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New Liberal Arts Education in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Japan has a long history of liberal arts education, whose main mission has been to accommodate domestic academic needs by offering various courses solely in the Japanese language. At the turn of the century, however, it saw the advent of a new type of liberal arts education that is characterized by its international focus and small-size seminars. In stark contrast with the traditional type, this new type typically offers university courses in English and teaches both Japanese and international students in the same classroom. This paper explains merits of this type of education from the perspective of developing well-rounded Japanese individuals who can adequately handle cross-cultural communication, fully utilizing practical skills of English that they acquire during the four years of undergraduate studies.

Keywords: Critical thinking; English education; Japan; liberal arts education; university education

INTRODUCTION

Japanese school education has traditionally been known for its somewhat ineffective English instruction, and how to improve it seems like a perpetual topic for debate among concerned educators. Also, it is often said that there are still universities that offer "mass production education," in which a single teacher typically holds a monologue without any interaction with more than a hundred (bored) students in a large classroom (Kasahara 2008). This rather dull and inefficient way of teaching certainly requires improvement, which in itself has been a topic for discussion for quite some time. Against this backdrop, a new type of liberal arts education emerged in Japan at the beginning of the 21st century, and it has come to secure its unique position, among many university choices, as an attractive option for high school students who want to work in the international arena in the future. It recruits quite a few foreign students in addition to Japanese students and teaches them together in the English language. It also offers a substantial number of small-size general seminars, in which important but often-ignored skills, such as those of critical thinking, are extensively taught.

The names of faculties that offer this type of education vary from university to university: School of International Liberal Studies (e.g. Waseda University), Faculty of Liberal Arts (e.g. Sophia University), Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies (e.g. Hosei University), International College of Liberal Arts (e.g. Yamanashi Gakuin University), etc. Besides offering courses in English, some of these faculties set a curriculum that requires Japanese students to study aboard for a year (e.g. Akita International University). In this way, they can develop internationally-minded Japanese individuals who can work effectively anywhere in the world by speaking the English language.

Perhaps, the recent emergence of this kind of education in Japan is no surprise in the current age of globalization. For a long time, Japan didn't have strong international business competitors, say, in the manufacturing sector, which produces, inter alia, home electrical appliances and electronic equipment, but that is a thing of the past now. Take smartphone business, for example. Even though Japan still boasts world-renowned electronics companies like Sony, it is Apple that has the largest share (43.3%) of the Japanese market, followed by Sharp (13.6%) and Sony (10.9%).[1] In the second quarter of 2018, Samsung took the largest share (20.9%) of the worldwide smartphone market, followed by Huawei (15.8%), Apple (12.1%), Xiaomi (9.3%), and OPPO (8.6%), with Japanese companies nowhere to be seen.[2] Thus, business leaders of Japan have a good reason to try to rid themselves of their insularity and educate themselves to be truly international in order to meet foreign competition.

What is more, the population of young Japanese is rapidly shrinking. In 1992, the number of high school graduates was 2.05 million, but as of 2018, it has dwindled to 1.17 million. For this reason, coupled with many youngsters' preference to study in big cities, small private colleges, especially those in the countryside, fail to recruit enough students and are on the verge of disappearing. In order to survive, therefore, Japanese universities now need to look outside the country for prospective students. But to attract international students, they also need to prepare quality programs that are conducted in English. Given the current status of English as a bona fide lingua franca of the world, they naturally think that this is the most logical thing to do. Actually, it is not just a logical thing, but also an unavoidable thing from the viewpoint of internationalizing more Japanese citizens. In fact, this effort has been promoted by the Ministry of Education with their Global 30 Project, under which the Japanese government aims to have some 300,000 international students enrolled in Japanese universities by 2020.[3]

This is the background behind the development of the new type of liberal arts education in Japan. In what follows, I would like to explain its contents by providing concrete examples from my own experiences – as someone who has been involved in international liberal arts education for the last 14 years at Waseda University. It is hoped that merits of this kind of education will be understood and be of some assistance to those who are interested in engaging in liberal arts education themselves.

PRACTICAL MERITS

In this section, two practical merits of the new type of liberal arts education are explained. They are: (i) discovery of interests by students, and (ii) practical English skills that students acquire.

