

Inducing Feedback in the EFL Classroom: Exploring the Causes of Student Hesitation¹⁾

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Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good we oft might win,
By fearing to attempt.

W. Shakespeare,
“Measure for Measure,” act I, sc. iv, 78

Prologue (Introduction)

Let's start by thinking back to those first few classes of any given school year. You walked into the classroom, and all the students were either as quiet mice or getting that way. This of course was nothing new—you expected the students to be quiet and attentive. After all, you were probably an unknown quantity to most of them, and they were probably curious as to what you would be doing in class—on that day and for the rest of the year. And we sure would like them to stay as quiet as mice for the rest of the year. . . or would we?

In an English “conversation” class or any class where the teacher would wish to have voluntary student involvement (feedback & discussion) perhaps silence is not what we want, even though it is often what we get. In how many of your classes has it seemed to you that the

students' idea of class was watching what you, the teacher, would do next. They just sat silently or if you picked on one to answer a question or offer an opinion, he/she froze and got the old "rabbit caught in the glare of the headlights of an oncoming truck"-type look. Bet they felt that way too. Sound familiar? Or when you asked, "Do you understand?" to your students after explaining a point, you got the same result—No feedback! Were your students "simply" shy, or were they non-motivated? Both? Or possibly some other reason?

In this paper I propose to explore student hesitation, a major reason why this lack of feedback occurs, from the perspective of the latest research, theories and experiences of other practitioners in our field, as compared with my own observations and experiences with Japanese college-level English "conversation" classes, the type of class I usually deal with, and this paper's specific point of comparative reference.

In "tracking down" the cause(s) of student hesitation, I will start with the visible results of student hesitation, what we as teachers see happening in our classes, and work back from there in an attempt to find the source or sources. Even if no clear answer is arrived at, it is hoped, at the very least, that the reader will have gained some insight into the causes of his/her students' hesitation in the classroom, and so understand his/her students better, and in effect, lead to more rewarding classes for all.

Act I: Setting the Stage

As this paper is also based on my own personal opinions and experiences, I consider it important to first set the stage, to show some of the underlying personal pedagogical bases that this paper will work from, by answering the following three questions:

- 1) What exactly is a "conversation" class?

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- 2) What is feedback and why is it important?
- 3) What is the importance of the first few class meetings?

To put it quite simply, I understand a “conversation” class to be a class whose purpose is to improve the students’ conversational abilities. The class may have a subject (content) focus such as education, British history, or practical living situations in America,²⁾ and though as we all know, that language and culture are inseparable,³⁾ the basic purpose and common denominator of the above classes would still be the same—to be able to communicate orally, with improving fluency, in the target language. Now I happen to hold to the belief, through practical experience, both teaching and learning language, that this goal cannot be reached by only passive instruction, whether it be reading, writing, or even listening. No tennis professional ever reached his/her status by only watching pro tennis tournaments on television, or only listening to the coach lecture. He/she became proficient by long hours of actual practice. The same goes for golf, or jewelrymaking, or any other acquired practical skill. The same goes for speaking English. “People learn best by doing.”⁴⁾ To become proficient in a communicative skill such as spoken English, communication itself must take place.

Communication is the “mutual exchange of information and ideas” (Vasek 1980:16). Lucas (1984) tells us that this idea holds true in the classroom as well as in interpersonal relationships, since most classroom education is carried out through talk. But the key word here is “mutual.” Teachers give instructions, information, and questions orally, and students should use verbal feedback to indicate understanding, request clarification, and other such items. If a student does not respond to a teacher’s speech, how does the teacher know the student heard or understood? Or if a student does not respond to another student’s speech during a pairwork exercise, how does the second student know if the first student understood? In other words, “genuine, productive communication

does not take place if it does not go in both directions" (1984:593), and giving and receiving feedback is an integral part of the communicative process.

In referring to the lack of feedback⁵⁾ in a classroom situation, we are not really saying that we get no response, or feedback, *per se*. We do get unconscious nonverbal feedback in the form of expressions (like a look of shock or surprise on a student's face), gestures (such as nervous movements), or actions (such as the student being questioned whispering to surrounding classmates). The alert teacher would recognize these nonverbal signals for what they are. Quite a few expression and gestures are universal (a yawn indicating boredom or fatigue, raised eyebrows indicating surprise), ⁶⁾ but we don't get the kind of conscious, coherent, voluntary verbal feedback in English that we, as teachers, would like. So, when we discuss the lack of feedback in a classroom situation in this paper, we specifically mean the above kind of verbal feedback.

