyed were dissatisfied with their English lessons, while only 16.5 percent were satisfied. When it comes to the objective for their learning English, 60.1 percent of university students want to improve their communication skills. Likewise, a similar poll conducted by a student body at Otaru University of Commerce in 1995, although greatly limited in the size of samples and less statistically reliable, indicates that 69.0 percent of the students would like to be able to speak English.

While these surveys indicate that students' strong demand for English skills is much concerned with the acquisition of communicative skills or conversational English, college English lessons do not always live up to their expectations. Since it seems quite appropriate to conclude that people wish to achieve what they have yet to attain, the fact that the vast majority of students hope to develop their oral skills, speaking and listening, suggests that these are the very areas that create difficulties in learning English.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold: one, to investigate and identify the difficulties faced by Japanese college students, two, to investigate and identify their questions raised in the course of studying English as a foreign language, and three, to discuss the background to the problems they have with learning. Based on the author's own experiences both as an ESL/EFL learner and ESL/EFL instructor, he offers a range of pedagogical suggestions.

## **METHOD**

### **Subjects**

A total of 267 subjects were asked to take part as respondents to a questionnaire during their regular English classes from June through July, 1996. They were Japanese college students attending one national and one private university in Hokkaido, Japan. The subjects were all asked to provide some biographical data — their academic status, age, area of studies and gender. The numbers of students and their average age are presented in Table 1.

Their major fields of studies or prospective majors include architecture, area studies, economics, electronic engineering, English, information science, Japanese literature, law, and management. These variables, however, were not treated as independent variables; they are

merely presented here for the readers' reference.

**TABLE 1** No. of Respondents and Their Average Age

academic status	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	total
male	90	26	28	4	148
female	69	39	9	2	119
total	159	65	37	6	267
age	18.9	19.7	21.6	22.2	20.6

### **Data elicitation**

The subjects were asked to identify their problems or questions related to learning English. To preclude satisfying the researcher's presuppositions or any variables that could affect the subjects' response, the survey sheet included no multiple-choice questions but provided a spacious blank to allow the respondents to write down anything, at any length, in their L1.

### **Analyses**

The problems and questions identified by the subjects were first translated into English and categorized according to the skill areas and their nature. The areas categorized were 1: listening; 2: speaking; 3: pronunciation; 4: reading; 5: writing; 6: vocabulary; 7: grammar; 8: qualification tests; 9: media & schools; 10: studying abroad; 11: school education; and 12: others. Pronunciation was differentiated from speaking in this study since a number of students had pointed out that their problems related to articulation and pronunciation. Each of the eleven rather broad categories was then subdivided into more detailed categories.

It should be noted, however, that a number of responses carrying primarily identical semantic properties with minute superficial differences in their original L1 expressions were collapsed into a single English form. For instance, sentences originally translated as “I don’t understand live English because it is too fast,” “I find foreigner’s English too fast,” “I cannot hear English unless they speak to me slowly,” “I cannot catch up with English because it is spoken too fast,” “English is too fast for me to comprehend,” were all retranslated into a single English sentence “I can’t hear English when it is spoken fast.”

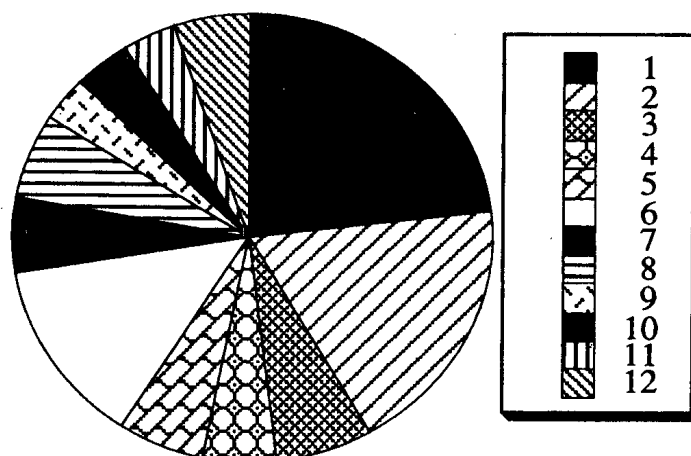
Besides, some of the targets they mentioned or requests they made, such as “I would like to improve my listening comprehension”, were considered to be equivalent to and thereby collapsed into a question form “How can I improve my listening comprehension?”

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

A total of 521 responses were returned from the 267 subjects. The average number of responses given by each student was 1.95. The responses were divided into eleven categories and the number of responses falling into each category and their proportion to the total number of responses are summarized in the Table 2 and presented more visually in Pie graph 1

**TABLE 2 No. of Respondents in Each Category**

Categories	No.	%	Categories	No.	%
1: Listening	120	23.1	7: Grammar	28	5.4
2: Speaking	97	18.6	8: Qualification Tests	32	6.1
3: Pronunciation	33	6.3	9: Media & Schools	18	3.5
4: Reading	27	5.2	10: Studying Abroad	19	3.6
5: Writing	30	5.8	11: School Education	19	3.6
6: Vocabulary	70	13.4	12: Others	28	5.4



Pie Graph 1

What can be immediately learned from the table and the graph is that the oral production skills—listening, speaking and pronunciation—dominate almost the half of replies (48 percent), while vocabulary-related responses also comprise a relatively large proportion.

In this study, the author would like to look at and discuss the most common responses in Categories 1 through 7. All of the responses, including those neither presented nor dealt with here, are given in Appendix I. Each category is subdivided into 1: General Results; 2: Background & Theories; 3: Learning Strategies; 4: Teaching Methods.

## **1: LISTENING**

### **1-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

Listening was the most cited problematic area of skills for the respondents (23.1%). A large number of students pointed out that they cannot hear English well and want to learn how to improve listening comprehension. This result does not at all contradict our expectation; listening is the most difficult foreign language skill.

It should be noted that as many as seven students pointed out that they understand Japanese English but not the English of native



speakers. The author regrets that no one makes reference to non-native speakers' English (other than Japanese) such as that spoken by Chinese and Russians. This suggests that most of their intercultural contacts are confined to classroom English taught either by Japanese or English native speakers.

Some items reflect the respondents' youthfulness. Some students wish to understand movies and songs. Those two forms are popular arts and cannot be separated from their lives; and, most importantly, that is the English which is close to them in their daily lives. It is quite natural for students to wish to understand what is being said in a film directly, not from the subtitles, which often omit original lines and provide inaccurate translations. The same is true of music. A lot of young people listen to English music without understanding or caring what the lyrics are about.

## **1-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

### **1-2-1. Grammar-Translation**

In Japan, classroom teaching centers on grammar-translation with little oral training; if anything else it is only the introduction of audio-visual materials such as audio tapes to accompany the textbook and some routine reading aloud by students following their translations into their L1. Oral training is of secondary importance.

It is often the case that Japanese English teachers in junior and senior high schools and universities and colleges fail to follow the native conventions of English vowels and consonants production, intonation or rhythm, both in reading aloud their textbooks and in unplanned speeches. That is why many Japanese learners of English cannot catch up with fast English speech, although this is common problem for almost all L2 learners in the world.

**FIGURE 1 Listening**

	Translations of responses made by the students	No.
#1	How can I improve my listening comprehension?	29
#2	I cannot hear English well.	21
#3	My listening comprehension does not improve.	19
#4	I cannot hear English when it is spoken fast.	8
#5	I can understand Japanese English but not that of native speakers.	7
#6	What kind of tapes should I listen to?	5
#7	I cannot understand English songs.	2
#8	I'd like to understand American movies without looking at the subtitles.	2
#9	When I listen to English music, I can't distinguish the boundaries of words.	1
#10	How can I make use of music to improve my English?	1
#11	I still do not understand what a foreigner is saying on TV.	1
#12	I find foreigners' English too fast.	1
#13	Whenever I hear any new word, I cannot continue listening.	1
#14	When I listen to someone speaking, I cannot pinpoint the main idea.	1

### **1-2-2: Wrong Order of Presenting Materials**

There are many theories to explain the difficulties of SLA in listening comprehension. Some attribute it to an emphasis on pedagogical structures: whereas L1 acquisition proceeds in order of listening, speaking, reading and writing as seen in children's first acquisition, the pedagogical order of presenting materials in English classes in Japan follows exactly the opposite sequence. This wrong order of presenting teaching materials leads learners to adopt the habit of recognizing new vocabulary items visually first, then audibly. Thus many Japanese learners of English feel uneasy unless they learn the spelling of a new word as soon as they hear it.

### **1-2-3: The Processes of Listening Comprehension**

Listening comprehension involves many more complex processes than are generally thought. General tips or advice often given by

teachers or advanced learners to poor learners of English, such as just keep listening to English news or natural conversation, are far from sufficient. Listening comprehension is viewed as “an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge” (O’Malley, Chamot and Kupper 1989: 418). A more detailed description of the processes involved in listening comprehension was given by Clark and Clark (1977: 49) as follows;

1. The listener takes in raw speech and holds an image of it in short-term memory.
2. An attempt is made to organize what was heard into constituents, identifying their content and function.
3. As constituents are identified, they are used to construct propositions, grouping the propositions together to form a coherent message.
4. Once the listener has identified and reconstructed the propositional meanings, these are held in long-term memory, and the form in which the message was originally received is deleted.

First, many Japanese learners of English have failed already during the initial stage. They fail to recognize a word because they miss some of the sounds that compose the word. There are so many sounds, both vowels and consonants, that do not exist in the Japanese language. Japanese cannot recognize a consonant that is not followed by a vowel. Many English phonemes are just allophones in Japanese. These inter-linguistic differences hinder initial Japanese comprehension of English speech.

Second, for learners to identify the constituents of what they hear, they have to be able to identify the boundary of words: segmentation.

As Richards claims, "Where segmentation is difficult, comprehension is also difficult." (1987: 162) Richards (1987) explains that segmentation requires syntactic knowledge that enables learners to chunk incoming discourse into segments or constituents.

If a learner's need to understand English is confined to the recognition of a single word or morpheme recognition, segmentation seems to play a less important role and the learner should spend most of his/her time on phonological identification tasks or similar mechanical practices. However, we can hardly find such a learner. Most learners of English would like to understand a statement that satisfies their comprehension. Syntactic knowledge is essential if we hope to understand the relationships of words we hear, and so grasp the meaning of the message accurately. Thus, a great number of students who claim that they do not understand English may have insufficient knowledge of grammar as well as failing to recognize single words.

Another major study on the mental processes L2 learners use in listening comprehension was conducted by O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper (1989). They investigated the strategies Hispanic learners of English use in different phases of comprehension, using think-aloud procedures. Their findings indicated that effective L2 learners used both bottom-up and top-down processing strategies, while ineffective listeners became embedded in determining the meaning of individual words. This means that the effective listeners seemed to be listening for larger chunks, shifting their attention to individual words only when there was a breakdown in comprehension, while the ineffective listeners seemed to approach listening on a word-by-word basis. This finding coincides with one of the responses collected in this current study as shown in Figure 1, #13: "Whenever I hear any new word, I cannot continue to listen." Their findings also indicate that while the effec-

tive learners frequently relate the new information to their personal experiences and make critical judgements about the value of the information, the ineffective learners do not make connections between the new information and their own experience.

