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# Why Do Japanese People Not Speak English? Japanese Elementary Students in a Bilingual School

Steven B. Rohrer  
*Cedarville University*

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WHY DO JAPANESE PEOPLE NOT SPEAK ENGLISH?  
JAPANESE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS IN A BILINGUAL SCHOOL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

By

STEVEN BEN ROHRER  
B.A. Literature, Wheaton College, 1987  
B.A. Philosophy, Wheaton College, 1987

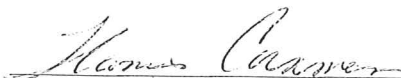
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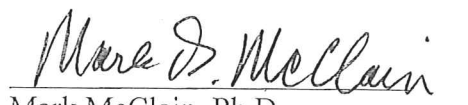
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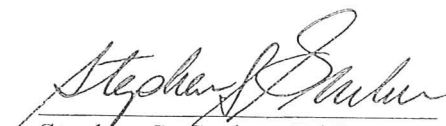
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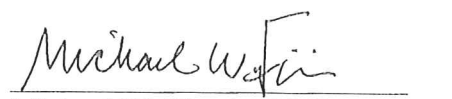
I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Steven Ben Rohrer ENTITLED Why do Japanese People Not Speak English? Japanese Elementary Students in a Bilingual School BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Education.

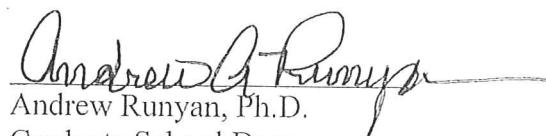
  
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Director M.Ed. Program

  
Michael W. Firmin, Ph.D.  
Psychology Department Chairman  
Thesis Advisor

  
Andrew Runyan, Ph.D.  
Graduate School Dean

## ABSTRACT

Rohrer, Steven B. M. Ed., Education Department, Cedarville University, 2011. *Why Do Japanese People Not Speak English? Japanese Elementary Students in a Bilingual School.*

Japanese schools have invested much money and effort in teaching English, yet why do most Japanese people not speak English? Their reticence has been attributed to various factors including communication apprehension or language anxiety. In this study, qualitative, phenomenological interviews were conducted with 24 Japanese upper elementary students at a bilingual international school in Japan to investigate influences on their willingness to communicate in English. Through open coding of the students' responses, four themes emerged. Intrinsic factors which made students reticent to speak in English were internal stress and the perceived difficulty of English speaking. Social groups and identity issues were extrinsic factors which were also found to influence Japanese students' attitudes toward English speaking.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Communication is an important part of daily life for most people but, in the United States and around the world, there are many people who are hesitant to communicate. This condition has been labeled by some as “communication apprehension.” In a seminal publication, McCroskey (1977) defined the construct as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). Approximately 20% of the American population shows various forms of communication apprehension (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2002). Even after years of study, its cause is not clearly understood, although it is theorized by Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) to be partly due to an inborn personality trait. One factor that is commonly accepted as a contributor to communication apprehension is self-perceived communication competence (Barracough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988). In this paradigm, it is assumed that the more competent individuals feel about their ability to communicate well, the less apprehension they will feel, and the more likely they will be to communicate with others. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) have termed this result of low communication apprehension “willingness to communicate.” Barracough et al. (1988) observed that a greater willingness to communicate was associated with higher self-perceived communication competence and lower communication apprehension.

Two other constructs related to communication apprehension are shyness and reticence. Keaten and Kelly (2000) found that reticent people tend to see themselves as



incompetent or not having necessary communication skills, which is similar to those who have low levels of self-perceived communication competence. In one study, for example, reticent individuals' families exhibited a low level of conversation, indicating reticence may be influenced by the individual's environment (Kelly et al., 2002).

Communication apprehension and its related constructs have been studied most extensively in the United States, but they also are observable among people internationally. Some studies have been conducted in numerous countries, comparing percentages of people who experience communication apprehension. McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida (1985) found Japan to be the country with the highest percentage in their sample. All of the university students that they had appraised exhibited communication apprehension and, overall, 73% of these students showed a high level of communication apprehension.

The apparent international presence of communication apprehension is particularly germane to the field of education. Traditional pedagogical methods of education are built on principles of communication between teachers and students. However, when students with communication apprehension are in the classroom, their preferred patterns may adversely affect attitudes toward learning, leading them to withdraw from participation in class activities and hampering their learning progress (Anzai & Paik, 2000). Eysenck (1979) found that anxiety generally hinders performance because task relevant information must compete with task irrelevant information in order to be processed by the brain. Consequently, communication apprehension presents a particularly difficult problem for second language (L2) learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) referred to this phenomenon as "language anxiety," when referring to L2

communication apprehension. Reticence, shyness, and language anxiety tend to lower students' willingness to communicate (Yashima, 2002) which, in turn, tends to hinder their linguistic progress, since communication is fundamental to language learning. In studying a foreign language, the more practice individuals have talking, the more they generally learn (Brown, 1987). Therefore, MacIntyre (1999) purports that language anxiety is one of the most accurate predictors of whether students will be able to learn a second language successfully.

Horwitz (2000) reported, from her sample, that one third of American college students in foreign language classes have been found to have moderate-to-severe levels of language anxiety. In a Puerto Rican sample, although only 11% of students reported high communication apprehension in their first language (L1), 43% were found to have high language anxiety in L2 (McCroskey et al., 1985). Other studies have indicated particularly high language anxiety for samples of individuals in Confucian Heritage Cultures, specifically China, Taiwan, and Japan (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Woodrow, 2006). The research of McCroskey et al. (1985) showed surprisingly little difference between the Japanese students' language anxiety in L1 and L2. A potential reason for this is that the percentage of Japanese university students who have high language anxiety in their first language is already quite elevated at 73%.

Horwitz et al. (1986) reported potential indicators for language anxiety. These provide insight into the students' situations that make language learning difficult. Anxious language learners experience worry and dread. Some sweat and have heart palpitations. When the teacher speaks, others hear only a loud buzz or become confused and have no idea what is being said. They cannot concentrate and quickly forget even

grammar points which they have mastered when it comes time to perform on a test or in front of the class. Other symptoms that teachers are more likely to notice include: missing class, turning in homework late, and being silent or withdrawn in class (Pappamihel, 2002).

There is no consensus regarding the cause of language anxiety. Sparks, Ganschow, and Javorsky (2000) assert that language anxiety results from students' difficulties and poor performance in the second language, rather than it being a direct cause of such difficulties. However, Price (1991) relates that interviews with anxious language learners showed many were intelligent students who were successful in other classes. Young (1991) suggests six potential sources from a review of the literature on language anxiety: 1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner interactions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing. It is possible that any combination of the factors above results in language anxiety, and the causes vary, depending on the student or culture under consideration.

As previously noted, several researchers have found Japan to be a culture with a relatively high percentage of high communication apprehension students (Cheng et al., 1999; McCroskey et al., 1985; Pribyl, Keaten, Sakamoto, & Koshikawa, 1998). This phenomenon seemingly has an effect on Japanese students' English learning. Native English instructors in Japan, as well as foreign countries, consistently report that even diligent Japanese students routinely do not speak English in class (Dwyer & Heller-Murphy, 1996; Woodrow, 2006). The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology became aware of this problem and about a decade ago revised

the national curriculum, putting more emphasis on English oral communication (Yashima, 2002). Why have Japanese people, in particular, developed this attitude toward speaking English?

First, the culture of Japan has been a contributing factor. For example, typical Japanese culture values reticence (McCroskey et al., 1985). An introverted, rather than extroverted, personality often is preferred by the Japanese (Pite, 1996). In Japanese schools, students frequently are expected to be passive recipients, rather than expressing their own ideas during class. Students typically do not want to stand out but, rather, prefer to blend in with their peers. Even when they know the answer, many Japanese students will not volunteer to provide answers to questions. Many also feel that it is rude for students to speak out and show how much they know (Dwyer & Heller-Murphy, 1996). Some fear embarrassment, if they state a wrong answer in front of their peers. These cultural values generally have encouraged reticence and helped make Japanese more apprehensive and less willing to communicate in English.

A second factor that has potentially contributed to this inhibited disposition is the traditional education system in Japan. Teachers and parents emphasize that students must study English in order to pass university entrance examinations (O'Donnell, 2003), so many Japanese students study English solely for this purpose (Brown, 1995). The relatively large size of junior high and high school English classes (often with about 40 students) lends itself to a lecture style of instruction and the study of English through translation into Japanese (Sato, 2003). Research by Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbrandt (2001) found that more than two-thirds of Japanese students believe they need translation into Japanese as part of their English study, so Japanese often is used to teach English

classes. Therefore, although they study English a minimum of six years during junior and senior high school, some Japanese high school graduates have stated they hardly ever spoke English or heard it spoken (Dwyer & Heller-Murphy, 1996). Consequently, many Japanese high school graduates have very little confidence in using English and, understandably, have very low willingness to communicate (O'Donnell, 2003). Such negative experiences studying English in the past have a detrimental effect on students' attitudes toward studying English in the present (Kimura, Nakata, & Okamura, 2001; O'Donnell, 2003).

The Japanese government has sought to improve students' motivation and attitude toward English by introducing it to students earlier in the curriculum, through the Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) program. However, Takada's (2003) research with FLES participants showed the program had little significant positive effect. As stated above, a sample of Puerto Rican students showed a significant increase in their language anxiety when speaking in the second language, even though they study English every year from the time they enter elementary school (McCroskey et al., 1985). Clearly, an early introduction to English alone is not a foolproof method of decreasing language anxiety. Keaten, Kelly, and Pribyl (1994) reported results from language anxiety tests given to grades K-12 in Japan, showing students' language anxiety steadily rose throughout their school career. What causes this anxiety to grow even in young Japanese children? This is an important topic for future research.

#### *Definition of Terms*

Bilingual – A person who is able to communicate, to varying extents, in a second language is considered bilingual (Skiba, 1997).

Bilingual Verbal Ability Tests (BVAT) – This is a standardized, norm-referenced test used to assess the complete verbal ability of bilingual students (Schrank & Woodcock, 2005).

Borrowing – Borrowing refers to a form of code-switching in which L1 nouns are used while speaking L2 in order to fill in gaps for unknown L2 words (Nishimura, 1995a).

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) – CALP is term that is used to discuss the language proficiency levels of students who are in the process of learning a second language (Cummins, 1979).

Code-switching – Bilingual people’s use of two languages in a single conversation is referred to as code-switching (Nishimura, 1995a).

Communication Apprehension (CA) - This construct is an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1977).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – EFL refers to teaching or learning English in a country where English is not spoken (Biegel, 1998).

English as a Second Language (ESL) – ESL refers to teaching English to people who do not speak English (Biegel, 1998).

Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) – FLES is an optional activity in the Japanese national elementary school curriculum implemented in 2002 by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology with the purpose of introducing students to English at a younger age to enhance motivation and develop a positive attitude toward English (Takada, 2003).

Immersion school – An immersion school is an educational institution in which the usual curricular activities are conducted in a foreign language (Spezzini, 2004).

Integrativeness – Integrativeness refers to a language learner's desire to have interaction with speakers of the language being studied (Gardner, 2006).

L1 & L2 – A student's first and second languages often are abbreviated in research literature as L1 and L2, respectively (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003).

Language Anxiety – When discussing communication apprehension in second language learners, it is generally referred to as language anxiety. Sometimes it also is referenced as foreign language anxiety or second language anxiety (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2002).

Native English Speaker – This term refers to a person who speaks English fluently because he or she was born in a family or country that uses English as the primary language of communication. A native English instructor is a teacher who speaks English fluently for the same reason (Shuck, 2006).

Reticence - This behavior occurs when people, who do not want to look foolish, keep silent and avoid communication (Keaten & Kelly, 2000).

Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) – This is an individual's perception of how competent he or she is at oral communication (McCroskey et al., 2002).

Shyness – This is the psychological tendency to talk little or be timid and reserved (McCroskey et al., 2002).

Silent Period – This is a developmental time in the learning process when many students of a second language refrain from talking in the new language (Krupa-Kwiatkowski, 1998).

Two-way Bilingual School – In this type of school, speakers of two languages study together and use both languages for academic purposes. Language-majority and language-minority students all learn both languages (Ovando, 2003).

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) – This is the orientation of an individual's personality toward initiating communication with others (Barraclough et al., 1988).

### *Statement of Issue*

Research has been conducted around the world, as well as in Japan, that relates to the influence of communication apprehension on learners of English as a second language (L2) and their willingness to communicate. Quantitative studies of language anxiety (mostly test results) and qualitative studies involving Japanese university students exist in the research literature. The purpose of the present study, however, was to explore the thoughts and attitudes of a unique population, namely, Japanese elementary school students. Using qualitative research methodology, I gathered multiple perspectives on the experiences of Japanese students in a two-way bilingual school that encourages English usage both in and outside of class from the age of six. This school setting provides a sub-culture within Japan that revealed helpful insights into how attitudes toward speaking a second language develop both in schools and in the larger cultural context from an early age. The results also contributed to the overall research literature regarding communication apprehension, helping to fill a gap in the present knowledge base.