In a classroom, the promotion and presence of communication is important from day one. Communication can help to create a rapport between the teacher and students and among the students themselves. Feedback from the students can tell a teacher much about their purposes and priorities of study, and their feelings towards such factors as the subject of study, the physical classroom and seating arrangements, their classmates, and the teacher himself/herself among other things. Knowing this can help guide the teacher in laying out or modifying his/her course of study to most efficiently benefit the students and the teacher during the span of the school year. On the other hand, a lack of feedback for whatever reasons in an initial class, if not acted upon, and allowed to continue, can result in a dampening atmosphere in the classroom that will inhibit the process of communication. A silent, uneasy classroom atmosphere tends to breed more of the same. Therefore the first few days can be critical in determining the course of the class for the rest of the year.

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Act II: . . . and a Cast of Thousands

Feedback can now be seen as a necessity in the conversation classroom, especially early in the year, but when we talk about a lack of feedback in a class, exactly what are we talking about? Specifically what happens, or to be more precise, does not happen? The following are the possible scenarios a teacher might find when questioning a student in a class, particularly an initial class. I have listed 12 types of reactions, of which combinations are sometimes possible, that I have observed:

- A) “the stiff”⁷⁾—sits quietly without moving a muscle, glassy-eyed, though may have glanced at the teacher once. May twitch, complexion pale or paling. May give the impression to the teacher that the student has just died, except the odds are against remaining upright in the seat. May respond after 1~2 minutes has passed.
- B) “the tourist”—looks around the room at the other students and at the furniture and various fixtures in the classroom. An action one would normally classify as being bored, except the student is evidently wide-eyed. Seems as if he/she is practicing for a sightseeing tour.
- C) “the census-taker”—his/her reaction is to whisper frantically (in Japanese, of course) to those other students sitting nearby, for all intents and purposes to ask either what the teacher’s question was, or to get as many opinions as possible before deciding on what is most probably “the” correct answer. Perhaps if the conferring was done in English, it might have possibilities for classroom use, for example as a pairwork exercise.
- D) “the defendant”—he/she immediately shoots back with a “No,” “いいえ” or “I don’t know,” sometimes in a loud or hostile manner. This response is given without evidently even listening to and/or thinking about the question. This kind of student doesn’t even try.

- E) “the invisible man/woman”—there is no response at all. Funny thing—the student was there when you took roll at the beginning of the class. At least someone answered then. Or the student is still there, but is trying to appear inconspicuous. Only answers when you call roll.
- F) “the penitent”—has only one response, “ごめん なさい.” Now whether this is due to failure to prepare for the class, and so not being able to offer an opinion or answer a question, apprehension towards one’s English ability, or just not paying attention is unknown to the teacher.
- G) “the mute switch”—much like a mute switch, which cuts the volume on a stereo, this student’s voice becomes mouse-sized when questioned by the teacher. When handed a microphone by the teacher to make up for the student’s weak voice, not surprisingly this student’s voice reduces to flea-sized.
- H) “the hot dog”⁸⁾—a student who always volunteers to answer. He/She responds quickly and with confidence. Very enthusiastic. May repeat everything the teacher says, even the questions presented, as well as directions for an exercise. When a question is addressed to the class, may not give anyone else the chance to answer or give comments.
- I) “the returnee in sheep’s clothing”—a student who responds reluctantly when in the situation of being in a large group, but when in the situation of one-on-one with the teacher, or in a group of close friends, responds with enthusiasm and with fluency in the target language. Seems to be reluctant to show ability in a large group of those much less fluent in the target language. Usually a student who has lived in a country where English is the native language.
- J) “the free-timer”—no immediate response until alerted by nearby students, as this student has been evidently engaged in some other activity such as whispering to associates, sleeping, writing a letter,

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working on the next period's homework, studying for another subject's test, rubbernecking at passing females (in the case of male students), or daydreaming. Probable secondary response of types A ~G or K. Doesn't realize was picked on by the teacher for being involved in the activities above, and will probably repeat such activities in a later class.

- K) "the busy-body"—the student does not respond, and instead proceeds to scratch his/her head while studiously going through the text and his/her notes. Gives the impression to the teacher that the student is trying.
- L) "the good language learner"⁹⁾—responds promptly with the answer or comment, or with some response such as, "Just a moment, " "Would you repeat that?" or "I don't know" depending on the situation.