Discovery of Interests

How many high school seniors already know what they want to do in life? I have been giving guidance to first-year students over a decade now, but I haven't met very many students who know exactly what they want to do after graduation. In fact, they don't even know which field of study they want to pursue at the time of university entrance, and this is exactly why they come to a school like the School of International Liberal Studies at Waseda University, which offers diverse courses in humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. In that sense, our students are lucky, since they can discover their interests as they take various courses in our program without having to declare a major. I say they are lucky, because for those who enter a program with a specific major, switching to another one is extremely difficult in Japan even if they realize their major is not really what they want to study. In our school, by the time students are juniors, most of them will have found their interest and be ready to pursue it in an advanced seminar, in which they write a graduation thesis. By doing this, they usually qualify for a concentration, which virtually works as a major. Each concentration requires completion of 24 credit hours of courses from a list of courses designated for that concentration. In this way, students can graduate with a specific specialization if they so choose. This concentration system is especially appealing to those who want to join international firms or organizations, which usually place great emphasis on their applicants' specializations. Needless to say, it is also good for students who want to study any given field further in graduate school.

However, there are still numerous Japanese companies that do not really care about their applicants' specializations. Traditionally, Japanese companies have valued applicants' extra-curricular activities as well as real-word experiences much more than their majors (and transcripts).[4] Knowing this, some students who want to join a Japanese company do opt for not joining an advanced seminar and keep taking courses from various areas in order to fully broaden their horizons. They may not have a specialization when they graduate, but they graduate with practical cross-cultural communication skills backed up by a wide range of knowledge and expertise (in addition to a bachelor's degree in international liberal studies), which is all that matters as far as they and their employers are concerned.

Practical English Skills

It is safe to say that Japan has long been a monolingual country, in which virtually everything is conducted in the Japanese language. In the 19th century, after a short period of school education in English by Westerners to selected elite, the English language became effectively a written code to decipher for those who were fortunate enough to receive decent education; that is, English was studied only for translation purposes by privileged some. In a way, this was understandable, because Japan was on its way to modernization then, and in order to quickly catch up with advanced countries, the Japanese people had only to absorb western knowledge from books written in English as effectively as possible (Suzuki 1999). In fact, for the majority of Japanese, there was absolutely no need to be able to speak the language at that time.

Interestingly, this trend is still continuing in Japan, despite all the efforts made by the Ministry of Education to change the nature of English instruction in schools. After World War II, English rapidly gained the status of an important examination subject, and as such, it was studied rigorously by school students, for whom, achieving a good grasp of its grammar and mastery of translation skills were essential for gaining admission to universities of their choices. Virtually all English teachers in ordinary schools were Japanese nationals who were good at explaining facts about English but had almost zero ability to speak the language. Therefore, it was all but impossible to expect Japanese students to learn to speak English even after studying the subject for ten years.

Fully realizing this problem, the Ministry of Education issued new school guidelines in 1977, in which it promoted "English for communication." In 1987, the Japanese government established the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, or the JET Program, and started to send to schools young native speakers of English as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). These measures were taken in an attempt to change the direction of school English education, from translation to conversation, but as Moteki (2004) points out, they all seem to have failed miserably. Indeed, university students' knowledge of English generally declined after the introduction of "English for communication" (Namai 2007). Also, as Sugiyama (2013) reports, this shift of emphasis from translation to verbal communication has resulted in a large number of university students whose knowledge of English grammar is even lower than the level set for junior high school students. However, this kind of result was expected from the beginning, since practical skills of English are totally useless for most Japanese students, who can do virtually everything in the Japanese language without having to use a single English phrase in their daily lives.

In that sense, the new type of liberal arts education makes a lot of sense. It is an established fact that Japanese students don't improve their conversational English skills from instruction that they receive at school, which seems to be for the simple reason that they have absolutely no need to use the language outside English classes. But students who enroll in international liberal arts schools have to use it on a regular basis, for all classes are conducted in English. Also, they study with quite a few international classmates, so they are naturally led to converse with them in English every day. Moreover, the compulsory study abroad program forces them to live in a non-Japanese-speaking country for a year. This seems to be the only kind of effective English education that Japan can provide for those who wish to acquire practical English skills that enable them to work in the international arena without a language handicap.

