

# Studying Abroad: Japanese Learners of English in an American Setting

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## [ I ] The Purpose of this Research

No matter what future plans my 27 interviewees have, all of them demonstrate a strong desire and determination to learn how to listen to and speak the English language. In addition to their academic goals, their concern is focused on being able to speak English fluently and to gain the ability to understand the spoken word. These abilities are essential to daily interaction with native English speakers, more so than reading and writing skills.

Through my classroom observations, I noticed that Japanese students had a hesitancy to participate verbally when compared to students from other parts of Southeast Asia. This pertained at both the American English Institute and the college level. My interviews showed that these students were disappointed in themselves for not actively participating more often in classroom discussions.

Since these students have between six and eight years of English training in the Japanese school system, a review of English teaching techniques in the Japanese school system is in order. Thus, my research topics are: "what conditions and situations influence Japanese students in their English speaking and listening skills?" and "How are Japanese students reacting to these conditions?"

It goes without saying that these topics may be approached from a number of perspectives. I have chosen to focus on answers given directly by students in my interviews with them, as well as information supplied by students in daily journals in which they recorded the situations where they interacted with English speakers. I have

focused on a range of activities and the problems encountered by students in learning the skills of listening to and speaking English. My lengthy experience as an English instructor in Japanese universities will help me in the analysis of the data.

## [II] **Research Design**

### **1. Personal Background**

All of the interviewees lived in Japan before studying in America. I needed to establish a baseline for each student related to their knowledge of English before they went to America. Personal information was gathered for each interviewee as follows:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Educational background in Japan
4. Number of years of English education in Japan
5. Amount of time visiting or living in English-speaking countries before coming to America for formal studies
6. Their impressions of the quality of their English education in Japan
7. Whether or not they had to go to English language school in America prior to being accepted by the American colleges. TOEFL scores must be above 500 points before a student can be directly accepted by the American colleges.

Personal capacity to learn a foreign language and personality characteristics which may affect learning (introvert vs. extrovert) are not examined in this study.

### **2. The Purpose of Studying Abroad, i.e., Personal Motivations**

All of the students had some purpose in mind for wanting to go to America to study. Some students were clearly aware of their motivations, while others were vague. In all cases, the underlying motivation was to increase speaking and listening skills, I focused on four areas: 1. short-term objectives; 2. long-term objectives; 3. plans to either stay abroad or return to Japan; 4. plans to return to America at some point in the future.

### **3. Learning Environments in America**

All the interviewees are attending one of three schools : University of Oregon(UO), Lane Community College (LCC), or American English Institute (AEI). Different levels of English ability as well as personal educational interests determined where they took classes. Time spent in the classroom is classified as formal situations. This is analyzed by my classroom observations at AEI and by examining the “activities” and “feelings” columns in the students’ journal entries. Time spent outside of the classroom (shopping, trips, parties, etc.) are classified as informal situations. This is analyzed by my interview questions regarding living situations, present schooling, and feelings of acceptance by Americans they meet and by examining the “activities” and “feelings” columns in the students’ journal entries.

### **4. What Methods Do Japanese Students Apply in Learning How to Speak and Listen to English ?**

I asked the students the following questions relating to how they make the best of their given learning environments :

1. What factors and activities help your English speaking and listening skills ?
2. In what ways do you increase your speaking and listening vocabulary ?
3. What could you be doing that would help increase your English speaking and listening abilities ?
4. What single factor is the most difficult in learning to speak or listen to English : a. vocabulary, b. pronunciation, c. idioms and colloquialisms, d. intonation and rhythm, e. vocabulary and idioms and colloquialisms, f. pronunciation and intonation and rhythm ?

In addition to the above questions, I analyzed the “activities” and “feelings” columns of their daily journals to study the students’ learning methods.

## 5. Motivations

Until the Japanese students acquire a certain level of fluency in English, they find themselves in uncomfortable and frustrating situations. They cannot communicate at a level commensurate with their intellectual capabilities because of the lack of language skills. There are always some degree of problems in this area until they reach fluency at the bilingual level. My American research colleague, Mr. Bloom, rated only one of the twenty-seven interviewees as bilingual. This student, unlike the others, had been exposed to an English-speaking atmosphere since his early teens. In addition, the student had the added stress of trying to complete his American studies in what amounts to a foreign language. It takes a strong degree of motivation to learn English for students to place themselves in such an educational setting. Motivation factors are closely related to item 4 (methods used in learning English) in the research design.

Motivation factors are divided into two categories: direct motivations and indirect (underlying) motivations. An example of the former would be the desire to get a good grade on the oral exam. An example of the latter would involve future plans such as a career as a simultaneous interpreter.

The nature of direct motivations is concrete, usually pertaining to instant feedback in the classroom situation. Successfully completing assignments tends to produce encouragement while failures tend to lead to discouragement. But failures can also motivate a student to try harder to be successful in the future.