Act III: Analysis

Scene I: Motivational Factors

We have experienced the how, the lack of feedback from students in many different forms. The question now is why. Is all this delay and silence from our students from the same root source?

Student response types D, J, and maybe E & F would seem to be very much indicative of a lack of interest in the class, in English in general, and what you, the teacher, are doing and/or saying in particular, though a type J non-response due to being asleep can be caused by exhaustion (playing mahjonn all night, long part-time work hours, worry, illness) as well as by disinterest.

For our purposes at present, we accept that motivational factors do play a part in suppressing feedback, as exemplified by student response types D, J, and sometimes E & F, but in this paper are concerned with the following hesitant causes for lack of feedback.

Scene II: Stage Fright (Communication Apprehension)

The greater number of student response types, A~C, E~G, I and K, are representative of what Lucas (1984) refers to as “communication apprehension,” a “generalized anxiety¹⁰⁾ or fear about oral communication,” or the fear to speak out, in our case in the classroom situation. In general, these students tend to be attentive, or more so than the non-motivation based responses presented earlier.

Most people experience communication apprehension at one time or another, even in one's own native language (Lucas, 1984; Dale & Wolf, 1988). Even some teachers feel nervous when they meet a new class for the first time. I, myself, have felt somewhat nervous and apprehensive speaking in front of a large unknown group. According to Lucas with respect to Friedman (1980), one survey showed that apprehension about public speaking was the most commonly reported fear, and data from 20,000 college students at three universities in the United States suggest that 15~20% suffer from debilitating communication apprehension. Now just consider, “if . . . students are apprehensive about speaking their own language, their fear of communicating in [a foreign language such as] English must be magnified ten-fold” (Lucas 1984:594).

It would appear that fear¹¹⁾ is one of, if not *the* factor, involved in student hesitation. But fear of what? From what cause? Lucas (1984, p. 594) infers five reasons why a person may be apprehensive about oral communication:

- 1) fear of being negatively evaluated by others
- 2) fear of failure in social situations (i. e. not knowing what to say or do, becoming tongue-tied)
- 3) fear of being rejected, by someone they like or by someone in authority (such as a teacher)

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- 4) fear of intimacy in which they must reveal their "real self" and "true feelings" to another person
- 5) fear of error due to lack of practice and unreal expectations about the need to "sound like Richard Burton or be as verbally skillful as Barbara Walters"

These are reasons that a number of other educators and researchers have also pointed out. Zimbardo (1981) mentions numbers one, two, and especially three (presence of authority) as factors: "Communication apprehension causes people to worry when they have to perform in unfamiliar situations, where they are the object of attention and are being critically evaluated by others whom they perceive to be dominant or demanding" (p. 25). And is the teacher not usually such a figure? Schumann (1978) suggests that the activities that many students have to do in many modern language classes can bring on negative reactions from the teacher or other students. Fear of such a reaction he calls "sensitivity to rejection." Harmer (1990:1) mentions students having "a strong fear of appearing ridiculous in front of their peers" as a reason for not wanting to speak in class.

Reason number four, fear of intimacy, appears to refer to the introversion (versus extroversion) of students. Introversion/extroversion is one of the features of personality which has received great attention from those researchers who are interested in the relationship between personality and second language learning. Studies by Nida (1950) and Pritchard (1952) suggest that extroversion might be a significant predictor of pronunciation ability. Chastain's (1975) examination of affective characteristics led to a conclusion that reserved/outgoing was one of the factors that influenced students' classroom achievements. Rossier (1975) concluded from his study that extroverts do better in speaking than others given all conditions being equal.

These results would seem to be taken for granted by educators such

as ourselves, for doesn't common sense and experience indicate that the outgoing student does better, at least in the area of verbal communication? The extroverted student speaks out more, so of course his pronunciation should be better. Because he takes a greater part in communicative-type situations, in general, aren't his communicative skills better than those who don't?

Surprisingly, several experimental studies (Naiman et. al. 1975, Suter 1976) did not support the hypothesis that extroverts are better language learners than introverts; nor did it reach agreement concerning the relationship of extroversion/introversion and second language learning. Indeed, as Ellis (1986) states, "In general, the available research does not show a clearly defined effect of personality [of which extroversion/introversion is a part] on SLA" (p. 121).