Why do Japanese people not try to speak English more? Why are even young children hesitant to do so in an atmosphere that promotes English speaking? What factors contribute to the development of these attitudes? Is apprehension developed at



school, at home, or through interaction with peers? The answers to questions like these from students who now are in the process of developing such attitudes needed to be heard. Their replies provided data for an inductive look at this puzzling educational problem. The themes that emerged from this phenomenological, qualitative study help elucidate students' perspectives concerning Japanese people's reticence in speaking English.

#### *Scope of the Study and Delimitations*

In this study, I gathered qualitative data about attitudes toward speaking English through in-depth interviews with Japanese elementary students at a two-way bilingual school in Japan. Quantitative data also augmented the qualitative findings, via the results of the Bilingual Verbal Ability Test (BVAT) and school grades. These scores were used to objectively rate participants' actual English proficiency.

The setting for this study was an English-Japanese, two-way bilingual school with grades 1 through 12. It was founded in 1999, being located in western Japan, near a large urban area. More than 220 students of 15 different nationalities attend the school. However, the majority are Japanese. Approximately 10% of the students are children of international marriages with one parent being Japanese. Another 20% have had extensive international experience, such as living in a foreign country for more than a year. All elementary students study English at least two periods each day. Many of the students also take other classes (taught in English), depending on their ability and parents' preferences. In these classes taught in English, students generally are required to speak only in English, and they usually comply or are silent. In spite of the international experience of many students and the large number of hours spent studying English at the

school, however, Japanese is used by most students when talking with friends or playing outside of class. Even native English speakers may be heard talking together in Japanese.

The students who were interviewed for this study were upper elementary age students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classes. Research already has been conducted in Japan regarding university students' English abilities and attitudes. Relatively less has been completed involving secondary students. Significantly less research has been conducted that involves elementary students who start studying English during the "critical period," the time which some scholars believe is optimal for learning a second language (Abello-Contesse, 2009). This study explored the attitudes of students in this age group who have been studying English for several years but have not yet reached puberty and the end of the critical period.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classes at the school I targeted in my research sample had a total of 56 students. Native Japanese speakers constituted 68% of these classes, 20% were native English speakers, and 12% were foreign students whose first language was something other than Japanese and English. Students whose sole nationality was Japanese comprised 54%, students with Japanese and another nationality were 21%, and international students comprised the remaining 25%. Of the native Japanese speakers with Japanese-only nationality, 20% had had extended international experience.

I used a relatively comprehensive sample of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classes. However, the students interviewed for this study were only fluent speakers of Japanese who had been studying English at the school for at least two years and so were expected to have made significant progress in their English ability. Several international

students who are native speakers of English, but have spent most of their lives in Japan, were interviewed as part of the pilot study in order to appraise whether potential indications existed that the surrounding Japanese culture had affected the attitudes toward language of even non-Japanese students. Students who had learning differences, low English ability, or whose parents did not give permission were not included in this study. The number of participants interviewed for the study was 24 in the final sample.

### *Significance of the Study*

The Japanese government and individuals in Japan are spending significant time, money and effort on learning English. As stated above, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology recently has revised the national English curriculum to encourage more English speaking and to expose students to English more at a younger age (Takada, 2003; Yashima, 2002). The use of English for international business is vital for the future of Japan's economy, so effective language learning is officially a priority of the government.

Most language anxiety research in Japan has focused on theoretical studies but, in order to help students who struggle with it to succeed in learning English, there is also a need to understand their perceptions and feelings (Sakamoto, Pribyl, Keaten, & Koshikawa, 1999). In particular, it is important to understand how language anxiety develops in young students, so its sources can be addressed before their anxiety-levels become too high. After completing a study of junior high school students' language anxiety, willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence, MacIntyre et al. (2002) concluded that more studies should be conducted in order to examine the situation of younger learners. Nevertheless, an extensive search of data

bases including ERIC, Electronic Journal Center, PsycINFO, Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, and Academic Search Complete did not yield published articles about qualitative studies concerning Japanese elementary students' English language learning. One exception was the article cited above in which Takada (2003) evaluated the effectiveness of FLES by studying junior high school students. This void presumably is due, in part, to the fact that most Japanese students do not begin serious study of English until junior high.

Therefore, the students at the selected school were rather unusual in Japan and made this study an original contribution to the knowledge of Japanese children's attitudes toward speaking English. The increased understanding of their experiences through this study potentially will aid in the development of improved, more effective methods for teaching English to Japanese students. Although the students in this study are in an unusual educational environment, they face comparable pressures from parents, peers, and Japanese society as a whole, which may be causes of language anxiety. Their attitudes toward English language learning, therefore, may be representative of the attitudes of Japanese elementary students as a whole inasmuch as they are the product of Japanese culture and society.

The knowledge gained through this study also may prove to be helpful for teachers and parents in generating realistic expectations for a school's English program. If success in learning English, as studies cited above have concluded, is more than just a matter of intelligence and aptitude, then a child's success is not solely the responsibility of the teacher or school. Parents also may need to play an important role in reducing anxiety in their children through the attitudes they help their children develop.

### *Methods of Procedure*

#### *Research questions:*

1. Why do upper elementary Japanese children not speak English?
2. Why are Japanese elementary children hesitant to speak English, both in and outside of class, even though they study English and are in an environment that encourages speaking in English?

These questions were studied through in-depth, qualitative interviews. I used a semi-structured interview protocol (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Interview questions focused on the participants' attitudes and experiences with English language learning, particularly concerning the possible sources of language anxiety enumerated by Young (1991): 1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner interactions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing. The length of the individual interviews was about forty minutes, including administration of the BVAT.

I prepared a parental consent form and distributed it to parents of the fourth through sixth grade students for them to sign and return to the school. It included a brief explanation of my research and the kind of interviews I planned to conduct with the students. The BVAT was explained, and parents were asked to allow me to use their children's BVAT scores and report card grades in my study. I assured parents that their children's scores and comments during the interview would be kept confidential and that their child could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Parents were permitted to access their respective children's interview transcripts upon request. I also received

informed, written consent from the school's administrators to carry out this study at the school building, during school hours with the fourth through sixth grade students.

After parental permission was received, a pilot study was executed with four students in order to check that the interview protocol was understandable for upper elementary students. During some of these interviews, the think-aloud technique (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) was used, in which the participant verbally spoke during the interview about aspects of the questions that were confusing or difficult to understand. The pilot study revealed minor revisions needed in the interview protocol. The pilot interviews also provided a clearer picture of the length of time necessary for each interview, which was an important consideration for scheduling.

When revision of the interview protocol had been completed, I arranged a schedule of times to interview students. The individual interviews were held during the school day in an empty conference room at the school. Students were able to help choose the time for the interview and missed the classes of their choice, provided they had the permission of the teacher of that class. I received the cooperation of all the fourth through sixth grade teachers in this regard.

The interviews were conducted either in English or Japanese language, according to the choice of the interviewee. This enabled the participants to express their thoughts and feelings without the stress of having to speak in English. I personally conducted the interviews with all of the students. My position as the participants' teacher and vice principal did not have any obvious effect on the answers they gave. However, I believe the very positive relationship I have with all of the fourth through sixth grade students led to honest communication in this study. I practiced reflexivity (Johnson & Christensen,

2004) during the process of interviewing and analyzing data, thinking carefully about my expectations in order to more effectively eliminate bias from the results.

I also administered the BVAT to each of the participants. This is a norm-referenced measure of verbal ability for bilingual individuals. The BVAT score, as well as past class grades, was reviewed in order to gain an objective appraisal of the students' English ability. This assessment was later compared with their own perceived ability stated during the interviews.

I generated a data trail (Daytner, 2006) for these interviews by transcribing the English transcripts of all that the students said. The data trail consisted of generating all the reasonable feedback that the participants provided regarding the themes I reported in the thesis. It was a means of auditing the data to help ensure that the results of the study were adequately represented and grounded in the data provided by the research participants. I also recorded insights and further questions that presented themselves in the process of interviewing and making transcripts.

I analyzed the interview transcripts using open coding (Maxwell, 2005) in order to explore relationships and commonalities in the various students' experiences. After an initial analysis, I conducted a second wave (Firmin, 2006a) of interviews with students in order to seek elaboration on seeming common percepts from the first round of interviews. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), appraising the various interview transcripts, the re-occurring codes that represent a consensus of the research participants eventually became the themes reported in the thesis.

In order to enhance the internal validity of my research findings, I used several strategies. First, as mentioned above, I compared students' English tests scores and class

grades with their own perceived English ability as a form of data triangulation (Berg, 2001). Second, I used low-inference descriptors (Johnson, 1997), as much as possible, in reporting the accounts of the participants' feelings and experiences and asked for participant feedback to confirm that my understanding of their comments was accurate. Saturation (Wray, 2007) occurred when generating my data, after around 16 interviews. In qualitative research, saturation occurs when adding new individuals to the data step no longer adds meaningful results to the study. Sampling typically stops when saturation occurs. In this particular study, I am reasonably confident that my sample was adequate since saturation happened (i.e., if I had added more students to the sample, I do not believe I would have generated new themes). After I exchanged the names of the participants for pseudonyms, I subjected my research to peer review (Merriam, 2002) by submitting my interpretations and conclusions to specialists in the field of ESL teaching in Japan. And finally, I implemented member checking (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). This involved re-visiting participants in the study, asking them to provide their feedback regarding the reported findings in the study. Each of the participants indicated that the four themes aptly represented their overall sentiments.



## Chapter 2: Plenary Literature Review

### *Attitude Toward English Speaking in Japanese Society*

In 2000, Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi announced the findings of his advisory panel, stating that English should be adopted as the second official language of Japan (Kawai, 2003). The ability to use English appears highly valued in Japan. So why are Japanese people so hesitant to speak English, even after studying it for a minimum of 6 years in junior and senior high school? Linguists Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai (2001) asked, “What is the engine that drives speakers to select one linguistic variety over another?” (p. 1). She went on to write, “We first acknowledge that the judicious answer to these questions is that an engine has many parts” (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001, p. 2). Likewise, many factors affect linguistic choices. Noels (2001) emphasized the important influence social milieu has on language learners. The majority of Japanese people grow up in Japan and are influenced by the surrounding culture. So what attitudes toward English are found in Japanese society?

Although the Prime Minister publicly announced that English should be important for Japan, Maher (1997) asserted the government has been committed to the position that Japan is monoracial and monolingual. Japanese has been treated as the only language used in Japan. Various minority languages have been in use for many years, but Maher (1997) continued:

In 1980 an official declaration was made by the government stating categorically that no linguistic minorities are present in Japan. This was contained in the Report

on Human Rights prepared in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Referring to Article 27, which recognises the existence of linguistic minorities and recognises the right 'to enjoy their own culture ... or to use their own language', the government of Japan stated 'Minorities of this kind mentioned in the covenant do not exist in Japan.' (p. 116)

Although more than 1% of Japanese residents are foreigners, Maher (1997) reported that the government has not encouraged bilingual education or language diversity in Japan. Government policies possibly are changing slowly in the 21st century but, historically, what has the Japanese government done to encourage English speaking? Recently, it has sought to improve students' motivation and attitude toward English by introducing it to students earlier through the Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) program. However, living in a nation with a one language policy presumably has had a long-term negative effect on Japanese people's attitude toward speaking English.

Another influential institution in Japanese society is the secondary school system, where students study English for six years. What attitudes toward English speaking do young people assimilate during this time? Murphey and Sasaki (1998) reported that Japanese teachers of English use the Japanese language more than 90% of the talking time during their English classes. The choice of which language to use in English classes, according to Murphey and Sasaki (1998), was influenced by personal, psychological, social, administrative, pedagogical, and practical factors. Murphey and Sasaki (1998) went on to relate seven arguments Japanese teachers often give for not speaking English:

1. Using Japanese is more comfortable.
2. Using Japanese is faster for getting through all the information.

3. Using Japanese is more natural ("We're all Japanese").
4. Principals, parents, and students all want us to teach for the entrance exams in Japanese because it's more efficient.
5. The other teachers I work with would not agree with my using English. I must get through the book that we have agreed to use and using Japanese makes this possible.
6. The entrance exams don't test English listening and speaking, so why study them?
7. The textbook is too difficult and so we must translate it all into Japanese so students can understand it. (Murphey & Sasaki, 1998, Reasons section, para. 1)

Since their teachers of English have these attitudes and seemingly speak English rarely, even in English classes, it is understandable that students easily may develop a mindset that English is not to be spoken.

This attitude is exemplified in Burden's (2002) account of Japanese high school seniors who, when given the opportunity to talk in English with a native English speaker, either ignored questions or mumbled that they were poor at English and tried to escape from the situation as soon as possible. Burden (1999) likewise found that many Japanese university students, when instructed to speak with a peer in English class, rather than using their language skills to communicate, usually looked for the quickest way to end the conversation. When they did speak, 90% of the students spoke in Japanese.