The nature of indirect motivations is more abstract. They are related to vague hopes for the future, such as working for an American company or finding an English-speaking boyfriend or girlfriend. The level of comfort in the English-speaking environment also relates to the indirect motivations. I seek to find out if students who feel more comfortable are also more motivated to pursue their English skills more diligently.

The direct motivations are analyzed by data collected through my interviews with the 27 students. The following questions were

asked: When do you feel most confident in speaking English? When do you feel least confident in speaking English? What would encourage you to study harder? What discourages you from speaking English?

The indirect motivations are examined by the following questions: How important is it to you to be fluent in English? How open are Americans to you? Briefly describe your image of an ideal conversational environment? What are the merits and demerits of studying in America?

I also referred to the "activities" and "feelings" columns in the daily journals to study factors related to indirect motivations.

### **6. Duration of Stay**

All other things being equal, English speaking and listening skills are expected to increase based on the amount of time the students have spent in America. I asked students how long they had been in America on this occasion and during other prior visits or stays.

### **7. Evaluation of Results**

The English abilities of the interviewees are assessed in three ways: (a) Mr. Bloom's fifteen-minute interview with each student and his five-point assessment of each; (b) interviewees self-evaluation based on the five-point assessment and the question "Are you making satisfactory progress in speaking and listening to English? Why (not)?" from the interview sheet; (c) TOEFL scores. This score is used by American universities to assess the English abilities of non-native English speakers. For students in the college programs, we may assume that their skills have increased since they took the test prior to being admitted and have since been exposed to more opportunities to improve. Some of the students at AEI are recent arrivals and have not yet taken the test.

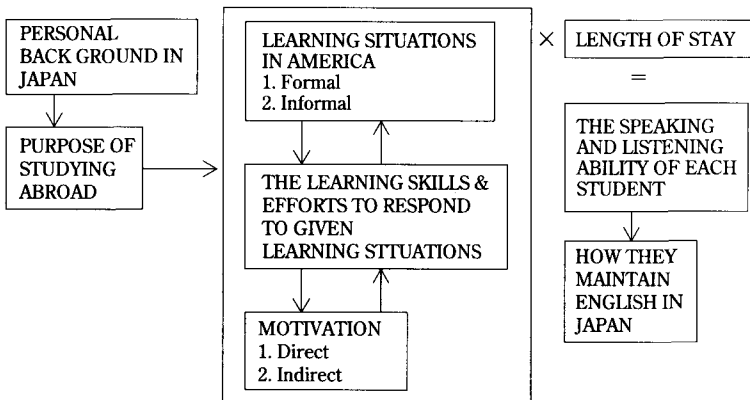
Student self-evaluations may be inaccurate - either too high or low - so I use my own judgment about their accuracy based on my personal interview observations. Mr. Bloom is an American sociologist who learned Spanish by living overseas. I consider his profes-

sional opinion to be a reliable indicator of students' abilities.

### 8. Students' Maintenance of English Skills upon Returning to Japan

This item (8) is derived from my research design. Once the students have obtained the language skills, they face the matter of maintaining those skills. Most of the Japanese students (25 of 27) plan to go back to Japan some day. My interview question is "How will you maintain your English-language skills after returning to Japan?"

### 9. RESEARCH DESIGN DIAGRAM : A SUMMARY



### [III] Sample and Setting

This research was conducted in Eugene, Oregon. There are three institutions that Japanese college level (age 18 or older) students attend depending on language skills and personal desires.

#### 1. The University of Oregon

This is a four-year state university emphasizing academic studies. The required TOEFL score for admission of foreign students is 520.

## 2. Lane Community College

This is a two-year public college emphasizing vocational studies and general education. The minimum TOEFL score for the admission of foreign students is 475.

## 3. American English Institute

AEI is a language school attached to UO that is designed to teach only English skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) to foreign students. The purpose is to advance English skills to a level that allows students to make adequate TOEFL scores to secure their admission to UO, LCC or another institution of higher learning.

### **Recruitment Principles and Processes**

#### PRINCIPLES

The following criteria were used in selecting the pool of interviewees :

1. A balanced ratio (1 : 1) of male and female students. In reality there are more female students in Eugene, so my sample has eleven males and sixteen females.
2. The sample is restricted to Japanese high school graduates enrolled in one of the three programs. The interviewees consisted of six from UO, nine from LCC, and twelve from AEI.
3. Graduate students or students staying here more than four years are eliminated from consideration. These students have attained sufficient language skills to interact with the American public in their personal and professional capacities. They no longer have to make a conscious effort to learn basic language skills.
4. The students at AEI have the lowest English skills in my sample. They are highly motivated to try strategies for learning English. Their lack of skills is frustrating to them and they are looking for opportunities to succeed. In English skill level, the AEI students are closest to Japanese students who remain in Japan. I also recruited Japanese students who had attended AEI and were now enrolled at UO and LCC to measure how these students are learning at a more advanced level.