EDUCATIONAL MERITS

One notable difference between traditional university education in Japan and the new type of liberal arts education is that the latter offers quite a few small-size general seminars in which teachers and students can discuss any topic. In the case of the School of International Liberal Studies at Waseda University, the maximum number of students for these seminars is 20, and it offers four first-year seminars and one intermediate seminar before students go abroad to study at a foreign institution. When they come back, most of them enrol in a three-semester-long advanced seminar, in which they write a graduation thesis. In this way, students have a lot of opportunities to actively engage in class discussion and develop a habit of critical

thinking. In this section, we turn to details of educational merits of the new type of liberal arts education, which are made possible, for the most part, by the large number of small-size seminars.

University Education as Opposed to High School Education

Generally speaking, high school students are expected to accept everything written in textbooks. In fact, they are trained to memorize what they read in textbooks so that they can score high on standardized tests (or college entrance examinations) in order to gain admission to institutions of higher learning. As a result, most of them enter university with the wrong expectation that they are going to study things that come with ready-made answers.

However, this is not what university education is designed to do. In university, students are expected to find their own problems in whatever field they choose to study and to develop their own original solutions by utilizing all the knowledge and skills they have accumulated throughout their lives. In other words, they are expected to offer a new insight to their field of study, not just to passively understand and learn from what others have written in the form of a textbook.[5]

In this regard, the attitude that Albert Einstein showed when he said "Blind respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth" (Isaacson 2007) is very much relevant. Suppose that everybody uncritically believed what they read in textbooks, naively assuming that textbook writers would never make mistakes. Then, nothing new could be found, and no knowledge would be advanced. Einstein, on the other hand, didn't do this. He even doubted what he read in *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* by Isaac Newton, and that is why he was able to revolutionize the field of theoretical physics by developing his original theory of relativity. After all, nobody is perfect, and we should never forget this incontrovertible fact. Anybody who is involved in university education should have a healthy dose of skepticism, and this is one thing that needs to be taught to students without fail.

Since this kind of topic isn't usually considered to constitute an independent subject, it often fails to be even mentioned in ordinary university classes. Hence, being able to discuss it in small-size general seminars is one advantage that the new type of liberal arts education has over others. Moreover, it is not very difficult to make it directly relevant to young university students by first introducing it as a moral lesson, like so:

> Suppose your best friend came to you and said something negative about someone you know. Would you believe your friend right away and think of that person negatively? It's very easy to naively accept words of someone we like. It's part of human nature. But this is where we need to be extremely careful. After all, it's only fair to listen to both sides of the story. So if what you heard from your friend bothered you, you should definitely go to the other person and listen to his side of the story as well. Until then, you shouldn't hastily make any kind of judgment, since it is possible that your friend inadvertently chose information that was only convenient to him and didn't reveal the whole story. In reality, however, not many people bother to listen to the other side of the story before making judgment, and this doesn't exclude people with high status, such as prominent entrepreneurs, famous politicians, and even dignified professors. Maybe, this is one reason why our society is filled with so many human problems.

I invite the reader to thoroughly discuss this particular topic with his/her own students, since without a fair and balanced attitude, nothing can be studied in a truly objective manner, which would be tantamount to failure of education.

Critical Thinking

What I have explained above naturally leads us to the topic of critical thinking, which is often taken for granted in college classrooms. As a result, many students graduate without knowing what critical thinking is all about. However, through small-size seminars in the new kind of liberal arts education, comprehensive training of critical thinking can be systematically

conducted, which helps create high quality graduates who are able to make logical judgments in real life situations.

Critical thinking is defined by Swatridge (2014: XI) as in the following paragraph:

> This is what you do when you think 'critically': you judge what it is that makes an argument strong or weak; you learn how to put forward stronger arguments and how not to be seduced by weak ones. The uncritical accept what they read or what they are told, at face value; critical thinkers weigh claims in the balance, and make — or reserve — judgment when the evidence has dispelled reasonable doubt.

In the next two sub-sections, I present concrete examples of critical-thinking exercises that are often conducted in small-size seminar classes. To be more specific, I will show how to think critically by reviewing a professional study on communication strategies employed by ESL students. I will do this in terms of the following two questions. (i) How strong are arguments presented? (ii) Are claims made facts or mere opinions?

