Traditional, Natural and TPR Approaches to ESL: A Study of Japanese Students

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This is a study of Japanese students' perception of traditional methods vs. the Natural Approach and Total Physical Response (TPR) methods for learning English, and their own preferred styles of learning. Japanese students generally prefer innovative methods, such as avoidance of grammar instruction, exclusive use of the target language by the teacher, emphasis on listening and speaking, use of games and role-playing, use of supplementary materials, and command usage in English (TPR). However, they also show some preference for traditional approaches, such as error correction, L2 only response, and rote memorisation of vocabulary lists for reading. In learning style preferences, Japanese students prefer kinesthetic learning first, and auditory learning second. Further, they prefer group work rather than individual work, and they prefer groups that include men and women. These findings will be of use not only to Japanese teachers of English but to the many English-speaking assistants who have been brought into the teaching system specifically to achieve higher levels of communicative language use among the learners.

Cultural Constraints on the Communicative Approach

Communicative competence, originally defined by Hymes (1972), goes beyond correctness of linguistic forms to the use of language that is appropriate in a given social context (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Based on this notion, communicative approaches to language teaching have been constructed, including the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), and Community Language Learning.

However, the communicative activities in these new approaches may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable to students from other teaching traditions, because educational systems in these countries emphasise 'rule learning, translation, and reading aloud, and to the students from large classes, limited resources, and teacher's low proficiency in English' (Furey, 1986: 23). Many ESL students have never experienced role-playing, group problem-solving tasks, story retelling exercises, or class discussion (Furey, 1986). Although research has shown that these methods and activities can be effective, it is still highly significant, and worthy of further consideration, that these approaches and the corresponding classroom practices were developed by people with a Western cultural perspective (Jones, 1993).

Indeed, even at the early stages of foreign language instruction as currently practised in Japan, most lessons concentrate on traditional approaches such as mechanical drills, rote memorisation of vocabulary and grammatical issues (Samimy & Adams, 1991). According to Taira (1982), the present teaching methods most frequently used in the classroom are the translation method at the high school level, and English grammatical analysis used at both the junior and

high school levels. Language teaching methods in Japanese higher education, according to Sakaguchi (1993), also emphasise the grammar-translation method and a few audio-lingual techniques. Under these traditional approaches, it is common knowledge that most Japanese students are not able to express more than simple greetings and self-introductions in English, despite at least eight years formal English instruction (Atkins & Tanaka, 1990; Samimy & Adams, 1991).

When thinking of teaching methods, classroom techniques and activities, and syllabus design, language instructors have traditionally looked to various disciplines: linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education. Very often they neglect the learner's perspective and attitude towards syllabus design and teaching methods (Yorio, 1986). Undoubtedly the preferred learning style of ESL students reflects the cultural norms, values, and the students' own beliefs. It is essential therefore to analyse the students' preferred learning styles in relation to the techniques actually being used by the teacher in their classrooms. Such preferences may include sensory preferences (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning style) and social preferences (individual, pair and group work).

Analysing the suitability of certain language teaching methods, classroom techniques and activities for Japanese learners, may have implications for developing curriculum design, textual materials and teacher training of ESL instructors. It may also be useful for the many English-speaking assistants who have recently become important in public secondary schools for the purpose of being able to practice communicative English (Morinaga, 1989; Nozawa, 1989; Samimy & Adams, 1991). It may help them to understand the potential obstacles and barriers to teaching Japanese students.

Previous Research

The present study was undertaken to investigate Japanese students' perception of the effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of different methods of teaching English, including the traditional Japanese approach, the Natural Approach and TPR.

Specifically, the principal research questions to be answered were:

(1) What are Japanese ESL students' attitudes towards the traditional Japanese teaching method, the Natural Approach and TPR?
(2) How are the different methods perceived by students of different gender, age and English proficiency?
(3) Do Japanese ESL students favour particular learning styles?
(4) Are learning style preferences influenced by gender, age, and proficiency level?

Based on theoretical cross-cultural analyses, Furey (1986) created a general framework for determining whether certain ESL teaching methods would be appropriate to the students' cultural values in educational settings. Her study included the role of the student and the teacher, teacher-student interaction patterns, classroom practices and students, learning styles. She suggested, but did not herself carry out, empirical research on ESL classroom practices by using a cross-cultural analysis of teaching methods. Certainly, empirical studies are

needed to determine how these pedagogical categories impact differently on students who have varying cultural backgrounds.