It seems to me that such differences derive, to a much larger extent than the three researchers expected, from the differences of vocabulary between the two groups. Although many learning strategy theorists urge ineffective learners to imitate what effective counterparts do in learning, teachers should be cautious when they determine what strategies to advise students to follow. The learners' current proficiency must always be considered when determining what strategies teachers should take. The need for strategy training for learners with different levels of proficiency is evident but rarely practiced in college classrooms in Japan.

#### **1-2-4: SLA in Listening Comprehension**

While we understand that Japanese learners fail to comprehend English because of interlinguistic differences between English and Japanese, and that Japanese learners experience difficulty in segmentation, we have to pay attention to the aspect of acquisition processes of listening comprehension. An almost equal number of respondents point out they have difficulties improving their listening comprehension. This means that they have already tried some methods to improve their listening comprehension. They may have taken tips from their English teachers, or advice from books on how to learn English, or other sources available.

Many students find their rate of development unsatisfactory and feel very frustrated. It is not because of their lack of effort, but it could be due to biological or neurolinguistic constraints. Larsen-

Freeman and Long (1991) emphasize maturational constraints. They conclude that among those a number of theories on what affects SLA, age or maturational constraint is the most reliable factor in determining the success of SLA and only children starters seem capable of attaining native-like second language abilities, especially phonological skills.

Some successful L2 speakers, however, have voiced opposition to this view. They claim that they acquired fluency of foreign languages long after many neurologists or psychologists claim to be critical period (Penfield and Roberts 1959; Lenneberg 1967). An example is a personal view held by Clark (1996), who started to learn Japanese, Chinese and Russian in his twenties or thirties. Clark holds a strong belief that anyone can learn any foreign language even after they enter college. He emphasizes the importance of listening over writing or reading, while pointing out that Japanese learners of English cannot learn accurate English pronunciation since they hear their Japanese teachers' faulty pronunciation when they start learning English in their junior high schools. It is true that a lot of Japanese learners of English wish to improve their pronunciation, and this will be discussed later in the section on pronunciation.

### **1-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

#### **1-3-1: Giving Advice to Students**

Japanese learners of English who have received insufficient input of oral English should be aware that they have to double their efforts to improve their listening comprehension. Although this does not appear in Figure 1 (but is shown in Appendix 1), some students asked how to listen to improve their listening comprehension. If you have a student with such a question, what would you say to him/her?

Advice varies from teacher to teacher, while whether you are a native speaker or a Japanese L1 speakers with experience of learning English counts, too. Japanese teachers of English ought to compare the student's problems with their own in the early days, reflecting on what worked or not. They would have an edge over native-speaking counterparts in their degree of empathy because of the identical L1 background and culture as well as the learning experiences which they can share with their students.

On the other hand, native speakers of English, especially those who have never learned a certain foreign language up to the level of their students' English, may have difficulty in providing a proper diagnosis for the student. On the other hand, those Japanese teachers of English who learned English without audiovisual equipment or any of the other modern learning aids available today may also fail to maximize the learner's learning opportunities because of their lack of practical knowledge of how to make use of these systems as a learner.

### **1-3-2. How to Listen to Audiovisual Tapes**

Since the improvement of listening comprehension for adult learners is time-consuming, their success depends more on independent learning activities outside the class. The most easily available resources in the context of EFL is audiovisual tapes. There are so many audio- and videotape materials commercially available that teachers can hardly grasp what learners can do by using tapes. In addition to recommending good tape material, we should also show our students the proper ways to using tapes to maximize their learning effects. The way to listen to tapes for independent learning seems to fall into the following five stages (Kobayashi 1996: 14-15):

### **1) Listening and Reading Aloud**

Look at the transcript and listen to the tape. Repeat after the tape sentence by sentence, or larger or smaller chunks, unit by unit.

### **2) Listening and Repeating**

Listen to the tape without looking at the script. Repeat after the tape in the same manner as the first step. You can skip the first step and start at this stage.

### **3) Listening and Dictation**

Listen to the tape without looking at the script and stop the tape at a certain point to rehearse the part you have just heard. Listen to the same part again and again at least ten times before you take a look at the script to check your recitation.

### **4) Shadowing**

Listen to the tape without looking at the script and try to repeat it immediately after or almost simultaneously with the tape. This is a commonly practiced method to train simultaneous interpreters throughout the world. At first, you can repeat the tape silently, and then as you become used to the practice, aloud. If possible, use a headphone with a microphone into which you can talk and monitor your own speech. You can also do this exercise by simply listening to the tape through a speaker or by listening to TV or radio English broadcasting programs of any kind.

### **5) Overlearning**

After you have used a tape for a certain period, then play it anytime in your room as background music for you to become comfortable with. This will allow you to grow accustomed to English rhythms



and intonation unconsciously.

### **1-3-3: English Conversation Programs**

One of the most popular independent ways to improve listening comprehension is to watch and/or listen to TV and radio English conversation programs such as NHK English Conversation II. This advice is also that most commonly given by Japanese teachers of English to their students. Learners can choose a program to study that accords with their current proficiency. Accompanying texts are commercially available every month and are both inexpensive and well designed. Watching or listening to different levels of program, learners can find their current level of English proficiency and thus can plan their learning according to each program's grading system. They should record programs so as to watch and/or listen to them again and again.

### **1-3-4: Satellite Broadcasting**

Nowadays, residents in Japan have access to a variety of TV shows from abroad through satellite broadcasting. TV news programs such as CNN, ABC and BBC can be watched all day, most easily in the morning. Learners can sit and watch these program whenever they like, or more periodically, say, every morning or once a week. They should record the program so as to watch it again and again, if necessary. They can record problems in either the English or Japanese mode. They can also watch the real-time broadcasting, switching between English and Japanese modes alternatively. NHK programs in the morning hours include English news from Hong Kong and the Phillipines as well as the well-known news stations.

## **1-4: TEACHING METHODS**

### **1-4-1: Japanese vs. English Native Speakers**

The pedagogical deficiency in listening training leads to some linguistic defects found among Japanese college students' English proficiency. The most notable observation is the 3rd response "I can hear and understand what a Japanese speaker of English says but not what a native speaker of English says." It apparently sounds so funny that we will be tempted to conclude that we should stop listening to any Japanese speaker's English; it does nothing but harm to young learners of English.

English teachers, particularly those who teach learners in the early stages, should realize how heavy are the responsibilities they shoulder. If he/she is a native speaker of English, here are some pieces of advice:

#### **1) *Understand interlingual phonology***

You should definitely try understand the Japanese L1 speakers' phonological problems in the process of learning English and adjust the way you speak to them. You are discouraged from talking to them as they talk to their friends. Although overpronunciation or an excessive slow rate of speech is undesirable, you should still try to make your speech comprehensible to your students by articulating every single word clearly enough for nonnative learners to understand without fear or uneasiness. If you speak in your usual manner on the assumption that learners should be exposed to the "natural" flow of speech, you need to change your attitude completely and try to develop empathy with your students.

#### **2) *Avoid idiosyncracies***

If you have some idiosyncracies in your speech, you should be alert

to these and try to avoid them as much as possible, considering the influence your students will receive from you.

### **3) Use proper vocabulary**

You should know the range of your students' vocabulary. Since most Japanese learners of English have not received enough listening instruction and oral production training in school, their vocabulary is passive, and more exactly receptive only in written media. They can read and understand a word, but not necessarily recognize it when it is heard in speech. They cram thousands of words and phrases in preparation for college entrance examinations, large numbers of which they tend to forget after they enter college when they lose the incentive to continue their vocabulary expansion.

Thus, even if you have a chance to take a look at some English reading textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and/or at English passages used for entrance examinations, you should not assume that students possess a vocabulary good enough to understand your formal speech or even casual conversation in class.

If you are a Japanese teacher of English and not confident in your own pronunciation, you could follow these guidelines:

#### **1. Improve your own pronunciation**

Improve your pronunciation to make it a model that may be proper enough to be imitated by your students. One way to do this is to receive formal training, such as having a tutor or by attending an English conversation school simply to improve your pronunciation.

#### **2. A thorough understanding of the English articulation system**

The teacher is always expected to explain something difficult in an

easy way. Even if you can yourself pronounce English words almost natively, you have also to be able to explain to your students how to pronounce them as accurately as you can. A thorough understanding of the articulation systems of English and Japanese is therefore essential.

### **3. Use audiovisual correctly**

You need to know when to use recordings and when to make yourself the model to be imitated by your students. Overdependence on audiovisuals may lead to your students' distrust in your own English proficiency, and above all you will lose empathy with your students.

#### **1-4-2: The Use of Music**

English classes for whatever skills we are teaching should always start in English. For the past several years, the author's English classes always start with music dictation. The author distributes a pack of sheets with English lyrics with some blanks and parenthesized word choices. An example of the sheet is offered in Appendix II. Students fill in the blanks or choose the word as they listen to an English song. The tape is usually played once. The author sometimes asks some students what their answers are so that he can check their comprehension and make necessary modifications on the sheet for the following year. While giving answers, the author often explains how a word sounds to our Japanese ears and give some related vocabulary words. After they have given their answers, the members of the class stand up and sing the song to the tape.

The pedagogical effects expected from this classroom procedure are abundant. First, music will motivate students to learn English since English will then appear to be much closer to their lives. Listen-

ing to and singing songs together in class will make all the students lively, vigorous and spirited even during the first period of the day. The author has had very positive responses to these activities from his students since he started using this technique in an intermediate English reading class of around twenty international ESL students including Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and Thai, when working in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

Students' interest in English will grow since after a year passes they will be able to sing over twenty songs. They can sing any of their favorite songs among the songs used in the class in potential intercultural settings, both personal and formal, or, more likely, they can demonstrate their expertise before their friends. The students may feel like adding more songs to those they can sing and may wish to understand more of the English songs they hear around them. Some of them may try to listen to songs and transcribe them to improve their listening comprehension as well as to have a larger repertoire.

Second, students can receive a systematic explanation about some of the important phonological rules of English such as reduction, unstressed vowels and the almost-unheard consonants at the ends of words. Songs, of course, differ from daily conversations in many phonological respects and are much harder for both ESL and EFL students to catch. Through exposure to more difficult linguistic forms, however, students will be confident and find their listening comprehension easier when they face more common spoken English.

Third, students can learn conversational English phrases and expressions through songs. Although you may say that they will be able to learn bad expressions associated with sex, violence and crime, the instructors can choose music to play in class which is appropriate to their students' level of English in terms of the vocabulary used, rate of

speech, content, etc. The author has a stock of songs sung by The Beatles, The Carpenters, and Simon & Garfunkle. Their songs are clearly-pronounced, not too fast, and, more importantly, contain beautiful lyrics.

## **2: SPEAKING**

### **2-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

The results indicate the strong demand for the ability to speak English. Since pronunciation is treated separately from speaking, speaking (18.6%) is in the second place after listening (23.1%) in a number of responses. When combined with pronunciation (6.3%), however, which is a rather more common categorization and often called oral production, it would account for 24.9 percent, slightly more than listening. Although whether this is statistically significant or not remains unproven, it seems that the learners find oral production more difficult than oral reception, as indicated by #10: "I can hear and understand English but cannot speak it."

### **2-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

#### **2-2-1: Reception and Production**

Many learners of English would like to speak English fluently as well as comprehend spoken English. This shows the popularity of "English conversation," which is often identified with "speaking." Most learners of English in Japan are not likely to distinguish the two terms in a strict sense of the words. The former is not an academic term but is generally used in contrast to classroom English associated with grammar-translation and intensive reading activities; the latter is a linguistic term conventionally used in the division of language skills.