## PROCESS

My assistant for this study is a UO student from Japan. She recruited five Japanese friends and acquaintances to participate. I prepared a letter of invitation for LCC students. It was randomly distributed to Japanese students by the LCC director of foreign student affairs. Nine students volunteered. I became personally acquainted with two Japanese students at AEI. In turn, they actively recruited subjects from among their classmates. Twelve interviewees volunteered to participate.

Although the sample is not randomly selected in a strict sense, all the interviewees come from a general pool of applicants and probably represent a good cross-section of Japanese students studying at the three schools.

### **Research Instruments**

#### 1. Interview Questionnaire

Prior to designing the questionnaire, I taped a conversation with one student from each of the three schools from which I selected interviewees. The topic of the conversation centered around the means by which they were learning to speak and listen in English. We talked about classroom activities, daily interactions with English speakers, living situations, study habits, and favorite music and television programs.

The information which I derived from this conversation was incorporated into the research design. Mr. Bloom, an experienced sociologist, reviewed the rough draft of my questionnaire. He suggested a few changes which I added to the questionnaire. I also examined the research in the field, but did not come across any that dealt with the questions I was examining.

#### 2. One-week Journal

I had the interviewees keep a daily journal to record their interactions with the English language. This is an important supplement to the interviews themselves because it provides detailed information about student activities. They can explain what they did, when and where, with whom and for how long. This journal consists of two



columns - "activities" and "feelings" regarding speaking and listening to English. I told the subjects that when they were involved with social gatherings and parties to designate the nationalities of the participants and what languages were spoken.

The activities are listed in one column with the corresponding personal feelings associated with those activities in the next column. The columns are arranged by time of day from 3 : 00 A.M. to 2 : 00 A.M. The subjects can show what time of day any given activity occurred and for how long the activity took place.

Of the 27 interviewees, 23 completed the one-week journal.

### 3. Mr. Bloom's evaluation of the interviewees' English speaking and listening abilities

Mr. Bloom met my requirements for an evaluator of students' skills : 1. He is a native English speaker ; 2 . He has a college degree ; 3 . He learned a foreign language by immersing himself in a country where that language is spoken (e.g., going to Venezuela to learn Spanish).

Mr. Bloom conducted fifteen-minute interviews with 25 of the subjects. He asked the same questions of each student, for example, "How does the weather in Oregon compare with that of Japan ?". He also engaged in free conversation suitable to the occasion.

Upon completion of the interview Mr. Bloom rated each student as (1) bilingual, (2) fluent or (3) not fluent. Then he developed a five-point grading system (5-highest, 1-lowest) for each of four categories : grammar, diction, vocabulary, and pronunciation. He used + or - for scores that fall between the numbers, e.g., 3+ = 3.3, 4- = 3.7.

## [IV] Analysis of the Data

### (1) Interviewees' Personal Background

Before starting to analyze the data, it may be convenient to show the interviewees' personal backgrounds in a table form. (See p. 54) The table contains their ages, genders, current institutions, and educational background in Japan. It is intended to make cross-

Interviewees	Age	Gender	Institution	Educational background in Japan
No. 1	27	M	L. C. C.	College
No. 2	21	F	L. C. C.	High school
No. 3	20	M	A. E. I.	High school
No. 4	19	M	U. O.	Japanese junior high school American high school
No. 5	27	M	U. O.	High school & language school (in Japan)
No. 6	25	M	U. O.	College
No. 7	25	F	U. O.	College
No. 8	25	F	U. O.	College
No. 9	23	F	U. O.	High school
No. 10	24	F	L. C. C.	High school
No. 11	24	F	A. E. I.	College
No. 12	28	F	A. E. I.	College
No. 13	19	F	A. E. I.	High school
No. 14	22	F	A. E. I.	Junior college
No. 15	19	F	A. E. I.	High school
No. 16	22	F	L. C. C.	Junior college
No. 17	23	F	L. C. C.	Junior college
No. 18	20	F	L. C. C.	High school
No. 19	18	F	L. C. C.	Junior college
No. 20	20	M	L. C. C.	International high school
No. 21	23	F	A. E. I.	Junior college
No. 22	19	M	A. E. I.	Half Japanese high school Half American high school
No. 23	22	M	A. E. I.	College
No. 24	27	M	A. E. I.	College
No. 25	23	F	L. C. C.	High school
No. 26	24	M	A. E. I.	College
No. 27	23	M	A. E. I.	College

references easier when they are necessary.

I have used the categories of age and gender to determine Japanese societal contexts that will give them meaning based on their decision to study in the United States.

