

Teacher Preferences of Student Behavior in Japan

Catherine L. Sasaki

Tokoha Gakuen University

The objective of this study was to learn more about the classroom-culture gap in EFL classes taught by native speakers (NS) in Japan. A two-part questionnaire was completed by 81 NSs teaching at Japanese colleges. On the first part, a list of 25 descriptions of student behavior, respondents marked the frequency level at which they prefer (TPref) students engaging in each behavior and the frequency level at which they perceive (TPerc) each behavior occurring in their college-level EFL classes. The second part invited respondents to supply additional descriptions of undesired and desired behaviors. A multivariate significant difference ($p < .0001$) was found between TPref and TPerc. A paired t-test yielded a significant difference ($p < .002$) between preferred and perceived frequencies on 24 of the items. Correlation analysis indicated teaching experience had a significant effect ($p < .05$) on one item of preference and three items of perception. Responses from the second part of the questionnaire underscore a preference for positive classroom participation behaviors. These results, while confirming a mismatch between NS-teacher preferences and Japanese college-student behavior, point to a need for both parties to work towards minimizing the classroom-culture gap.

本研究の目的は、日本において英語母語話者が教える英語の授業に存在する教室文化のギャップについて明かにすることである。2つの部分からなるアンケートを日本の大学で教える81人の英語母語話者に実施した。第一部は学生の行動を記述した25の項目からなり、それぞれの行動が好ましいと考えられる頻度 (TPref) と実際に大学の英語の授業でそれらの行動が起こる頻度 (TPerc) を記してもらった。第二部は、上記の25項目以外の好ましい行動、好ましくない行動を記してもらった。TPrefとTPercの間には、多変量解析の結果、0.1%レベルの有意差が認められ、t検定の結果でも24項目において、TPrefとTPercの間に2%レベルでの有意差が認められた。相関検定においては、教育経験と強い相関 ($P < .05$) のあったのが、好ましいとされた行動1項目、よく起きるとされた行動3項目である。第二部の結果からは、教師が学生の積極的な参加を望んでいることがわかる。全体として、これらの結果は、すでに言われている母語話者教師の好みと日本人学生の行動の不一致を再確認する形になっており、教室文化のギャップを埋める努力が双方に必要とされることを示している。

Classroom environments, regardless of where they are in the world, exist as a physically defined space in which a teacher provides instruction to students. People tend to think all classrooms are like the ones they have experienced. Close examination of classrooms in different cultures, however, reveal that they are not alike. Moreover, cultural values and social rules heavily influence the conduct of teachers and students in them (Andersen & Powell, 1991). Therefore, it is not surprising to observe miscommunication and communication breakdown when students and teachers of different cultural backgrounds bring their expectations and codes of conduct into the classroom. Archer (1986) uses the term "culture bump" for awkward situations which evolve when one's culturally-rooted expectations are not met by people of a different culture. "Confused encounters" is what Thorp (1991) calls difficulties in interaction stemming from an incompatibility in expectations between student and staff of different cultures.

EFL courses in Japanese higher education often have the basic condition for such encounters: a native speaker (NS) teaching monocultural classes of Japanese students. Both NS and Japanese teachers have recognized difficulties arising from a gap between teacher-held expectations and student participation patterns in EFL classes. Shimazu (1984) describes NS teacher behaviors which make Japanese students feel uncomfortable and student behaviors which frustrate the NS teacher. Thorp (1991) explains how she accommodated her teaching style to Japanese students. Hansen (1986) describes language teachers in Japanese universities as having "*discouraged* personalities" because frustration with student indifference squelches their initial enthusiasm for teaching. "The inertia of student indifference would stifle Sisyphus himself, to say nothing of the well-intentioned mortal" (Hansen, 1986, p. 154).