Perhaps we should look at a more pertinent, specific study. Most of the previous studies were done with speakers of European languages learning other European languages. Busch (1982) carried out her research on introversion/extroversion and EFL proficiency with Japanese students. She found no relationship between introversion/extroversion and performance on an English proficiency test. She points out that the traditional Japanese language class requires students to be introverts, and that students' introversion or extroversion would have very little to do with language proficiency in such an EFL situation unless the classroom learning situation itself changes. This finding in itself was valuable in supporting Brown's (1980) claim of the importance of cultural aspects when carrying out research, a point we will cover more fully later in this paper.

Reason number five, fear of error, while of course is related to three of the other reasons (#1—being negatively evaluated by others possibly due to error, #2—failure in social situations possibly due to some faux pas, #3—fear of being rejected possibly because of a mistake made), was referred to by Lucas as being the usual cause of communication

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apprehension. In support of Lucas, material concerning communication apprehension presented and published does center around this fear of error as a cause.

In my own experience, I find that the average native-English teacher on the street mentions fear, along with shyness, of speaking English poorly or incorrectly as the causes of their students' apprehension.

Taira (1982) supports this supposition from a survey in which he reports that over two-thirds of the English teachers in Japan surveyed thought that Japanese hesitate to speak for fear of making mistakes. One such teacher, Tessa Woodward, relates her experiences of teaching in Japan:

“When I taught in Japan, I found that a large number of the students in my classes had a similar problem. They were overconcerned with not making mistakes, and in this desire to be accurate would hesitate, start, correct themselves, wait, think and start again rather than blurt out something to the waiting listener. They seemed to think that a native speaker would prefer to wait for them to produce the perfect utterance than receive a bit of spontaneous content” (Woodward 1986:11).

In explaining one of the causes of fear of error, Yukawa (1989) also picks up on number five as a major cause of communication apprehension among Japanese students of English. She informs us that there is a strong feeling among Japanese learners of English, including intermediate and advanced learners, that they have to sound exactly like Americans or British people to have themselves recognized as good speakers of English. She considers this “obsession” with what she terms “perfectionism” to be unproductive, even harmful, in that it shuts up intermediate learners because of the fear of making mistakes and “even those who are obviously advanced learners think they speak ‘poor English.’ No matter how

effectively they can communicate, they think their English is not good because it has a strong non-native accent, or they failed to use idiomatic expressions that a native speaker would have used at a certain moment of the conversation; i. e., because their English is not perfectly native-like" (p. 23).

She proposes that American and British English should be used as a sample model and not as a goal in English education in Japan. She rightly claims that it is rather unrealistic to set a goal on matching a native-speaking American's linguistic and sociolinguistic abilities, a sentiment Swan (1989) echoes exactly.

Duggan et al. (1985) refer to a number of studies (Scovel 1969, Asher 1985, Oyama 1976, Seliger et al. 1975, Asher and Garcia 1969) that support the claim that accent-free speech is not probable for the learners of a second language who start after a certain age, usually the upper limit being the onset of puberty. Though research comparing child-adult differences in the degree of grammar (syntactic and semantic) proficiency ultimately achieved is less than that concerning pronunciation, several studies suggest that the results of research in pronunciation correlate with grammar (Oyama 1976, Snow et al. 1978, Patkowski 1980).

Based on such research, for the type of students we are dealing with (Japanese college-level English students), a goal of "perfect" English based on a native speaker's proficiency would be unattainable, especially so in an EFL situation as the one we are in.

Berwick and Ross (1989), supporting this and Yukawa's point, tell us that the relationship between foreign language learning and motivation and attitudes is an even more complex issue in an EFL context than in an ESL context. They refer to Edamatsu (1978) and Miller (1986), who argue that Japanese learners' attitudes towards learning English are influenced by psycho-social barriers which eventually limit the effectiveness of their acquisition of the target language, and Nakayama

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(1982), who underscores this point, contending that the use of Anglo-American models of English fosters the development of psycho-social barriers to learning in that learners are presented with culturally invalid models.

Nickel (1987) goes one step further when he argues that the image of an American or British person as the model of a native-English speaker no longer applies. Taking his cue from Kachru's "World Englishes," Nickel states, "The problem of standards or norms, particularly complicated with reference to the different varieties of English, and usage and attitudes toward them on the native-speaker part makes it almost impossible to speak any longer of the native-speaker as a monolithic phenomenon" (p. 21).