**Age :**

The 27 interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 28. I have classified these into three subcategories : 18-19 yrs. old - 5 students : 20-25 yrs. old - 17 students : 26-28 yrs. old - 5 students. These subgroups identify most Japanese students enrolled abroad. Students younger than 18 are generally studying abroad because they are living overseas with their parents, not from any personal motivation to do so. On the other hand, Japanese older than 30 tend to be involved with their families and careers. Even if they have a personal desire to go abroad to study they must sacrifice it to these more important demands. If they come to America to live, it is to work for a business or to do research for institutional organizations. Because the Japanese social structure still depends on lifetime employment, it is very risky for middle-aged Japanese to abandon their careers and study abroad for mere personal satisfaction. Older Japanese who come to America to study are few and their situation is beyond the scope of this study.

The students who are studying in America as part of their educational development tend, therefore, to be between 18 and 30 at the oldest.

My research has uncovered the following characteristics of this age group :

1. Compared to older generations they have clear aspirations for their future careers. Twenty-six of the 27 have already determined their desired job or career.

2. They have a strong expectation that their American degree and good English speaking skills will help them to find desirable employment.

3. It is part of the younger generation's attitude that they need to experience other cultures first-hand. Going to study in America satisfies their desire for a more cosmopolitan outlook on life.

### **Gender :**

I discovered an interesting aspect to the gender category while analyzing my data. My initial intent was to interview 50% male and 50% female students. Of my 27 interviewees, 16 are female, while only 11 are male. Interestingly, this proportionally represents the female to male ratio of Japanese students at the three schools in Eugene from which I selected interviewees.

University of Oregon	Undergraduate	Graduate
Female	164	34
Male	148	28
Lane Community College		
Female	61	
Male	46	
American English Institute		
Female	27	
Male	16	

The number of female students clearly exceeded the number of male students. Traditionally, Japanese parents are reluctant to send their daughters abroad. This aroused my curiosity, so I discussed the matter with four of the female interviewees. They stressed that women in Japan are more constricted in terms of job opportunities than men are. They felt that if they stayed in Japan, with its rigid gender roles and social expectations, they would be left with narrow choices for their future. They thought that their international experiences would demonstrate their independence and originality. They also hoped that increased proficiency in speaking English would expand their prospects for finding interesting jobs.

### **Educational Background in Japan**

Of the 27 interviewees, 10 graduated from four-year colleges in Japan, 5 graduated from two-year colleges in Japan, 9 graduated from high schools in Japan, 1 graduated from an international high school in Japan, and 2 graduated from American high schools.

The following are the majors of the four-year college students :

Liberal Arts majors : economics, English, Spanish, physical edu-

cation, economics, journalism, business administration.

Science majors : electronic engineering, design, architecture.

The following are the majors of the two-year college students :

Liberal Arts majors : Four students major in English, Cultural History.

There is a high percentage of high school graduates among the interviewees. There are a number of reasons for this :

1. They felt that they had no choice but to come to America.

a. Their major field of study was not offered by Japanese colleges (# s 18, 22).

b. They failed to pass or did not care to take the rigid Japanese entrance exam (# s 3, 4).

c. One student spent his childhood in America and went to international high school in Japan. Naturally, his English is better than his Japanese. He felt he would do better at an American college (#20). Two others quit Japanese high school at an early stage and transferred to American highschools.

They wanted to pursue their educations at English-speaking institutions (# s 4, 22).

2. They were personally curious to see America and wanted to come here to pursue their education (# s 9, 10, 13).

3. A general belief among the students that it is easier to learn a foreign language the younger one is. They wanted to come to America as soon as possible to study English.

Do college or junior college graduates change majors when they come to America ? The following list examines this. \* indicates a two-year college graduate. > indicates a student who is still at A.E.I. If the student has an aspiration for a major, that is listed. 1. electronic engineering - business, 2. economics - business, 3. English - international studies, 4. Spanish - international studies, 5. design - > art administration, 6. physical education - > English, 7. \* English - > not sure, 8. \* English - business administration, 9. \* English - general studies, 10. \* English - general studies, 11. \* cultural history - > not sure, 12. economics - > business, 13. journalism - > journalism, 14. architecture - > architecture, 15. business - > business.

The data show two things :

1. The students are likely to choose the same or a closely related major field of study as they had chosen in Japan. One reason for this is that some of their Japanese credits are transferable to the American schools. This will shorten the time they need in order to earn their college degree in America. Also, their previous knowledge in the field of study will help them to understand the lectures better, aiding them in overcoming their weakness in English.

2. Four of the five junior college students (all female) majored in English while in Japan. They came here to hone their English speaking skills and get a job that has to do with interpersonal relations (e.g., secretary, stewardess, sales clerk). They tend to choose a general studies major which covers a wide range of information, giving them a broad educational background. They feel that this will help them in interpersonal exchanges. In contrast, the four -year college graduates tend to pursue the same specialized field that they studied in Japan.