There is substantial reason to suspect that Japanese student behaviors will deviate from the preferences and expectations held by NS teachers. Research shows that the Japanese communicative style and related norms widely differ from those in the West (e.g., Barnlund, 1989; Naotsuka & Sakamoto, 1981; Neustupny, 1989). Those norms are cultivated and reinforced in the classroom. In Western societies, for example, eloquence is highly valued. Students are guided and encouraged in school to develop skills in verbal analysis, argument, self-disclosure, and self-expression. Verbal expression is less valued in Japan. Western verbal skills would present a threat to harmonic interpersonal and group relations, which are highly valued (Barnlund, 1989). As a result, Japanese schools cultivate intuition, respect, and avoidance of words or acts that might bother others. Rarely are teachers questioned or challenged, and oppor-

tunities for discussion, debate, or argument are infrequent. In order not to disturb class harmony, students are reluctant to state personal opinions, engage in logical argument, or make sharp distinctions between "yes" and "no" (Neustupny, 1989).

There is a need to know about sources of mismatch between students and teachers. Thorp (1991) warns that teachers are likely to judge students negatively when the students' styles of interaction do not match their own, regardless of whose culture dominates the classroom. Negative consequences for both student and teacher are apt to escalate if gaps in expectation and behavior are not bridged.

The purpose of the present investigation is two-fold. One objective is to better understand what NS teachers value in student behavior. The other is to learn to what degree teachers perceive students engaging in the behaviors they value. Thus, the research question for the present study is: Is the behavior of college students in EFL classes in Japan consistent with the preferences of their NS teachers? A survey polling NS teachers on their preferences and perceptions of student behavior is expected to reveal they do not coincide.

A secondary interest here is whether preferences and perceptions are influenced by length of teaching experience in Japan and, specifically, teaching at Japanese colleges. Relationships are expected to be found between these factors.

The Study

Method

Subjects: A questionnaire was completed by 81 randomly selected NS teachers of EFL classes in Japanese colleges. The respondents consisted of 49 males and 25 females (7 did not indicate gender) from the following countries: U.S. ($n = 61$), U.K. ($n = 9$), Canada ($n = 6$), New Zealand ($n = 3$), and Ireland ($n = 2$). Length of teaching experience in Japanese colleges ranged from 0.5 to 32 years; less than 5 years ($n = 35$), 5 to 10 years ($n = 27$), and over 10 years ($n = 18$). The youngest respondents were in their twenties ($n = 2$). The majority of respondents were in their thirties ($n = 37$) and forties ($n = 33$). Five were in their fifties and three were over 60 years of age.

All 81 teachers conducted classes in oral communication at the time of the survey. Less than half of them were teaching reading, writing, or listening skill classes, and about one-third taught specialized skills and/or content courses.

Due to missing values (unanswered items), which were 1.1% of the data, only nine out of the 25 survey items had a complete set of responses. Zeroes indicating "not applicable" accounted for 2.7% of the data.

Procedure: A list of 25 brief descriptions of behavior was presented in question form, e.g., "Do your students volunteer to answer your questions?" The respondents were instructed to rate how frequently they perceived each behavior occurring in their Japanese college-level EFL classes (TPerc), and how frequently they preferred the occurrence of each behavior in those classes (TPref). A 5-point scale ranging from (1) *Never* to (5) *Always* was used. Respondents marked (0) when a behavior was not applicable to their classes.

The 25 items were arbitrarily derived from the writer's teaching experience in Japan and feedback from NS colleagues. In order to gain a fuller understanding of teacher preferences, respondents were requested to supply additional descriptions of desired and undesired student behaviors.

Results

The Cronbach alpha formula¹ was used to measure internal reliability of the survey items. For this calculation, each missing value was substituted with the mean for its item. "Not applicable" responses were included. The resulting alpha value was .70.

Means for TPerc and TPref frequencies are shown in Table 1. The least occurring behavior was "make clear needs in classroom" ($M = 1.86$). The behavior perceived to occur most frequently was "wait to be called on before speaking" ($M = 4.20$). "Over 15 minutes tardy" was the least preferred behavior ($M = 1.48$) while "do assigned homework" was the most preferred ($M = 4.83$).

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on the TPerc and TPref data. Zeroes and missing values were replaced with the mean for their items. Pillais, Hotellings and Wilks (PHW) indicated a multivariate significant difference at $p < .0001$; therefore, a univariate follow-up t-test was done.