The twelve responses given in the Table 2 contain some intriguing

**FIGURE 2 Speaking**

	Translations of responses made by the students	No.
#1	How can I improve my speaking ability?	22
#2	What should I do to speak English fluently?	8
#3	I cannot speak English well.	8
#4	I have few chances to speak English.	5
#5	I do not know how to express myself in English.	4
#6	I cannot come up with the word to convey my meanings when I speak.	4
#7	I have to think hard before I speak.	3
#8	How can I get my meaning across in English?	3
#9	I cannot communicate with foreigners.	2
#10	I can hear and understand English but cannot speak it.	2
#11	I would like to be able to make basic English conversation.	2
#12	I feel nervous when I talk to a foreigner.	2

elements for EFL teachers.

The seventh answer is a commonly observed step among all foreign language learners. An act of speech or speaking can be divided into a planning and a production session. The planning session refers to a preparatory period during which a speaker encodes a message into the target language. The length of the period varies according to the proficiency of the speaker's TL. The proficient expression of a message in a second language depends on the automatic retrieval of prefabricated phrases and the learner's linguistic creativity. Thus, a good second language speaker needs less time for decoding, while a novice tends to spend a longer time to translate L1 into L2, often with poor forms in terms of structure, word order, collocation, pronunciation, intonation, etc. This, however, should be fully understood by those learners frustrated with their problem. The learners should be encouraged to keep thinking before they start talking, keeping in mind that in the end they will be able to think and talk almost simultaneously.

Many of the learner's problems are themselves not really problems but merely stages of the developmental process every L2 speaker goes through. They have to understand where they are in the SLA and must keep patiently engaging in learning activities which have a sufficient amount of input, output and interaction. The instructor needs to grasp the learner's current state of the target language development and to keep the learners interested in their learning.

The tenth response, although stressed by only two respondents, represents a common phenomenon of SLA: comprehension precedes production. In the L1 acquisition, the order of the four skills acquisition follows this sequence: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the order of the general model of successful Japanese English learners' acquisition, predominantly affected by the classroom instruction and their external environment, reading comes first followed by writing, listening and speaking. We recognize that learners are saying that they can hear but cannot speak; they can read but cannot write. It is also true that written language precedes spoken language, as we may see in the order of the general model of successful Japanese English learners' acquisition: they can read and write but cannot hear or speak English.

Some of the other responses are common even to L1 behavior. Feeling nervous with foreigners is not necessarily peculiar to L2 development. Many of the learners who complain of their psychological inhibition in intercultural communication have the same problem when they speak their native language. Whether this can be counted as a major interference from L1 to L2, the learner needs to review his/her whole life pattern including his/her human relations, occasions for interpersonal communication, etc. It is important for the instructor to let learners know that their L2 learning is pretty much affected by their



total linguistic life and social competence.

**2-2-2: Development in Oral Production**

To clarify the relationships between grammaticality and second language production, the author would like to offer the following figure (Figure 3), which shows how second language learners productive oral skills develop through several stages.

Most L2 learners of English need to follow these developmental stages although many of them are between stages. The novice learner's oral production is hard to understand because of his/her inaccurate structures and unnatural word usage. The intermediate learner says something communicative but makes a lot of grammatical errors and uses unnatural expressions. The advanced learners can make a clear and accurate speech but it may still contain some linguistic traits which are unconventional or violate the native norm. The superior learner or near-native speaker can pass for a native speaker of the target language, satisfying all three linguistic requirements.

**2-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

**2-3-1: Active Involvement in Intercultural Communications**

Students should be encouraged to involve themselves actively in intercultural communication outside the classroom. Unlike the situa-

**FIGURE 3 Development in Oral Production**

linguistic traits	communicative	accurate	natural
Novice	—	—	—
Intermediate	+	—	—
Advanced	+	+	—
Superior	+	+	+

tion encountered by students of ESL, with its abundance of opportunities to use English, Japanese learners of English should try to find a chance to speak and listen to English, native or nonnative, and keep up personal relationships to further international friendship. An occasion to use English in a conversation provides learners with time to practice and increase their knowledge of discourse in conversation: how to start or finish a conversation; how to propose or reject an offer; how to rephrase a previous incomplete statement, etc. They can also refine their linguistic competence in oral production and gain a knack of receiving information in listening by including segmentation for comprehension and recognition of sounds considered to be difficult for Japanese learners of English, such as unstressed vowels and consonants at the ends of words.

## **2-4: TEACHING METHODS**

### **2-4-1: Research Presentation**

Among numerous teaching techniques suggested or practised widely by both ESL and EFL instructors around the world, research presentation is one of the most effective classroom activities that can be easily introduced at any level of classes; it is especially suitable in college English classes where most learners are intellectually mature enough to work independently upon the selection of topic and preparation. In research presentation, individual students or a group of students are given ten to fifteen minutes to present anything they like in English. They can talk about their hometown, hobbies, club activities, or, more seriously, topics such as the AIDS epidemic and world peace, etc. They may use audiovisual aids such as audiotapes, videotapes, CDs, MDs, boards, overhead projectors, realias or whatever is available in the room. Kobayashi(1996) reported on his one-year-long observa-

tion of his own college English classes of research presentations and pointed to several educational effects that can be expected from the introduction of a reaserch presentation into the syllabus:

**1) *The strengthening of research skills and data analysis***

A research presentation consists of three stages: preparation, presentation and questions & answers. Students are expected to make an extensive survey or data collection work prior to their presentation day. They will have to spend time using the library to collect data related to their topic or use computers to get access to Internet home pages to search for relevant documents, after which the must read the collected data and select what they need for their presentations.

**2) *The improving of the reading comprehension of English materials***

Through their reading of the collected data written in English, their chances to practise reading English is guaranteed. The process of reading involves both intensive and extensive reading, depending upon the purpose of data collection. This work can be considered a task given by the instructor as an assignment that will play an important role at the stage of presentation.

**3) *The improving of writing and transaltion skills***

Students may have to translate Japanese materials into English. Those who try to present a topic related to Japan and Japanese culture or some Japanese-specific topics or those who plan to present something personal may have difficulties finding data available in English. Thus, they have to translate any Japanese data to be used for the presentation into English. The task of translation provides a number of learning opportunities for students since they have to use Japanese-

English dictionaries and sometimes they may go to their instructor for help with the translation.

#### **4) *The improving of impromptu oral composition skills***

In the third stage of questions and answers, the presenters have to accept questions from the floor and answer them properly since their answers will be counted toward their grade. In contrast to their prepared and planned speech in presentation, they have to respond to questions and give impromptu answers in English — unplanned English speech. The presenters, assuming that they may receive unexpected questions or comments after their presentation, should spend extra time preparing for such an impromptu performance. They may try to predict questions or comments from the floor and may prepare their answers accordingly. In the process of peer feedback among presenters in the preparation stage, they will have chances to go through question-and-answer interactions that are similar to what will happen after the presentation.

#### **5) *The improving of listening comprehension***

The presenters will also have chances, although these will be rather limited, to improve their listening comprehension through their data search for audiovisual materials such as TV and radio programs or interviews with foreign students or instructors and videotaped or audiotaped documents. Besides, they will have to listen to questions in English from others students or their instructor, which will provide them limited exposure to oral English in class.

#### **6) *The improving of interpersonal communication skills***

Students are expected to make a presentation that is easy for the

audience to understand. To make their presentation comprehensible and persuasive, they have to learn effective interpersonal communication methods: what kind of attitude, posture, facial expressions, gestures, eye-contact, tone of voice and cloths they wear as well as preparing a linguistically comprehensible script of the speech. The success of interpersonal communication seems to depend, to a great extent, upon such extralinguistic elements as body language and its impressions, which is an important social skill required not only in a presentation class but also in the society they live in.

**7) *The deepening of the knowledge about a certain topic***

A research presentation will increase, improve, correct or clarify students' knowledge of a certain topic. During their research or preparation work, they may encounter a new piece of information that could convince them of or strengthen their ideas about the topic. Some may run into material that could drastically alter their previous hypotheses or positions on the topic.

**3: PRONUNCIATION**

**3-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

Although pronunciation is an integral part of speaking, the author would like to discuss it separately since pronunciation constitutes a relatively large proportion of the number of reponses on this issue (6.3%). That more than half of those pointed to speaking as their problem area indicates the difficulty of pronunciation. The interesting point is that four learners, although the number is not so large, mentioned their little progress in improving pronunciation, while no one mentioned his/her little progress in speaking.

## **3-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

### **3-2-1: Articulation**

Pronunciation inevitably involves the muscle development of articulators such as the oral muscles that need to be adjusted to articulate English vowels and consonants that are absent in Japanese. Even if you learn the mechanism of articulation through visual aids and some practice, it takes a long time for anyone to produce an accurate sound automatically. If learners pay a good deal of attention and are able to produce a sound or pronounce a single word, they may produce an almost perfect sound, often indistinct from that of native speakers.' When it comes to a longer unit such as a sentence or paragraph, they are likely to succeed in producing target-like sounds, as the fifth response remarks. This is especially true when learners make an unplanned speech, in which their attention is paid more to deep structure than to surface structure — when fixed on semantics and structure rather than upon individual sounds.

### **3-2-2: Maturation Constraint**

The last response, although made by only one student, ought to attract the attention of instructors. According to Long's maturational constraint theory (1991), the success rate of phonetic development in SLA is largely determined by age. One of his pieces of evidence is that almost all returnees who have spent years in English-speaking nations during their early years have native-like pronunciation and retain it even when they come back and spend time in Japan, while their parents still pronounce English words with strong Japanese accents.

Intonation or supersegmental elements are more difficult for adult learners of English to acquire. Even when an adult learner pays the utmost attention to individual sounds, he/she often fails to produce

native-like intonation. In the case of Japanese learners, they produce flat and monotonous intonation, which is difficult for native speakers of English to understand. In conclusion, an adult learner may be able to acquire the accurate pronunciation of English, he/she has much more difficulty acquiring accurate intonation that sounds natural enough for L1 English speakers to comprehend. It is not always appropriate, however, for EFL instructors to tell this to their students who are trying hard to master native-like pronunciation and intonation.

### **3-2-3: A Bottom-up Approach**

In practising English pronunciation and intonation, we tend to focus on a bottom-up approach. That is, we teach individual sounds first, then go on to larger units such as words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. This traditional approach, however, puts intonation in a secondary place. Research (Jones 1996) shows that a child first notices the intonation patterns of the language he/she hears around, then pays attention to individual sounds. This shows that intonation is more salient to all human beings. Japanese learners of English should learn a top-down approach to the phonetic acquisition of English, paying attention to intonation rather than to individual sounds.

## **3-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

### **3-3-1: Shadowing for Refining Pronunciation**

Imitation is the most basic and important factor in acquiring proper pronunciation. Shadowing, as previously mentioned in the section of listening, is one of the most effective methods for helping us to get used to the rhythmic patterns of English as well as enabling us to learn correct pronunciation and intonation contours. The method is widely used to train conference interpreters. In shadowing, learners

listen to a taped monologue and repeat the tape aloud almost simultaneously into a microphone so that they can hear and monitor their own speech.