#### **Amount of English Education Received in Japan as It Relates to Attendance at the Language Institute School in America**

English language course work in Japan varies according to the type of school. There are three years of instruction in junior high school and three years of instruction in senior high school. Two-year college graduates have one year of English, except for English majors who have two years. Four-year college and university students have two years instruction, except for English majors who have four years. Language school and international school students have a year of English instruction for each year they attend that school.

The number of years of English instruction among the sample is as follows: 10 yrs. - 1 student; 8 yrs. - 12 students; 7 yrs. - 3 students; 6 yrs. - 8 students; 5 yrs. - 1 student (international school); 4 yrs. - 1 student; 3 yrs. - 1 student. Of the 27 students, 21 had attended a language school in America. Of these, nine were four-year college graduates; four were two-year college graduates; eight were high school graduates.

Of the six interviewees who were not required to attend the language institute prior to being admitted to an American college, three can be easily explained. One was educated in English at an international school in Japan. One graduated from an American high school. The third spent time as a high school exchange student in America.

The other three had personally made special efforts to acquire English speaking and listening abilities, beyond their regular school curricula. One had been an active member of the English Speaking Society at her university. She had been actively using English for four years, even though her major was Spanish. Another was an English major who had practiced intensively to be able to get a high TOEFL score. The third went to a Japanese language school that specialized in a two-year program focusing on developing students' speaking and listening skills.

The data indicate that a typical Japanese student needs to attend a language school in America even after he or she had received extensive English instruction in Japan. Many of these students have close TOEFL scores that gain them admission to American colleges but they need to go to the language school in order to bolster their speaking and listening skills.

The implications are clear. Despite receiving extensive English course work in Japan, the students are deficient in speaking and listening skills. Formal English education in Japan needs to improve in these important aspects.

The next issue in my research is to examine the length of time spent at the language school before enrolling in regular American colleges. Do the college or junior college graduates need to spend a shorter time in the language school than the high school graduates? The students currently attending the language school are obviously excluded from this portion of my analysis.

The following data relate to the length of time that each student spent in the language institute :

For college and junior college graduates : #1 - 14 mos., #6 - 6 mos., #7 - 3 mos., #17 - 12 mos., #18 - 12 mos.,

For high school graduates: #5 - 24 mos. (language school in Japan), #9 - 6 mos., #25 - 12 mos.

The range of time spent at the language institute is from three months (#7) to twenty-four months (#5). In general, it appears that students need to spend from six to twelve months in the language school prior to entering college. High school graduates do not necessarily need more time at language school than college graduates. Individual factors seem to play the more important role in the length of time a student is required to attend the language school.

### **Impression of English Education in Japan**

I asked the students to give me their subjective impressions of the English course work they completed in Japan. The four broad areas of course work can be categorized as (1) grammar, (2) reading and writing, (3) speaking and listening, (4) vocabulary and idioms.

1. Students felt that the grammar lessons they received in Japan were very useful for reading and writing, but were not especially useful for conversation (# s 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26).

2. Students tend to feel comfortable with their basic reading and writing skills (# s 7, 10, 12, 17, 21). They also felt capable of higher -level reading which was not too technical in nature, (# s 6, 8, 23, 27).

3. Their knowledge of vocabulary and idioms is useful to an extent. Some of the expressions are too formal or outdated for conversation. Being able to listen to spoken English is very important for understanding vocabulary and idioms (# s 6, 7, 10, 25).

The most glaring deficiency in the way English is taught in the Japanese school system is in regard to speaking and listening. According to the students, the Japanese methods are not good at all (# s 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24).

Among the complaints are :

- a. They do not teach conversational expressions.
- b. There is almost no practice in pronunciation.
- c. There is almost no practice in listening to English.
- d. There is no practice in public speaking of English. That is one reason why Japanese students at American colleges are



reluctant to engage in classroom discussions.

The interviewees also commented on the different levels of English education taught in Japan

1. English learned in junior high school is very useful to them.
2. English learned in senior high school is helpful with vocabulary and grammar.
3. Collage-level English courses are not very helpful.

Conversation classes consist of too many students for an individual to receive enough practice. One exception is that of a student who attended a junior college where students spoke English on campus with native-speaker instructors and exchange students. She did not experience much of a change in atmosphere when she came to college in America.

Some further points brought up by interviewees : The textbook used at junior high school is very useful since it contained almost all the common everyday expressions used in America (#3) ; some college-level textbooks are too artistic or technical and difficult to understand (# s 6, 11) ; audiotape materials attached to textbooks are too slow to effectively improve students' listening abilities (#7).