Twenty-five paired t-tests were used to compare means of TPref and TPerc. A Bonferoni adjustment to the alpha level of .05 was made to avoid Type II errors. The resulting alpha value of .002 was determined by dividing .05 by 25. TPref and TPerc were found to be significantly different ($p < .0001$) on 23 of the 25 items. There was no significant difference found on Item 15, "mimic what the teacher says or does" ($p < .003$). Item 21, "show nonverbal signs of not understanding," was sig-

Table 1: Means for TPerc and TPref

| Student Behavior | | <i>n</i> | TPerc | TPref |
|------------------|---|----------|-------|-------|
| 1) | Volunteer to answer teacher's questions | 79 | 2.19 | 4.55 |
| 2) | Readily volunteer to share opinions | 76 | 1.91 | 4.41 |
| 3) | Seek clarification from teacher | 80 | 2.35 | 4.73 |
| 4) | Verbally indicate not understanding | 81 | 2.31 | 4.61 |
| 5) | Wait to be called on before speaking | 79 | 4.20 | 2.36 |
| 6) | Listen quietly when teacher speaks | 79 | 3.87 | 4.48 |
| 7) | Listen quietly to classmates | 78 | 3.28 | 4.76 |
| 8) | Do assigned homework | 78 | 3.54 | 4.83 |
| 9) | Over 15 minutes tardy | 73 | 2.41 | 1.48 |
| 10) | Speak audibly in English | 79 | 3.33 | 4.81 |
| 11) | Respond to teacher without consulting others first | 77 | 3.05 | 4.23 |
| 12) | Take risks, are unafraid to make mistakes | 79 | 2.51 | 4.50 |
| 13) | Try to use English as much as possible | 78 | 2.56 | 4.73 |
| 14) | Ask teacher for help | 80 | 2.74 | 4.38 |
| 15) | Mimic what teacher says or does | 71 | 2.36 | 2.83 |
| 16) | Avoid sitting in front rows | 68 | 3.49 | 1.80 |
| 17) | Resist working with students other than friends | 72 | 2.61 | 1.63 |
| 18) | Respond to teacher spontaneously | 75 | 2.53 | 4.38 |
| 19) | More comfortable with structured tasks than loosely structured ones | 63 | 3.68 | 2.68 |
| 20) | Relaxed when teacher monitors | 74 | 3.41 | 4.33 |
| 21) | Show nonverbal signs of not understanding | 79 | 3.15 | 3.62 |
| 22) | Make needs in classroom clear | 78 | 1.86 | 4.37 |
| 23) | Rely more on classmates for instruction than teacher | 76 | 3.41 | 2.42 |
| 24) | Initiate interaction with teacher in English | 80 | 2.71 | 4.40 |
| 25) | Early finishers extend in-class practice activities | 73 | 2.10 | 4.38 |

Table 2: Results on t-test for Pairs of TPerC and TPerf

| | Student Behavior | Mean diff | df | t |
|-----|---|--------------|----|-------------------|
| 1) | Volunteer to answer teacher's questions | 2.35 | 78 | 21.08 * |
| 2) | Readily volunteer to share opinions | 2.47 | 75 | 24.32 * |
| 3) | Seek clarification from teacher | 2.37 | 79 | 23.83 * |
| 4) | Verbally indicate not understanding | 2.30 | 80 | 21.36 * |
| 5) | Wait to be called on before speaking | 1.75 | 78 | 13.39 * |
| 6) | Listen quietly when teacher speaks | .61 | 78 | 6.56 * |
| 7) | Listen quietly to classmates | 1.47 | 77 | 13.15 * |
| 8) | Do assigned homework | 1.29 | 77 | 15.09 * |
| 9) | Over 15 minutes tardy | .96 | 72 | 8.38 * |
| 10) | Speak audibly in English | 1.47 | 78 | 15.18 * |
| 11) | Respond to teacher without consulting others first | 1.18 | 76 | 8.07 * |
| 12) | Take risks, are unafraid to make mistakes | 2.00 | 78 | 18.25 * |
| 13) | Try to use English as much as possible | 2.15 | 77 | 17.20* |
| 14) | Ask teacher for help | 1.64 | 79 | 14.16 * |
| 15) | Mimic what teacher says or does | .46 | 70 | 3.10 ($p<.003$) |
| 16) | Avoid sitting in front rows | 1.69 | 67 | 8.79 * |
| 17) | Resist working with students other than friends | 1.03 | 71 | 7.42 * |
| 18) | Respond to teacher spontaneously | 1.84 | 74 | 16.61 * |
| 19) | More comfortable with structured tasks than loosely structured ones | .90 | 62 | 6.12 * |
| 20) | Relaxed when teacher monitors | .92 | 73 | 8.47 * |
| 21) | Show nonverbal signs of not understanding | .49 | 78 | 3.43 ($p<.001$) |
| 22) | Make needs in classroom clear | 2.51 | 77 | 21.06 * |
| 23) | Rely more on classmates for instruction than teacher | .97 | 75 | 7.50 * |
| 24) | Initiate interaction with teacher in English | 1.67 | 79 | 15.32 * |
| 25) | Early finishers extend in-class practice activities | 2.29 | 72 | 17.58 * |