In a 1986 study, Yorio emphasised the necessity of identifying a learner's perspective and attitude towards syllabus design, teaching methods, classroom procedures and classroom activities in the foreign language classroom. The population used for the study was university French-Canadian and foreign students. The study concluded that the responses of the Chinese and Japanese students did not correspond to the common impression that these students set a high value on grammatical explanations. However, Japanese students considered memorising vocabulary lists as more valuable than others do, and they viewed translation exercises very highly. Although Yorio's study included cross-cultural questions using the subjects' native languages (French, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese), the questionnaire did not contain distinguishing items based on specific teaching methods such as the Natural Approach, TPR, Suggestopidia, and so forth.

Johns (1981) conducted a survey to determine which academic skills were most important to a non-native speaker's success in a university classroom. The results ranked the receptive skills of reading and listening as most useful to both undergraduate and graduate students. Unfortunately, the research questions were limited to reading, listening, writing and speaking, and were not related to cultural analysis, despite the focus on non-native speakers.

Christison and Krahnke (1986) conducted a study to 'determine how non-native English speakers studying in United States perceive their language learning activities and how they use English in the academic classroom' (1986: 61). The results showed that speaking or conversation skills ranked first as activities in which students wanted to participate. Grammar explanation was viewed as the easiest and least interesting classroom technique, and ranked first as what students wanted removed from instruction.

Zhao (1990) examined how the Natural Approach applied to Chinese EFL students from the perspective of a cross-cultural analysis. The results indicated that 'certain features of the Natural Approach may be adapted to teaching China's non-English majors if those features are altered somewhat' (Zhao, 1990: 58). For example, his study suggested that the avoidance of error correction, which is a special feature of the Natural Approach, was not strongly favoured by half of the Chinese students. The study also suggested that with respect to L1 and L2 usage in the classroom, English should be mainly used in the classroom, Chinese being spoken only for assistance. In addition, Chinese students think that language instructors have to consider how to reduce the students' anxiety, thereby lowering students' affective filters. Zhao's research concluded that a balanced approach between traditional methods and the Natural Approach could be utilised effectively in the EFL Chinese classroom.

Sano's (1986) study suggested that the use of TPR activities in the EFL classroom could be helpful in incorporating English into regular classes in Japan. He also emphasised the effectiveness of TPR in the language classroom, and found a positive attitude towards this approach. However, the high mean score (96.6 out to 100) suggests that the test administered in this study was very easy for the students and therefore may not have been a valid measurement of student achievement in English.

Except for Zhao (1990), the other studies reviewed do not compare the specific features which characterised the target teaching methods under consideration in this study, such as error correction and the balance of L1 and L2 in the classroom. Moreover, most of the previous studies do not examine student perspectives in terms of cultural variation to teaching methods and classroom practices.

The Study

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 237 Japanese students who were attending intensive English language schools in the United States. These institutions were selected based on their appropriate ESL programs and number of students enrolled. Nine schools were selected on the basis of geographical location.

Two of the language schools have a special program for Japanese students from Japanese universities in which English is studied as a second language in a short term of about six weeks. Most of the students are female and range in age from 18 to 22. In this study, these schools were designated as 'special program schools'. The other six schools were called 'regular schools'. The number of students in regular schools was 104 and there were 133 students in special program schools.

The students were classified by gender, age level, and whether they were in a beginners, intermediate or advanced class. It was anticipated that students would differ in their educational background and current goals.

The questionnaire

The student questionnaire, which is presented in full below, was designed to measure attitudes to three general teaching approaches, Traditional Japanese, Natural Approach, and TPR. Although the approaches are not totally exclusive of each other, the following characteristics were identified for each of them, and specific questions were included in the questionnaire to refer to them. (Q# indicated the questionnaire item number in the instrument):

Traditional Japanese methods

- heavy emphasis of grammar instruction (Q 3 & 4);
- exact translation of each sentence and each word in the passage (Q3);
- memorisation of vocabulary lists (Q5 & 6);
- reading and writing stressed prior to speaking and listening (Q7);
- rote practice of words and sentences between the instructor and students (Q8);
- errors by students corrected overtly in class (Q2);
- teacher speaks both English and Japanese in class (Q10);
- students are forced to speak only English (Q11).