In conclusion, the various inputs in the English curriculum as taught in Japan can be graded as follows : grammar and vocabulary - very good ; reading and writing - good ; speaking and listening - poor.

The negative impact from the way English speaking and listening is taught explains several things : Why so many Japanese students want to study in America ; why they need to go to a special language school in America before entering college there ; why Japanese society needs English conversation school besides the regular English courses.

### **The Experience of Visiting or Staying in an English-Speaking Country before Coming to Study in America**

Interviewees fall into three categories on this variable.

1. Short stay or visit. (less than two months). Thirteen interviewees had this experience, consisting of a short stay with an

American family, family vacation trips, or participation in a sporting event. They liked their time spent in America but regretted not having better speaking and listening skills.

2. Long-term stay (one year or more). Eight interviewees had this experience. It consisted of long-term language training or schooling. Two students had lived in English-speaking countries for a number of years while growing up. Three went to an American high school as either a regular or an exchange student. Three attended language schools in either the United States or Canada. These students wanted to extend their knowledge of English beyond high school into college.

3. No experience. Six interviewees were in this category. They had never been in a foreign country before coming to Oregon, but they had strong motivations for studying abroad. Some were influenced by friends or family members who had studied in America. They all wanted to learn how to speak and listen to English better.

## **(2) Purpose of Studying Abroad**

I asked the interviewees why they wanted to study abroad. The answers are grouped in four broad categories. Often these categories overlapped, as rarely did an interviewee express only one reason, but I have extracted the most prevalent reason and assigned each interviewee to only one category.

### **1. A Longing For American Life**

America is a symbol of freedom. Students who felt constricted by the structures of Japanese society aspired to the individualism and self-esteem characteristic of American society. They dream of the glamorous, materialistic American lifestyle portrayed in the news and entertainment media. These students hope to be able to live out this fantasy (#s 1, 9, 11, 22 {he was fascinated by American baseball}).

### **2. A Desire to Master the English Language**

These students wanted to become fluent in English. Most of them had spent some time in America. They realized that even after extensive English study in Japan they could not communicate very

well with Americans. They were interested in getting better at English speaking for personal and career reasons (#s 2, 7, 10, 13, 15, 16, 19).

A number of students in this category have not clearly focused on a career objective. They relish the chance to live in America and immerse themselves in American culture. They do not put intense academic pressure upon themselves, enjoy socializing with friends, or even working part-time (#2). They tend to view studying abroad as a necessary part of growing up in a small world. Many are majoring in general studies, such as international studies (UO) or general studies (LCC). These students emphasize the importance of learning English skills to get a job in a human relations field such as an interpreter (#7) or stewardess (#13).

### 3. A Desire for Improved Status in Japan

For a variety of reasons these students did not like their future prospects in Japan and felt that bettering their English education in America would improve their situations. They did not have the education, exam scores or social position to reach their goals in Japan and they believed that by studying in America they would become better qualified for success in Japan.

Two cases of high school students: One was not recommended for the university he desired, even though he went to the attached high school (#3). The other disliked the rigorous Japanese college entrance examination that requires too much memorization to achieve high scores (#4).

Two cases of college students: Some could not get the job they wanted (#s 6, 21, 27). Another did not want to be just an office secretary which is all she could expect in Japan given her educational background.

### 4. A Desire to Attain Specific Academic Goals

The majority of interviewees fell into this category. It is composed of two subgroups. The members of the first subgroup are motivated to study a field of pursuit that is rare or non-existent in the Japanese college system. Some examples are: sports medicine (#s 3, 18, 27); art administration (#11); film-making (#22); the roots

of Okinawa-Asian study (#24).

The members of the second subgroup are in fields taught in Japan, but the students feel the course work is more advanced in American colleges or there are better research and support facilities. Some examples are: physics (#5); social welfare (#25); pre-school education (#10).

The interviewees in groups 1, 2, and 3 tend to have their idealistic focus merge over time with the feelings of the students in group 4. The pragmatic aspects of choosing a major and going to daily classes bring them into a more practical understanding of American culture.

### **Short-term Objectives**

The interviewees' short-term objectives fell into two broad categories: (1) setting and pursuing a specific academic goal, and (2) developing better English language skills.

1. The academic goals varied depending on the school they attended.

For AEI students: score well enough on TOEFL to transfer to a two-year college, four-year college, or graduate school so they can study in their major field (# s 3, 11, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27).

For LCC students: graduate from LCC (# s 1, 10, 16); graduate and obtain a one-year working visa to get job experience (# s 2, 17, 25); transfer to a four-year college (# s 18, 20).

For UO students: graduate from UO and return to Japan (# s 4, 6, 8, 9); go on to graduate school (#5); graduate and obtain a one-year working visa to get job experience (#7).

