NNSs' attention to grammatical and pragmatic features

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This study makes an exploratory attempt to integrate the notion of interlanguage pragmatics with that of English as an international lingua franca. The study, which was modeled after Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study is based on empirical data collected from 181 Japanese college English learners (JCELs) with respect to English spoken by four non-native English speakers (NNSs: Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and Korean) as well as two native-English speakers (NSs). The analysis outcomes reveal that the JCELs show somewhat ambivalent judgments toward English spoken by familiar speakers (a Japanese speaker in particular), and more importantly that their judgments seem to be not only inaccurate but also affected by their stereotypical image, especially of native English speakers. Several methodological and pedagogical implications are discussed based on the results.

本研究は中間言語語用論の理論を国際共通語としての英語の研究に取り入れることを目的とした探索的研究である。研究は、Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) の実証研究をモデルにしており、4人の英語非母語話者（中国語、イタリア語、日本語、韓国語の母語話者）及び2人の英語母語話者の発話に関して収集した181人の日本人英語学習者のデータに基づいている。分析の結果、日本人英語学習者の判断は、親しみのある英語、特に日本語話者のそれには相反的な反応を示し、さらに重要な点として、判断があまり正確ではないこと、そして英語母語話者についてはある種のステレオタイプ化したイメージに影響されていると思われることである。これらの結果に基づき、研究から得られる方法論的、及び教育的示唆について論じている。

English now plays a de facto role as an international lingua franca (ILF). Accordingly, investigation into English use from the perspective of non-native speakers (NNSs) is becoming more important than at any time in the past (Iwai & Rinnert, 2002). Reflecting such recent trends of English diffusion, researchers are eager to explore new research domains such as *world Englishes* from a sociolinguistic perspective (see Bolton, 2005 for a good review of studies on world Englishes), English curricula from a sociopolitical perspective in language education (Nunan, 2003), and interlanguage pragmatics from a pedagogical perspective for classroom applications (e.g., Rose & Kasper, 2001).

Following these recent exploratory attempts, the present study deals empirically with English spoken by NNSs. Methodologically, the study was modeled after a unique interlanguage pragmatics study by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998: hereafter, BH&D study), in which they made cross-cultural comparisons with respect to NNS (and partially NS) judgments on grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness. In this paper, the BH&D study is reviewed, after which empirical data collection for the present study and outcomes from the data analysis are presented. Finally, several pedagogical and methodological implications are discussed on the basis of the outcomes from the study.

Literature Review: Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998)

Both learners and teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) and those of English as a second language (ESL) are involved in the BH&D study. The study was conducted to discover whether there would be any difference between EFL learners (370 Hungarians and 112 Italians) and ESL learners (173 ESL students in the U.S.) and between EFL teachers (25 Hungarians) and ESL teachers (28 NS teachers in the U.S.). The comparison across the three learner groups and that between the two teacher groups were made on the basis of quantitative data collected through a questionnaire survey. In this survey, 20 video scenarios were displayed to participants, and they were requested to judge the quality of an English utterance spoken by one designated person appearing in each video scenario. The judgment targets were assigned to grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness of the utterance. Either a grammatical problem or a pragmatic problem had been inserted in advance in each scenario, with the exception of a few intact cases that served as distractors.

The major findings from this empirical investigation were that 1) the learning and teaching contexts of EFL and ESL affect grammatical and pragmatic awareness; that is, the EFL learners and teachers paid more attention to grammatical problems, but ESL learners and teachers were more concerned with pragmatic problems, and 2) EFL learners' English proficiency correlated positively with their

grammaticality and pragmatic judgments in the EFL context, while ESL learners' proficiency had a similar correlation with pragmatic judgments but not with grammatical judgments.

The present Study

Research questions

BH&D interpret the findings of their study as evidence for the necessity of strengthening pragmatic instruction in EFL contexts. Their argument is worth taking into account, but there seem to be further considerations necessary to generalize their findings and to integrate this kind of discussion into studies of English as an ILF. Among other concerns, their investigation is based only on norms of English native speakers (NSs), and one may wonder if learner reactions would have been the same if judgment targets were NNS utterances instead. Additionally, one may question whether learners in different EFL contexts whose English proficiency is on a similar level as the participants in the BH&D study (pre-intermediate) can perceive grammatical/pragmatic problems as accurately as those in the BH&D study in order that the BH&D findings can be generalized regardless of learning contexts.