### **3-3-2: Occasional Self-Monitoring**

L2 learners should occasionally take a close look at their own pronunciation. They should monitor their own pronunciation, before they speak, while they are speaking, or after they have finished speaking.

L2 learners should prepare to articulate carefully during the planning session or before they speak. They may need to stop to think of the accurate description of how to articulate a certain sound. The common description of how to articulate the English /l/, which is said to be difficult for Japanese learners of English, is "Raise the tip of your tongue and rest it at the back of your upper front teeth." This is easy to say but hard to do. Constant remembrance of such a description whenever learners' speech involves the sound might make them obsessive and inhibit them from speaking the target language freely. However, the author believes that this should be done occasionally if the learners are either novices or at the intermediate level.

**FIGURE 4 Pronunciation**

	Translations of responses made by the students	No.
#1	My English pronunciation is bad.	11
#2	How can I improve my pronunciation?	6
#3	My English pronunciation has made little progress.	4
#4	I find English pronunciation difficult.	2
#5	I understand the phonetic alphabet and can use it. But I cannot pronounce English words properly when they appear in a sentence.	1
#6	Is it possible even for me to master perfect pronunciation?	1



While learners are speaking the TL, they should occasionally moderate their rate of speech and closely monitor it immediately after it is uttered or almost simultaneously. This might be recommended even for some advanced learners of English whose speech once in a while produces inappropriate sounds.

After they finish speaking, which should be differentiated from the time spent speaking which includes “immediately after it is uttered,” they can occasionally ask their interlocutor(s) or someone else standing nearby if their utterances have contained any inaccuracies. If their utterance is a monologue such as a speech or an oral presentation, they can taperecord it so that they can check it themselves. The taperecorded speech can be monitored by someone else with better pronunciation such as more advanced learners of English or native speakers of English. The learners can ask such monitors to give them some corrective feedback to help them realize any errors that constantly or frequently appear. For a detailed description of this type of retrospective correction of one’s linguistic forms, see Kobayashi’s empirical study entitled “Can Retrospective Feedback Improve ESL Speech?” (1995)

### **3-4: TEACHING METHODS**

#### **3-4-1: Guidelines and Techniques**

Carruthers (1987: 195-196) suggested the following guidelines for the planning of lessons in pronunciation:

1. Base your lessons on material collected by constant and careful observation of your students’ pronunciation. Remember that you must teach your students to overcome their individual problems. Real data from students will help you to make every lesson meaningful.

2. Correct only one thing at a time. If you try to correct everything at once, students will become discouraged. Students concentrating on one specific problem, in and out of class for a week, will make real progress.
3. The three main points of a pronunciation lesson are imitation, explanation, and drill. You may use yourself, recordings, or other speakers as the model to be imitated. Use diagrams, words and any other resources at hand to explain how sounds are made and contrasted with other sounds. Adults students in particular will find that a clear explanation will help them not only to make a sound, but also to remember how to make it again.
4. Always use real language in the classroom. Many teachers tend to overpronounce and to speak far too slowly with the result that students are seldom exposed to one of the most difficult features of English pronunciation, namely the reduction of unstressed vowels.
5. Move from the known to the unknown, using the students' abilities to help them over their difficulties.

The first guideline puts emphasis on real data from students. In teaching English to Japanese students, enough such data have been already accumulated to indicate the pedagogical emphasis on particular features of English phonology, e.g. specific minimal pairs such as /l/ / r/ and /b//v/. Japanese English teachers could easily compare student's problems with their own phonological problems.

The second is important not only for teaching pronunciation but also for other pedagogical situations where corrective feedback is given by teachers to their students. The smaller the correction to be made by the teacher of a student's L2 output, the more certainly the students concentrates on and is likely to remedy the problem. It is, however, practically impossible to provide such a steady approach to error

correction in regular English classes in Japan in light of the typical class size of over 40 at junior and senior high school levels, and even more at colleges and universities.

What should be particularly noted in the third suggestion is the point it makes about the importance of explanation as a tool for remembering how to make sounds. No one would object to my saying that one of speaking's practical skills concerns the unconscious and automatic movements of oral organs like the tongue and teeth which are necessary in the production of certain sounds. Such an unconscious and automatic utilization of physical activities has generally to be preceded by the conscious explanation at the initial stage of SLA.

The fourth guideline stresses the need for natural input of the target language data in class. Although the passage discourages over-articulation and far slowed-down speech, there still is room to justify such unnatural use of the TL in a way to make the input more comprehensible to the students. Krashen (1985) recommended teachers to input language which contains linguistic items that are slightly beyond the learner's present linguistic competence ( $i+1$ ). It is generally not easy for the instructor to measure the current linguistic competence of each student in class since competence can only be measured through such performance as responses to the teacher's questions and the results of quizzes and examinations.

The fifth is a general principle that can be applied to any human activity of information processing between interlocutors. One of the examples of interpersonal communication observed in class is the interaction between the teacher and individual students. The teacher is always expected to grade the level of his/her questions and comments in an attempt to insure students' comprehension and intake of knowledge.

## **4: READING**

### **4-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

The results indicate that the learners are interested in how to read English quickly rather than how to read it accurately or interestingly. Of the seven categories cited for discussion in this paper, reading attracted the lowest rate of responses (5.2%).

Some of the subjects asked what they should read to improve their reading comprehension. The fifth question seems to focus on one of the learning dilemmas that every ESL/EFL learner will experience. The sixth question is a common instruction that instructors tend to give to their students.

### **4-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

#### **4-2-1: Reading While Translating Into L1**

An assumption that prevails among Japanese learners of English is that they can read English, which is often through translation into their L1. The practical skill of reading in intercultural settings enables the learner to read and gain necessary information in a limited time, reading a label on drugs, say, or a newspaper column. Most Japanese learners of English, well-trained in translating an English sentence into Japanese in order to grasp what is meant in the original sentence, transfer this classroom routine into their actual use, and as a result they identify reading with translation. For many Japanese college students, spending half an hour translating a single page into perfect Japanese is seen as a sufficient skill required for international communication. This assumption is reflected in the results of this survey, as can be seen from the relatively small number of responses regarding reading in comparison to those relating to listening, speaking and pronunciation.

FIGURE 5 Reading

Translations of responses made by the students		No.
#1	How can I read English fast?	4
#2	How can I improve my reading?	3
#3	Which magazines written in English should I read?	2
#4	What is the most effective way to read English papers?	1
#5	When I run into a new word, should I stop to consult a dictionary or just keep on reading?	1
#6	I was once told to think in English while reading English. How is it possible?	1

#### 4-2-2: Reading Fast

The most popular answer in this category concerns how to read English fast. Reading fast or rapid reading became popular in Japan several years ago when self-teaching materials became commercially available in great variety. It is doubtful, however, if all their theories and explanations are applicable to Japanese learners. Apparently some of the materials are commercially exaggerated and merely eye-catching.

When you discuss rapid reading, you need to redefine "reading" in relation to comprehension of the material. Can you still say you have read something with less than 50 percent comprehension? In the EFL classroom, it is often convenient to sort reading into intensive reading and extensive reading, more practically into scanning (to obtain a specific piece of information) and skimming (to obtain the general idea). "Rapid reading" or "speed reading" is likely to be categorized into scanning for extensive reading. What is actually required in real intercultural communication is, however, the integrative skills of those four subdivided skills ready to be utilized on the basis of the needs peculiar to the situation. Classroom reading activities should thus contain all of these elements. Learners have to realize the purpose of

reading a certain text, how they should read, what they should focus on, etc.

#### **4-2-3: Schema Theory**

Comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text (Carrell and Eisterhold 1987: 220). The reader's knowledge of the world, otherwise known as the "content schema" alongside the "formal schema," which is the reader's knowledge of the text structure and discourse, should be expanded at the stage of pre-reading activities. Schema raising activities involve oral introduction or the giving of summaries of the content, presenting some visual aids such as videos or pictures. While understanding the importance of raising schema, particularly content schema, before the students start reading the text, the author often wonders if it is really realistic.

In reality, it is rarely the case that L2 users are given such a chance created by the instructor at the pre-reading stage. L2 learners usually have to read any material without taking steps such as pre-or post-reading. They are more likely to take a "bottom-up" approach than a "top-down" approach. It seems, therefore, the more an instructor does something for his/her students in class, the less realistic their activities become.

### **4-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

#### **4-3-1: Reading Magazines and Newspapers**

College students should be able to make use of the library to read magazines, newspapers and other materials written in English. If they can afford to, they can subscribe to one or two weekly magazines or newspapers to insure regular or constant contacts with reading mate-

rials at home. The author has advised several students to subscribe to an English paper published by one of the three major Japanese newspapers, much of which is translated from the Japanese edition, and found that only a few continue to read it; many of them leave it unread and covered with dust. The piling up of newspapers discourages learners and they tend to be stuck since they feel they must read the old unread ones first before reading the current day's newspaper.

Such learners are in a vicious circle and need a specialist's advice before they cancel their subscriptions. The author always advises them to begin by reading any favorite parts, such as the sports or entertainment pages, and then take in other pages little by little. The author also tells them to throw away the paper when they cannot read it that day and wait for the following day's edition so that they only need to keep one copy every day. This is how they can overcome the piling up of newspapers and feel fresh when reading new material every day.

#### **4-3-2: Reading Internet Materials**

Today students can enjoy reading English materials through Internet home pages or WWW (World Wide Web). The number of people who have a computer at home that is connected to the Internet is increasing and more colleges and universities have a facility that enables students to use the epoch-making invention.

Many international organizations or government agencies have their own WWW sites or home pages to provide information free of charge. One of the most popular WWW sites among beginning Internet users is the White House Home Page. The site provides many precious materials such as full scripts of the president's speeches or important political documents, many of which cannot be obtained in

other places or are never available, even in magazines or newspapers. Learners of English can download any document and make a hardcopy for reading in detail or keeping as their self-study material for future use.

There are also many TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)-related home pages for vocabulary building, rapid reading, even listening comprehension. Learners can buy magazines or books that introduce the latest information on such home pages to improve English skills. Instructors should keep in touch with recent technological developments as seen on the Internet and provide useful information so that their students may have many learning opportunities not available in the classroom.

#### **4-4: TEACHING METHODS**

EFL instructors should set three basic reading activities — pre-reading, reading and post-reading activities — to nurture learners' practical reading skills. In particular, pre-reading activities should be integrated into their daily reading instruction to raise their content schema for interactive reading.

Unlike writing and speaking, in which the instructors are actively involved as correctors and/or facilitators, reading seems to require more of the learner's own independent effort. In other word, the reading activity itself involves only the reader him/herself. Students need to be isolated from anyone else, so that the can concentrate on reading their material. Thus, in regular reading classes, the students are expected to read the text before they come to class and the instructors must check over their comprehension and give answers to the exercises that come with the text.



## **5: WRITING**

### **5-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

Writing attracted the third lowest rate of responses of the seven categories (5.8%). Of the 23 subjects in the eight responses, 11 subjects are bothered about “translation,” which is a part of writing but an unpractical procedure and does not constitute writing proficiency. It is also interesting that two subjects answered “I can read but cannot write.” (#6), which can be compared to “I can hear and understand but cannot speak.” This response indicates again that production is more difficult than reception.