2. The data regarding goals for bettering English language skills are as follows: want to develop English speaking skills (# 4, 19, 23, 24); want to meet more Americans and speak English through a job situation (# s 17, 25); obtain better writing skills (#19); obtain better business writing skills to get a good job (#8).

The students who remain in America after graduating and apply for the working visa aim to use the job site to improve their speaking abilities. They realize that while in school they have to focus on their academic responsibilities. They do not get an opportunity to

immerse themselves in American culture and really hone their English skills. Obtaining a job in America is an ideal setting for increasing their English skills as well as preparing themselves for the chance to get a good job in Japan.

Five of the six students who mentioned that they wanted to develop better English speaking skills, are recent arrivals (less than six months) to America. Their frustration level is high due to their listening and speaking deficiencies. They need to meet more Americans to alleviate this situation. The two who want to improve their writing skills have applied for working visas. They also want to improve their English skills while preparing themselves for a better job in Japan.

#### **Plans to Stay Abroad or Return to Japan**

Stay abroad - 1 (#22)

Return to Japan - 22 (# s 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24)

Not sure - 4 (# s 5, 25, 26, 27)

The interviewees are aware that if they want to work for any of the major corporations in Japan, they must begin their careers soon after graduation. The Oregon economy does not afford them many good job opportunities. They might get a lower-level job, such as a receptionist at a place that attracts a lot of Japanese students, but these are the types of jobs they are trying to escape from. The interviewees simply do not have the language skills of their American counterparts to compete for the really good jobs. Even with businesses that conduct their affairs throughout the Pacific Rim, the students do not have the business experience yet to be very valuable. They must return to Japan to get a good job.

Many of the Japanese students have not immersed themselves in American culture to improve their English skills well enough to compete realistically for American jobs. Also, their parents, who sponsored their education, want them to return home to Japan. They usually do return.

The student who wanted to stay here and the ones who are not

sure have been here for over two or three years. They feel more confident in their English skills and feel comfortable in America. The one who plans to stay here intends to become a movie director. The four “not sure” students are flexible but job-oriented. For instance, #5 wants to be a physicist. He will stay in America or return to Japan depending on where he receives the better job offer.

### **Future Plans**

Each interviewee was asked about career aspirations.

- 1 . self-employed business owner
- 2 . counselor
- 3 . sports doctor
- 4 . self-employed business owner
- 5 . physicist
- 6 . businessman
- 7 . interpreter
- 8 . consultant on foreign student matters at a college or a prefectural office
- 9 . junior college English professor
- 10 . kindergarten English teacher
- 11 . manager of a public facility
- 12 . English teacher-tutor at a private school
- 13 . stewardess for an American airline
- 14 . entertainer
- 15 . high school English teacher
- 16 . office worker at a foreign affiliated firm
- 17 . importer of foreign products
- 18 . sports doctor
- 19 . secretary
- 20 . architect
- 21 . volunteer
- 22 . movie director
- 23 . advertising agent
- 24 . journalist
- 25 . community service worker in a developing country

26. architect

27. businessman with a trading company

I was surprised to find that everyone had a specific career objective. All of the careers required some knowledge of English. The question to me is : Do they choose careers where they get to use English because they want to speak English or are they studying English because it will help with the careers they have chosen ?

For the purpose of analysis, I have eliminated the students at AEI. They have not been in America long enough for me to ascertain whether they are more language-oriented or job-oriented.

I will regard the interviewees who expressed a desire to obtain one-year working visas or those who wanted more opportunities to meet and talk with Americans as language-oriented. These are # s 2, 4, 7, 10, 16, 17, 25. Their career objectives tend to be focused on public relations (# s 2, 4, 7, 16, 17) or public services (# s 10, 25). In most cases, the goals they have chosen require a high level of English speaking ability. All, except #4, are females.

The more job-oriented interviewees (# s 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 18, 20) tended to choose careers that had more technical aspects than just knowing English. Even when the knowledge and use of English was important there were other special skills that were also required in the profession.

### (3) Learning Situations in America

#### A Formal Situations

##### I. Housing

How do various housing situations affect the development of the students' speaking and listening skills ? According to the students' answers in the interviews, some patterns are observed :

1. (Short homestay) Dorm → Apartment  
No. 1 (2 yrs., 7 mos.), No. 2 (2 yrs., 3 mos.), No. 3 (1 yr.), No. 4 (4 yrs., 2 mos.), No. 6 (2 yrs., 3 mos.), No. 7 (2 yrs., 10 mos.), No. 8 (1 yr., 3 mos.), No.10 (2 yrs., 2 mos.).
2. (Short homestay) Dorm → Homestay  
No.9 (4 yrs.), No.20 (2 yrs., 3 mos).

3. Homestay → Apartment

No.12 (6 mos.), No.16 (3 mos.), No.17 (2 yrs., 8 mos.).