To examine these issues, an empirical study related to the BH&D study was planned, in which Japanese college English learners (JCELs) were chosen as observation targets. More specifically, the following research questions were formulated in this study:

1. Are JCELs' judgments of NNS and NS utterances consistent in assessing the following items: comprehensibility, pronunciation acceptability, grammatical correctness, and pragmatic appropriateness (in order to avoid redundancy, these four are referred to hereafter as C, Pro, G, and P or CProGP items)? (RQ1)

2. Are JCELs more similar to EFL or ESL respondents of the BH&D study in terms of grammatical and pragmatic judgments? (RQ2)

3. Can JCELs make grammatical and pragmatic judgments accurately? (RQ3)

4. Does proficiency affect JCELs' grammatical and pragmatic judgments? (RQ4)

Data collection method and participants

Empirical data collection of this study was conducted by using eight *audio* scenarios, instead of *video* scenarios as in the BH&D study. In addition, the scenarios of this study consisted only of *request refusals* rather than mixed speech acts as in their study. Some request refusal situations were borrowed from the BH&D study, and similar situations were newly created in this study to maintain an appropriate number of scenarios. Despite the difference in speech act selection, the task format itself was unchanged. That is, an audio scenario was presented in a dialogue format between a male NS teacher and a female NNS student (six scenarios) or in a dialogue between a male NS teacher and a female NS student (two scenarios),[1] and then the JCEL respondents judged the students' utterance in each dialogue with respect to the four assessment points, i.e., the CProGP items (Table 1). The NNS students in the six scenarios represent the

following nationalities: Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The NS student roles were played by an NS of American English. Of these eight scenarios, a Spanish speaker's utterance was used for a practice session, and the Vietnamese speaker's was used as a distractor. Hence, the total number of task scenarios used for the actual data analysis was six, including the two NS scenarios.[2]

Table 1. Audio scenarios for the judgment task

No	Name	Nationality	C	Pro	G	P
Warm-up & distractors	Mera	Peruvian		-	+	-
	Nguen	Vietnamese		-	+	+
1	Ming	Chinese		-	-	-
2	Choi	Korean		-	-	-
3	Kana	Japanese		-	-	-
4	Anna	Italian		-	-	-
5	Emily	NS		+	-	-
6	Nancy	NS		+	+	+

N.B.: '-' stands for deviations from standard English norms. C = comprehensibility, Pro = pronunciation, G = Grammaticality, P = pragmatics

As in the following example, both a grammatical error and a pragmatically inappropriate segment (direct request refusal) were inserted in each one of these six scenarios, except for one NS utterance (Nancy: see the "+" mark in both G and P items in Table 1).

(e.g.) Interaction between NS-NNS (Kana Tanaka)

Kana Tanaka is a Japanese student. She knows it is her day to give a talk in class, but she is not ready.

Teacher: Thank you Mary, that was very interesting. Kana, it's your turn to give your talk.

Kana: **I don't want to do it today**. But **I am do it** next week. (G problem: verb form; P problem: direct request refusal)

N.B.:   Each dialogue was played twice. A chime sound was inserted before the recording of the student utterance in the second display to signal the judgment target clearly.

As in the above example, all the grammatical problems in the scenarios are made up of violations of English grammatical rules, including the use of 'many' for an uncountable noun ('many time'), wrong past tense ('did not brought'), a subject-verb disagreement ('a person who have'), and a wrong comparative form (much more busier). Pragmatic problems in all the scenarios are concerned with a rather direct request refusal as in the above example.

Immediately after listening to each scenario, the participants answered the first question about their understanding of the dialogue (see Appendix 1 for the details of the task questions). To avoid responses made only by guessing, the respondents were directed to skip the remaining CProGP questions if they did not understand a scenario. The CProGP questions were formatted in a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very difficult/bad" to "very easy/good" with an additional sixth choice of "I can't determine", which was also intended to avoid responses by guessing. The total participants in the study were 181 JCELs (87 males and 94 females),[3] who can be divided into three proficiency groups: high, mid, and low

(N = 77, 57, and 47, respectively) according to their responses to a self-evaluation question on their English proficiency (Appendix 2: the high group members are those who chose 'A' or 'B' in the question; the mid group, 'C'; and the low group, 'D' and 'E', respectively).[4]

Results

Descriptive statistics

For ease of grasping the entire response patterns, the means of overall responses are plotted on a graph (Figure 1) by each tested item (see Appendix 3 for detailed descriptive statistics).