The natural approach

- teacher speaks only English in class (Q9);
- students are not pressured into speaking only English (Q11);
- class activities include role-playing and games (Q13 & 14);

- grammar instruction is minimised (Q4);
- errors are not corrected in front of the class (Q1);
- listening to English being spoken is considered to be a highly important process, and is practised before the students begin speaking (Q12);
- various materials are used such as television, movies, tape-recorders and pictures (Q18).

Total physical response (TPR)

Although the TPR method and the Natural Approach were developed independently, they do share many of the same features. Nonetheless, the distinctive features of TPR include the following:

- the learning of words and sentences are linked to physical actions. The students are given various commands in English to respond to physically rather verbally (Q15 & 16);
- students are not forced to speak before they feel ready to (Q17).

Learning Styles

Items concerning learning style preferences were based on the type of sensory stimulation preferred (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic – Q19 & 20) and on preferences concerning class activities (working by oneself, in pairs, or in groups – Q21, 22 & 23).

In its final form, the questionnaire read as follows.

Q1 I feel embarrassed when the teacher corrects my errors in front of the class.
Q2 Having the teacher correct me when I make an error helps me improve.
Q3 I think it is more effective to translate each sentence in a passage than to concentrate on the meaning of the whole passage.
Q4 It is more important to try to understand the meaning of a sentence or passage than to concentrate on sentence structure.
Q5 Memorisation of vocabulary lists is a good way to learn to read English.
Q6 Memorisation of vocabulary lists is a good way to learn to speak English.
Q7 English instruction that emphasises reading and writing is better than instruction that stresses speaking and listening.
Q8 Repeating words and sentences spoken by the instructor helps me learn how to speak better than when I speak with other students in group work or role-playing.
Q9 Learning English is easier when the teacher speaks only English.
Q10 I like it better when the teacher speaks both Japanese and English than when the teacher speaks only English.
Q11 I think students learn the language faster when they are forced to speak only English during class.
Q12 I think it is easier to learn to speak English by spending a lot of time in class listening to English being spoken, instead of concentrating on reading and writing English.
Q13 I think it is very helpful to use activities such as role-playing.
Q14 I think the instructor should use activities such as games in class.
Q15 I think it is very helpful when the instructor uses commands in English for

learning words and sentences (for example, when the teacher says 'stand up' or 'touch your nose' and then the students does the action).

Q16 I feel embarrassed when I am given a command where I have to something in front of the class such as 'go to the chalkboard'.

Q17 Listening skills should be learned before speaking skills.

Q18 I like it when the teacher uses materials such as television, tape-recorder, pictures, charts, maps and advertisements.

Q19 Of the following learning styles, I prefer (a) listening, such as to the teacher lecturing, (b) reading passages and information from the chalkboard, (c) doing activities such as games and role-playing).

Q20 Of the following learning styles, choose the learning styles that you like second best (items are same as Q19).

Q21 I learn best by working (a) by myself, (b) with just one other person, and (c) with several people).

Q22 Of the following, the working condition that you like second best (a) by myself, (b) with just one other person, and (c) with several people.

Q23 When I am working with other people, I would prefer to work (a) with people of same gender, (b) with people of opposite gender, and (c) with people of both genders.

Procedures and data analysis

The appropriate authorities were contacted for permission and to explain the purpose and procedures of the study. All subjects were volunteers. The subjects were given a cover letter containing an explanation of the instrument, and were asked to respond to the items. The administrators gathered all answer sheets and mailed them to the researcher.

The responses to all the items were analysed by chi-square in order to determine whether there were significant preferences. Contingency tables were used to compare the responses by gender, age level, proficiency level and type of program. The frequencies were converted to percentages for interpretation purposes. A total score for the questionnaire was derived by arranging the scores 5 to 1 so that a high score favoured new methods among Japanese students. Differences in total score among the sub-groups were examined using a *t*-test and one-way ANOVA. Two types of school program were compared, regular and special, and the data were also partitioned by gender, age, and level of English.

Results and Discussion

Student preferences

The summary of the data based on per cent and chi-square is presented in Table 1. The survey results reveal that, overall, Japanese students prefer new methods to traditional approaches. Out of 18 questionnaire items related to teaching methods, Japanese students favoured new methods in 14 cases, and traditional methods in only 4 cases.