Weak Arguments

Manzano (2018) is a paper that reports the results of a study on communication strategies (CSs) employed by six Nepalese individuals who speak English as a second language. At the time of the study, the Nepalese subjects were all first-year female students between the ages of 17 and 18 at a state university in the Philippines. Their English level was said to be intermediate. Littlemore (2001) and Tarone (1980) are cited in defining a CS as "the speaker's attempt to overcome linguistic problems" (p. 84). "Although there have been several studies that examine the oral communication strategies used by EFL/ESL learners, there is no study yet that reports the CSs employed by Nepalese learners in an ESL context" (p. 86), and this was the motivation for this particular study. It is claimed that the results of the study offer interesting insights as to how Nepalese ESL students struggle in speaking English as well as hints for language teachers in helping them.

In the paper, CSs are classified rather thoroughly, as summarized below (p. 85):

> Communication Strategies (Tarone 1980)
> *approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance*
>
> Psycholinguistic Classification (Faerch & Kasper 1983)
> Avoidance strategies: *reduction (linguistic avoidance) and functional reduction (semantic and topic avoidance or message abandonment) strategies*
> Achievement strategies: *compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies*

It is then explained that "[c]ompensatory strategies (e.g., code switching, use of first language, cooperative strategies, nonlinguistic strategies, transfer, interlanguage-based strategies, and appeal for help) refer to making alternative strategies available to learners to achieve any communicative goal (Nakatani 2006) while retrieval strategies (e.g., keyword mnemonic and summarizing) relate to learners' conscious attempt to recall a known lexical item (Krings 1986, Liu 2010)" (p. 85).

The procedure of the study is as follows. "The participants engaged in a picture storytelling task to elicit language samples for analysis (sic). A series of six pictures were used to guide the learners in their storytelling and served as the stimuli for students to perform the oral task. […] The researcher observed and video-recorded each learner during the oral communication task to capture both the verbal and non-verbal CSs employed. An informal interview was also conducted with the students to determine the reasons for their use of gap markers and use of communication strategies" (p. 86). Gap markers are "manifestations of communication difficulty" (p. 86), and examples of them are listed in the following table (Table 1, p. 87).

TABLE 1. Gap markers observed among the Nepalese learners during the oral task

Gap Markers	Number of Occurrences
Pointing at a particular detail in the picture	19
Looking at the instructor	9
Stepping movement	6
Circling of hands	3
Waving of hands	2
Putting/removing the hand in the pocket (sic)	2
Toying with the identification card (ID)	1
Scratching the head	1

The table below (Table 2, p. 88)) shows the number of times each verbal CS was employed by the students:

TABLE 2. Verbal communication strategies employed by the Nepalese learners from an interactional perspective

Verbal CSs	Number of Occurrences
Approximation	20
Repetition	12
Restructuring	9
Introducing	6
Valuing	6
Circumlocution	4
Lifting	2

For the sake of discussion here, let us concentrate on the three most frequently used verbal CSs, namely *approximation*, *repetition*, and *restructuring*, and see how strong the arguments made about them in the paper really are.

When the six Nepalese students could not come up with a certain word, they frequently (20 times) used some other word to convey a similar meaning, and this is regarded as strategy of approximation. One of the examples presented is the use of *cycle* for *bicycle* by one student. (Others include *cycled* for *rode*, *scratches* for *bruises*, *gets burned* for *overheat*, *horning* (the bicycle) for *rang the bell*, etc.) Repetition, "which is a time-gaining communication strategy" (p. 89), was observed 12 times. The high frequency of this strategy is understandable, since the students were still rather poor at speaking English. By repeating some words or phrases, "they searched for the needed item or word" (p. 89). Restructuring (observed 9 times) is said to be a strategy by which ESL learners start another sentence without completing the first one, owing to their limited knowledge of English.

From these observations and others, several conclusions are drawn in the paper. One of them is that the findings above are "helpful in determining the areas in which these learners are having troubles. Hence, appropriate pedagogical interventions can be provided to them. As pointed out by Barrot (2014, 2015), Dörnyei (1995), Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994), Faerch and Kasper (1986), Maleki (2010), and Nakatani (2005), CS instruction is necessary for developing learners' strategic competence" (p. 95).