### **5-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

#### **5-2-1: Misconceptions about Writing**

Writing is not identical to translation; translation is a part of writing. A concept assumed by Japanese learners of English is that they can write English, which is often through translation from L1 into L2. For them, writing means translating a short Japanese sentence into an English sentence, often with dictionaries and other aids. In almost all junior and senior high school classes in Japan, teachers teach students how to translate a Japanese sentence or occasionally a longer unit such as a paragraph into an English equivalent, often done with the introduction of a new grammar item. They are not trained to express directly what they have in mind in English, but merely to translate a sentence written by someone else or write first in Japanese and then to translate it word by word into English. This shows how little the importance of writing has been recognized in Japan.

#### **5-2-2: Revised Course of Study**

It is, however, notable that the new course of study for the high

**FIGURE 6 Writing**

Translations of responses made by the students	No.
#1 How can I improve my writing?	5
#2 I cannot translate Japanese into English.	5
#3 I cannot write good English.	4
#4 I cannot translate long English sentences.	3
#5 I cannot translate Japanese into natural English.	2
#6 I can read but cannot write.	2
#7 I hear writing improves English proficiency. However, I do not know what to write.	1
#8 How can I translate English into Japanese fast?	1

school curriculum, revised and implemented in 1994, introduced an independent course: Writing, along with Reading, Oral Communication A, B, C and English I and II. However, the Ministry-of-Education-approved textbooks such as “New Horizon English Writing” published by Tokyo Shoseki, “New Access to English Writing” by Kaitakusha, “Mainstream Writing Course” by Zoshindo, and “The Crown English Writing” by Sanseido, all of which contain a lot of visual aids such as photos, maps, and illustrations, consist predominantly of traditional mechanical grammar exercises — multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, word combination — and some Japanese-English translation exercises. And the course status is still elective.

### **5-2-3: Interference of Translation in Oral Production**

The habit of interlingual interaction or of expressing oneself by overly depending upon one’s native language often transfers to the medium of oral production. The learners think and prepare a full message in their minds first and then translate it as accurately as possible into English, often only to fail.

It should be noted that translation is actually a more difficult task than merely expressing whatever one likes in English. If a learner is allowed to write anything, he/she can avoid anything he/she cannot manage, and has to use simpler word or structure instead (Faerch & Kasper 1983; Schachter 1974). Avoidance is an important communication strategy designed to enable a fluent flow of speech or writing, although overuse blocks the user's second SLA in the end.

#### **5-2-4: Process Writing**

We can observe today a pedagogical shift from the traditional approach to writing, namely, a product-oriented view with writing instructions, to a more process-oriented approach or process writing. This shift from a product-centered to a process-centered orientation has been advocated by a number of researchers and educators in this field, suggesting that the writing instructor should enter into the process of writing with students to whatever extent the physical and administrative conditions allow (Buckingham 1979; Carnicelli 1980; Taylor 1981; Hillocks 1982; Cohen 1983; Raimes 1983; Sanaou 1984; Sommers 1984; Zamel 1985, 1987; Chaudron 1987; Allwright, Woodley, and Allwright 1988; Inoue and Pennington 1989; Kobayashi 1992).

### **5-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

#### **5-3-1: Keeping a Diary**

Students should be encouraged to keep a diary. Diary keeping will provide anyone with writing opportunities anytime. It can be time-consuming and sometimes painful. The success of diary keeping is, to a great extent, dependent on the power of will of the learner. For most learners, keeping a diary for a long period of time seems to require more than integrative motivation. The instructors could instrumen-

tally motivate their students to keep a diary by making the custom a part of grading or at least by giving their writing some feedback, including correction or any other form of assistance.

### **5-3-2: Writing to Editors**

Students should be encouraged to write a letter in English periodically to the editor of magazines or English newspapers. Their letters could be printed within a few weeks after being edited. The student can compare the original letter, which should always be photocopied or saved on a floppy disc, to the edited letter. Seeing their writing printed in a magazine or newspaper, while assuming that the letter may be read by hundreds of thousands nationwide or worldwide, will motivate the students more than anything. The instructors should lead their students to write to editors.

### **5-3-3: International Correspondence**

Recent International correspondence is often carried on through E-mail on Internet. There are some homepages which introduce pen pals or place anyone's brief biographical data and introduction. Correspondence, whether it is done by traditional mail exchange or modern E-mail exchange, has a number of implications for language learning. Learners will be highly motivated to keep writing to learn more about their pen friends or to introduce more about themselves. The author himself started international correspondence with several boys and girls in countries such as France, Sweden, the United States, Mexico and Argentina. The drive to maintain contact with international friends played a determinant role in causing him to devote himself to learning English.

Instructors, especially EFL teachers from abroad, could gain a list

of students of their alma maters or of local schools in their home towns and send their own volunteers' list to them. The instructors could promote such international exchange and might help occasionally correcting their students' writing.

#### **5-4: TEACHING METHODS**

##### **5-4-1: Journal Writing**

Journal writing give students much time to express themselves freely in English. A journal advocate such as Hubbard (1988) characterized the journal as "storage for free writing" (p. 83). In a typical journal writing instruction, students write something and turn it in to their instructor, who checks the writing and makes comments or even responds to any questions the students might ask. Usually, the students write in a notebook that goes back and forth between the student and the instructor.

Journal writing motivates students to write more and devote more effort to the improvement of their writing proficiency. Students can ask any question of or explain their problems to the instructor, which will create humanistic interpersonal communication between them. The instructor can either correct any errors and inadequate usage of vocabulary items or minimize such corrective feedback to encourage fluency in writing rather than accuracy.

##### **5-4-2: Editing by Three Colors**

Editing improves the L2 learner's writing proficiency. Learners can improve their writing by revising compositions corrected by their instructor or even by their peers. That editing someone's composition will really improve the editor's writing skill itself, however is usually underestimated or almost ignored. Editing involves a variety of ele-

ments that constitutes writing proficiency: grammatical judgement, vocabulary, knowledge of the world, etc.

The author usually integrates writing into his reading class or even into his oral classes and provides ample opportunities for students to edit their peers' writing. The method the author practices in his classes is "editing by three colors." In some of his English classes, students have to translate five Japanese sentences into English before they come to class. The students are instructed to imitate model sentences underlined in a reading textbook. The author chooses five students randomly and asks them to come to the board to write down their compositions on the board, using a white chalk. Each sentence is assigned to one student. At the same time I pick up five "editors" from the class to correct each sentence with a yellow chalk.

Each editor comes to the board and stands close to one of the "writers" writing down his/her composition. After the writers finish writing and go back to their seats, the editors start correcting each of their assigned sentences. They are instructed not to erase any part of the sentence but to add words or phrases over it.

In a few minutes or so, when the author judges that the editors can no longer correct the sentence, he lets the editors go back to their seats. The author then checks each of the sentences with corrected marks, looking at and confirming the two students in class. The author this time picks up a red chalk to distinguish his corrections from the original and editorial work. He checks both the original sentence and the added marks, evaluating and commenting on them.

It is often the case that the editor has left apparent errors uncorrected or instead has 'corrected' parts that were correct. The author gives detailed explanations of grammaticality, naturalness, frequency of particular words and phrases, etc. In this way, both the writing and

editing students can learn how to compose, how to choose appropriate structures and vocabulary words, and so forth.

## **6: VOCABULARY**

### **6-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

The number of problems and difficulties related to vocabulary expressed by the subjects (13.4 %) exceeded those of reading (5.2%) and writing (5.8%). The general results in this category suggest that students are not satisfied with their current vocabulary and have much difficulty increasing it. The statements such as the 8th and the 9th seem to come from relatively successful learners.

### **6-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

#### **6-2-1: Passive & Active Vocabulary**

College applicants, including high schools students, work hard to cram thousands of English words and phrases by the time they take entrance examinations. Their vocabulary is usually passive and is used simply to understand English prose. The opportunities for writing are limited and there is little opportunity for testing listening comprehension and oral production skill. The moment those with an abundant passive vocabulary enter college, they start to forget a large part of the vocabulary in which they had invested a great deal of energy and time. It is highly regrettable that a Japanese EFL learner's vocabulary reaches its peak at the time of college entrance examinations and then can often gradually or rapidly decline almost to nothing.

College English teachers thus have a strong responsibility for helping students to retain their vocabulary or to change their passive vocabulary into active and more importantly orally productive terms as

**FIGURE 7 Vocabulary**

Translations of responses made by the students	No.
#1 I have difficulty learning words.	12
#2 How can I increase my vocabulary?	11
#3 How can I memorize words?	10
#4 I easily forget words that I have learned.	8
#5 My vocabulary is poor.	6
#6 How can I learn words and idioms?	2
#7 I tend to use the same vocabulary words since I cannot learn new words.	1
#8 Don't we have to know the dialects of English?	1
#9 I would like to learn more daily slang.	1

well as to increase their receptive vocabulary to read materials written in English.

#### **6-2-2: How Vocabulary is Acquired**

Vocabulary is acquired by the process shown in Figure 8:

Many students in the survey seem to be stuck either at the 3rd or 4th stage of vocabulary acquisition. Students who claim that they easily forget the words they learn have problems somewhere around the 2nd or 3rd stage. Those who ask how to increase vocabulary are unable to encounter and imprint new vocabulary items properly.

Methodologies of how to expand vocabulary are abundant. Some of the most popular methods are: root-memorization, learning through context, learning through morphemes, learning by groups, etc. The point is that most learners today should be aware of these methods, but there are not many who will actually try some and see if they are compatible.

Questions such as “How many words should I memorize?” show that the questioner has no knowledge of vocabulary building other than



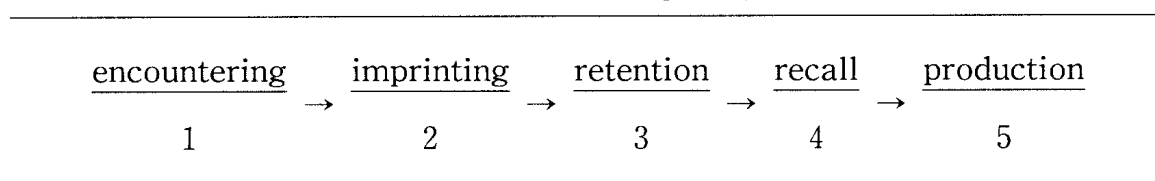
root-memorization. Root-memorization, except in the case of some geniuses, does not ensure retention. Memory depends to a great extent more upon “what you do with the information than on how your senses perceive it” (Seleskovitch 1978: 37).

### 6-2-3: Previous Studies of Vocabulary Acquisition

Many studies have in the past been carried out on vocabulary, both L1 and L2. Most of the studies have tried to investigate what independent variables are likely to affect vocabulary acquisition. Bahrlick (1984, 1987) found that English speaking learners of Spanish retained longer the words presented just once or twice and then learned than those presented several times and then learned. The results support “depths of processing” theory ( Craik & Lockhart’s 1972) that the retention of vocabulary depends greatly upon the level at which information is processed.

Brown and Perry, Jr (1991), conducted an experimental study in ESL vocabulary acquisition with subjects with two levels of English proficiency to compare three learning strategies: keyword, semantic and keyword-semantic. The study found that the keyword strategy facilitated vocabulary acquisition for lower-proficiency students and that the keyword-semantic strategy, which combines keyword and semantic strategies, increased retention above the other strategies. They argue that using the combined method makes students with different levels of proficiency “more versatile in handling words with

FIGURE 8 Vocabulary Acquisition



differing levels of concreteness” (p. 667).