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) and the Assistant English Teachers (AET) programs have become important in the public schools of Japan, and it is possible that these programs might have positively influenced these Japanese

Table 1 Summary of per cent and chi-square of Japanese students at regular and special schools in English class

Item	A (agree)	N (no opinion)	D (disagree)	N	Chi-square*
Q1	19	18	62	235	$\chi^2 = 116.60$
Male	22	16	64		
Female	20	19	62		$\chi^2 = 14.12$
Regular	23	18	58		
Special	17	18	66		$\chi^2 = 18.40$
Q2	95	3	1	236	$\chi^2 = 408.47$
Q3	8	24	68	236	$\chi^2 = 179.21$
Male	8	26	67		
Female	9	23	70		$\chi^2 = 9.53$
18–22	9	21	71		
Over 23	4	46	50		$\chi^2 = 10.27$
Regular	7	28	65		
Special	9	21	71		$\chi^2 = 10.62$
Q4	79	13	8	235	$\chi^2 = 222.75$
Q5	55	24	21	237	$\chi^2 = 49.70$
Male	40	23	37		
Female	60	24	16		$\chi^2 = 11.68$
Regular	41	29	30		
Special	65	20	14		$\chi^2 = 14.60$
Q6	36	22	42	237	$\chi^2 = 14.08$
Q7	2	12	86	237	$\chi^2 = 295.59$
18–22	1	10	89		
Over 23	8	31	62		$\chi^2 = 14.38$
Beginner	7	5	88		
Inter.	0	12	88		
Advanced	2	20	78		$\chi^2 = 13.05$
Regular	3	18	79		
Special	2	8	91		$\chi^2 = 7.04$
Q8	15	21	65	237	$\chi^2 = 105.22$
Male	25	23	52		
Female	12	20	68		$\chi^2 = 6.57$
18–22	13	20	67		
Over 23	27	31	42		$\chi^2 = 6.51$
Regular	21	18	61		
Special	10	23	67		$\chi^2 = 6.90$
Q9	71	19	10	235	$\chi^2 = 153.63$
Beginner	67	17	17		
Inter.	68	25	7		
Advanced	84	11	5		$\chi^2 = 9.52$

Item	A (agree)	N (no opinion)	D (disagree)	N	Chi-square*
Q10	22	21	57	236	$\chi^2 = 58.48$
Male	7	26	67		
Female	28	19	53		$\chi^2 = 10.48$
Regular	16	18	65		
Special	27	23	50		$\chi^2 = 6.07$
Q11	82	9	9	237	$\chi^2 = 251.11$
Male	67	19	14		
Female	87	6	7		$\chi^2 = 12.35$
Q12	81	14	5	237	$\chi^2 = 241.24$
Beginner	88	7	5	237	
Inter.	82	16	2		
Advanced	70	18	12		$\chi^2 = 11.51$
Q13	65	27	6	233	$\chi^2 = 129.28$
Q14	76	17	6	233	$\chi^2 = 206.27$
Male	61	29	11		
Female	82	13	5		$\chi^2 = 11.34$
Q15	74	19	5	232	$\chi^2 = 196.30$
Male	67	22	11		
Female	78	19	3		$\chi^2 = 6.62$
Q16	9	21	69	233	$\chi^2 = 142.77$
Male	18	16	66		
Female	6	23	71		$\chi^2 = 7.70$
Q17	51	32	16	232	$\chi^2 = 44.65$
Q18	81	13	6	192	$\chi^2 = 199.91$
	Auditory	Visual	Kinesthetic		
Q19	23	13	62	233	$\chi^2 = 96.55$
Male	32	23	45		
Female	21	10	69		$\chi^2 = 11.50$
Q20	41	35	22	231	$\chi^2 = 13.64$
	Individual	Pair	Group		
Q21	32	17	50	234	$\chi^2 = 38.18$
Q22	32	43	25	234	$\chi^2 = 12.03$
	Same	Opposite	Both		
Q23	12	6	80	234	$\chi^2 = 242.49$
Male	4	21	75		
Female	15	2	83		$\chi^2 = 30.74$
18–22	13	5	82		
Over 23	4	21	75		$\chi^2 = 10.21$
Regular	5	13	82		
Special	18	2	81		$\chi^2 = 19.54$