Figure 1. Means of CProGP judged by JCEL respondents
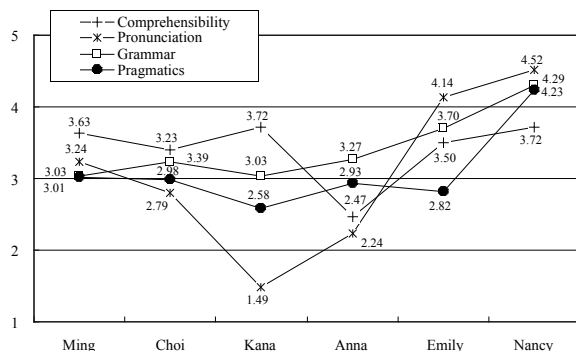
N.B.:   Scale for 'Comprehensibility': 1-very difficult to 5-very easy. Scale for 'Pronunciation', 'Grammar', and 'Pragmatics: 1-very bad to 5-very good.

Those who did not understand the dialogue (Q1) and those who chose "I can't determine" in the CProGP questions were excluded from the calculation of means. See the section of Responses of "I can't determine" below for more about these responses. It should be noted in interpreting these results that, except for Nancy's utterance, low judgments (below 3.0) were expected for all the scenarios, especially on the G and P questions, due to the intentional insertions of problems in these two items. Salient features are noticeable in the response means, and the four main ones are mentioned here.

The first feature is concerned with a peculiarity of Kana's means. Although the comprehensibility of her utterance was highest along with that of Nancy's, Kana's utterance was ranked lowest in the Pro and P items among all the NNS utterances. The second feature is that the two NSs represented by Emily and Nancy were assessed higher on most items than the other NNSs, except for Emily's mean for the P item. Next, Anna's means were lower in the C and Pro items; however, the means of her other two judgment items stayed in the middle. Finally, Choi and Ming, the two non-Japanese Asian NNSs, were judged neither high nor low on all the items, except for Ming's C item.

Difference of means between grammar and pragmatics

Next, the analysis focused specifically on the difference of means between the items of G and P in order to discern if the JCEL participants were grammar-oriented or pragmatics-oriented, as in BH&D's EFL/ESL dichotomy. A difference of means (G – P) for each speaker, which can be obtained from Figure 1, is .02 for Ming, .25 for Choi, .045 for Kana, .034 for Anna, .88 for Emily, and -.06 for Nancy. To examine

whether these differences are significant, a paired *t*-test was run for each NNS speaker separately, and the results obtained were significant for all the speakers, except for Ming and Nancy: Ming, $t = 0.138$, $p = 0.889$; Choi, $t = 3.908$, $p < .001$; Kana, $t = 5.184$, $p < .001$; Anna, $t = 2.750$, $p < .01$; Emily, $t = 8.556$, $p < .001$; Nancy, $t = -1.221$, $p = .225$. Judging from these results, one may want to conclude that the JCELs are more similar to BH&D's ESL learners, who were more sensitive to pragmatic problems than grammatical problems (note again as already mentioned in the preceding section that lower means of the G and P items signifies more sensitive perception of G or P problems.) However, caution must be maintained regarding this interpretation due to the results shown in the next section.

Responses of "I can't determine"

As annotated in Figure 1, the means of the CProGP items were calculated by excluding those who did not understand the audio scenarios and those who answered "I can't determine" in the CProGP items. The *N* row in the Table 2 shows the total number of respondents who could understand each scenario "completely" or "more or less" (see Appendix 1), and the figures in the remaining rows represent the numbers of those who chose "I can't determine" in each one of the four judgment questions.

Table 2. Total respondents who chose "I can't determine"

Name	Ming	Choi	Kana	Anna	Emily	Nancy
N	177	176	178	133	172	152
C	4	3	1	2	2	3
Pro	6	2	2	4	4	2
G	31	43	30	45	41	33
P	16	12	16	20	13	7
C	2.3	1.7	0.6	1.5	1.2	2.0
Pro	3.4	1.1	1.1	3.0	2.3	1.3
G	17.5	24.4	16.9	33.8	23.8	21.7
P	9.0	6.8	9.0	15.0	7.6	4.6

N.B.: The upper half of the table shows the raw numbers, and the lower half percentile shares of the respondents shown in the N row.