In using the keyword strategy, according to Atkinson (1975), the learner chooses a keyword which is acoustically similar to the new word, yet has a meaning of its own independent of the new word's meaning. A visual association through an image is then made between the keyword and the new word's meaning. To remember the word “evidence,” a Japanese learner of English may divide the word into two separate units, *evi* and *dence*, which are acoustically similar to the Japanese words *ebi* (=shrimp) and *dansu* (=dance). Then the learner may imagine that a shrimp is dancing to develop the notion into a more logical saying, “*Ebi ga dansu shiteiru shoko o misero*” (=Show me the evidence that a shrimp is dancing.) This strategy has attracted high school students in Japan and is considered among examinees to be one of the effective ways of memorizing words.

The semantic strategy refers to “any procedures that cause the learner to act on the meaning of a new word by tying it into existing knowledge structures” (Brown and Perry, Jr. 1991: 658). This loosely defined strategy could include grouping words according to their common nature such as the names of vegetables, animals and plants. Perry (1982) argued that the semantic strategy should be better aid to retention than the keyword strategy. Previous studies (Hall, Wilson, & Patterson, 1981; Crow & Quigley, 1985; Eeds & Cockrum, 1985; McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985; Pressley et al., 1987) found that the keyword method has mainly been effective with individual presentation, while semantic strategy has been more successful with group presentation.

### **6-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

#### **6-3-1: Combining Different Strategies**

Learners should make more use of the benefits of keyword strategy. They should check books commercially available to collect examples like “evidence” or make their own associations. It is the author’s experience that after his vocabulary had reached a certain level, he did not have to take the trouble of making an association every time he tried to memorize a new word and he was able to memorize words easily without any particular imprinting work.

An example of the combination of keyword strategy and semantic strategy is that you first group words according to a certain criterion such as the nature, figure, or context in which the words are used, and then make keyword associations for a word which you find difficult to memorize.

There are several more vocabulary memorizing methods available. The most important thing, however, is to find the strategies or the combination of strategies that suit the learner best. The learner should not hesitate to try different kinds of strategy over an extended period of time. He/she should make a scientific approach to his/her vocabulary building: use several strategies, record the effectiveness of each strategy, compare them, and find the best. The learner should keep in mind that effectiveness should not be the only criteria used to select the method. They should consider how long the learning activity takes, if the activity is demanding enough to affect subsequent daily activities, and so forth.

#### **6-3-2: Effective Use of Dictionaries**

Learners need to be instructed in the proper use of dictionaries. College students, often assumed by college instructors to have learned

how to do this before they are admitted to college, should receive more extensive instruction on this strategy. College learners of English should keep both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries.

In general, bilingual dictionaries, namely an English-Japanese dictionary, are the most commonly used dictionaries among Japanese learners of English since they carry detailed and clear descriptions of each entry in Japanese. Since the dictionary market in Japan is huge and competitive, we can find a great variety in the book stores. In choosing which dictionary to buy, learners have to consider what they need to learn from the dictionary they are looking for.

Learners are often recommended by their instructors to use a monolingual dictionary or English-English dictionary from early in the stage of learning, say, high school. We often see high school students, encouraged by their English teacher to use a monolingual dictionary to improve their English, stuck in a maze of word definitions. Once they find a word and read the definition with some new words used, they have to check the new words immediately. And then the same thing happens again and again. This often discourages them and pushes them back to the bilingual dictionary they used to consult. The lower the level of the learners, the easier and simpler the definitions the dictionary suited to them has to carry.

They should keep two type of monolingual English dictionary: one is a large dictionary with detailed description of each entry such as the Webster World New Dictionary; another is a pocket-size one with much simpler descriptions but easy to carry such as the Longman Handy Learner's Dictionary. Many prestigious dictionaries, both British and American, are available in paperback with smaller cover and fewer entries.

The author often tells his students to check four things when they

consult a dictionary: the meaning, the pronunciation, the spelling and the context. The last check is often neglected by learners, especially ineffective learners or poor learners. The context determines the word's meaning. The instructors have to make their students keep discourse in mind; in other words, they must ensure a shift from the morphological to the pragmatic unit of language use.

#### **6-4: TEACHING METHODS**

##### **6-4-1: Impressive Vocabulary Presentation**

As Craik and Lockhart's "depths of processing" (1974) suggest, the instructors have to make their presentation of new vocabulary as impressive as possible for the student's better retention. To raise the level at which information is processed, new vocabulary items should be introduced in a meaningful context and ideally repeated several times in different contexts in a lesson.

##### **6-4-2: Vocabulary Quiz**

The author gives a vocabulary quiz at the beginning of each of his regular English reading classes. Vocabulary items to be tested are selected from the reading textbook and the students are informed of them during the previous lesson. Each vocabulary quiz includes ten Japanese words to be translated into English. The students are given only five minutes at the outset of the class. Thus students have to come to class in time for the quiz.

The administration of a vocabulary quiz at the beginning of every class has the following pedagogical effects:

First, the students can review the textbook covered in the class, since it is generally true that the instructors want their students to learn as much as possible from the textbook they select and use in the class.

The commonly-held first and second semester examinations in Japanese colleges encourage students to review the text only before each exam and they tend to make a rote memorization of certain materials or the Japanese translation of English textbooks that circles among their friends. Instead of placing the dominant weight of grading on the two examinations, the instructors can direct their students' attention more to each lesson by giving quizzes every time.

Second, vocabulary quizzes give students opportunities to maintain the momentum of vocabulary expansion. We often hear it said that Japanese learners' vocabulary reaches its prime level at the time of college entrance examinations, and then starts to decline once they enter college. This is simply because the majority of college students, who used to be instrumentally motivated before the exams, lose any chances or reasons for vocabulary building or show no interest in improving their English. The author assumes that not many EFL instructors at college in Japan give such a vocabulary quiz as his and almost no Japanese English teacher carries out such a demanding procedure. By motivating college students instrumentally again through vocabulary quizzes, instructors can help their students' vocabulary expansion.

Third, the students' attendance rate can be maintained at an extremely high level. Knowing that the quiz is given at the outset of each lesson and the results of vocabulary quizzes are counted toward their grade as much as the seasonal examinations, the students are serious enough to come to class on time. If an instructor feels responsible for his/her students learning, he/she should try to keep their attendance as high as possible throughout the semester. The traditional Japanese college instructors' attitude toward students' attendance may often look to EFL instructors who come from North

American or the United Kingdom and who expect a lot from their students, as negative, and could be characterized as indifferent, irresponsible and even lazy.

## **7: GRAMMAR**

### **7-1: GENERAL RESULTS**

Problems of questions related to English grammar constitutes 5.4 percent of the total responses, which is the second lowest percentage among the seven skills discussed in this paper. The results in Figure 9 indicate that the most common problem is that learners do not understand grammar, followed by the question as to how to improve it. The 4th problem is one of the most common problems, which is often pointed out by advanced L2 learners of English whose L1 lacks the English-type article system. The author's own experiences of teaching ESL to Asian students in Hawai'i verifies this. Chinese and Korean students also speak or write with quite a few article deletions or redundancy.

### **7-2: BACKGROUND & THEORIES**

#### **7-2-1: The Grammar-Translation Method**

Japanese junior and high school English classes are generally based on a grammar syllabus. Grammatical items are well arranged, from forms that linguists assume to be simpler and thus easier for students to learn to forms that are more complex. The grammar-translation method or GTM has long played a dominant role in English classes at ordinary schools in Japan, although various attempts have also been made to modify it by integrating more oral training. The term "grammar-translation method," which is often cited by theorists to be in contrast with a method which they believe is more effective and thus

appropriate, indicates how deeply Japanese English classes are concerned with grammar.

The overemphasis on grammar has led critics to say that Japanese learners of English know a lot of grammatical rules but they are unable to speak English. One piece of evidence to support this observation can be found in the average TOEFL scores. Of the three sections, listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension, the average Japanese examinees take the highest score in the second section and the lowest in the first section. Of speaking, we often hear native speakers of English say that Japanese speak English with accuracy rather than with fluency, and use the written mode in the spoken medium. That is to say, Japanese speech sounds bookish to the ears of native speakers.

### **7-2-2: Grammar as an Essential Component**

The term “grammar” is often misunderstood by general learners of English. It is often seen that when two participants discuss whether grammar is necessary for speaking English, they seem to have different definitions of grammar in mind. Grammar is actually essential in any

**FIGURE 9 Grammar**

	Translations of responses made by the students	No.
#1	I do not understand English grammar well.	9
#2	How can I improve my grammar?	6
#3	Can we still make ourselves understood by foreigners even if we make a few grammatical mistakes?	2
#4	I have difficulty judging if an article is required or not before a certain word, or if it should be singular or plural.	1
#5	English structures are difficult for me to understand.	1
#6	I do not remember grammar or structures when I listen to English.	1



phase of interpersonal communication since it is the minimum knowledge that the two parties should share to understand each other.

Some may maintain that broken English, which is generally meant to consist of ungrammatical pidginized forms, is sufficient for mutual communication. These people forget that communication involves impressions of the communicator as well as the meanings he/she tries to convey. Ungrammatical speech with inaccurate pronunciations sounds to most ordinary native speakers of English — who have much less patience towards and understanding of second language learners than have language educators — uneducational, unintelligent and even offensive to their ears. In this respect, Japanese learners of English with their international contacts confined to those patient and friendly English speaking residents in Japan, tend to indulge in their current proficiency and find that their English has become fossilized. Selinker (1972) said fossilization occurs when the learner realizes that the error does not hinder him/her in satisfying his/her communicative needs.

### **7-2-3: Declarative & Procedural Knowledge**

When you say grammatical knowledge, you have to redefine the word “knowledge” for the discussion to be consistent. According to Anderson (1985), knowledge, in cognitive psychology and learning theory, can be divided into two types: declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge refers to information of known facts, concepts or ideas, while procedural knowledge concerns things we know how to do but which are not consciously known. It is the procedural knowledge of the grammar which ESL/EFL learners need to have in order to gain the practical skills necessary to code or decode messages in intercultural communication.

Native speakers of any languages in the world have procedural knowledge of their L1 with little declarative knowledge about the grammatical rules of their own language since they use it unconsciously. Non-native speakers at novice or intermediate level, on the other hand, are able to increase declarative knowledge of TL grammar but are unable to break free of the conscious processing of that grammatical knowledge, which requires time and concentration and thus makes their real-time communication almost impossible. Procedural knowledge is said to be acquired only gradually and through practice. It is thus almost impossible for L2 learners to learn how to speak or write the target language unconsciously over a short period of time.

This binary distinction can be applied to other aspects of language learning: pronunciation as previously discussed is one of them. Japanese adult learners of English may know how to make an articulatory distinction between /l/ and /r/ but often confuse the two sounds or are more likely to differentiate them in aural perception. This is also the area which requires considerable practice on the part of learners.

#### **7-2-4: Conscious & Unconscious Knowledge**

If the learner's grammatical knowledge needs to be unconsciously drawn upon in oral communication, either receptive or productive, does it mean that students will never be declaratively aware of grammatical rules when they are engaging in real-time communication? In this respect, the 6th problem cited by one student in Figure 9: "I do not remember grammar or structures when I listen to English" would evoke both teachers' and researchers' interest in determining the current proficiency and grammatical knowledge of this student.