A = Strongly agree and Agree combined; D = Strongly disagree and Disagree combined.
Percentage is rounded off to whole number.
*$p < 0.05$

students' attitudes towards newer methods. However, the study indicated that students also showed a degree of acceptance of classroom techniques of the traditional methods, and significant discomfort with certain innovative methods. Although the students are likely to accept innovative classroom techniques, they apparently still have mixed feelings towards the teaching methods currently used in many of the language classrooms in the United States. These mixed perceptions likely stem from the students' educational background in their own country. They have been taught for about six to ten years in a setting which uses a teacher-centred approach, with the grammar-translation method and some techniques from the audio-lingual method in the language classroom. However, since students apparently did not develop good conversational skills when they were taught by the more traditional approaches, the students recognise that, in a traditional educational setting, they cannot achieve adequate language communicative skills.

The results on error correction indicated that most students consider error correction as a positive approach to improve their language skills and that they do not feel undue embarrassment, even if the error corrections are made in front of the class. Traditional approaches emphasise the value of a teacher's error correction, and the students in this study preferred to have their errors corrected by the teacher.

The responses to the error correction item are probably based on an important Japanese cultural trait. Japanese students typically think that they have to speak English using perfect grammar. Japanese culture also greatly values an individual's sense of 'face' in public. The meaning of 'face' in Japanese culture is much more concerned with the feelings of other people, hence Japanese have to 'save face' in front of the public by not making mistakes. As a matter of fact, Japanese students consider making mistakes in their communication in English as inappropriate. Although Krashen and Terrell (1983) advocated avoiding error correction in students' speech, Japanese students do not believe that avoidance of error correction is a good approach for learning English. There is, of course, a counter argument regarding error correction. Higgs and Clifford (1982), and Omaggio (1993) suggested that early error correction was crucial in avoiding fossilisation in the students' speech performance. They have also suggested that the instructor might use more tactful techniques for error correction in order to reduce the anxiety of Japanese students.

Since the grammar-translation method is still commonly used in the Japanese EFL classroom, grammar instruction, the translation of each word and sentence, an emphasis on reading and writing rather than listening and speaking continue to be part of the traditional Japanese approach. However, in this study, the students perceived that these traditional approaches were not always as effective as some of the newer approaches such as stressing the meaning of whole passages with minimised analysis of grammatical structure, and the importance of listening and speaking skills.

This study showed that Japanese students today also oppose oral rote repetition of words and sentences by instructors and students, which is a major part of the audio-lingual method. This suggests that the students do not feel that this method is effective in helping them to speak English well. The students in this study believed that memorisation of vocabulary lists may be an effective way of

learning to read English, but that it is not as effective in learning to speak well. Only one-third of the students responded that memorisation of vocabulary lists was effective for learning to speak, whereas more than half thought it was useful in learning to read English. It may be that Japanese students still generally prefer rote memorisation of vocabulary lists, which has been a major component of the traditional approach in Japan.

When a teacher speaks only English during class, the Japanese students in this study believe that this technique expedites learning English as a second language. Consequently, they preferred native speakers, or near-native speakers of English as instructors, rather than instructors who speak both Japanese and English in the language classroom. When the teacher speaks only English, the classroom is exposed in an atmosphere of genuine communication which, according to Krashen and Terrell (1983), enhances 'acquisition'.

Students responded favourably to having their teachers use innovative activities in the classroom such as role-playing and games, and so these classroom techniques of the Natural Approach were preferred. In accepting these classroom activities, the students are also exposed to situations for enhancing 'acquisition' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), that is, learning the language from real situations or artificial but realistic situations. The use of supplementary materials such as television, tape-recorders, pictures, charts, maps and advertisements, was also preferred.

There was agreement with the use of commands in English by the instructor. Furthermore, students did not report feeling embarrassed when they were given a command to do something in front of the class. There was a favourable disposition to the main characteristics of the TPR, as in Asher (1986). He feels that since in the TPR classroom, students often remain silent and are not required to speak until they feel ready to, this method should be suitable for the language classroom of Japanese students, who tend to be quiet and rather reluctant to speak, especially in a beginners' level class.

Both the Natural Approach and TPR recommend practising listening skills prior to speaking skills, and half the students in this study agreed with this approach. They showed a moderate degree of agreement with the statement that listening skills should be learned before speaking skills. However, since one-third of the students indicated no opinion, there is still no widespread support for the theory that it is most effective to work on listening skills before speaking skills.