It's evident that as Lucas and Yukawa say, unreal expectations lead to a lack of confidence, a feeling that one's English is poor, even among advanced students. In language teaching, the role of positive self-confidence is usually associated with successful language learning. Beebe (1983) suggests that most good learners have a healthy self-esteem which keeps them from thinking that their errors make them look foolish. Krashen (1982) considers self-confidence as one of the three important affective variables (along with anxiety and motivation) in relation to his affective filter hypothesis. Brown (1977) suggests that "a person with high self-esteem is able to reach out beyond himself more freely, to be less inhibited, and because of his ego strength, to make the necessary mistakes involved in language learning with less threat to his ego" (p. 352), and that self-esteem "could have everything to do with success in learning a language" (1973:233). So it is no surprise to find that the reverse is true, that the lack of self-confidence is usually associated with unsuccessful learners, as reported by Naiman et al. (1975).

According to Scovel (1988), confidence and competence are cyclic, one leads to the other. He reports on unpublished research by Deckert of Arab and Japanese students (among others) that showed the Arab stu-

dents had more confidence in their oral skills, and were actually better (more competent) when tested. The Japanese students were underconfident and did worse when tested.

Along with unreal expectations leading to a lack of confidence, Lucas also mentions lack of practice as also being an influence on fear of error (#5) as a cause of communication apprehension. By lack of practice, we specifically mean lack of practice in actually speaking the target language, not through repetition or controlled drills, but in natural communicative situations, as I pointed out earlier in my definition of what makes up a "conversation" class.

There is a consensus among educators that Japanese students are poor English speakers and fare unsatisfactorily in oral encounters, even after years of English language instruction. Educators and others have long placed at least some of the blame on the English curriculum in Japanese schools, which emphasizes literature and grammar-translation; on the instructors, many of whom speak as poorly as their students; and on teaching methods which rely on tightly controlled drills and exercises, manipulative classroom activities, and activities in which the students listen to teachers or tapes and simply mimic the words they hear.

Scene III: Monitor Overuse

Even Krashen (with Terrell 1983), in describing his Monitor, supports the two causes presented by Lucas as causing student hesitation, though not necessarily fear of error. Krashen might explain that Woodward's (1986) experiences are just examples of an overused Monitor. Use of the Monitor does take some amount of time to think about rules, though not enough to disrupt communication in a normal conversation. "Monitor overusers are constantly checking their output with their learned conscious knowledge of the second language. As a result, they speak hesitantly, often self-correct in the middle of utterances, and are

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so concerned with correctness that they have difficulty speaking with any real fluency" (1983:44). But when he comes to causes for overuse of the Monitor, he believes that there may be two. One derives from learning without acquisition,¹²⁾ someone who has only had formal exposure to a second language in grammar-based classes. These people may have very little acquisition to rely on and may have no choice but to be an overuser. The other may be related to personality, people who have acquired at least some of the grammar of their second language but have no faith in their acquired competence.

Krashen's argument does seem plausible in that the description of the Monitor overuser matches that of Woodward's students. Also, his description of the causes of Monitor overuse are applicable to the average Japanese student—exposure to the language generally limited to grammar-based classes¹³⁾ with very little exposure to acquisition-supportive situations, and the lack of confidence in one's own English-speaking ability. His two causes for overuse are similar to what Lucas refers to as the two causes for fear of error.

Scene IV: Systems and Strategies

Reinelt (1987 a) digs in deeper detail in presenting his point of view. Reinelt, whose research is focused in Japan, proposes that the problem concerning lack of feedback lies not with any single entity such as a teacher or student, that no *one* is really at fault, but that a difference in cultures, specifically learned behavior, is the culprit. Foreign language teachers used to the Western question-answering system at school seem to consider four factors as being important for a good mark in school. In order of importance:

- 1) quick response
- 2) an individual answer (if one student is addressed)

- 3) originality of the answer, where applicable
- 4) correctness of the answer

Japanese students, however, have been brought up to apply different criteria for giving their answers. Correctness ranks first, or more accurately, mistakes are not acceptable.

Reinelt also believes that Japanese students have naturally developed strategies in the Japanese-taught classroom that help to reduce the chances of an incorrect response, that they have brought over to the foreign language classroom. One such strategy:

“After Japanese teachers ask students a question, they often add further material, often translations in Japanese, which, in turn, the students can rely on. To wait, then, is safe” (1987 a:8).