Kraschen (1976) separated knowledge systems into the acquired

system and the learned system. He claimed that the acquired system, which consists of unconscious knowledge of the TL grammar, was the only knowledge source that speakers could use in real-time communication, while the learned system served to inspect or monitor the output of the acquired system. However, Schmidt (1990) maintained that the role of unconscious learning has been exaggerated and that some degree of consciousness is necessary for language learning. What happens to the subject with the 6th problem can be guessed only with more information of the student's English proficiency and with some data-based research done on him.

Schmidt's claim (1990) for the role of conscious process in SLA would answer the questions raised by some subjects (see Appendix 1: 8-3: Self-study materials) that cast doubt on the effectiveness of subconscious listening activities as leading to the outburst of oral production so widely and frequently advertized for years in major Japanese newspapers by audiotape manufacturers. Those companies are of course much concerned with the all-out promotion of the sales of their miraculous self-taught audiotape materials. It seems that learners frustrated in their slow development of English oral skills are vulnerable to such tempting illusions. College English teachers may sometimes need to express their own stance and academic analysis, positive or negative, of the commercialism of English teaching and learning that their students may come across.

### **7-3: LEARNING STRATEGIES**

#### **7-3-1: Grammar Books & Mechanical Exercises**

College students should occasionally study grammar in explicit ways. The author often advises his students to read some grammar books or do some mechanical grammar exercises such as fill-in-the-

blanks and error corrections, which are familiar to them in college entrance examinations. What the author always tells them is that they should not do such exercises in the same way they used to in high schools. They should use those exercises while speaking aloud whatever comes to their minds so that they can refine their declarative knowledge and raise consciousness about grammar. It is the author's position that developing grammatical knowledge up to the procedural or unconscious level requires firmly established initial ground, namely accurate and explicit declarative knowledge that can be verbally reported again and again, almost automatically.

### **7-3-2: Teaching is Learning**

In the author's firm belief, explicit declarative knowledge of English grammar can be acquired through teaching to junior and high school students either as a tutor or as a cram school instructor, or in any other position of teaching. The process of preparation, elaborating of the wording to explain complicated grammar rules in a clear, systematic way in an attempt to maximize teenagers' understanding, will surely improve that knowledge.

### **7-4: TEACHING METHODS**

Few college classes in Japan seem to be dedicated to grammar instruction. This is because college students are assumed to have already learned all the grammar or grammatical rules necessary to read and write English at college, or grammar is regarded as an integrated part of linguistic skills such as speaking, listening, writing and reading. Therefore, college English teachers seem not to use grammatical terms as often as their junior and high school counterparts.

Grammar instruction or more explicit conscious-raising activities for grammar can be realized as integrated in writing instruction where the instructor corrects student compositions. In particular, the editing or correction of students' writing will be particularly effective as a means to help them to learn the usage of English article systems, which is really complicated and hard for Japanese ESL/EFL learners to acquire.

## **CONCLUSION**

In sum, the data collected suggest that a majority of the students who responded feel less confident in oral than in other skills: listening, speaking and pronunciation — or that they have a hard time improving these skills. The results also indicate that most of the respondents have no idea how to improve the skills they assume to be undeveloped, which implies the need for more explicit and systematic learner training to help our students to be more independent and responsible for their own L2 development.

With all the results of this study in mind, the author would like to offer three suggestions for both L1 Japanese and English EFL instructors in the hope that they will be more aware of their students' real needs and the longitudinal development of English as a foreign language.

### **Suggestion 1**

EFL teachers, whether English native speakers or not, should be concerned with learning strategies that both empirically and personally have been proved to be effective and that would help their students with varied levels of proficiency to be more actively and independently involved in input, output and interaction outside the classroom as well

as to engage more willingly and enthusiastically in classroom activities.

### **Suggestion 2**

The presentation of such skills should be more denotatively brought to the attention of students through occasional introductions and demonstrations in class, or possibly in the form of tasks or assignments. Any comments, positive or negative, will be a useful source for student learners if they are empathetic and encouraging enough.

### **Suggestion 3**

EFL teachers should reconsider the process and mechanism of learning English as a foreign language and get rid of a false concept of “teaching” as playing a predominant part in SLA. Teaching greatly helps acquisition with proper teaching methods under ideal circumstances, but will not necessarily produce successful EFL/ESL speakers or those who use English quite satisfactorily for their needs in their intercultural communications, either of the spoken or the written medium.

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## APPENDIX I

### The Complete List of Responses

#### 1: Listening

##### 1-1: Hard to listen to

- I cannot hear English well. (cited by 21 subjects)
- My listening comprehension does not improve. (19)
- I cannot hear English when it is spoken fast. (18)
- I can understand Japanese English but not native speaker's English. (7)
- I cannot hear English at all. (1)
- I cannot comprehend what others say to me while I am speaking English. (1)
- I find foreigners' English too fast. (1)
- Whenever I hear any new word, I cannot listen anymore. (1)
- I get confused when I hear English. (1)
- I do not know how to answer a question given to me. (1)
- I cannot hear and understand English without looking at the written script. (1)
- When I listen to someone speaking, I cannot pinpoint the main idea. (1)

##### 1-2: How to improve listening comprehension

- How can I improve my listening comprehension? (29)
- Is there any knack for improving listening comprehension? (1)
- Is there any good way to tell differences among similar words? (1)
- Can I improve my listening comprehension if I study abroad only for three months? (1)

##### 1-3: Audio materials

- What kind of tapes should I listen to? (5)
- Is listening to tapes useful? (1)
- I can hear and understand English narrations on the tape while looking at the text, but not without looking at it. (1)
- When I listen to tapes, I cannot hear short words. What should I do? (1)
- I do not understand what is said on tapes. (1)

##### 1-4: Movies

- I would like to understand foreign movies without looking at subtitles. (2)
- I would like to start to learn English with movies. Which movies should I see? (1)
- How many films do we have to see to understand them without looking at their subtitles? (1)
- Can I improve my English through movies with subtitles? (1)

##### 1-5: News

- I would like to be able to comprehend news English. (1)

1-6: Songs

- I cannot understand English songs. (1)
- When I listen to English music, I cannot distinguish the boundaries of words. (1)
- I often listen to western (English) songs. Are their pronunciations correct? (1)
- How can I make use of music to improve my English? (1)
- I like hard rock music. Is it useful to improve my English? (1)
- Can we improve our listening comprehension through western music? (1)

1-7: Others

- I think listening comprehension will improve with visual aids. (1)
- I can easily understand English in conversation but not in presentation. (1)
- Why is non-Japanese non-native speaker's English so fast? (1)
- I still do not understand what a foreigner is saying on TV. (1)

**2: SPEAKING**

2-1: Can't speak English well

- I cannot speak English well. (13)
- I cannot come up with the word to convey my meanings when I speak. (4)
- I have to think hard before I speak. (3)
- I cannot communicate with foreigners. (2)
- I cannot express my meanings well even in easy English. (1)
- I cannot speak English well with foreigners. (1)
- I cannot speak English fast. (1)
- I can speak only broken English. (1)
- My speech is not smooth. (1)
- Why is it that we are unable to speak English even though we have memorized a lot of structures for entrance examinations? (1)
- When I speak English, I cannot make use of the grammar and structures I know. (1)
- When I speak English, I often forget English grammar and vocabulary words I learned at junior high school. (1)
- I can read English sentences but cannot come up with them in speech. (1)
- When I speak English, I cannot ask even an easy question. (1)
- I am worried whether I can make myself understood in English. (1)
- Isn't it too late for me (18 years old) to become a good speaker of English? (1)
- How can I make words come out of my mouth smoothly? (1)
- I find it difficult to connect sentences. (1)
- What kind of methods are available for us to improve our English conversation? (1)
- I think my writing has improved a lot, but I still have difficulty speaking. (1)

- What should I do to communicate on equal terms with foreigners? (1)
- How can I master English conversation in a short period of time? (1)
- I cannot form a question when I want to ask my English teacher a question. (1)
- I cannot participate in a conversation voluntarily. (1)
- 2-2: Hard to improve speaking
  - My speech does not improve. (1)
- 2-3: Can hear but not speak
  - I can hear and understand English but cannot speak it. (2)
- 2-4: How to improve speaking
  - How can I improve my speaking? (21)
  - What should I do to speak English fluently? (8)
  - How can I get my meaning across in English? (3)
  - I would like to be able to take part in basic English conversation. (2)
  - Will we really be able to speak English? (1)
  - How can I translate Japanese coming up in my mind into English quickly? (1)
  - I would like to be able to speak English fast. (1)
  - Is it possible for an L1 Japanese speaker to be able to speak English as well as a native speaker of English? (1)
  - How can I engage in English conversation? (1)
  - Can I improve my conversational skill through movies? (1)
  - How can I respond to a question quickly and appropriately? (1)
  - How can I connect sentences well? (1)
- 2-5: Translation
  - I cannot translate Japanese into English when I actually speak English. (1)
- 2-6: Affective filter
  - I feel nervous when I talk to a foreigner. (2)
  - I am unable to understand how to make a sentence when I actually speak English to someone. (1)
- 2-7: Few chances to speak English
  - I have few chances to speak English. (5)
- 2-8: Pronunciation
  - My English pronunciation is bad. (11)
  - How can I improve my pronunciation? (6)
  - My English pronunciation has made little progress. (4)
  - I find English pronunciation difficult. (2)
  - I can read English, but I can hardly improve my pronunciation and listening comprehension. (1)
  - I find it difficult to use “a” “an” “the” properly in accordance with the context they appear in such as “have a.” (1)

- Should I talk to foreigners often to be able to speak English with good pronunciation?
- Is it possible for me ever to master perfect pronunciation? (1)
- I cannot distinguish “l” and “r” in pronouncing. (1)
- I do not understand the phonetic alphabet. (1)
- I understand the phonetic alphabets and can use them. But I cannot pronounce English words properly when they appear in a sentence. (1)
- How should I practice to pronounce words that may have slightly different pronunciations? (1)
- Is it true that Japanese learners of English are handicapped because of some problems related to the vowels of the Japanese language? (1)

### 3: READING

#### 3-1: Hard to read English

- I am not good at reading a long English passage. (1)
- It takes me longer than any other person to read and understand English. (1)
- I am not good at reading. Do you think I will be able to read English if I practice? (1)

#### 3-2: How to improve reading

- How can I improve my reading? (3)
- What should I read to improve my reading? (1)
- What should I do to read English smoothly? (1)
- What should I do to summarize a long passage well? (1)

#### 3-3: English papers, magazines and books

- Which magazines written in English should I read? (2)
- Should I read English papers? (1)
- What is the effective way to read English papers? (1)
- Do we have to read from cover to cover of an English paper? (1)
- Are there any books easy enough to understand? (1)
- What kind of book should I read? (1)

#### 3-4: Rapid reading

- How can I read English fast? (4)
- I cannot read and comprehend English quickly. (1)
- I would like to be able to read English materials faster and more accurately. (1)

#### 3-5: Others

- When I run into a new word, should I stop to consult a dictionary or just keep on reading? (1)
- Why do we have to read aloud a Japanese word relating to geography or food with an English accent when they appear in English passage? (1)