This negative attitude toward English speaking is also common in Japanese society as a whole, as seen in a survey by the Daily Yomiuri newspaper ("Survey," 2000). Sixty-

six percent of the 1,918 respondents agreed English is necessary for Japan, but also indicated that they had negative feelings toward English. Common responses included: "It's difficult," "It's hard to understand," "It's hard to deal with," and "I can't speak it." The majority of Japanese people have acquiesced to the belief that they will not be able to speak English and, with that, has come an expectation that everyone in Japan will speak only Japanese. Even international couples in Japan list pressure from society to speak Japanese as one of the major obstacles to their multiracial children's development of their English language skills (Gomi & Thompson, 2005).

In addition to the pressure not to speak English from the government, schools, and society as a whole, other young people also have a powerful influence on students' choice of language. This is true, even in international schools in Japan, which have designated English as the official means of communication. Students who are fluent in English often are heard speaking in Japanese or a combination of Japanese and English when with their peers (Greer, 2008). The same situation has been observed in international and immersion schools in other nations as well. For example, at an English immersion school in Paraguay, 88% of students reported using only Spanish when talking with peers, even during classes, if the teacher was not nearby (Spezzini, 2004). Although they viewed practicing English as the key to speaking fluently, many felt the only way they could improve was "to be away from the people that they always talk to in Spanish" (Spezzini, 2004, p. 418). Peer pressure exerts an irresistible force for many students, and it starts at a young age. Tarone and Swain (1995) observed a decrease in the use of the second language (L2) in social settings at an immersion school as students progressed from lower to upper elementary grades.

Other children in one's family also influence the choice of language. For international families in Japan, the presence of siblings was found to be one of the two most influential factors on the language children speak to their English speaking parent (Yamamoto, 2001). If siblings are present, they usually will choose to speak to each other and their parents in the dominant language of the country where they are living, rather than in one parent's minority language (Obied, 2009). Siblings, peers, society, schools, and the government all may influence students in Japan to speak in Japanese and not even try to speak in English.

#### *Internal Factors Affecting Attitudes Toward English Speaking*

Numerous external factors influence Japanese people's choice of language. Internal factors, however, may be even more important to consider. The phrase, "communication apprehension," has been defined by McCroskey (1977) as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (p. 78). This condition has the potential to profoundly affect people's oral communication. This is particularly true in Japan where McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida (1985) found that 73% of the university students they appraised showed a high level of communication apprehension.

Anxiety often produces two types of reactions, namely physiological and cognitive (Naveh-Benjamin, 1991). Physiological reactions include blushing, sweating, and heart palpitations and behaviors such as fidgeting, stuttering, and talking too much (Woodrow, 2006). Cognitive reactions, which are more likely to hinder communication, include worry and dread. Some students cannot concentrate and quickly forget even previously learned grammar points when it comes time to perform on a test or in front of the class.

When the teacher speaks, others report hearing only a loud buzz or become confused and have no idea what is being said (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Other symptoms that teachers are more likely to notice include: missing class, turning in homework late, and being silent or withdrawn in class (Pappamihel, 2002).

### *Language Anxiety*

When studying acquisition of a second language, Horwitz et al. (1986) referred to communication apprehension as “language anxiety” and explained it as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Campbell and Ortiz (1991) reported that nearly one half of all students studying a foreign language experience high levels of this language anxiety. Furthermore, McCroskey et al. (1985) documented that it was present to a substantial degree in 75% of Japanese university students. This is certainly significant for some Japanese speakers of English since MacIntyre (1999) indicated that language anxiety is one of the most accurate predictors of whether or not students will be able to learn a second language successfully.

The importance of language anxiety is due, in part, to the fact that this construct, along with perceived competence in the language and other social psychological characteristics, have been found to influence speakers’ willingness to communicate in both their first language (L1) and L2 (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clement, 1999). Baker and MacIntyre (2000) asserted that it is not simply a lack of language skills that hinders communication, but the individual’s perceptions of their competence in the language that will affect their willingness to communicate. McCroskey and Richmond (1991) supported this theory stating: “Since the choice of whether to communicate is a cognitive

one, it is likely to be more influenced by one's perceptions of competence (of which one is usually aware) than one's actual competence (of which one may be totally unaware)" (p. 27). This is a significant problem in Japan in view of what Burden (2002) called the "I'm poor at English" syndrome, which is prevalent in classrooms and in Japanese society as a whole.

Language anxiety is common in the early years of studying a language (Tani-Fukuchi, 2005). However, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) reported that as "experience and proficiency increase, anxiety declines in a fairly consistent manner" (p. 111). Nevertheless, language anxiety is still prevalent among Japanese students who have been studying English for more than 6 years.

Language anxiety is often studied only in the classroom context. Woodrow (2006), however, asserted that it is helpful to view "language anxiety at a two-dimensional construct reflecting communication within the classroom and outside the classroom in everyday communicative situations." Woodrow (2006) found that Japanese students have higher levels of out-of-class anxiety than do students from some other cultures, such as Viet Nam. Horwitz et al. (1986) asserted that listening to and speaking a second language caused significant language anxiety in students. In studies specifically with Japanese students, speaking with native English speakers (Woodrow, 2006) and having to speak English in front of their peers (Burden, 2002) were found to be the situations that produced the most anxiety.

Another important internal factor that affects the use of a second language is motivation. In Gardner's (2006) model, motivation is an internal attribute of individuals that can be influenced by external forces. Gardner's integrative motivation concept

includes three parts: integrativeness, the individual's attitudes toward the learning environment, and motivation. Integrativeness is the learner's desire to have interaction with speakers of the language being studied and is a necessity to truly learn a language (Gardner, 2006). Although Japanese students and members of society have exhibited low perceived competence in English (Burden, 2002), in Falout's (2004) findings, students demonstrated integrativeness through their positive attitude toward the L2 community. According to Gardner (2006), motivation must include a desire to learn the new language, effort, and positive attitudes toward learning the language. Strong (2001) indicated that renowned experts, such as R. C. Gardner, believe motivation is the principle factor in second language acquisition, irrespective of innate language abilities. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) also found that motivation positively influenced the reported frequency of L2 usage.

Tani-Fukuchi (2005) reported 68% of Japanese university students surveyed had negative feelings toward their English study. When looking back on past English classes, the students recalled anxiety, shyness, fear, tense feelings, confusion, anger, frustration, discomfort, negative moods, resistance, worthlessness, self-hate, inferiority complex, and suffering. Thirty-six percent of the students could recall no positive learning experiences in their English classes, after more than 6 years of study. Although many Japanese students exhibit integrativeness, these students seemingly do not possess the positive attitude toward learning English that Gardner believed to be a necessary ingredient for language learning motivation.



### *Code-switching*

Another practice which is an important factor for Japanese students' choice whether to speak Japanese or English is code-switching. Nishimura (1995a) stated: "Code-switching is the use of two languages in a single conversation practiced in everyday life in many bilingual communities" (p. 123). In this case, a bilingual person is one who is able to communicate, to varying extents, in a second language (Skiba, 1997). Kite (2001) elaborated on this construct: "Code-switching can be any alteration between language varieties, including a switch between a standard variety and non-standard variety within the same language, as well as switches between two distinct languages" (p. 313). Code-switching can be done inter-sententially (one sentence is spoken in one language and the next sentence is spoken in a different language) or intra-sententially (two languages are used within the same sentence). In contrast, when one base language is used and only nouns from a different language are used, this is usually referred to as "borrowing" (Nishimura, 1995a, p. 123). In conversations among bilinguals, Cook (1991) found code-switching to consist of 84% single words, 10% phrases, and 6% clauses.

Kuhl, Conboy, Padden, Nelson, and Pruitt (2005) found indications that learning a second language occurs in a different part of the brain than does learning of the first language, so when using the second language in a different situation, children are likely to code-switch (Soderman & Oshio, 2008). Azuma (1997) listed some of the variables that may affect code-switching patterns. These included the length of time the speaker has known each of the languages, the speaker's proficiency in each of the languages, and differences in the roles and status of the two languages.

Researchers, using different constructs, have tried to explain the structure of code-switching. For example, Blom and Gumperz (1972) observed two kinds of code-switching. Situational code-switching occurs when a situation is changed by the addition of a new participant or introduction of a new topic. Metaphorical code-switching, also referred to as conversational code-switching, is used to enhance parts of a conversation such as requests, denials, or elaborations. Auer (1995), however, made a distinction between participant-related and discourse-related code-switching. Participant-related code-switching was caused by the language preference or competence of the participants, while discourse-related code-switching occurred in order to structure conversational acts.

Does code-switching occur in Japan? After all, some (e.g., Maher, 1997) have stated that Japan is considered a monolingual and monocultural society. In spite of the high percentage of Japanese speakers, the following types of bilingual groups exist in Japan: ethnic minorities living in Japan, children of international couples, Japanese returnees who have lived overseas and moved back to Japan, and students who have studied in English at international schools. According to the definition of bilingual stated above, most Japanese people also could be called bilingual, since they have studied English for at least six years and are able to communicate to some extent in English as their second language. Azuma (1997) provided an interesting example of code-switching in Japan in the case of disc jockeys of American pop music programs who, although native speakers of Japanese, often code-switch between Japanese and English during their discussion and introductions of American songs.

Nishimura (1992) has identified three types of code-switching used by Japanese-English bilinguals. There is a basic “Japanese type” in which the speakers converse

mostly in Japanese and use nouns borrowed from English from time to time. The opposite of this is a basic “English type” in which speakers sometimes include Japanese words or phrases. A third type of code-switching used by Japanese-English bilinguals is a “mixed type” in which Japanese and English are both actively used with inter-sentential and intra-sentential switches. An interesting feature of Japanese-English code-switching is the use of what Nishimura (1995a) has termed “portmanteau sentences.” Since the word order in English sentences is basically subject-verb-object (SVO) while in Japanese it is subject-object-verb (SOV), portmanteau sentences can include intra-sentential switches with the result being a subject-verb-object-verb (SVOV) word order. In these sentences, the English verb at the beginning of the sentence is repeated in Japanese at the end of the sentence. Code-switching is practiced by various Japanese people in an interesting variety of patterns.

Many reasons for code-switching have been hypothesized by researchers, and these have been summarized by Crystal (1987) as three basic patterns. First, speakers may be deficient in their second language, and so they switch to their first language in order to compensate and complete the desired communication. Once the switch has been made, the speakers often will continue using their first language. Second, a speaker may code-switch in order to show solidarity with a certain social group or to build rapport with the listener. Third, a speaker may use code-switching in order to focus attention on important words or communicate a certain attitude to the listener. These three causes of code-switching will be discussed in greater detail below.

### *Code-switching to Compensate for Language Deficiencies*

When contemplating the question of why Japanese students do not speak using more English, due consideration should be given to the possibility that Japanese people do not know English. Deficiencies in the L2 can cause speakers to code-switch to their first language, but this answer, alone, is too simplistic. Kite (2001) reported that the majority of teachers surveyed in an English language international high school in Japan stated that this was the apparent reason for their students' code-switching. Many see code-switching as an indication of language deficiency, so code-switching is often viewed negatively (Legenhausen, 1991). However, Kite's (2001) anecdotal evidence did not show any connection between the practice of code-switching and poor academic performance. Speakers with high proficiency in their second language also code-switch at times. Nishimura (1995a) found that Japanese-Canadians who were considered fluent in Japanese performed a form of code-switching she termed "borrowing" by using English nouns in their Japanese speaking in order to fill in gaps for unknown Japanese words. The goal of speaking is to communicate so, as Skiba (1997) asserted, "where it is used due to an inability of expression, code-switching provides a continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference in language." Code-switching is sometimes a helpful means to more effective communication.

There are also cases where students learn to use a second language in a certain setting but are not able to use it in other settings. Spezzini (2004) presented an immersion school in Paraguay as a good example of this. Students learned English in classes at school and were comfortable and proficient in using English for academic purposes such as reading or for discussing academic topics like mathematical calculations.

However, all of the social interaction in the school between students was carried out in Spanish, so students never learned English vernacular. Students used code-switching, depending on the topic and setting they were in at the school. Tarone and Swain (1995) found the same principle to be true of elementary students at a French immersion school in Canada. As they progressed into upper elementary, they spoke less of their second language because they had not learned the vernacular to use in social situations. At the English immersion school in Paraguay, as at other immersion schools, “students demonstrated a relatively high functional English proficiency but not necessarily near-native” (Spezzini, 2004, p. 425). Although their second language proficiency may be high, students use code-switching to compensate for their second language deficiencies.

It can be assumed that some students in Japan also code-switch into Japanese due to insufficient skill in English. However, for many Japanese students, it is not only a matter of deficiency but their perceived deficiency, as documented above in the discussion of self-perceived competence. Burden (2002) discovered, through a survey of university students in Japan, that the majority have a very low estimation of their own English ability even though they have studied English more than six years. This evidently is one reason why many Japanese students who try to speak in English quickly code-switch to Japanese and then continue on in their first language.