This would help to explain the delay found in many of the observed student responses, if verbal feedback did occur at all (Types A~C, E~G, and I~K). In another strategy in coming up with a correct, and therefore the best and safest response, Reinelt explains that students seem to need time to gather moral support and answers/help from those around them. “If the task is distributed to more students, more alternative answers can be generated; correctness can be checked and reconfirmed” (1987 a:9).

We saw an example of this in the type C student response. Reinelt describes this, along with the type K student response as “intermediate activities”¹⁴⁾ designed to show the teacher that the student is putting forth effort in an attempt to arrive at the correct answer.

In effect, the Western answering system usually demands a prompt reply of some sort, and so renders delay unacceptable. But as we could see in our observed student responses, we often get no feedback at all. Is this because students cannot come up with what they believe to be a

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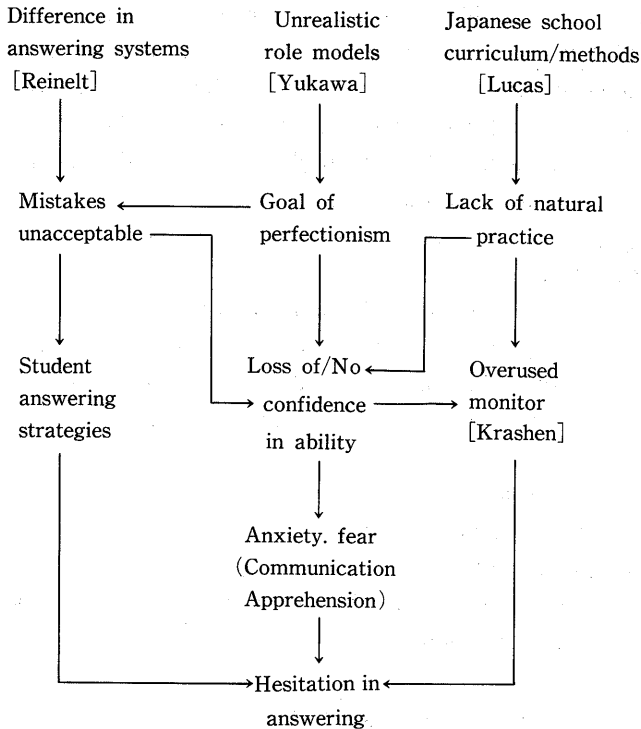
correct answer, or perhaps have an answer but are afraid of being wrong and so find it safer not to answer? Or are they waiting for a translation? From a non-Japanese teacher? Isn't it possible that the non-Japanese teacher, or even the Japanese teacher exposed to the Western answering system, is using, innately or acquired, the Western answering system, and so does not wait for a student's answer. That because the answer was not promptly given, the teacher assumes that the student has no answer or will not answer?

In any case, it would seem that cultural aspects and differences lie at the core of our problem (don't they always seem to?) with student hesitation. Up to this point we've realized three main culturally-related factors that are advocated as source origins of student hesitation:

- 1) unrealistic role models
- 2) the English language curriculum in Japanese schools being geared for college entrance tests
- 3) the criteria involved in different question-answering systems and naturally-developed student strategies

If we were to make a chart compiling all the material we have covered up to this point, it would look like this: (See chart)

And what factors influence and caused the difference in answering systems, unrealistic role models, and the Japanese school curriculum and methods laid out in the chart to come about? Here we impede on the realm of sociology, even psychology and anthropology, and, as an educator, I must draw the line here. Neither does the available second language research seem to encroach past this point. I would like to point out though, some cultural aspects that do seem to play a part in causing student hesitation, and research that shows what influence culture is seen to have on communication. I did not include such cultural influences in the chart because they are more overall and pervading (in terms of the chart)



than specifically affective.

Scene V: Cultural Aspects

The interrelationship of culture and language is well-known among educators, as explained earlier. But culture does not affect only the grammatical structures and lexicon of a language such as Japanese. Less direct and less visible influences of culture on language occur. Cultural aspects play a large part in determining the characteristic personality features of any people, and the Japanese are no exception. We have seen

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some of these personality features covered earlier in this paper—introversion/extroversion, self-confidence, and anxiety.