- I was once told to think in English while reading English. How is it possible? (1)
- I am not good at reading and summarizing an English passage. (1)
- I would like to be able to grasp the context accurately while reading. (1)

#### **4: WRITING**

##### 4-1: Hard to write

- I cannot write English well. (4)
- I can read but cannot write. (2)
- When I write English, I cannot come up with proper words immediately. (1)
- In writing English, I can write only with junior high school level English. I use poor expressions. (1)
- I hear writing improves English proficiency. However, I do not know what to write. (1)
- I have difficulty spelling English words. (1)

##### 4-2: How to write

- How can I improve my writing? (5)

##### 4-3: Translation

- I cannot translate Japanese into English. (5)
- I cannot translate long English sentences. (3)
- I cannot translate Japanese into natural English. (2)
- I cannot translate English into Japanese. (1)
- I have more difficulty translating English into Japanese than vice versa. (1)
- Is there any easy way to translate Japanese into English? (1)
- How can I translate English into Japanese fast? (1)
- I would like to improve my translating of Japanese into English. (1)

#### **5: VOCABULARY**

##### 5-1: Poor vocabulary

- My vocabulary is poor. (6)
- I tend to use the same vocabulary words since I cannot learn new words. (1)
- I'm afraid that my present vocabulary is smaller than in my high school days. (1)
- Because of my poor vocabulary, I cannot make myself understood well. (1)

##### 5-2: Hard to learn

- I have difficulty learning words. (12)

##### 5-3: Easy to forget

- I easily forget words I learned. (8)
- Why do we easily forget a word we learned? (1)

5-4: How to increase vocabulary

- How can I increase my vocabulary? (11)
- How can I memorize words? (10)
- How can I learn words and idioms? (2)
- What is the knack of learning words and idioms? (1)
- Is there any way to learn words easily? (1)
- Should I learn a word while reading the sentence or learn it independently? (1)
- How can I check the meaning of technical terms on a computer? (1)
- Please let me know how to memorize many words in a short period of time. (1)
- How many idioms should I learn for daily English conversation? (1)

5-5: Dictionaries

- Could you recommend a good English-Japanese dictionary? (1)

5-6: Spellings

- When I hear a new word in the news, I cannot pick up the word in a dictionary because I do not know its spelling? (1)
- I cannot distinguish words with similar spellings quickly. (1)
- I have a hard time distinguishing “-ler” and “-lar.” (1)

5-7: Others

- Don't we have to know the dialects of English? (1)
- I would like to know about English honorific expressions. (1)
- I do not understand the nuances of each auxiliary verb. (1)
- Should I learn synonyms? (1)
- I know only formal and routinized expressions. (1)
- I would like to learn more daily slang. (1)
- I would like to learn proverbs. (1)

**6: GRAMMAR**

6-1: Not good at grammar

- I do not understand English grammar well. (9)
- I have difficulty using prepositions—whether one is required, which one to use, etc? (1)
- I cannot use 5W1H questions. (1)
- I have difficulty judging if an article is required or not before a certain word, or if the word should be singular or plural. (1)
- My knowledge about English is not clear. How can I make it clear? (1)
- I do not understand prepositions and articles. (1)
- English structures are difficult for me to understand. (1)
- I do not remember grammar or structures when I listen to English. (1)

6-2: How to improve grammar



- How can I improve my grammar? (6)
- How can I learn exceptions in English grammar? (1)

6-3: Others

- Can we still make ourselves understood by foreigners even if we make a few grammatical mistakes? (2)
- How can I improve my knowledge of grammar in order to teach it? (1)
- I do not like to study English grammar. (1)
- Should I learn structures? (1)

**7: QUALIFICATION TESTS**

7-1: STEP tests

- Should I hold a STEP grade? (3)
- How should I prepare for a 2nd grade STEP test? (3)
- What is the merit of holding a STEP grade? (2)
- How should I learn English to pass the 1st grade STEP? (2)
- Is the STEP 1st-grade test difficult? (1)
- How should I prepare for STEP tests? (1)
- I am wondering if I should take a STEP test. Should I take it? (1)
- What should I do to pass the pre-1st grade STEP? (1)
- What should I primarily do to pass the pre-1st grade STEP? (1)
- Is it possible to pass the pre-1st grade STEP just through self-study? (1)
- Should I take TOEFL as well as a STEP test? (1)
- How much should I study English to pass the pre-1st grade STEP at my present ability. (1)
- How should I prepare for the 2nd exam of the pre-1st grade STEP test? (1)
- I passed the 2nd grade STEP test although I did not comprehend what the examiner at the 2nd exam said to me at all. Is it still okay at the pre-1st grade test? (1)
- I do not know how to prepare for STEP tests. (1)
- Which grade of STEP is necessary to enjoy daily conversations with Americans? (1)
- Is it difficult for those who have never studied abroad to take a pre-1st grade STEP? (1)
- I would like to learn the forms of STEP tests since I have never taken them. (1)

7-2: TOEFL

- How should I prepare for TOEFL? (3)
- I would like to take a TOEFL. What score should I aim at the first time? (1)
- Should I take TOEFL? (1)
- My TOEFL score does not reach 550. (1)

In which test should I pour more of my energy, STEP or TOEFL? (1)

What is the U.N. English test? (1)

## **8: MEDIA & SCHOOLS**

### 8-1: English conversation programs

Which TV English conversation programs are good? (2)

Is it possible for us to improve our English through NHK English programs? (1)

How long should I continue to watch TV or listening to radio English conversation programs to be able to communicate in foreign countries? (1)

I bought an NHK English conversation textbook. But I was not able to keep listening to the program for long. What should I do? (1)

### 8-2: English conversation schools

Should I attend an English conversation school? (4)

Can I become a good speaker of English if I attend an English conversation school? (1)

I don't know how much it'll be helpful for me to attend an English conversation school. (1)

Can I really improve my speaking at a NOVA? (1)

I would like to learn English conversation. What kinds of place should I go to? (1)

I would like to learn which school is good for me to attend to improve my conversational skill in English. (1)

### 8-3: Self-study materials

I wonder if we will become good speakers of English by listening to those tapes advertized in newspapers which emphasize that the listeners will be able to speak English just by listening to the tapes. (2)

Is the "Listening Marathon" and "Hearing Marathon" effective for us to improve our English? (1)

How can I make distinctions between good and bad learning materials? (1)

Please recommend any materials for self-study. (1)

## **9: STUDYING ABROAD**

### 9-1: Necessity

Should I study abroad to improve my English? (2)

Is there any way of learning necessary to study abroad? (1)

Is it worth studying abroad by taking a year's leave from college? (1)

### 9-2: Effect

Can't we become a good English speaker unless we study abroad? (1)

Is it really true that anyone will become a fluent speaker of English once he/

she studies abroad? (1)

9-3: Place

If I go abroad, where should I go? (2)

Which country should I go to, Britain or the U.S., to improve my English? (1)

9-4: Cost

How much does it cost to study abroad? (1)

How much does it cost to get to the United States alone? (1)

How much does it cost in total to study abroad? (1)

How can I study abroad at a low cost? (1)

How can I go and study abroad at a low cost. (1)

9-5: Duration

For how long should I study abroad? (1)

How many years should I study abroad to become fluent in English? (1)

9-6: Others

I do not know how to study abroad. (1)

I would like to improve my English enough to communicate in foreign countries. (1)

Do I have to leave my school to study abroad? (1)

**10: SCHOOL EDUCATION**

10-1: Current English class

I have difficulty catching up with English classes. (1)

I have an English conversation class. But I do not have many opportunities to speak English there. I want to speak more. (1)

I am worried about learning English from foreign teachers next year. (1)

10-2: English for entrance examinations

I would like to learn practical English useful for travelling, not classroom English. (1)

In high school, I stuck to formal English. (1)

I am good at English for entrance examinations but I cannot speak English. (1)

What are the differences between learning English to communicate with foreigners and to prepare for exams? (1)

Why is it that I can speak only a little although I have been learning English for such a long time? (1)

I have been learning English for eight years but I cannot speak it. Why not? (1)

10-3: Declining English proficiency

My English proficiency has become worse since I entered college. What does this mean? (1)

I think our English ability reaches its prime at the 3rd year in high school.  
How can we maintain our ability. (1)

My English has become worse since I entered college. (1)

#### 10-4: Continuation of learning English

How can I continue to learn English? (2)

How can I retain my interest in the English language? (1)

My exposure to English has diminished since I entered college. What should I do? (1)

How can I continue to learn English every day? (1)

#### 10-5: Others

Since I entered college, I have had no chance to practice vocabulary. Should I do so? (1)

How can I retain my interest in the English language? (1)

### 11: OTHERS

Which dialect of English should I learn, British or American? (2)

How can I become an American? (1)

I would like to make friends living in English-speaking countries. (1)

I do not understand English at all even when I study. (1)

I am looking forward to the Halloween party. What will we do? (1)

I am convinced that I am not good at English. (1)

I do not like the English language. (1)

I do not dislike the English language. But I do not feel like learning it. (1)

What level of English is required to study at a graduate school? And how should I prepare for it? (1)

In what way will English be useful in the future? (1)

Is the United States dangerous? (1)

How can I learn English without spending time at it? (1)

Tell me how to get good grades in tests. (1)

I cannot think in English. (1)

Is it possible for a Japanese national to work for an organization like the FBI or the secret service? How should I prepare for it? (1)

How can I overcome my xenophobia? (1)

There are ups and downs in my motivation. (1)

I would like to know if there are any volunteer English conversation circles. (1)

I cannot get used to the rhythm peculiar to English. (1)

My English does not improve though I have been studying English for a long time. (1)

I want to become a foreigner. (1)

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- How many years does it generally take to acquire English? (1)
- Why does “I” as in “I’m” always have to be written in a capital letter? (1)
- How can I feel attached to the English language? (1)
- I don’t understand practical English. (1)
- Is it true that we can improve our speaking by improving our listening comprehension? (1)
- Will we come to a deadlock once we have reached a certain level of proficiency? (1)

## APPENDIX II

### YESTERDAY ONCE MORE

When I was young,(1: \_\_\_\_\_) listen to the radio

Waitin' for my favorite (2: song/songs/the songs)

When they played, I'd sing (3: alone/along/long).

It made me smile

Those were such happy times and not so long ago

How I wondered where they'd gone

But they're back again, just like a long lost friend

All the songs I loved so well

Every Sha-la-la-la Every Wo-o-wo-o Still shines

Every shing-a ling-a ling That they're startin' to sing So (4: \_\_\_\_\_)

When they get to the (5: part/park/pearl)

Where he's breakin' her (6: hard/heart/hurt)

It can really make me cry, Just like before

It's yesterday once more.

Lookin' back on how it was in years gone by

And the good times that I had makes today seem rather (7: \_\_\_\_\_)

So much has changed

It was songs of love that I would sing to (8: them/then/there)

And I'd memorize each word

Those old memories still sound so good to me

As they (9: \_\_\_\_\_) the years away

Every Sha-la-la-la Every Wo-o-wo-o Still shines

Every shing-a ling-a ling That they're startin, to sing So (10: \_\_\_\_\_)

All my best memories come back (11: clearly/really/freely ) to me

Some can even make me cry Just like before

It's yesterday once more.

Every Sha-la-la-la Every Wo-o-wo-o Still shines

Every shing-a ling-a ling That they're startin, to sing So fine