#### *Code-switching to Demonstrate Group Solidarity*

Although many instances of code-switching are due to language deficiencies, a number of researchers (e.g., Auer, 1998; Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993) asserted that code-switching is also used as a means to achieve certain communication goals or in order to signal the social or cultural identity of the speaker. Gumperz (1982) purported

two seminal ideas that significantly influenced research on bilingual conversation in the years that followed (Cashman, 2008). First, Gumperz (1982) noted that bilingual speakers used a special code or language when talking with members of their own group and a different code when talking with those who were not in their group, such as monolinguals. Code-switching was framed as a means that speakers use in order to identify themselves with a certain social group. Second, Gumperz (1982) observed that code-switching might be used as a clue to aid communication, a means “by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows” (p. 131). Code-switching as a tool in communication and a way to achieve conversational goals also became a focus of research, drawing from Gumperz’s paradigm.

According to Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai’s (2001) account of the history of research on code-switching and social identity, in the 1960s, Labov (1966) and Fishman (2000) asserted the “social factors” approach to explaining the forces behind linguistic choices. Labov’s (1966) approach, which continues to appear in research literature, assumes language choices are made by individuals due to influences from the surrounding community. In Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai’s (2001) words: “Linguistic choices primarily reflect the speaker’s place in a social group” (p. 2). The social groups that help to determine linguistic choice may be connected to the speaker’s identity on a macro-level, like ethnic, political, regional or national identities, or on a micro-level, such as family members, friends, teenagers, or individual identities (Cashman, 2008).

In Fishman’s (2000) paradigm, known as domain analysis, the domain which determined the language choice of the speaker consisted of the participants, topic, and

setting of the conversation. In an example provided by Kite (2001), a teacher and student (participants) discussing a math problem (topic) at school (setting) would be considered the domain of education. At an English language international or immersion school, as illustrated already by Spezzini's (2004) case of the school in Paraguay, the language that would be required in the educational domain is English. However, in a distinct domain such as home, friends, or individual thinking, the appropriate language choice might be different (Kite, 2001).

Lanza (1997) suggested that, as bilingual children learn languages at an early age, they develop the ability to connect social meaning to language use and can discern which language to use in what social situation. As they grow older, speakers make more conscious decisions about language use dependent on their attitude toward a group. As Beebe (1988) observed, speakers can either choose social convergence, by speaking like a certain group, or divergence, by speaking differently than the group. This is why, as discussed above, Gardner (2006) stressed that to learn a language students must like the speakers of that language and want to identify with them.

Using language to include members in a group or exclude others from the group is often called "membership marking" (Kite, 2001, p. 324). Bucholtz and Hall (2008) noted monolinguals' fear that language choice is made during conversations in order to leave out those who are not seen as members of the in-group. Nonetheless, researchers have often observed the opposite phenomenon. One example is Nishimura's (1992) depiction of Japanese-Canadians who would code-switch into Japanese when a Japanese native speaker was present and into English if a native English speaker was a participant, so everyone would be able to understand the conversation. Similarly, Greer (2008)

documented bilingual conversations by students in an international high school located in Japan where code-switching occurred to provide translation of parts of the conversation for participants in their preferred language. This served to include all participants in the group but, as Bucholtz (2005) observed, it also created two new groups, namely, those who were linguistically limited and those who were fluent in two languages. Code-switching is a powerful tool for establishing identity groups.

One of the identities commonly supported through code-switching is ethnicity. Nishimura (1995b) studied code-switching practices among Niseis, second-generation Japanese-Canadians who were born in Canada. Although fluent in English, they interjected words and phrases in Japanese while conversing in English. Nishimura (1995b) found the Niseis' practice to be a means of expressing their common Japanese ethnic background. Shin (2010), likewise, recognized that Sunday school teachers' code-switching from English to Korean, in a Korean church located in California, served to socialize the children in their Korean identity. Shin (2010) concluded: "The switch to a particular language in the bilingual discourse can also be employed as an effective vehicle to signal ethnic identity" (p. 91). It is evident that identity issues affect code-switching practices. For Japanese people, their Japanese identity clearly influences them to speak Japanese. This was exemplified by Japanese teachers of English who spoke Japanese during English classes because it was more natural since everyone in the class was Japanese (Murphey & Sasaki, 1998).

Another Japanese social group which has the potential to influence students significantly in their choice of language is the peer group. Matsubara (2006) found student-student relationships to be one of two factors with the most influence on



motivation of Japanese students of English. Elwood (2006), likewise, reported from his study of young, successful, Japanese learners of English that the positive influence of friends and peers was of the highest importance for successful language learning. International parents in Japan also stated in a survey by Gomi and Thompson (2005) that a lack of English-speaking peers was one of the three top obstacles to their children's English language development. Kite (2001) found Japanese-English code-switching to be the unmarked language of choice for peer conversations in an English language international high school in Japan. The peer group is a powerful force for young learners and can influence their willingness to speak English either positively or negatively.

Spezzini's (2004) research at ASA, an English immersion school in Paraguay, exemplified the powerful influence of the peer group on language use. Students at ASA "described their language use as an almost conscious effort to create a special identity: 'ASA speech is unique – special, it's ours'" (Spezzini, 2004, p. 420). Another student explained: "When we speak English, we speak ASA English, and when we speak Spanish, we speak ASA Spanish. Basically we are always speaking Spanglish" (Spezzini, 2004, p. 420). Students at ASA understood the power of language for establishing social group identity. Spezzini (2004) wrote concerning languages: "Ethnic varieties have been known to be actively maintained or developed to express the distinctive ethnic identity of the users" (p. 421). Following this pattern, ASA students developed their own unique language through Spanish and English code-switching, which most students in the peer group of that school spoke in the social domain. Spezzini (2004) concluded: "These findings also highlight the important relationship between friends and language learning" (p. 426).

Social groups often have a salient influence on language choice, and speakers sometimes choose their language to identify with a certain group. However, as Li (2005) asserted: “In some bilingual communities code-switching is a highly significant social act, whereas in some others it is merely the common discourse model” (p. 378). Rather than the choice of language always being guided by social group considerations, as Labov (1966) and his associates maintained, Li (2005) held that code-switching is a tool used by bilinguals, who are “aiming primarily at achieving coherence in the interactional task at hand” (p. 375).

#### *Using Code-switching to Focus Attention*

The third major reason why code-switching may be practiced by a speaker is to focus attention or communicate a certain message to the listener. Kite (2001) found one possible cause was that “students use code-switching to enhance their discourse in order to be more expressive” (p. 324). For example, some topics are easier to describe in one of the languages or words in a certain language may be more effective in communicating a desired feeling. Shin (2010) noted how Korean Sunday school teachers code-switched into Korean to talk about bodily functions and topics which might be found offensive.

Another instance exists in which code-switching is used in order to enhance communication. This occurs when a sentence is spoken in one language, then the speaker code-switches and repeats part or all of it in another language, in order to assure that the message has been conveyed accurately (Saigusa, 2005). In addition, bilinguals who encounter a problem while speaking their second language may code-switch to their first language in order to settle the problem in a less formal atmosphere, figuratively speaking “behind the curtain,” out of the spotlight created by speaking in the L2 (Saigusa, 2005).

Often, code-switching serves as a spotlight to focus attention on certain words, if they are spoken in a different language than the one currently in use. Shin (2010) described how Sunday school teachers in a Korean church in Los Angeles code-switched from English to Korean when giving commands to draw more attention to the importance of listening to what they were saying. Li (2005) related how a Cantonese-English bilingual mother used English to ask her son, who was busy playing a computer game, whether he had finished his homework. When he did not reply, the mother code-switched to Cantonese in order to obtain his attention. This resulted in the boy replying in English. Saigusa (2005) explained the power of code-switching in this way:

L1 and L2 are spontaneously placed on the speaker's imaginary scale and the one that is not spoken at the moment may have been instantaneously employed for the purpose of using the other optional language as a marker. In other words, the two languages were measured on a see-saw and the one that can attract more attention was selected. (p. 482)

Code-switching is a powerful tool bilinguals can use to focus attention on important segments of their communication.

Grosjean (1982) stated that code-switching can also serve to add authority or status to what is spoken. Shin (2010) concluded that code-switching to Korean when teachers provide directives might heighten students' awareness of the social hierarchy between Korean adults and children. For Japanese-English bilinguals, Saigusa (2005) noted that using English created a more formal atmosphere, while the atmosphere was less formal when speaking Japanese. For this reason, a bilingual trainer used English "to distance herself when evaluating or assessing the trainees" (p. 482). When seeking to empathize

with the trainees' struggles, however, the trainer code-switched to Japanese. Code-switching can serve to increase the perceived authority of a speaker or the message that is being communicated.

Individuals who are bilingual code-switch for a variety of reasons. They may have a deficiency in one language, so they do not know certain words or the language necessary to communicate in a certain domain. Speakers may code-switch in order to identify their ethnicity or to associate themselves with a certain group. They also may choose their language or use a mixture of two languages in order to enhance their communication. Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai (2001) asserted that speakers, even at a young age, rationally process their options, using a kind of cost-benefit analysis and choose the code or language that will optimize their rewards. Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai (2001) expanded on this construct:

In summary, choices in a rationally based model of linguistic variation pass through several filters. They begin with the external constraints on speakers: their linguistic repertoires, which in turn are constrained by large-scale societal factors and the discourse structure of their communities. They are also filtered through internal constraints, the innately available architectures (a markedness evaluator, somatic markers) that bias choices based on experience. Finally, choices pass through a third filter in which a social mechanism, rationality, is the centerpiece. To act rationally means that speakers take account of their own beliefs, values, and goals, and that they assess these in regard to internal consistency and available evidence. (p. 22)

The choice of which language or combination of languages to use in a certain situation is a complex decision influenced by individual personality as well as academic, social and linguistic factors. Understanding how such decisions are made by students in Japan and around the world is an important field of continuing research.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *Introduction to the Method*

I used a qualitative, phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007) for the present study. The purpose was to explore reasons why Japanese people do not speak English more often. Specifically, I investigated why Japanese upper elementary children are hesitant to speak English, both in and outside of class, even though they study English and are in an environment that encourages speaking in English. To research this, I conducted in-person, audio-taped, semi-structured interviews (Holliday, 2007) with 24 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students currently enrolled in a bilingual international school in Kyoto, Japan. At the same time as the interview, I also administered to each individual student the Bilingual Verbal Ability Test (BVAT). The participants in the sample all met predetermined, specific criteria.

Prior to the interviews, I received permission from the school administration to conduct the study in the school. I also distributed a letter of explanation to the parents of the participating students and received their written consent. The respective children in the study provided verbal, informed consent and each interview was approximately 45 minutes in duration.

### *Rationale for the Method*

Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated, “Qualitative interviews...can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic” (p. 183). Although substantial research has been

conducted with second language learning, and also on attitudes toward English language usage among people in Japan, a paucity of research has been conducted with younger students' attitudes about language learning and usage (Takada, 2003). MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, and Donovan (2002) asserted, subsequent to studying a sample of junior high school students: "Investigating individual differences among younger learners is both possible and to be encouraged" (p. 156). Documentation of the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of upper elementary language learners is a helpful addition to the literature on second language learning and usage.

#### *Population of the Study*

The population for this study consisted of Japanese fourth, fifth, and sixth grade elementary students. This study possesses some degree of external validity for Japanese upper elementary students who attend international schools in Japan. The results of this study are most applicable to students who are bilingual in Japanese and English. The findings are also relevant for Japanese children from international marriages or with other international experience.

#### *Sample Criteria.*

The participants for this study were obtained from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classes at a two-way bilingual, international school in Kyoto, Japan. All participants were fluent Japanese speakers with Japanese nationality who had been studying English at the school for at least two years. At this school, they studied English and other subjects taught in the English language at least two periods every day. Members of the sample had a reasonable degree of verbal English ability, as demonstrated by their English class grades and scores on the BVAT. All of the

participants who were studying English as their second language received passing grades during the two years prior to their participation in this study. On the BVAT, participants all received English cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) scores of 3 or higher on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being negligible English ability and 6 being very advanced English proficiency. Although a CALP score of 3 indicated a level of English proficiency that the BVAT reported as “limited,” compared with native speakers of English, it still established these participants as having English ability comparable to native English speaking second or third graders. Students with developmental and learning differences were not included in the sample. Informed parental permission was also a requirement for participation (Appendix B).

#### *Rationale for the sample*

The over-riding rationale for the present study was qualitative criterion-sampling (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Although Japanese speaking students of various nationalities attend the selected school, only students with Japanese nationality were chosen due to the unique cultural influences in these students’ lives through their families and Japanese society as a whole. Students in the study were fluent in Japanese to the extent that they were very comfortable speaking Japanese and usually preferred to speak Japanese. This inclination toward speaking in Japanese is congruent with the situation of most Japanese elementary students, as well as most of the population of Japan, making the study more beneficial for the understanding of English speaking in Japanese society as a whole.