Benedict, in her classic study, *The Chrysanthemum and Sword* (1946), claims that the Japanese avoid shame-arousing situations, and fear ostracism and social disapproval more than self-repression or self-denial. Shame in Japanese society is used as a tool for getting people to perform or behave the way society says they should. Mothers get their children to behave by telling them that others are watching and are shocked at their actions or laughing at them. Zimbardo (1981) points out that typically, the Japanese grow up with it deeply impressed on them that they are not to bring disgrace to the family. "Disgrace" can mean anything from not playing well in a little league baseball game to performing poorly in school. In Japan, failure is blamed on the person who made the mistake, while success is credited to parents, teachers, coaches, or Buddha. In this sense, students might feel that they have nothing to gain by speaking out in class, and everything to lose.

Nakane, the noted anthropologist, in her book *Japanese Society* (1967), tells that members of the Japanese society prefer to be silent rather than utter words that might disrupt the harmony of the group.

Lucas (1984), and Hill (1990), reporting from Loveday (1982), point out a general distrust and dislike of people skilled in oral communication in the Japanese culture, as expressed in the following proverbs:

"Mouths are to eat with, not to speak with. "

"Speech is silver, silence is golden. "

"Even a pheasant will not be shot if it keeps quiet. "

"Talkers are not good doers. "

Those communication and conversational skills such as prompt replies, originality, freely giving opinions, etc. that are seen as positive in the eyes of Westerners were not seen as such by Japanese. To Japanese

people, Americans appear talkative, with bold, loud speech. Their informality in behavior, especially their attitude toward leaders and elders, appears to the Japanese as inconsiderate, even rude.

Castagnaro et. al. (1985) report on two studies surveying the characteristic personality features of Japanese. The first, a survey conducted by the National Language Research Institute, presents the impressions that Japanese gave to 201 foreigners living in Japan. From this survey, Japanese were conceived of by foreigners as diligent, polite, kind, proud, honest, and shy. They were not conversant, logical, calculating, aggressive, or open-minded. In the second study, Barnlund (1975) covered what Americans and Japanese find as characteristic cultural features that have a bearing on communication, of themselves and each other. The accumulated data were similar to the results found by the National Language Research Institute survey as concerns impressions of the Japanese. On the whole, Japanese seen to prefer more formal and regulated encounters, tend to be reserved and cautious in expressing themselves, and prefer to be evasive and silent rather than open and frank. Americans were considered to be self-assertive, frank, informal, spontaneous, and talkative.

Castagnaro et. al. compiled six points in the Japanese character that they believe act as a hindrance in the learning of English:

- 1) sensitivity to shame
- 2) afraid of making mistakes
- 3) concerned about the eye of others
- 4) not self-assertive
- 5) passive in learning
- 6) restless and nervous

Zimbardo (1981) has found, in creating a design for a society in which communication apprehension is most likely to exist, based on the

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values, goals, standards and characteristics of said society and members of, has found that communication apprehension is much more common in some cultural settings than in others. Some of the characteristics of such a society are:

- 1) promotes self-consciousness
- 2) makes failure a source of personal shame in a highly competitive system
- 3) sets limitless aspirations and ambiguous criteria for success without teaching ways of dealing with failure
- 4) discourages the expression of emotions and open sharing of feelings and anxieties
- 5) provides little opportunity for intimate relations between the sexes
- 6) places strict taboos on most forms of sexual expression

Not surprisingly, based on this information, Japan was found to be the culture in which communication apprehension is most common.

Before we conclude this paper, there are two student response types that we have not yet covered.

Scene VI: A New Cause of Apprehension

Types H and I are exceptional cases. The type H student can be either as asset or an ass in a class depending on how the teacher handles this situation. This student may end up being somewhat despised by, or become the laughing stock, or the class. More important, to our paper, than the type H student is the type I student, who, in his/her own special way, is a victim of communication apprehension, and one that has been appearing recently in greater numbers.

At one end, you have the students we have covered at length who may be apprehensive because they feel their English is not good enough

and at the other end you have the type I students, who are apprehensive because they feel their English is too good. (As I stated earlier, these type-response students have usually lived overseas in an ESL situation for some period of time.) The type I student does not want to be different from the rest of the class, and so end up ostracized to some degree as the type H student may be.