Let's see how strong this argument is. It is true that strategies like approximation and repetition (though frequently employed even by native speakers of English too) often suggest restricted knowledge of English vocabulary on the part of language learners. They can indicate, albeit indirectly, what kind of words and phrases learners have yet to learn. But is this a significant discovery? Over the years, ESL teachers have been administering vocabulary quizzes in their classes, fully realizing that their students' knowledge of English words and phrases is limited. If students make mistakes on these quizzes, teachers immediately know exactly which words and phrases students still need to memorize or work on and what next to do in order to help improve their vocabulary. This fact was confirmed by the results of the

study, but it was certainly predictable and is nothing surprising. Hence, there doesn't seem to be anything academically significant about counting the number of CS instances. As a pedagogical technique to find out which words and phrases students still don't know or have difficulty with, it is time-consuming and cumbersome, and doesn't seem any better than giving vocabulary quizzes.

What is really puzzling is the next statement: "CS instruction is necessary for developing learners' strategic competence," which was noted in the quote above. Despite the label of CSs, "strategies" like approximation and repetition are actually learners' desperate acts of trying not to stop their storytelling with what little vocabulary they have. In that sense, they are symptoms of poor vocabulary, not helpful techniques for effective communication. Given this fact, should teachers still instruct their students to deliberately use these "strategies"? Shouldn't they instead teach appropriate words and phrases so that students won't have to approximate or repeat next time around? When these symptoms are observed in students' utterances, should teachers be satisfied and happy, because the students are "strategically competent" in their use of these CSs? That would seem highly unreasonable and even unprofessional.

Speaking of CS instruction, how realistic is it anyway to teach an act like approximation to students who can't even come up with a simple word like *bicycle*? Occasionally, approximation does seem to be a useful conversational skill — if it is meant for higher level students. Advanced students may passively know a word like *treatise*, for example, but cannot come up with it in conversation. Then, teaching them an alternative word like *paper* will certainly be helpful. However, the Nepalese student in question said *cycle* for *bicycle*, as we saw earlier. This effort itself is laudable, but should teachers accept it as an instance of successful approximation and teach it to other students as well? Would that be a pedagogically sound thing to do, when it is patently clear that *cycle* doesn't mean *bicycle*? Moreover, suppose that a student cannot find a word like *car* when talking.[6] Then, what should the teacher tell the student to use instead? A more formal word like *automobile* wouldn't seem to be a good choice. (*Car* for *automobile*, on the other hand, would make more sense.) Thus, a bit of pondering immediately reveals how unrealistic it is to treat such an act as approximation as a communication strategy and teach it to students whose English level is as low as that of the Nepalese students in this particular study.

Let us now turn to restructuring, by which students start a new sentence without completing the first one. The following excerpt is from Transcript 1 (p. 89) in the paper:

> In one fine day (looks at the instructor), an old man was driving his car (points at the car), **and a young boy was passing the way on his bicycle** (points at the bicycle). Suddenly (scratches head), the boy the boy was hit by the car and..., and **he lost his consciousness of cycling on his way, and he got fall on the road**.

The two parts in bold type are said to be instances of restructuring. Regarding the first part, it is stated that this particular student "would like to say … *and passed by the boy who was riding his bicycle*" (p. 89) instead of starting a new sentence after the first (i.e., *an old man was driving his car*). In other words, what the student must have had in mind was a single sentence with one subject (*an old man*) followed by two predicates (*was driving his car* and *(was) passed by the boy who was riding his bicycle*). But with her English still poor, she couldn't come up with the second predicate at the time of the storytelling and started a new sentence (i.e., the first bold part), which qualifies as a case of restructuring.

But how do we know exactly what the student had in mind but couldn't come up with during the storytelling task? Maybe, compounding (i.e., connecting two independent sentences with the conjunction *and*) was what she had in mind in the first place. This is a strong possibility, since it just seems unlikely that the student was able to explain in the after-task interview that she had wanted to construct a rather complicated sentence with one subject and two predicates. Of course this is only a conjecture on my part, but there isn't even a hint in the paper about how the researcher came to her own analysis. So it is only reasonable to surmise that the analysis of restructuring here is based solely on the researcher's subjective imagination. In fact, there is a clear indication of this in the paper, regarding the second bold part in the excerpt: "Perhaps the learner wanted to say ... *he was knocked off his bicycle*" (p. 89). The use of the word *perhaps* here directly indicates that what the researcher is saying is only a reflection of her subjective opinion. This does not seem to be an ideal research method to adopt in

conducting any kind of objective inquiry. (We will take up the difference between fact and opinion in the next sub-section.)