The participants also were required to have previously studied English for at least two years, so they would possess sufficient skill to speak comfortably in English.



Logically, it did not seem prudent to study the motivation behind not speaking English for those who did not have the skills needed to do so. The participants' English skill was verified through their English class grades and BVAT scores. Students from a two-way bilingual, international school were chosen because they were in a setting that teaches and promotes the speaking of English. The majority of these students also have parents who strongly encourage them to speak English, as much as possible. Students in this unique environment have the ability and encouragement to speak English, yet they still often opt to speak Japanese.

#### *Methods of Sampling*

All fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students at the school who met the above criteria were invited to participate. Some participants who did not have Japanese nationality and others who did not attain a CALP score of 3 or higher on the BVAT were not included in the study in order to produce a more homogenous sample, which is preferable in qualitative studies (Firmin, 2006a). The final purposive sample consisted of 24 students. Saturation (Wray, 2007) occurred after around 15 interviews (see Appendix C), so I concluded that 24 interviews were sufficient in order to accomplish the study's overall objectives.

#### *Demographic data for the sample*

Of the students in the sample, 15 were girls and 9 were boys. The sample was comprised of six fourth graders, nine fifth graders, and nine sixth graders. Nineteen of the students in the sample were native speakers of Japanese only. Five were near-native speakers of both English and Japanese because of their family or schooling experiences.

Thus, all of the participants were native speakers of Japanese, but most had learned English as a second, foreign language.

Those who usually spoke Japanese at home were 18 members of the sample, while 2 usually spoke English. Three of the students regularly spoke both Japanese and English at home, and one was a student with a different ethnic background, who usually spoke a language other than Japanese and English at home. Nine of the students had international experience. Five were from international marriages in which one parent was a native English speaker and the other a native Japanese speaker. Six were returnees who had lived overseas and had come back to live in Japan.

All of the parents gave permission for their children to participate in the study, and none of the participants withdrew during the course of the study. Three additional students were interviewed, but they were not included in the final sample. The reasons for their exclusion were as follows: two of the students, although fluent in Japanese, did not have Japanese citizenship. The third student, who entered the school midway through elementary, received a cognitive-academic language proficiency score of 2 on the BVAT. This score did not reflect English proficiency sufficient for inclusion in the present study. Therefore, data from these three students was not included in the study.

### *Procedure*

*Instruments.* The instruments for data collection in the study included semi-structured audio-recorded interviews and the Bilingual Verbal Ability Test. The interview questions (Appendix A) were prepared beforehand in order to focus on the participants' attitudes and experiences with English language learning and speaking, particularly concerning the possible sources of language anxiety enumerated by Young

(1991): 1) personal and interpersonal anxieties, 2) learner beliefs about language learning, 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching, 4) instructor-learner interactions, 5) classroom procedures, and 6) language testing. Interview questions were checked by an independent, experienced qualitative researcher and, after revision, were approved by the administrators of the school.

The Bilingual Verbal Ability Test (BVAT) is a norm-referenced test that provides a measure of the overall verbal ability of bilingual students, assessing comprehensive verbal proficiency of bilinguals. The BVAT was used in this research in order to provide an objective measure of the students' English verbal ability that could be compared with their perceived English ability as reported in the interviews. For this reason, only the English portion of the BVAT was administered to each student, producing a standard score of the student's cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP). The BVAT was co-normed with the standardization of the Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ III), including a representative sample of U.S. participants, ages 2 through 90 years (N=8,800), in more than 100 geographically diverse communities. The overall reliability for the various BVAT domains ranges from .80 to .89, with the English language proficiency score having a reliability of .93. The content validity of the BVAT for upper elementary age students ranged from .55 to .92. The predictive validity ranged from .65 to .85. The BVAT's construct validity was reported within the .70 to .90 range.

#### *Pilot Study*

After parental permission was received, a pilot study was conducted with four students in order to check that the interview protocol was generally understandable for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. During these interviews, the think-aloud technique

(Johnson & Christensen, 2004) was used, giving the interviewees the opportunity to speak out loud during the interview regarding various aspects of the questions that may have been confusing or difficult for them to understand. A minor revision of the interview protocol was completed based on the pilot study.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

Interviews were slated with the participants at times during the school day that were convenient for their schedules. I then conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with each of the respective 24 students in a private room at the international school. Students were free to answer questions either in Japanese or English, and I clarified, in Japanese, any uncertainties about which they had questions. The respective students' discussions of the questions were tape-recorded and typically lasted approximately 20 minutes. I then administered the BVAT, which took an additional 20 minutes.

Later, the tape recorded interviews of the participants were transcribed in English. Japanese portions of the interviews were translated and transcribed in English. Open coding (Maxwell, 2005) was used to organize the data into categories and identify recurring themes. These themes were discussed further with six students in a second interview wave in order to clarify questionnaire responses.

#### *Relevant Ethical Considerations*

There were no apparent risks or potentially harmful situations for the participants. Before starting the interviews, I prepared a parental consent form and distributed it to parents of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students for them to sign and return to the school. It included a brief explanation of my research and the kind of interviews I would

be conducting with the students. Parents were informed about the BVAT, and I asked them to allow me to use their children's BVAT scores and report card grades in my study. Parents were given access to their respective children's interview transcripts and BVAT scores upon request. I assured parents that their children's scores and comments during the interview would be kept confidential and would not affect their grades at school in any way. Quotations used in the study were reported using pseudonyms in order to insure confidentiality. Interviews were conducted at a convenient time in a setting that was comfortable and private for the participants. Participation was voluntary and students were not pressured to answer any questions they did not want to answer. Participants could choose to withdraw from the study at any time, although none did so.

#### *Methods of Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted using a constant-comparative, qualitative coding method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I did not approach the data with pre-established categories in mind. Instead, I analyzed the interview transcripts using open coding to look for recurring themes in the various students' experiences and assigned category names to related segments of data that emerged. I practiced reflexivity (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) during the process of analyzing the data, being aware of my expectations in order to more effectively eliminate bias from the results.

I was particularly alert to the repetition of key words, phrases, and constructs. I read and re-read the transcripts, appraising them for commonalities among the responses given to the interview questions. Codes (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) were assigned to the data at points, allowing me to track the similarities of the participants' reported data. Since I used semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2007), some participants elaborated on

points where they felt pathos or desired to provide illustrations and examples. Where coded data consistently showed consensus among the participants, these points eventually became the themes reported in the thesis. After completing this analysis, I conducted a second wave (Firmin, 2006a) of interviews with students chosen by purposeful sampling (Flick, 2002) in order to seek elaboration on comments and themes from the first round of interviews. Based on overall gestalt of the two waves of interviews, I isolated the themes reported below which summarize the phenomenological perspectives of the participants.

#### *Safeguards to Internal and External Validity*

In order to enhance the internal validity of my research findings, I used several strategies. First, as mentioned above, I compared students' BVAT scores and class grades with their own perceived English ability as a form of data triangulation (Berg, 2001). Data triangulation also was practiced as I used multiple interviews in two waves to provide numerous sources of data. Second, I used low-inference descriptors (Johnson, 1997) in accounts of the participants' feelings and experiences, quoting their words as much as possible, rather than paraphrasing their comments into my words. Third, member checking (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002) was also employed as I asked for participant feedback during the interview process in order to confirm that my understanding of their comments was accurate. Participants consistently indicated that my overall findings reported in the thesis were congruent with their perceptions. Finally, after exchanging the names of the participants for pseudonyms, I sought peer review (Merriam, 2002) by submitting my interpretations and conclusions to two specialists in the field of ESL teaching in Japan. Their overall percepts were that my findings were

plausible and made meaningful research contributions to the general understanding of English communication among Japanese speakers.

Limitations exist to the external validity of this study. The unique educational experience and environment of the participants make it particularly difficult to generalize to all upper elementary students or Japanese culture as a whole. However, generalization was not the central purpose of this study. Qualitative research results most effectively achieve external validity as studies are repeated in various contexts (Raffanti, 2007). Therefore, the greater goal of the present study was to hear the perspectives of students who have started their study of English at a young age and are in an international school environment that encourages speaking in English. Their outlook in this context may serve to increase our understanding of the various psychological, social, and linguistic forces that influence the choice of which language to speak in Japan.

## Chapter 4: Results & Analysis

### *Introduction*

The students in the sample for this study were all Japanese citizens. However, almost all of them reported overall positive attitudes toward learning and speaking English. Similarly, a substantial majority expressed a desire to improve their English ability, affirming they want to be able to speak English. They also receive encouragement at home to engage in frequent English speaking. The parents of the participants have paid for their children to attend a two-way, bilingual school where they have an opportunity to learn English from the age of six, and most participants' parents encourage them to speak more often in English. The students all have at least two periods of English study every day at school, and they generally expressed a positive attitude toward their classes. Almost all of the students asserted that their English classes have helped them learn to speak English. However, in spite of all these factors that promote English speaking, when asked how often they speak English outside of classes at school, most of the participants indicated once a day or less. Contrarily, when asked how often they speak Japanese outside of classes at school, most replied several times a day or more. Why do upper elementary students who study English every day in an environment that encourages English speaking still choose to speak Japanese most of the time outside of classes? Qualitative, phenomenological interviews with the participants in this study revealed intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence English speaking among Japanese speakers. Intrinsic factors included the themes of internal stress and the



perceived difficulty of English. Extrinsic factors that emerged were social groups and identity issues.

### *Intrinsic Factors*

*Internal Stress* One major factor that clearly contributes to students' hesitancy to speak English is their worry or fear that they may make a mistake and be embarrassed or laughed at. The majority of the participants made comments related to this internal stress that they experience. According to their interview responses, the students sometimes feel shy, nervous, embarrassed, worried, hesitant or afraid when talking in English, especially when among foreigners who they do not know well. Panic was another common response of students who tried to speak in English. Sachi illustrated this sentiment when she stated: "I get kind of stressed-out when I have to speak English and, when I finish, I always feel relieved."

Participants' panic was said to be due to a variety of causes, mostly connected with the uncertainties in conversations. When talking informally with someone in any language, the topics that will arise usually are not known beforehand, so it is difficult to prepare. The stress this causes is compounded for non-native speakers of English who sometimes struggle to understand the overall topic of conversation, as well as specific vocabulary that may surface. English spoken quickly or with an unfamiliar accent makes the phenomenon even more challenging. Once students are able to comprehend what has been said to them, they then must strive to remember the correct vocabulary and arrange it in the right order in order to make a coherent reply. Natsuko illustrated this fear of the unknown, stating: "I feel panic, and I think, 'Oh no, what should I do!' I get nervous before we start talking, because I worry about what they will say and how I should

answer.” Conversations in which the interlocutor is an unknown foreigner add even greater uncertainty to the situation, thus producing more stress in the student attempting to speak English. For example, Kenji said: “I sometimes panic if it’s my first time to meet the person.” Students often freeze-up when faced with unknown people, topics, and English words.

The results of students’ fear and panic are a serious hindrance to communication in English. Anxious feelings cause students to focus on the emotions or the situation they are experiencing. Their minds often go blank, or it becomes more difficult to concentrate on listening to what is being said. This further exacerbates the difficulty of formulating a response. Keiko shared the feelings of most students in this respect: “If there are words I don’t know, I panic, and it’s harder to hear and understand the rest of what they’re saying.” Students’ emotional apprehension sometimes leads to negative self talk. Tetsu illustrated: “If they use difficult words, I can’t understand. I tell myself in my mind that I don’t know, so I have trouble thinking about what to say.” In sum, the fear and panic some students experience while trying to communicate in English make it very difficult to understand and reply during a conversation.

Another common cause for students’ fear of speaking was the concern about making mistakes or memories of making mistakes. Many students fear the embarrassment caused by blunders in front of their peers, even in their first language (Fassinger, 1995). Almost all of the participants in this study could remember making a mistake or being laughed at when they spoke English, and many with such memories were more hesitant to speak English as a result. The risk of failure and its accompanying embarrassment compels them to keep quiet or speak in Japanese when in an English

speaking situation. Mieko summarized many students' feelings in this respect: "They think that they might say it wrong, and they are afraid of being embarrassed, so they don't speak. I often think that way too, so I don't speak English." Natsuko agreed:

If I do say something, after I say it, I think, "Wow! That sounded really weird!"

but I don't know how to make it better or fix it. Then I feel really weird because I said something so stupid. I just feel stupid speaking English.

Past mistakes and the fear of making mistakes again often discourage students from trying to speak in English.

With the memories of past mistakes and the possibility of future mistakes, many Japanese students do not have sufficient confidence in order to try and speak in English. This deficit is another source of the internal stress they feel in a situation that requires English. However, the lack of confidence stems seemingly from a variety of sources, in addition to past mistakes. Comparing their speaking ability with their peers' was a common practice that often was noted as a contributor to feelings of inadequacy. When other students around them seemed to have substantially progressed in speaking English proficiency, participants did not want to reveal their deficiencies and, rather, chose not to speak. For example, Sachi succinctly illustrated: "I don't have confidence. I tell myself that I'm bad, and I compare myself to others."