From the *N* row of the table, we can observe that, among the 181 respondents, from a minimum of 3 respondents (Kana: 181-178) to a maximum of 48 respondents (Anna: 181-133) could not understand the scenarios. Moreover, we also can know from the table that quite a large number of respondents could not judge the G and P items as the highlighted areas in the table indicate. Compared with the C and Pro items (ranging from a minimum 0.6% to a maximum 3.4%), the ratios of the "I can't determine" choosers are extremely high in the G item (from 16.9% to 33.8%) and the P item (from 4.6% to 15.0%).

In addition to these undetermined responses, Figure 1 indicates that most NNS means are centered around 3.0, and this could be attributed to the possibility that the participants

were not confident enough to make a definite decision. These NNS means contrast somewhat with the NS means of Emily and Nancy in the G item and of Nancy in the P item. Here we should not overlook the fact that Emily's utterance has a similar grammatical problem to those of the NNS speakers, which means that the participants might have given a higher G score only due to the fact that Emily was an NS speaker (see Note 1 regarding how the NS status of Emily and Nancy was delivered to the respondents).

Proficiency difference in the G and P items

Finally, how the participants' proficiency had influenced their judgments on the G and P items was examined. The results are presented in the two tables below for each item along with the graphs that are displayed vertically. The results of a one-way ANOVA for the three-group comparison are also summarized at the bottom of the table and graph display.

Two salient features emerged from this analysis. One is that proficiency yielded a significant difference only in the NS judgments (but none of the NNS judgments) both on the G and P items. The other is that, despite the intentional insertion of the G and P problems in each scenario other than Nancy's, the learners with higher proficiency tended to make more positive judgments on the G item. This sounds somewhat contradictory to our general expectancy of learners' proficiency since the learners with higher proficiency by definition have a better command of grammar. The most plausible reason for this would be that most of these learners actually could not notice the problems, but they chose to make more positive judgments, especially

toward the NSs. Conversely, the less proficient learners chose rather to be neutral (i.e., chose 3) due to their lesser confidence in their English.
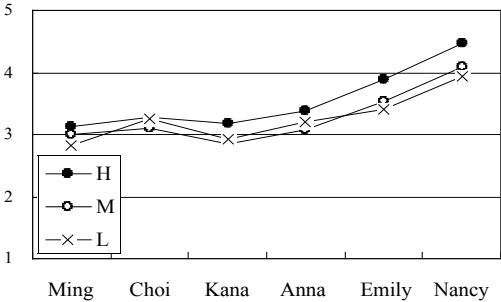
Discussion and implications

We will discuss the main findings presented in the preceding section according to the order of the four research questions of the study.

First, regarding RQ1 on JCELs' judgment consistency, consistent judgments were observed with respect to the NSs' utterances and those of the two non-Japanese Asian NNS speakers (Ming and Choi). However, Kana, the Japanese speaker who represents the JCELs' most familiar variety of English, was judged best in comprehensibility but worst in the Pro and G items. This asymmetric pattern could be accounted for by a stereotypical negative image that Japanese people have toward strong Japanese accents in English, while the positive judgments of the NSs would simply reflect the participants' innocent belief that English spoken by NSs is perfect and they are always good models for study. In contrast to these judgments regarding the scenarios by the Japanese NNS and the NSs, both of whose varieties the JCELs are frequently exposed to, the neutral judgments on Ming and Choi can be ascribed to the JCELs' unfamiliarity with their ways of speaking. As for the Italian NNS, her pronunciation must have seemed to the participants extremely different from that of the others, and thus her utterance was determined to be difficult to understand. Consequently, the JCELs must have made a negative judgment on her highly *exotic* pronunciation to them.