For these reasons, it is concluded that the claim that CS instruction is necessary for developing learners' strategic competence lacks solid argumentation backed up by objective evidence, despite the fact that it is a claim made in a paper accepted for publication by a peer-reviewed professional journal. What to take from this is that Einstein is absolutely right; blind respect for authorities can indeed be dangerous. All first-year students need to be taught this in order not to "accept what they read or what they are told, at face value" without "weighing claims in the balance," as was noted in the quote by Swatridge above.

Fact and Opinion

In making sound judgment, it is important to distinguish between fact and opinion. But what is a fact, and what is an opinion in strict terms? According to BBC's Skillswise, an educational website for adults who want to improve their English and math skills, they are defined as follows.[7]

> A fact is something that can be checked and backed up with evidence, e.g. In 2010, Lionel Messi was named FIFA World Footballer of the Year. We can check these details by looking at FIFA records. An opinion is based on a belief or view. It is not based on evidence that can be checked, e.g. Wayne Rooney is the best football player in the English Premier League. Some people might think there are other players in the English Premier League who are better than Wayne Rooney.

Moreover, the following lists, which are from the website of Palm Beach State College, help us distinguish fact and opinion.[8]

> A fact
> – can be proven true or false through objective evidence.
> – relies on denotative language.
> – frequently uses measurable or verifiable numbers, statistics, dates and measures.
> An opinion
> – cannot be presently verified.
> – relies on connotative language.
> – can mean different things to different people.
> – uses value judgment words and comparisons such as *best*, *most*, etc.

What is interesting to note here is that as long as a statement can be proven true or false, it is a fact even if it is false. Hence, the statement that "a majority of experts agree that smoking daily can improve your health" is false but still is a fact.[9]

Most students don't know these things, so it is advisable to teach them at the beginning of university education as part of critical-thinking training. Small-size general seminars provide an ideal environment to do exactly that.

From this perspective, let us examine Manzano (2018) again, since it is supposed to be a paper presumably based on verifiable facts too. In addition to verbal CSs, occurrences of non-verbal CSs were also counted in the study, and the result is summarized as in the table below (Table 4, p. 91).

TABLE 4. Non-verbal communication strategies by the Nepalese learners from an interactional perspective

Non-Verbal CSs	Number of Occurrences
Gesture	34
Unfilled pause	22
Indirect appeal	9
Lengthening of words	4
Avoidance	2
Filled pause	2
Mime	2

For the sake of the present discussion, I again choose just the first three CSs, namely *gesture*, *unfilled pause* and *indirect appeal*.

Let's start with gestures, the most frequently used CS. The kinds of gestures observed during the storytelling task were "(a) pointing at a particular detail in the picture, (b) stepping movement, (c) circling or waving of hands, (d) putting or removing the hand in the pocket (sic), (e) toying with the identification card (ID), and (f) scratching the head" (p. 92). It is then stated that "[t]hese gestures surfaced while the participants were talking. It shows that they could transmit a message and employ gestures at the same time which helped them to continue their talk despite their linguistic errors (p. 92)."

The first sentence of the second quote in the previous paragraph is certainly a fact. However, the second sentence in the quote contains an opinion. To substantiate the claim that use of gestures (especially (d) – (f)) while transmitting a message (= talking?) actually helped the learners continue their task, the researcher would have had to conduct the same experiment by prohibiting the learners from using gestures when performing the same storytelling task and see if their performance would actually deteriorate. This not done, the claim cannot be presently verified, hence can only be an opinion.

Let's turn to the CS of unfilled pause, which "refers to unfilled gaps in an utterance (Lennon 1990)" (p. 92). The examples provided in the paper are found in the following excerpt (p. 92).

> In this story..... (looks at the teacher), we can see that there are two person – one young boy who ride a bicycle and another an older man who drive a car. In this picture (points at the picture), we can see that:... that the older man was in hurried, and the younger boy is saw like beginner because he was too difficult in riding bicycle [Transcript 6].

The dots in the excerpt indicate unfilled pauses, and the researcher's assessment of them is that "[a]lthough an unfilled pause helped the learners convey their message, it also slowed down their talk which contributes to disfluency" (p. 92). The main clause of this statement is a fact, which is verifiable from the recording, but the adverbial clause is definitely an opinion, which lacks objective evidence. Unfortunately, there is no explanation in the paper as to how the pauses in the excerpt, much less other CSs (especially (d) – (f)), actually helped the learner (as well as the other learners) in the storytelling task.