* $p<.0001$

nificant at the .001 level. Pairs for which there was either no response, or a response of "0" (not applicable) were not included in the *t* analysis. This is why there are differing degrees of freedom (df) for the 25 items.

Several respondents did not answer Items 15 and 19 as reflected in the low df in Table 2. Confusion over the meaning of those behavior descriptions was a contributing factor. A few respondents noted that they were not sure if "mimic" in Item 15 was intended to mean imitation of native speech as language skill practice, or ridicule of the teacher. On Item 19, which had the highest number of "0" responses for TPref ($n = 15$), a few teachers were not sure what was meant by "structured activities."

Correlation analysis yielded significant results ($p < .05$) between years of teaching at Japanese colleges and TPerc 6 ($p = .046$), TPerc 16 ($p = .033$), and TPref 21 ($p = .044$). Also found was a significant correlation between years of teaching in Japan and TPerc 21 ($p = .02$). Due to the positively skewed distributions of both length of experience factors, caution is warranted in concluding there is a causal relationship between the variables found significantly correlated.

Of the respondents, 43 gave descriptions of undesirable behaviors and they are summarized in Table 3. Sleeping in class was by far the most frequently mentioned ($n = 20$).

Table 3: Undesirable Behaviors

| <i>n</i> | Behavior descriptions |
|----------|---|
| 20 | Sleeping |
| 9 | Doing homework for other classes or homework which should have been completed for the present class |
| 7 | Speaking Japanese during practice time for speaking English |
| 7 | Copying homework, answers on tests |
| 3 | Not listening, talking with classmates when the teacher is talking |
| 3 | Reading comic books, magazines |
| 3 | Not doing homework |
| 2 | Not bringing paper, pencil, dictionaries to class |
| 2 | Coeds doing makeup and grooming themselves and others |

Thirty respondents provided descriptions of desirable classroom behaviors. They are summarized and categorized in Table 4. Teachers indicated a desire for students to initiate interaction with the teacher and with other classmates, display a good sense of humor, behave cooperatively with the teacher, and be polite and/or respectful to the teacher.

Table 4: Desirable Behaviors Categorized

| <i>n</i> | Behavior descriptions |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Interacting With the Teacher | |
| 2 | a) talk to teacher after lesson |
| 1 | b) ask teacher's opinion |
| 1 | c) include teacher in group work when (s)he stops to monitor |
| 2 | d) suggest new or different class activities |
| 2 | e) dare to disagree with the teacher or text and give sound reasons for opinions |
| 1 | f) look at teacher when (s)he is talking |
| Interacting With Classmates | |
| 1 | a) initiate conversation in English |
| 1 | b) show support for classmates |
| 1 | c) willingly work in groups |
| General Classroom Behavior | |
| 5 | a) behave politely |
| 2 | b) smile, laugh |
| 2 | c) try to follow directions |
| 1 | d) put energy into speaking tasks |
| 1 | e) show feelings |
| 5 | f) try to use humor |
| 1 | g) react verbally or nonverbally |

Discussion and Conclusions

This study provides evidence that a classroom-culture gap exists between Japanese college students and NS teachers. The results of the survey clearly indicate the behavior of college students in EFL classes in Japan is not consistent with the preferences of their NS teachers. The MANOVA and paired t-test results indicate NS teachers' preferences are not being met in college-level EFL classes in Japan. This stimulates a broad concern over the influence this gap may have on the climate of the classroom, the interaction between teachers and students, and the achievement of pedagogic goals.