It is not only students who compare themselves with others, but their parents also do so. When parents compare their children's abilities with others' and make negative comments about their children's inadequacies, whether made directly to the child or to a third party, it can undermine their children's assurance. Students need encouragement, particularly from their parents, when learning new and difficult skills, so parents'

negative comments may be especially discouraging. Mieko provided insight on this point: “Sometimes my mom gets together with other moms, though, and she talks about how bad I am at English. I don’t really care that they say this though, because I already know that I’m not smart.” The words of Mieko’s mother reinforced the inadequacy Mieko already felt, but it is difficult to determine the original cause of Mieko’s uncertainty. Often, comparison with other students, by parents or students themselves, is a contributing factor to lack of confidence in speaking English.

In addition, test scores were found to affect students’ level of confidence in their English proficiency. Poor results on standardized tests, when they occurred, made students in the sample feel inadequate. Particularly, tests designed for native English speakers, which are quite challenging for EFL students, led students to conclude they were not as fluent in English as they otherwise had believed. In other cases, students’ apt performance on standardized tests or class quizzes assured them of their progress. This made them more willing to try to communicate in English. In this manner, written tests can have a positive or negative effect on students’ confidence in their English ability.

In order to feel their English abilities are adequate to attempt communicating, students need to have an accurate means of gauging their ability. Although some did so using written tests or by comparing themselves with their peers, other participants in this study were uncertain what benchmark was best to use in assessing their skills, so they lacked confidence. Shun exemplified this concept by stating: “It is kind of hard for me to say that I’m very good at English. I don’t know if I’m good or not.” One result of this uncertainty is that students too often do not attempt to speak the English they have studied. Unfortunately, they seemingly lack assurance that they will be successful, so

they assume they will not be. A few participants experienced how success breeds confidence but, for most, this lack of aplomb prevents them from having English encounters that would build their confidence. Sora illustrated this attitude as he lamented: “If I speak to foreigners, they probably won’t understand me. So I’m not very confident to speak to them.” To summarize, panic, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence are forms of internal stress that were found to affect Japanese students’ willingness to communicate in English.

*Perceived Difficulty* Regarding intrinsic factors that affect language choice, a second theme the majority of the participants mentioned was a linguistic one: English is difficult. The participants, who all were fluent speakers of Japanese, described speaking the Japanese language as easier and more natural. Speaking English, in contrast, was labeled difficult, hard, confusing, and too much trouble. A total lack of knowledge or ability in English was not raised as a problem. Rather, most of the participants described their own English ability as being overall “good.”

The students’ appraisals of their own English proficiency were supported by their teachers’ appraisals. An inspection of the students’ past report cards showed that all of the participants who were studying English as their second language received passing grades during the two years prior to their participation in this study. Their English teachers affirmed that all the participants were progressing in their English reading, writing, and speaking abilities.

The participants’ self-assessment was further supported by the results of the Bilingual Verbal Ability Test (BVAT). This test provided an English cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) score on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being negligible English

ability and 6 being very advanced English proficiency. A score of 4 is considered fluent or average for native English speakers of that age. All of the participants in this study received a score of 3 or higher on the BVAT. Although a score of 3 indicated a level of English proficiency that the BVAT reported as “limited,” compared with native speakers of English, it still established these participants as having English ability comparable to native English speaking second or third graders. Self-appraisals, English class grades, and norm-referenced test results demonstrated the participants in this study generally possess at least minimal levels of verbal English ability. So why did the majority say, when given the choice, they prefer speaking Japanese?

Tetsu illustrated part of the reason, when he reflected the sentiments of the participants in the research sample: “They can speak it, but they don’t want to because it confuses them.” Speaking in a second language is challenging. Students claimed speaking English is a nuisance. It requires much thought and effort, while communication in Japanese is relatively effortless. Sachi elaborated the point in this way: “It’s kind of a bother because I have to decide what to say, then translate that in my mind, and then try to say it correctly.” Having limited proficiency in English makes sentence production laborious and frustrating for students who are trying to communicate their complex thoughts or feelings. Remembering the appropriate English words and putting them together in the brain, using correct grammar, is a formidable task for native English speakers, and the participants in the study reported the difficulty of the process to be compounded when speaking in English as a foreign language. Certainly, speaking one’s mother tongue is not nearly as challenging as speaking a second language that is in the process of being learned, so students choose the easier way to communicate. Mao

summarized how she believed her peers feel: “It’s easier for them to speak Japanese because they’re used to it and they know it well. Also, it’s hard for them to translate what they want to say into English.”

Although the participants all have a reasonable degree of English proficiency, there are still gaps in their knowledge of English that make communication problematic. There are grammatical constructions they have not yet mastered and significant vocabulary they have not learned. So how do students bridge the gaps in their English ability or vocabulary when in the midst of a conversation? Mieko explained the sentiments of most participants in the sample: “I speak Japanese when there are hard words that I don’t know how to say in English.” The subjects tend to code-switch from English to Japanese when their communication is blocked by deficiency in their English ability. In some cases, students may substitute only one Japanese word in an English sentence to replace an unknown English term (borrowing). However, when students find they do not know numerous words needed to communicate the intended message, they often switch to Japanese and continue on in the more familiar language. Sora expressed the common experience of students at this stage in their study of English: “Sometimes, the word I want to use disappears from my mind, and I forget how to say what I want to say, so my sentence becomes broken. This makes it hard to speak.” This situation often results in students code-switching.

The main purpose of language is to communicate, so elementary students, like people of any age, naturally will choose the language that helps them achieve their purpose. The inclination to practice English for improved speaking ability is readily subordinated to the desire to convey the message needed in the present situation. The

elementary participants, in particular, displayed an eagerness to complete communication as simply and speedily as possible. Interaction between peers is regularly marked by subtle nuances that are challenging to relate in a second language. Chiaki's comments were representative of the sample: "If they try to speak in English, it's hard to say what they want to say. And if they speak Japanese, they can say what they want to say. That's why I don't speak English more."

The topic of conversation also helped participants determine which language would be more effective for communication. Students agreed that subjects in the academic domain, such as mathematics and science, were often easier to discuss in English. They had studied this material in English, so their knowledge of English terms related to these issues often surpassed their Japanese vocabulary. Interaction on these topics occurred most often in the classroom setting. However, participants were accustomed to discussing topics in the social domain, such as sports, entertainment and peer relationships, in Japanese. Communication related to these matters generally took place outside of classes, so Japanese was the language of choice for that setting. Atsuhiko exemplified this experience, saying: "I like to speak the language that I can explain myself and be understood the best in. Certain topics are easier to speak about in Japanese and others are easier to speak about in English."

Given the choice, the Japanese elementary students sampled in this study most often will choose the language to speak for efficacy reasons. Although they have a reasonable degree of English proficiency, speaking English is perceived as more difficult and burdensome. They will speak in the language by which they can most easily convey



their message. Chika summed up the feelings of many English students: “When I try to speak English, it’s too hard, so I don’t want to speak anymore.”

### *Extrinsic Factors*

*Social Groups* Two extrinsic factors also were found to affect language choice significantly. The consensus among participants was that social groups profoundly influence students’ use of English outside of classes. The most important groups in the lives of the study’s participants were stated to be the students’ families, friends, and foreigners.

Most of the participants indicated that Japanese is the language of their most important social unit, their family, and that this phenomenon influenced their language use. Most participants usually speak Japanese with their families and they speak in English at their homes once per day or less. This is due to the fact that most of the parents have spoken to their children only in Japanese since the day the children were born. When asked regarding which language he preferred to speak, for example, Tetsu replied: “Japanese, because it was my first language, and it is my family’s language.” The children started speaking in Japanese at home with their families as their mother tongue, so it became the natural language for communication both in and outside of their homes. This deep-seated habit of communication is not easy to change, even if the parents have strong English ability and encourage their children to speak more in English.

The reality is that, although many parents are eager for their children to learn English, they seemingly make relatively little effort to learn or speak English. Parents serve as important role models for many aspects of their children’s development. However, aside from the children of international marriages, few of the participants had

parents who modeled bilinguality. On the contrary, participants had to speak Japanese at home in order to communicate with their parents. Yuko exemplified this situation: “My parents are Japanese, and they can’t understand so much English, so I can’t communicate with them.” Once again, communication effectiveness is the primary goal that determines the language to use. In this case, with members of the family, the participants’ most important social group, the impact proved to be most cogent.

Another significant group having a salient impact on the choice of language was the participants’ friends. As students progress through elementary school, their relationships with their peer group become increasingly influential. Students want to be liked and accepted by their friends, and this requires effective communication. Participants, therefore, chose to use the language that allowed them to communicate most effectively with their friends. Shin commented: “I just speak English or Japanese based on which one is easier for my friends to understand.”

Even if the students were more adept at English, they regularly chose to speak in Japanese, if the group of which they wanted to be a part usually spoke in Japanese. In the international school selected for this study, student groups are often formed, in part, on the basis of the language that is usually spoken by the members. Japanese students who grew up using Japanese at home usually join groups that speak Japanese in the social domain. Maki shared about the effects of friendships on language use, stating: “I feel like I have to speak Japanese with my Japanese friends because it is their first language and they would like it more if I spoke Japanese. I speak to them in Japanese to be a good friend.”

Speaking the same language in the group allows for more effective communication and builds solidarity. Students showed thoughtfulness toward friends in their group by using the language they could understand most easily. Even students who were proficient in English and wanted to use it when talking with friends sometimes chose not to do so out of consideration for the lower abilities of other friends in their group. Natsuko illustrated: “If I speak in English, my friends who aren’t as good at English may not understand and may feel left out.”

Acceptance by the peer group and the maintenance of good relationships generally took precedence over personal language preferences or the desire to practice English speaking. This dynamic was most clearly visible in the cases of children of international marriages who spoke English at home and Japanese returnee children who had come to live in Japan, after spending considerable time growing up overseas. Although English was their personal language of choice, they regularly elected to speak in Japanese in order to be accepted by a group and develop relationships with friends. The pressure from the Japanese language culture and the necessity of speaking the Japanese language to be accepted in a group were demonstrated by the experience of a half Japanese boy who came to live in Japan. Jun related his experience:

All of the people around me are speaking Japanese all the time, so I guess that makes me want to speak Japanese. If I’m the only one speaking English, I may feel a little left out. It’s easier for other kids to understand me when I speak Japanese, so I feel more accepted. I kind of felt pressure to speak Japanese when I first came to (the school)...I felt kind of nervous when I was in a group where everyone was speaking Japanese. If I talked to kids in English, they would

answer me in English, but whenever they spoke to me in English, they spoke in a joking manner, using a Japanese accent.

The powerful influence of the peer group requires Japanese students to speak in Japanese to be accepted and maintain good relationships with their friends.

So what would happen (hypothetically) if some members of the peer group attempted to speak English in order to encourage their group to do so? In general, the perceived response would be negative, or the attempts would be ignored. Japanese was said to be the “accepted” language for interaction between Japanese people. For a Japanese speaker to address other Japanese speakers in English was believed to display disregard for established social group norms. It would be unexpected and result in the speaker being considered with incredulity. Sachi’s comments represented the participants’ consensus overall: “People may also be kind of surprised or wonder why in the world I’m speaking English if I try to speak to them in English.” Participants assumed the listeners would tell the speaker to use Japanese or ignore the attempt at using English and carry on the conversation in Japanese. At best, it would be overlooked, but it could possibly harm relations within the peer group. Mao elaborated on this idea, reflecting the concerns of the sample:

I don’t think that my friends would agree to speak English together and, if they did, it might be a little awkward. It might change our relationship as well, because it would be hard to communicate what we really want to say to each other.

In view of the prevalence of these attitudes, it would be challenging for established Japanese speaking group members to venture English speaking outside of classes.

For a peer group to respond positively to members' attempts at speaking English in the social domain, the support of the popular, group leaders is crucial. Leaders of peer groups often exert powerful control over what is approved or disapproved by the group. Consequently, if group leaders are not very proficient in English, it is unlikely that they will allow their deficiencies to be revealed by supporting English speaking among their friends. Mika, a Japanese girl who grew up overseas, related her experience of how the group reacted to her use of English:

If someone popular speaks English, maybe they would all speak English but, if you speak it by yourself, it's kind of embarrassing. Also, their main language is Japanese, so it's easier to speak Japanese than English. If the leader of the group suggests speaking English, then maybe everyone would but, if someone isn't the leader, she might be teased....I am forgetting my English because my friends don't speak English. When someone says that we should speak English, I want to, but they don't, so we just speak Japanese....Not many people speak English, so I'm the only one speaking, and that makes me want to stop speaking.

In sum, peer groups and their leaders, with their personal language preferences, exert a powerful influence on whether students speak English or not outside of classes.