In summary, this study revealed, somewhat contrary to the author's expectations, that a large percentage of Japanese ESL students favour several innovative approaches and classroom practices which are characteristic of the Natural Approach and TPR methods. These include the avoidance of grammar instruction, the usage of only English in class, the emphasis on listening and speaking, the use of games and role-playing, the use of supplementary materials and finally the use of commands in English by the instructors. However, the students also remained favourably disposed towards some techniques of the more traditional approaches, namely, error correction, only responding in English and the rote memorisation of vocabulary lists.

Contrary to Zhao's (1990) study, the Japanese students in this study favoured the Natural Approach and TPR more than traditional Japanese approaches. This

observation is interesting since these two countries have traditionally maintained similar educational systems based on common precepts of Eastern culture. The difference in the results of these two studies may be attributed in part to the type of subjects. Chinese graduate students who had completed their formal English-language education were used in Zhao's study, whereas in this study, the students were currently enrolled in language schools.

Another factor for such a difference may be that the Japanese students felt some pressure to answer the questions which supported the methodology used by their teachers. Although it had to be assumed that the students' attitudes could be reliably demonstrated, some students may have felt threatened, because the Japanese educational system is often an authoritarian system, and the students are traditionally respectful of the perceived preferences of the instructors.

In terms of learning-style preferences, Japanese students favoured the kinesthetic learning style most, and auditory learning style second. Reid's (1987) study also found that Japanese students preferred the kinesthetic style first, and auditory second and visual third. The results of learning style preferences in sociological elements indicated that half the Japanese students preferred working in groups the most. This contrasts with the findings of Reid (1987) who reported that Japanese students preferred working by themselves. It should be noted that Japanese society is group-oriented and is a collectivist culture which admires harmony and interdependence in the society. Furthermore, the Japanese educational setting emphasises group goals even in daily classroom activities, and students feel comfortable working together as a group. Japanese students reported feeling comfortable working in groups of more than two people rather than individually. The students in this study preferred to work with people of both genders rather than with the same. In a study of the level of self-disclosure in communication style among Japanese students, Barnlund (1974) indicated that there was a slight preference among the students for working with the same sex rather than with the opposite sex. In this study, both genders preferred to work in a mixed-gender group.

Group comparisons

The results of comparisons between sub-groups are presented in Table 2.

Age

There were some differences noted between the two age groups. Younger students generally preferred the newer approaches more than the older students. For instance, younger students disagreed with the effectiveness of the technique of translating each word and sentence, while some older students agreed that oral repetition of words and sentences was helpful.

Other sub-group

There were no apparent differences when the responses were analysed by gender, level of proficiency classes, or type of programs.

Gender

Although there was a slight tendency for Japanese males to prefer more traditional approaches, overall, there were no pronounced gender differences. The

Table 2 Scores on total questionnaire for sub-groups of Japanese students in English classes

Group	N1	Method*	SD	t and F values
Total Group	183	61.76	5.25	
Male	53	61.64	6.56	
Female	129	61.78	4.68	$t = 0.16$
18–22	160	62.09	5.27	
Over 23	22	59.14	4.43	$t = 2.51$**
Beginner	41	60.71	3.93	
Intermediate	75	62.41	5.25	
Advanced	51	61.65	6.31	$F = 1.38$
Regular programme	95	61.64	5.82	
Special programme	88	61.89	4.59	$t = 0.31$

*A high score indicates preference for newer methods over traditional methods (total score possible = 85).

The total score was not computed for all 237 subjects because there were 54 missing data in the total score. Out of 183 subjects, there were 16 missing data in level of proficiency, 1 in gender, and 1 in age groups.

** $p < 0.05$

results showed that more Japanese males strongly disagreed with error correction by the teacher in front of the class since this caused embarrassment. More males showed negative feeling to the use of the TPR practice of carrying out commands. However, male students also showed a preference for innovative approaches over what they perceived as the ineffectiveness of translation method and the rote memorisation of vocabulary lists.

English proficiency

There was also no trend in the preferences towards new and traditional approaches based on proficiency level. Beginning level students preferred having the teacher speaking only English less than intermediate and advanced students. However, advanced students were less inclined to favour a heavy emphasis on listening to English than were students at the other two levels.