Contrary to what was expected, correlation analysis show that preferred and perceived frequencies were not affected by length of teaching experience in Japan, or at Japanese colleges. Only four of a total of 100 correlations were found to be significant. The possibility that these

results were due to chance cannot be excluded. Future studies which control experience factors are needed before any speculation can be made about a causal relationship.

Descriptions of undesired behaviors in Table 3 and the results of TPerc indicate that teachers perceive a high frequency of what Wadden and McGovern (1991) would call "negative class participation" behaviors. Such behaviors, both passive and active, hinder, if not disrupt, classroom learning. For pedagogical purposes alone, behaviors of this type should be minimized, if not eradicated.

Descriptions of desired behaviors in Table 4 and the results of TPref suggest NS teachers would like students to engage in positive classroom participation behaviors. From the limited number of responses obtained, it appears that NS teachers prefer interaction with and among students. Two-way communication between teacher and students seems to be favored over one-way communication from teacher to students, and active learning preferred to passive. These preferences do not coincide with the passive nature of classrooms which Japanese students are accustomed to.

In a sense, this study has exposed the roots of a classroom-culture gap. NS teachers prefer behaviors valued in their cultures, while Japanese students follow their cultural code of classroom conduct. What should be done to close the gap? Teachers who are sensitive to the students' culture have demonstrated ways to accommodate their teaching behavior, in spite of their preferences. Is it unrealistic to ask students to do likewise when the classroom is in their culture?

Assuming the classroom-culture gap between Japanese students and NS-teachers can be closed, the critical question is: Who is responsible for bridging it? The position of this paper is that it is the responsibility of both students and teacher. Allwright (1984), while maintaining that lessons cannot occur without interaction, stresses that successful lessons involve successful management of classroom interaction in which both teachers and students are "managers of learning." Furthermore, he proposes that students can increase their chances of getting better instruction by taking responsibility in the "co-production" of lessons and effectively doing their part to manage interaction in the classroom.

Just as NS teachers should be sensitive to cultural factors operating on the behavior of their students, students need to be aware of cultural influences on the interaction style of NS teachers. There is a need for students to understand that NS teachers are more than teachers: They are cultural beings. If NS teachers make their expectations and preferences of classroom interaction clear, and help students see the cultural roots attached to them, students may be more willing to adjust their

style of interaction to meet the preferences of their teacher. As they work towards closing the classroom-culture gap, students will likely find their communicative competence enhanced by increased sociocultural competence in the target language.

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Catherine L Sasaki is an assistant professor in the Foreign Studies at Tokoha Gakuen University, Shizuoka, has taught EFL courses in Japan for nearly 15 years. Her research interests include intercultural and interpersonal communication and creative thinking.

Note

1. See Brown (1995, 1996) for further information on the statistical procedures used in this study.

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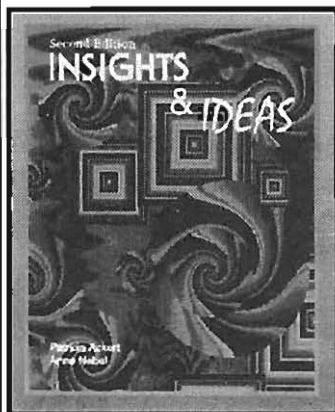
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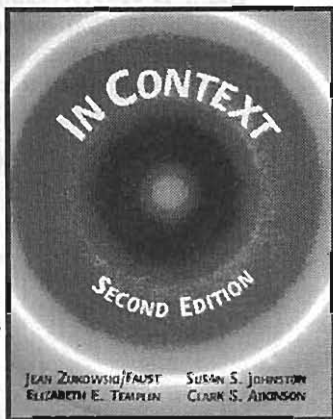
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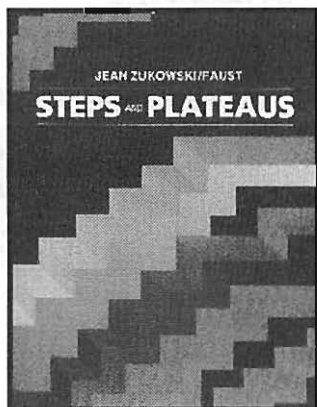
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