Finally, indirect appeals, which are assumed to be requests for help, "were used as a non-verbal CS that assisted the learners in overcoming their linguistic problems" (p. 92). The example provided for this claim is found in the excerpt below (p. 92).

> So... (moves hands), the moral of the story is if...you... if you (**looks at the teacher**) lend your hand for help to others, then only they'll help you in return.

This particular student looked at the teacher while talking, and that is regarded as an instance of indirect appeal for help. However, this cannot be a fact, since there is no evidence provided for that claim in the paper. (Maybe the student was just checking to see whether or not the teacher was generally satisfied with her performance.) Hence, the claim cannot be presently verified; thus, it is only an opinion.

As for the claim that indirect appeals assisted the learners in overcoming their linguistic problems, it is a false fact, as far as the excerpt above is concerned. This is so, because this particular student was able to complete her sentence without getting any help from the teacher.

Indeed, it is clearly stated in the paper that "[s]he was on her journey of finishing her story at a fast pace, so she continued talking despite the lack of assistance" (p. 92). Thus, the truth is that the CS of looking at the teacher didn't affect the student's performance in any way in the storytelling task. Hence, it is impossible to argue that indirect appeals assisted this student in overcoming her linguistic problems.

This kind of critical-thinking training seems indispensable in any decent college education, and as I have been stressing, small-size seminars do come in handy in that regard.

CONCLUSION

Understanding different cultures and winning friendship/trust of foreigners are crucial to success in this increasingly globalized, diverse, and close-knit world. In order to achieve them, practical skills of English are effectively a must-have now for anybody from a non-English-speaking country who wants to interact with foreign partners. This rings especially true for people of a country like Japan, a nation traditionally known for its rather poor English education.

However, one important fact about Japan is that a large majority of its citizens still don't have to rely on any languages other than their own in order to lead an adequate life (i.e. school, work, play), as long as they stay within the country. In a way, this is something that the Japanese people can be proud of. The Japanese language unites people in Japan and enables high-quality education for the most part – which forms the basis of the country's healthy job market – without using textbooks or manuals written in foreign languages at all. After all, even though most of its people still don't speak English, Japan became the second largest economy in the world in 1968 and has been savoring its economic success ever since.[10]

And yet, it has to have its share of English speakers in order to work together with other countries in this age of globalization. But Japan's Ministry of Education places extreme equality upon English education, much to the dismay of people like myself. English is a compulsory subject for everybody up to senior high school, and in my opinion, this is exactly why English education in Japan has always been a disappointment. Let's face it. English is not for everybody in Japan. And yet, since it is compulsory for every single school student, a large number of English teachers are required to accommodate all of them. As a result, even people who don't speak the language get hired as English teachers. For this reason, quality education cannot be expected from the beginning, and not only ordinary students but also talented ones often get sick and tired of English classes and end up not pursuing the language to the level of practical proficiency. This is really strange and sad, since other important subjects in natural sciences and humanities have always been elective courses for most senior high school students. In this way, students who are not fond of, say, physics or chemistry can choose to only study humanities subjects, such as literature and arts. Students who like natural sciences, on the other hand, can concentrate on their favorite scientific subjects, including mathematics, and don't have to worry about struggling with history or classical Japanese. Whichever route students take, however, English always haunts them.

Incidentally, the level of baseball is very high in Japan, so much so that quite a few players get recruited every year by the Major League Baseball in the United States. I am of the opinion that this is because baseball is not a compulsory subject in Japan. Only those who love the sport choose to play it and practice it regularly as a club activity. Hence, recruiting a large number of coaches isn't necessary; a small number of well-qualified coaches can train high school baseball players sufficiently. As a result, the motivation of players and the quality of practice are both very high, which explains why Japanese baseball has always been a big success.

In a way, the new type of liberal arts education in Japan is like baseball. It's meant only for people who love the English language and wish to gain an international perspective by studying in a truly cross-cultural environment. As I have explained in this paper, it has both practical and educational merits that cannot usually be found in university programs of traditional types. My observation is that it has already secured its unique position among all the different university programs available in Japan and that it will keep producing well-rounded Japanese individuals who can think critically and lead the rest of the country on the

international front – with respectable English skills that they acquire in the new type of liberal arts education.

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ENDNOTES

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