Table 3. Means of G item by proficiency & speaker

Name	M			SD		
	H	M	L	H	M	L
Ming	3.12	3.00	2.83	1.24	0.96	0.91
Choi	3.28	3.11	3.25	0.86	0.80	0.68
Kana	3.19	2.84	2.93	1.34	1.06	0.98
Anna	3.39	3.07	3.20	0.80	0.68	0.63
Emily	3.90	3.54	3.41	0.88	0.78	0.69
Nancy	4.46	4.09	3.93	0.61	0.71	0.62

Table 4. Means of P item by proficiency & speaker

Name	M			SD		
	H	M	L	H	M	L
Ming	2.86	2.98	3.35	1.16	0.88	0.79
Choi	2.95	2.92	3.11	0.89	0.66	0.70
Kana	2.55	2.58	2.63	1.02	0.79	0.91
Anna	2.95	2.83	3.06	0.85	0.82	0.73
Emily	2.57	2.92	3.19	1.18	0.98	0.98
Nancy	4.43	4.19	3.69	0.80	0.71	0.62

Figure 2. Graph display of Table 3

Figure 3. Graph display of Table 4

N.B.: Scale: 1-very bad to 5-very good

Ming: $F(2, 143) = 0.747$, $p = 0.476$

Choi: $F(2, 130) = 0.592$, $p = 0.554$

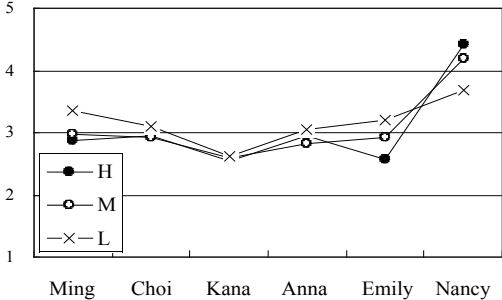Kana: $F(2, 145) = 1.305$, $p = 0.274$

Anna: $F(2, 85) = 1.648$, $p = 0.199$

Emily: $F(2, 128) = 4.413$, $p = 0.014$

Nancy: $F(2, 116) = 6.593$, $p = 0.002$

N.B.: Scale: 1-very bad to 5-very good

Choi: $F(2, 161) = 0.698$, $p = 0.499$

Kana: $F(2, 159) = 0.090$, $p = 0.914$

Anna: $F(2, 110) = 0.491$, $p = 0.613$

Emily: $F(2, 156) = 4.349$, $p = 0.015$

Nancy: $F(2, 142) = 9.558$, $p = 0.000$

With respect to RQ2 in reference to the HB&D study, the JCELs seem most similar to their ESL learners; however, this interpretation appears to be too simplistic. RQ3 asked about the accuracy of their judgments on the G and P items, and the results obtained were not as expected. Therefore, it is highly doubtful that the grammatical mistakes and pragmatically inappropriate factors were accurately perceived by the JCELs, except for those cases involving varieties familiar to them, such as that of Kana (but not regarding her utterance grammaticality) and the two NSs. Moreover, the analysis of proficiency differences, i.e., RQ4, indicates that even the learners in the highest proficiency group have not reached a threshold level to perceive simple G or P problems. In fact, the higher learners were more inaccurate than the lower two groups in their grammaticality judgments.

There are several implications from these findings. Among others, the most important and serious one is the fact that the JCEL participants' grammatical and pragmatic competence was in practice insufficient to help them make proper judgments on the fairly simple utterances that they may encounter in quite ordinary language use. It should be noted that about half of the participants belong to a department where paramount importance is placed on English proficiency, and additionally their English scores in the nationwide unified entrance examination is far higher than the average. Overemphasis on grammatical knowledge in English education in Japan is often critically viewed; however, the fact would most probably be that their grammatical knowledge has not been nurtured adequately as practical *live* knowledge that is necessary either for grammatical or pragmatic judgments.

Another important implication is the JCELs' irrelevant, naïve belief in the NS myth, which probably derives from their unfamiliarity with and/or ignorance of NNS varieties. In actual language teaching, it should be stressed that NSs make mistakes similar to those of NNSs, and more importantly, pragmatically careful utterances by NNSs are often accepted as better than arrogant-sounding utterances by NSs on the part of most English speakers who know how to use English in the international context.

Methodologically, the present study has an important implication. The current study can primarily be categorized as a study of interlanguage pragmatics. In this research area, the majority of past studies are based on NS norms as the BH&D study typically shows. In fact, however, English is not the native speaker's property any longer, and from this standpoint the present study claims the necessity of integrating an additional perspective of English as an ILF into studies of interlanguage pragmatics. In such new types of interlanguage pragmatic study, a methodological innovation, as attempted in this study, seems to be essential.