Lebra (1976) and Samimy (1989) tell us that traditionally there is a strong concern for belonging among Japanese. So Japanese who do not behave like Japanese are often ridiculed because of an ambiguity of identity in terms of their belonging. Samimy refers to Nakatsu (1979) & Farkas and Kohno (1987) concerning the many incidents reported about Japanese children who have returned from abroad and found it extremely hard to readjust to their own country. It seems that anyone who breaks the group norms by behaving or speaking like an "American" is often left out of the Japanese group. Speaking English like a native speaker is especially threatening to the in-group and is often interpreted as being disloyal. So even children who learned to assimilate themselves into American culture and English successfully, tend to deny their experiences abroad once they return to Japan. In Kohno's survey, 71.4% of the returnees responded that they did not want to apply what they had learned from living abroad to Japan, and only 51.4% said they would like to utilize their knowledge of English. Kohno concluded that these responses were due to the returnees' desperate need to readjust themselves to Japanese society.

In questioning some of my returnee students after class (in a class of about 25 female junior college students) as to why they didn't speak up more or volunteer opinions in class, especially when I was sure they knew the answer or had some opinion, they said it was really difficult for them to explain why. But from what I did gather, they did not want to be "different" or to show up the other students. They were quite enthusiastic though, when I proposed a class only for returnee students. They said

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that they wanted to get a chance to speak out more and discuss topics in English, because they felt they were losing their English ability. In the end, we find cultural affects as the causes of hesitation with these students, too.

Epilogue (Concluding Remarks)

Communication apprehension cannot be attributed to any one cause or simple factor, as we have seen from the various studies and material presented by a number of researchers and educators. The fact is, there are a number of causes and factors related to communication apprehension that must be taken into account when considering the cause of a lack of feedback in the classroom. I do not dispute any of the arguments put forth by the educators and researchers in this paper. I believe each of these arguments have merit. The classroom is a complex system. In my experience, I have found no two classes of students to be exactly similar. Individual student attitudes, differences in ability levels, the physical classroom and seating arrangements, and yes, even if the class before or after lunch, are all variables that give a class its own personality and special needs. It is important for the teacher to get to know and understand each class they have, and its idiosyncracies and needs, as early as possible. And in doing so, to also take into account cultural aspects as regards second and/or foreign language instruction. Krasnick (1985) warns us that because cultures consist of different and often diametrically opposed rules, failure by the teacher to heed the intercultural nature of second language instruction can greatly lead to interpersonal misunderstanding in the classroom.

For it is only by better understanding the various influences and causes that lead to student hesitation, can the teacher be better prepared to handle such situations if and when they arise.

Footnotes

- 1) This paper evolved from a workshop presentation by the author at the JALT Gunma Summer Seminar (on 6 August 1988 in Kusatsu, Gunma Prefecture, Japan).
- 2) The content of most ESL and many EFL “conversation” classes and “conversation” texts tend to focus on various practical ESL living situations such as shopping, using the bank, making a phone call, etc.
- 3) An item voiced by many, as shown by Krasnick (1985:18~19) and Hill (1990:113).
- 4) The stated philosophy of Jane Willis, “Language Tasks for Fluency and Accuracy, ” Unpublished paper presented at JALT 1989 Conference, Okayama, Japan, November 1989.
- 5) In second language acquisition, use of the term “feedback” generally applies to the teacher’s response (correction, approval, expansion) to the learner’s speech or writing, and not to the learner’s response or feedback (or lack of it) to the teacher (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982:34~35). Though much more research has been done on the former, it is with the latter that we are concerned.
- 6) See Bauder, “A Partial List of Common American Gestures,” pp. 28~29.
- 7) A slang term meaning a corpse.
- 8) A slang term meaning an overly eager person.
- 9) The terminology used by Ellis (1986:122~123) in describing that student with the characteristics of good language learning.
- 10) Scovel (1978) notes two kinds of anxiety in terms of performance: facilitating anxiety (which improves one’s performance) and debilitating anxiety (which has a negative effect, as in the example this footnote refers to). When we speak of anxiety among our Japanese students, it is usually debilitating anxiety.
- 11) I would like to note here that the terms anxiety, apprehension, and fear, which are used by various educators and researchers throughout this paper, suffers from a problem noted by Castagnaro et al. (1985), the problem of definitions: different researchers have tended to use different names to describe the same item. For our purposes, we may consider these terms to

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be similar, unless otherwise noted.

- 12) Acquisition is defined by Krashen & Terrell (1983:18) as the development of ability in a language by using it in natural communicative situations.
- 13) An extensively documented situation: See Berwick & Ross (1989) and Wadden (1990) among others.
- 14) Student actions that takes place between the teacher's question and the answer formulation. Usually highly recurrent.

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