A third important group having a significant effect on students' willingness to speak English was foreigners. A majority of the participants in this study said they wanted to be able to talk with foreigners. This desire to communicate with English speakers is a strong motivating factor for students to study English. Keiko's feelings were representative of most participants in the sample: "My biggest goal in speaking English is to be able to talk to Americans....My relationships with foreigners are very

important to me.” English speaking foreigners are attractive to the participants. Students want to build friendships with them and be able to speak English like them. The consensus was that the subjects would be willing to attempt communication in English with internationals who did not speak Japanese. Foreigners serve as linguistic role models for the participants. Being with internationals motivated them to want to improve their English speaking skills.

Most international students have lived in Japan a relatively long time and have developed their Japanese ability to the point where they can communicate in Japanese more effectively than the Japanese students can speak English. As Jun shared above, in Japanese society, there is pressure to learn and speak Japanese, and many students feel the need to communicate in Japanese in order to be accepted by their peer group. This is strong motivation for most foreign students to learn Japanese. Therefore, outside of classes in this international school setting, Japanese students generally will speak Japanese to internationals who understand Japanese. They usually will speak English only to those who do not understand Japanese.

Foreign students who speak Japanese generally were not viewed as good candidates for English speaking partners by Japanese students. The reason is likely due to the history of their relationships. When Japanese students entered the school, they did not know any English. Consequently, most international students developed friendships with the Japanese children by communicating in Japanese. This pattern of Japanese speaking became a habit that has become very difficult to break. Natsuko’s thoughts epitomize the sample: “My American friends, like Mary, can speak Japanese so well, and I’m used to speaking to her in Japanese, so I don’t really have any opportunities to speak

English to her.” Natsuko and Mary were in a group of friends that followed a pattern of speaking Japanese in the social domain, so Natsuko did not think of Mary as being someone to whom she could speak in English, even though Mary was a native English speaker. To summarize, English speaking foreigners who do not know Japanese are an influential group that motivates participants to learn and speak English, while internationals in the school who speak Japanese are rarely spoken to in English.

*Identity Issues* A fourth theme that emerged in a majority of the students’ comments concerned the issue of identity. When asked why students at the school do not speak more in English, a common answer, as exemplified by Maki, was simply “because most of the students at (the school) are Japanese.” Ethnicity has a strong influence on language choice. Participants described Japanese as their first language, their mother language, their main language, and more natural. Japanese seemed to be the intuitive and logical language to speak. This way of thinking likely is due, in part, to the obvious fact that the school is located in Japan and all of the participants live in Japan. Kenji stated this sentiment in the most straightforward manner: “This is Japan, so people should speak Japanese.” In addition to their physical presence in Japan, the nationality and ethnic background of the interlocutors in conversations often determines the language used. Japan has long been considered a monoracial and monolingual nation, resulting in the idea that only Japanese should be spoken in Japan (Maher, 1997). Thus, when Japanese nationals speak to each other, it is generally assumed that they will speak Japanese. Natsuko’s statement is representative of the Japanese students in the sample: “I don’t speak English with my friends though, because we’re Japanese, so we feel like we should

speak Japanese.” The country where the students live and their cultural identity have a cogent influence on their language choice.

This attitude toward the Japanese language usually is established long before Japanese students enter first grade. They start speaking Japanese at home, and they soon develop the habit that they take with them when they go to school. Most follow the example of their parents and speak only in Japanese. Shota, although half American and fluent in English, shared the following concerning his Japanese friends: “I think it’s natural for them to speak Japanese because they speak Japanese at home. I choose to speak Japanese for this same reason.” For Japanese students, speaking Japanese has become so natural that many said it felt “weird” to speak anything else, especially to other Japanese people.

Speaking Japanese is an important part of Japanese students’ cultural identity. They feel that speaking Japanese is an integral part of “being Japanese.” All Japanese nationals are expected to speak Japanese fluently. This can result in problems for Japanese who live overseas and grow up studying and speaking English or a language other than Japanese. When these students return to Japan to live, they feel pressure in Japanese society to conform, being as everyone else. This includes the compulsion to converse in Japanese like other Japanese nationals. In such cases, speaking English causes students to attract attention, as one who is peculiar, leading some to experience a mild identity crisis. Mika, who grew up speaking English overseas, shared:

After school when those little kids in the yellow hats [public school children] hear me speaking English, they tease me and mimic me. I sometimes feel like I should



hide that I can speak English because I'm Japanese, and I don't want to be different.

Speaking Japanese is a powerful and natural expression of cultural identity for Japanese students, from the time they began speaking as young children in their respective homes. Breaking this habit by speaking English to other Japanese students takes dedicated motivation and much effort. In sum, the issue of Japanese identity is an additional extrinsic factor that compels most Japanese students to speak in Japanese with each other in the social domain.

#### *Summary of Findings*

Through qualitative, phenomenological interviews, I found intrinsic and extrinsic factors that exert a powerful influence over students' language use choices. Intrinsic factors included the theme of internal stress, exemplified by panicking when faced with a situation that required the use of English, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence in their abilities, all of which caused many students to be hesitant to speak English. Although students in this study had an apt degree of proficiency in English, real and perceived deficiencies existed in their English linguistic skills nonetheless. This phenomenon emerged as an additional intrinsic factor that often made them feel compelled to speak Japanese for more effective communication. Important social groups (i.e., families, friends, and foreigners) comprised an extrinsic factor that influenced students' willingness to speak English both positively and negatively. The extrinsic, external factor of Japanese students' ethnic identity was a final theme which fostered participants' natural inclination to speak Japanese. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors, in the form of these four themes, reveal the challenges which face Japanese elementary students

who are learning to speak English as their second language, even in the supportive atmosphere of a bilingual, international school.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

### *Interpretations and Potential Applications*

The majority of research pertaining to English learning and speaking in Japan has focused on high school and university students or adults. The present study provides a rare look at Japanese upper elementary students' views of English speaking. In 2002, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology decided to include Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) as an optional activity in a new elementary curriculum with the aim of enhancing students' motivation to learn English (Takada, 2003). Whether this program is successful in achieving its aim is a matter of debate. Nonetheless, in this study, the elementary students interviewed were found to have a very positive attitude toward learning English. They have a good impression of studying English from the classes they have taken thus far, and they want to learn to speak English, especially so they can talk with foreigners. These are very promising characteristics for their future study and use of English.

At the same time, three-fourths of the participants admitted they presently speak English outside of classes at school only once a day or less. This occurs in the context of students feeling that it is only natural for Japanese people in Japan to speak Japanese to each other. In addition to this attitude, the fact that most of the participants are in groups with friends where Japanese is the unofficially designated language for communication also lends itself to relatively little English speaking in social contexts. And finally, knowing that the general course of students' protocol is consistent with human nature to

choose the path of least resistance, in the present context, preteens opt to communicate with their friends in their native Japanese, rather than the much more bothersome English language, when they have the freedom to choose.

Parents and teachers, in contrast, often have much higher expectations. Japanese parents sometimes are bewildered or disappointed to hear their children talking with their Japanese friends in Japanese on the international school playground after school. English teachers and school administrators are heard in the halls, from time to time, encouraging EFL students to talk to their friends in English. The school selected for this study has a weekly “English-only-day,” when elementary teachers encourage the students to speak to their friends all-and-only in English during lunch time and breaks. To date, this endeavor has met with limited success. When in the presence of a helpful and encouraging teacher, students may attempt to speak in English but, without teacher intervention, most Japanese students converse in Japanese. Parents, teachers, and administrators may need to develop more pragmatic expectations of what Japanese elementary students will do when they are free to choose which language to use.

Teachers need to consider how difficult it is to recall the English vocabulary, remember the correct grammar, and put them together in order to produce a proper English sentence. Since many students reported that a paucity of vocabulary led to frustrations when trying to understand and speak English, conversational vocabulary should be taught and practiced in class in addition to more formal, high level vocabulary that typically appears on standardized tests. Class activities should be interesting enough for motivating students to input the effort needed in order to complete assignments in English, rather than so complicated that the students only feel frustrated at their inability

to communicate. Additionally, teachers should praise students for each small step achieved when they are giving due efforts in classes, rather than expecting students to continue that concentration during what is supposed to be break time.

Parents should contemplate the fact that, although they may encourage their children with their words to speak more English, their personal examples are cogent. As previously noted, around two-thirds of the participants are speaking exclusively Japanese with their families at home. It reasons to query: Why should a 10-year-old boy be expected to talk with his friends in English at lunchtime, if his parents would not talk with their friends or family members in English? Adults should also consider the impact that friendships have among teens, relative to being accepted by the peer group. The nuances of spoken English words can often make the difference between being teased by pre-teen peers and being praised by them. Consequently, students in the study seemingly were reluctant to engage in the trial-and-error experiences that eventually will make them proficient English speakers. The road to English fluency must seemingly first successfully pass through youth's self esteem and image.

In view of these realities in the students' experience, teachers should recognize that the optimal time for students to learn and practice English is during their classes. English teachers generally should, whenever feasible, use only English and encourage their students to do the same during class. Discussing various topics in a variety of role-play situations, possibly tied to audio or video recordings, potentially could help students learn to communicate about diverse topics in new settings. This also might help students be less likely to panic when they face fear-producing situations with unknown topics and unfamiliar people.

Since fear of making mistakes and being embarrassed emerged as a major factor in causing students to be more hesitant to speak English, teachers should promote a relaxed, accepting class atmosphere where it is safe to make mistakes and no one is laughed at. It needs to be clear to the students that everyone makes mistakes as part of the language learning process. To help students better understand this reality, teachers can share some of their own mistakes as illustrations and model a relaxed attitude if they make mistakes during classes.

Teachers should help students not only develop their English ability, but also cultivate a positive attitude toward English speaking and confidence in their ability to do so. Positive self-talk can be encouraged and practiced. As some participants' comments affirmed, success in speaking English leads to confidence in advancing their speaking skills, so teachers should provide multiple opportunities to try speaking English at a level where students can succeed. Successes should be praised and remembered. Similarly, parents would do well to praise their children's progress when talking with other parents. Opportunities for students to gauge their progress and their English ability are important in order to develop their confidence, whether they are written tests or other English production activities. In sum, English classes are prime occasions for students to use their English and develop their confidence.

The influence of peer groups and their leaders is another important force for improving speaking skills. Teachers should consider speaking with peer group leaders individually, discover their dreams and motivations, and encourage them to lead their group in trying to speak English in particular settings in order to help cohorts reach their personal goals, rather than discouraging those in their group who may speak in English

from time to time. Naturally, teachers cannot control friendship groups outside of classes but, in classes, they can potentially divide groups of friends who are in the habit of speaking Japanese to each other, so students are seated near people they do not converse with so often. This may promote an environment where students are more open to speaking English together.

Interest in foreign people and the desire to communicate with them is another potential motivating factor that teachers should encourage. Students should be given regular and ample opportunities to communicate with foreign people, whether by letter or with foreign visitors. International students also can be encouraged to be bilingual role models who sometimes speak English to their Japanese friends, as well as Japanese. While more foreign students would be helpful, the faculty, at the same time, need to be aware that new students who do not speak Japanese may feel left out of peer groups at times. Trips for students to English speaking countries also may be a motivating and confidence building experience.

Parents, teachers, and administrators also need a proper attitude toward the Japanese language. For Japanese students, speaking Japanese is a habit developed from birth, and it is not a bad habit that needs to be broken. Being Japanese is good, and speaking Japanese is good. Both ought to be affirmed. However, speaking a second language in appropriate situations also should be affirmed and encouraged. Teachers, foreign students, and parents as well should serve as role models of bilingual communicators.

### *Biblical integration*

The Bible makes it clear that God created human beings with the ability to use language to communicate with Him and each other (Genesis 3:9-13). Therefore, language is a good gift from God for which people should give thanks. The Bible also relates how the diversity of languages resulted from man's pride at the Tower of Babel, where God confused their languages and scattered them to various parts of the world (Genesis 11:1-9). Although the differences in languages were caused by man's sin, it is still clear that distinctive languages were given by God and thus should all be affirmed as good. God knows all things (1 John 3:20), including all languages, and the Bible does not single out one language as better than the others. Revelation 7:9 states that there will be people from every language group in heaven, but the Bible does not say what language will be spoken there.

Many of the heroes of the Bible were bilingual or multilingual and spoke God's word to people according to the language the audience would best understand. The Apostle Paul provided a classic example of the power of code-switching in Acts 21:40-22:2. He switched to speaking the Hebrew dialect in order to emphasize his ethnic solidarity with his audience, and it resulted in the crowd paying closer attention to what he was saying. Fitzmyer (1992) asserted that even the Lord Jesus Christ himself was almost certainly bilingual when on earth, speaking Aramaic and Greek.

The Bible also gives instructions concerning how Christians should treat others who may be different in the language they speak or may be trying to learn another language. Galatians 3:28 asserts that people's ethnicity does not determine their value, for all are one and equal in Christ Jesus. So people are equally valuable and important



regardless of the language they speak and should be treated as such. Both parents and other students should put into practice the guideline in Ephesians 4:29: “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” Language learners need encouragement from teachers, parents and friends.