Finally, the present study is exploratory and is weak in some points. The most serious one is the fact that the study is based solely on the JCEL judgments, even though it claimed the necessity of introducing the view of English as an ILF into studies of interlanguage pragmatics. To promote the study, therefore, responses in other EFL contexts must be collected, and they must be compared with the JCEL responses. In fact, while writing this paper, the authors of the study have been trying to collect such responses from EFL learners in China, Italy, and Korea, i.e., three other NNS groups for this study. Thus, the authors are hoping that

they will be able to present findings from the extended data collection at the next JALT conference.

Notes

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1. In each scenario, the speaker's nationality was explicitly announced. Regarding the two NS speakers, they were introduced as "Emily Smith is an American student" and "Nancy Watson is a Canadian student", by which it was indicated that these speakers would be native English speakers.

2. An alternative data collection design is to employ different profiles of one specific NNS variety, the Japanese one in particular as in (G+, P-), (G-, P+), and (G+, P+). We chose the one presented in Table 1 since we intended to conduct a cross-cultural study that will be mentioned in the section of *Discussion and implications* of this study.

3. Whether the respondents of this study represent Japanese college English learners in general is a controversial point. To avoid responses by a specific student population, the respondents were chosen in this study from two local, co-educational universities (one public and one private) in fairly diverse major areas (e.g., business, law, international studies, and information sciences). Even so, the statistical sampling problem is not completely solved and, therefore, we have to be careful not to generalize the findings of the study too excessively.

4. This self-evaluation method of determining participants' proficiency was also borrowed from the BH&D study, where some practical problems as well as merits of using this method are discussed. Unarguably, a more reliable method is to use test scores, but they are not always easily obtainable due to practical restrictions of giving a test or tests. In this study, it was impossible to give any tests at a university where the authors were unaffiliated.

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Appendix 1: Questions for each scenario (Translated into English)

Q1: Did you understand what the speaker was saying? "Yes, completely." "Yes, more or less." "No, not at all."

If your answer to Q1 is, "Yes, completely" or "Yes, more or less," evaluate her talking on the following four points:

1) Difficulty to understand her talking

1. Very difficult 2. Difficult 3. So so 4. Easy 5. Very easy 6. I can't determine

2) Her pronunciation

1. Very bad 2. Bad 3. So so 4. Good 5. Very good 6. I can't determine

3) Her grammar

1. Very bad 2. Bad 3. So so 4. Good 5. Very good 6. I can't determine

4) Her manner of talking (polite/appropriate enough?)

1. Very bad 2. Bad 3. So so 4. Good 5. Very good 6. I can't determine

Appendix 2: Self-evaluation question on proficiency (Translated into English)

Q: How well can you communicate in English?

A: I can express my opinions in English freely. (Advanced)

B: I can say most of what I want to say despite some difficulty of doing so. (High-intermediate)

C: I can say what I want to say, but have much difficulty

in doing so. (Low-intermediate)

D: I can't say most of what I want to say. (Beginning)

E: I can't express myself at all. (True beginner)

Appendix 3: Descriptive statistics of scenario judgments

Item		Name	N'	M	SD
C	1	Ming	173	3.63	0.85
	2	Choi	173	3.39	0.83
	3	Kana	177	3.72	1.02
	4	Anna	131	2.47	0.95
	5	Emily	170	3.50	1.03
	6	Nancy	149	3.72	1.13
Pro	1	Ming	171	3.24	0.79
	2	Choi	174	2.79	0.72
	3	Kana	176	1.49	0.68
	4	Anna	129	2.24	0.85
	5	Emily	168	4.14	0.82
	6	Nancy	150	4.52	0.75
G	1	Ming	146	3.03	1.10
	2	Choi	133	3.23	0.81
	3	Kana	148	3.03	1.20
	4	Anna	88	3.27	0.75
	5	Emily	131	3.70	0.84
	6	Nancy	119	4.29	0.67

P	1	Ming	161	3.01	1.01
	2	Choi	164	2.98	0.78
	3	Kana	162	2.58	0.93
	4	Anna	113	2.93	0.82
	5	Emily	159	2.82	1.10
	6	Nancy	145	4.23	0.79

N.B.:   N's stand for the respondents who chose either "Yes, completely" or "Yes, more or less" in the first judgment question (see Appendix 1 above for the detail of this question).