4. Homestay → Dorm → Homestay

No.18 (1 yr., 6 mos.)

5. Homestay

No.19 (3 mos.), No.25 (10 mos. this time), No.26 (6 mos.).

6. Dorm

No.11 (8 mos.), No.13 (9 mos.), No.14 (9 mos.), No.15 (8 mos.), No.21 (7 mos.), No.22 (3 mos.), No.23 (3 mos.), No.24 (3 mos. this time), No.27 (4 mos.).

There is a tendency for students to live in a dorm or stay with a host family at first. After two or three terms (one term = three months), they are likely to move to an apartment or a house. All the students in the dormitory have been in Oregon for nine months or less and are studying at AEI. They are now undergoing an initiation phase and after they have gained experience and confidence in living here, there is good likelihood that they may move out into a house or apartment.

Category no.2 consists of a student and host family who get along well. The student tried dorm life for a while but decides to move back and wants to stay with the host family during her entire stay in America. The group of students under category no. 3 has spent a short time with a host family and then moved into an apartment. The student in category no.4 moved from the host family to a dorm, but did not like dorm life ; She found another host family to complete her stay. The students under category no. 5 are spending their initiation period with a host family. Depending on their relationship with the host family they may stay there or move out after a time.

Since the students tend to move into a house or apartment after experiencing dormitory life or life with a host family, I tried to ascertain why. I asked the interviewees for their subjective opinions on the pros and cons of dormitory life or life with a host family.

Dormitory life :

Pros: (1) A good deal of exposure to spoken English with a



roommate and other friends in the dorm ; (2) No need to fix meals ; (3) Good facilities. There is even access to the internet ; (4) Since dormitories are on or close to campus there is easy access to the classrooms ; (5) There are many opportunities to get to know and talk to not only American friends, but also to friends from other countries. They can become better friends with other Japanese students, too.

Cons: (1) No privacy ; (2) They cannot do as they please because they must respect their roommate's space ; (3) Noisy ; (4) American roommates tend to associate with other Americans in the dorm ; likewise, Japanese students tend to associate with other Japanese or Asian students ; (5) At first, no right to choose your roommate for compatibility.

These opinions shed some light on the reasons Japanese students eventually rent their own apartments. They want privacy even if it means giving up the opportunity to be around English speakers. But by the time they move into their own apartment they have gained experience and confidence regarding their English speaking abilities. Now they need privacy to concentrate on their academic work. Students who can have their privacy with a host family may well stay there for their entire school experience. In some cases, a Japanese student will share a two-bedroom apartment with an American friend. This way they can have their privacy and maintain close contact with a native English speaker.

As a setting where English is spoken naturally, the impact of the quality of interaction between a Japanese student and either a roommate or a host family has a lot to do with how quickly the Japanese student's English improves.

I discovered an interesting fact during this research. There are a number of foreign students of various nationalities studying at the University of Oregon. Dormitory roommates of Japanese students are not necessarily Americans. Of the nine interviewees staying in a dorm, seven are sharing their room with non-Americans - with Koreans, Malaysians, South Africans, and other Japanese. I therefore asked the interviewees their opinions regarding their experi-

ences with non-native English speaking roommates and with native English speaking roommates.

#### Non-native English Speakers as Roommates :

Pros : (1) They share the mutual experience of being foreigners in the United States ; (2) Communication is easy because English is a second language for both people. They are not as self-conscious about making mistakes ; (3) Most of the foreign roommates are Asians so they have some cultural similarities to make it easier to become friends.

Cons : Communication occurs within a limited vocabulary. They tend to repeat the same things ; (2) Their pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation are not always reliable.

#### Native English Speakers as Roommates :

Pros : (1) They can learn English with natural pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation. They can learn idiomatic terms and everyday expressions ; (2) They can learn the American way of living and get a feel for the American lifestyle ; (3) If they become good friends, the American student can become a link between the Japanese student and American society.

Cons : (1) Because of their cultural differences, after a while the relationship can become strained ; (2) The American roommate is considerate but still has a life of his or her own. They just do not have much in common.

In the dormitory setting there are many native English speaking students around. The Japanese students can easily find opportunities to speak with them even if they are not roommates. Unless the Japanese student has another Japanese as a roommate they still have to use English to speak to students of other nationalities.

In general, Japanese students benefit from living with a host family or with a roommate in a dormitory. This affords the newcomer to America an opportunity to be exposed to and to use the English language. After a time of adjustment, the Japanese students place more importance on privacy and solitude. Unless the situation

Studying Abroad : Japanese Learners of English in an American Setting

with a host family or dormitory roommate satisfies these personal needs, the student often feels better off living in an apartment. This way they can socialize and speak English when they desire by inviting friends over or by visiting friends, but they can also have the privacy needed for studying and personal contentment.

*(To be continued.)*