Type of program

There were only minor differences in preferences towards new and traditional approaches by students in the regular or the special program. Regular school students were slightly less embarrassed by error correction and showed more acceptance of oral repetition of words and sentences compared with special program students. On the other hand, the students in the regular schools reported more preferences towards new methods over rote memorisation of vocabulary when compared with the students in the special program. Consequently, there were no pronounced differences with regard to type of program in preferences for new or traditional approaches.

Learning style

Gender

The females showed some tendency to prefer kinesthetic style more than male

students. Male students showed a greater preference for working with members of the opposite gender. This finding indicates that Japanese female students are less comfortable working with males.

Age
A slight difference was noted for age. The older students preferred working with the opposite gender more than the younger students.

Type of program
The students in the regular schools also preferred working with the opposite gender slightly more than students in the special program schools. However, since the students in the special program schools were all female, these students might not be as comfortable working with the opposite gender as were the regular program-school students.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the results of this study, some implications for ESL instructors can be noted. If the ESL instructor understands Japanese students' preferences toward certain teaching methods, the instructor will be able to teach English as a second language to Japanese students with greater understanding and effectiveness.

The Natural Approach advocates enhancing students' communicative skills so that they are able to freely express their feelings and opinions. However, Japanese students have been taught with teacher-centred methods, with an emphasis on rote memorisation, and without initiating classroom discussion. These students tend to have difficulty in expressing their feeling and opinions voluntarily, which may lead to frustration in a new situation. For example, even when Japanese students do not understand the teacher's questions, they probably will not ask the teacher to repeat the questions. Japanese students are sometimes reluctant to express their opinions on certain topics discussed in class, especially if the topics are too personal. They tend to remain quiet and reticent in the classroom. Such cultural characteristics can affect the classroom atmosphere and act as barriers for effective instruction.

Several recommendations are therefore offered with respect to the classroom environment and cultural differences.

(1) Classroom techniques which the Natural Approach advocates could be used effectively if emphasis is placed on listening and speaking, avoidance of heavy grammar instruction, the use of games and role-playing, and the use of various audio-visual materials. However, students may need sufficient time to become accustomed to these activities.
(2) Some aspects of the traditional approaches to teaching should also be used because Japanese students still value traditional classroom practices such as error correction and rote memorisation of words.
(3) Concerning error correction, even though the results of this study showed a positive attitude toward error correction, the teacher should try to use tactful techniques for correcting student errors. Tactful error correction should help to reduce student anxiety and make the student feel more comfortable in the classroom.
(4) The techniques of TPR can be utilised effectively in the classroom. This

methodology is perceived as helpful and it does not require students to speak until they feel ready. Students in beginning level classrooms should be particularly receptive to this method.

(5) The use of TPR techniques, especially activities such as role-playing and games should be useful, since Japanese students have a high preference toward the kinesthetic learning style. It should be noted, however, that there is a tendency for Japanese male students to feel less comfortable with TPR techniques than female students.

(6) Group activities and working in pairs seems to be preferable for Japanese students. These small-size group activities may serve to enhance communicative skills and reduce anxiety.

(7) When Japanese students interact with students of other nationalities, except possibly those from other oriental cultures, they are likely to listen to other students' opinions first and wait until other students finish talking before speaking. This tendency may be frustrating for the teacher and other students. Consequently, the teacher and other students should give Japanese students ample time to become used to the class atmosphere so that they might speak.

(8) Although most Japanese students prefer to work with members of both genders, according to the results of this study, males tend to prefer this arrangement more strongly than do females. The teacher should be sensitive to the fact that female students are somewhat less inclined to interact with males, and should encourage the female students to express their opinions clearly and voluntarily.

Finally, further research is needed to compare Japanese ESL and EFL students. Since Japanese ESL students remain in the target language culture, and EFL students remain in their own country, the difference in preferences between the two types of Japanese students in learning English would be interesting to compare. Also, since this study was conducted only among Japanese students, the assessment of perceptions of communicative teaching methods among other nationalities would provide valuable information which could be used in teaching English to students from different countries. A third recommendation for further study is that an investigation should be made of perceptions toward language teaching methods and classroom activities with respect to learning other foreign languages, such as Spanish, German, French, Chinese and Japanese.

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