#### *Relation of the Results to Other Literature*

The four themes that emerged in this study with 24 Japanese upper elementary students at a bilingual international school in Japan were consistent with many previously published studies conducted with bilinguals and English language students in Japan and around the world. Communication apprehension and two of the three patterns of code-switching, namely, to make up for deficiencies in one language and to show solidarity with a certain group, generally correspond to the internal stress, linguistic difficulties, social groups and identity issues discussed above.

Participants in this study displayed characteristics of what McCroskey (1977) termed communication apprehension. This fear of communicating was primarily experienced when speaking in English, their second language, which is commonly referred to as language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The phenomenon was hallmarked by their hesitancy to speak English because of fear of making mistakes. Memories of past mistakes and fear of future failures caused half of the respondents in this study who recalled past mistakes to show less willingness to communicate in English, a result which Barraclough, Christophel, and McCroskey (1988) also observed. Also, congruent with Woodrow’s (2006) findings, participants in the present study specified speaking with native English speakers caused the most anxiety.

However, there also were some marked differences between the students in the present study and results of some previous research. For example, McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida (1985) found that 100% of the Japanese university students in their sample exhibited indicators of communication apprehension, while only 40% of the participants in the present study related personal experiences that indicated possible communication apprehension. Likewise, while Tani-Fukuchi (2005) reported 68% of Japanese university students surveyed had negative feelings toward their English study, most of the participants in this study stated that they liked studying English and gave a reasonably positive appraisal of their English class experiences. Although students in the present study share some of the same experiences and psychological struggles that have been reported in other research, they do so to a lesser degree. Age differences or language experience, when compared with Japanese university students, may be potential moderating factors.

In Gardner's (2006) model, another important internal factor that affects the use of a second language is motivation. Students in this present study exhibited all three qualities which Gardner believed were necessary to learn a second language. First, the participants demonstrated integrativeness, a desire to have interaction with speakers of the second language, as most said they wanted to be able to speak to foreigners in English. Second, as noted above, they expressed relatively positive attitudes toward the learning environment, their English classes. Third, most of the students revealed at least two of the three following aspects in Gardner's construct of motivation: desire to learn the language, positive attitude toward learning the language, and effort. Most of the participants evinced the desire to learn English when they affirmed they wanted to be

able to speak English. A large majority also displayed a positive attitude toward learning the language, when asked if they liked studying and speaking English. Effort, the third necessary component in Gardner's concept of motivation, was not explored in this study.

As in previous studies (Kite, 2001; Nishimura, 1995a; Spezzini, 2004; Tarone & Swain, 1995), one reason for code-switching by the bilingual elementary school participants in this study was due to deficiencies in one of their languages, usually English. Code-switching occurred when students substituted single Japanese words in a sentence for English words they did not know. Code-switching also was reported by students who used English in the academic domain in order to discuss subjects such as math and science, and switched to Japanese in the social domain, similar to the case of students in Spezzini's (2004) study. As stated by Li (2005), code-switching is a tool used by bilinguals, who are "aiming primarily at achieving coherence in the interactional task at hand" (p. 375). Bilinguals often will choose to use the language that best enables them to communicate. This was found to be true of the elementary students in this study who affirmed that certain topics were easier to discuss in English while others were better to engage in Japanese. Linguistic deficiencies were found to be a factor that led to code-switching in the present study as well as in the literature.

Another purpose of code-switching, according to a number of researchers (e.g., Auer, 1998; Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993) is to signal the social or cultural identity of the speaker. Code-switching is seen as a means that speakers use to identify with a certain social group. This was found to be true of participants in this study whose experiences revealed peer groups in their school as having an unofficially designated or unmarked language. The marked language, namely English, was rarely used by such

groups for social interaction, even though members of the group might be fluent in it. As in research by Greer (2008) and Nishimura (1992), Japanese participants in this study were found to choose their language in order to include others in their group interaction, rather than to exclude them. Peers were found to have salient influence on students' learning and use of English language in this study as in previous studies (e.g., Elwood, 2006; Greer, 2008; Spezzini, 2004; Tarone & Swain, 1995).

In addition to peer groups, some researchers (e.g., Nishimura, 1995b; Shin, 2010) have found people choose their language for reasons related to their ethnic group. This present study similarly found Japanese students in Japan often feel it is natural to speak Japanese and strange or unnatural to speak to other Japanese students in English. Japanese students who speak English are sometimes considered "weird" by their classmates who usually speak only Japanese, leading some to speak Japanese so as not to stand out and be different. Students in the present study reflected attitudes, experiences, and practices that coincide with much of the literature on language learners' and bilingual students' English speaking experiences.

#### *Strengths of the study*

The present study focused on the attitudes and experiences of Japanese upper elementary school students toward learning and speaking English. Most previous language anxiety research in Japan has focused on theoretical studies, however, Sakamoto, Pribyl, Keaten, and Koshikawa (1999) affirmed there was also a need to understand individual language learners' perceptions and feelings. MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, and Donovan (2002) asserted that more research should be conducted in order to examine language anxiety, willingness to communicate, and self-perceived

communication competence in younger learners. Nevertheless, few articles have been published in English about qualitative research involving Japanese elementary students' attitudes toward English language learning and speaking. This study is a unique contribution toward exploring this construct empirically.

The design of this study included in-person interviews with 24 students which yielded a rich data set. I generated a data trail (Daytner, 2006) for these interviews by transcribing the English transcripts of all that the students said as a means of increasing internal validity. From analysis of the interview transcripts, four themes emerged which were consistently stated by a majority of the participants. A second wave of interviews with six students confirmed further the influence of these four themes on students' language use choices. Other research literature likewise attested to the importance of these factors.

Although the students in this study are in a relatively unique educational environment, the qualitative interviews revealed that they face psychological and linguistic struggles as well as pressures from peers, parents, and Japanese society as a whole, which have influenced their feelings about speaking English. Students' attitudes toward English language learning, therefore, may provide insight into the attitudes of Japanese elementary students as a whole, inasmuch as they are the product of Japanese culture and society.

The results of this study are helpful for administrators, teachers, and parents as they generate realistic expectations for a school's English program. Success in English communication is more than just a matter of linguistic factors such as intelligence, grammatical knowledge, and effective English classes. Psychological, social, and ethnic

factors also are influential. Therefore, a child's success is not solely the responsibility of the teacher or school. Successfully learning to communicate in English will require the pooled efforts and cooperation of administrators, teachers, parents, peers, and individual learners.

#### *Limitations of the study*

*Remaining threats to internal validity.* Interviews with 24 students provided substantial data to analyze for analysis of recurring themes. However, many of the students, being young and generally not inclined yet toward deep thinking, often answered questions briefly and did not explain their feelings and experiences thoroughly. Consequently, more rich detail likely exists to be reported – more than I am able to share in the present manuscript.

Likewise, participants were chosen from among the fourth through sixth grade; students who met the research criteria and agreed to take part in the study. Therefore, the sample generally consisted of cooperative students who tended to be interested in English and possessed a relatively positive attitude toward the foreign interviewer. Students with learning differences (or, in some cases, learning disabilities) and low English achievement did not participate. The nonrandom nature of the sample may have resulted in disproportionately high percentages of students who had positive attitudes toward English learning, English classes, foreigners, and other similar experiences.

#### *Remaining threats to external validity*

The participants in the present study represent a small sample size. Consequently, external validity is a significant issue, as it is in most qualitative studies (Firmin, 2006b). The results can be generalized most aptly to settings that possess demographic

characteristics similar to the subjects who were interviewed. The participants in this study were members of a very small minority of Japanese elementary school students who have had the opportunity to learn English several hours a day in an international elementary school setting. The participants also were daily immersed in an environment that allowed for and encouraged communication in English. This unique set of circumstances limits the external validity of the study, but it is also these characteristics that (arguably) made the study most meaningful. Elementary students who do not know English, and have no encouragement to speak English, have no choice but to speak in Japanese. The participants in this study, however, have the ability and external motivation to speak English, yet usually choose not to do so. This was a main point of inquiry for this study.

#### *Suggestions for future research*

Since qualitative research results best achieve external validity through replication (Firmin, 2006b), future studies of this kind in other contexts would provide more support toward a comprehensive grounded theory regarding Japanese elementary students' English speaking behaviors. Similar studies in different international school settings in Japan also are recommended. Particularly, international schools with higher percentages of foreign students who do not know Japanese would help answer some needed questions in this domain. Analogous research with elementary students in other cultures also would provide for meaningful comparisons with the present sample. Qualitative research regarding attitudes toward English study and English speaking among students in international junior and senior high schools would provide insight into how habits and attitudes come to develop. Since the present study did not measure the

participants' present levels of effort in their study of English, one of the factors which Gardner (2006) asserted was necessary to successfully learn a second language, further research on this construct also would provide valuable data. And finally, large-scale survey data would be useful for helping to provide generalizable findings to more broad populations of Japanese elementary students who speak English as their second language. Significant amounts of money, effort, and time are spent on English study in Japan, but further studies such as these would help to fill the void of knowledge about individual students' attitudes toward this endeavor.



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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What language do you usually speak at home?
2. How often do you speak English at home? (Reply using the scale below.)  
Never once a week once a day several times a day almost always
3. How often do you speak Japanese outside of classes at school?  
Never once a week once a day several times a day almost always
4. How often do you speak English outside of classes at school?  
Never once a week once a day several times a day almost always
5. How often do you think in English (outside of classes at school)?  
Never once a week once a day several times a day almost always
6. How often do you use English internet (outside of classes at school)?  
Never once a week once a day several times a day almost always
7. Have you ever dreamed in English or had a dream in which you were speaking English? Tell about it.
8. What language do you prefer to speak? Why?
9. Do you like studying and speaking English? Why or why not?
10. Have your English classes helped you learn to speak English? In what ways?
11. Why do people not speak more in English? How about you?

12. Have you ever been forced to speak in English?  
Where? When? Tell about it.  
Did that help you to improve in English speaking?
13. How would you rate your English ability?  
Poor      low      good      very good      fluent
14. What do you use to rate your English ability? (e.g., test scores, class grades, others' comments?)
15. Do you want to be able to speak English?  
Why or why not?
16. Do you want to be able to talk with foreigners in English?
17. How do you feel when you talk with foreigners?
18. What makes it hard for you to understand when you are talking with someone in English? (e.g., hear noises in head, panic, etc.)
19. What do you think or what happens in your mind when you are in a situation where you must speak English?
20. What would help kids speak English more?
21. Why did you choose to go to a bilingual school?
22. Do your parents encourage you to speak English?
23. Do you remember making a mistake when speaking English? Tell about it.  
How did you feel?
24. Have you ever had someone laugh at you or make fun of you when you were speaking English? Tell about it. How did you feel?



25. Have you had any other experience that made you want to speak English more or made you more hesitant to speak English? Tell about it.
26. Have you ever been in a group where everyone else was speaking a language you didn't understand? Tell about it. How did you feel?

APPENDIX B

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Dear parent/guardian,

As I work to complete my master's degree in education from Cedarville University, I would like to ask for the assistance of your child in my research for my thesis. I am studying why Japanese students are hesitant to speak in English, and I would like to interview 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students concerning their experiences and attitudes toward English speaking.

Students who participate in this research will be interviewed individually by me during the school day, being excused from study hall or another class. The interview will last approximately forty minutes and will include a test of English proficiency, the Bilingual Verbal Ability Test. Some students may also be asked to give a follow-up interview at a later date to explain their ideas and feelings more deeply.

Students will not be forced to participate in this research, and they will have the freedom to stop at any time during the interview and return to class. Participation in this study will have no effect on students' grades. Students' answers will be confidential, and quotations in my thesis will be anonymous.

I would request that if your child is going to participate in this study, that you not discuss the topic with your child in advance, as I would like to gather the students' personal, original feelings and ideas for my research. Your child's cooperation would be much appreciated, not only to help me complete my thesis, but also to help make the school's educational atmosphere more effective.

Thank you in advance for you and your child's cooperation with this project.

Sincerely,

Steve Rohrer  
Vice Principal

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, please sign this permission slip and return it to Mr. Rohrer in the envelope provided.

I give permission for my child to be excused from class to be interviewed by Mr. Rohrer for his master's thesis research on Japanese students' experiences and attitudes toward English speaking. My child's comments may be quoted anonymously in Mr. Rohrer's thesis.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

The table below contains data from the interviews which was used to decide when saturation occurred. Each theme which the participant mentioned is marked with an X.

	Name	Perceived Difficulty	Social Groups	Internal Stress	Identity Issues
1	Sachi	X	X	X	X
2	Maki		X		X
3	Yoshi	X		X	X
4	Tetsu	X	X	X	
5	Kenji	X		X	X
6	Chika	X		X	
7	Yuko	X	X	X	X
8	Chiaki	X		X	
9	Shun		X	X	X
10	Hinako	X	X		X
11	Mika	X	X	X	X
12	Mieko	X	X	X	X
13	Keiko	X	X	X	
14	Natsuko	X	X	X	X
15	Nozomi	X	X	X	X
16	Jun	X	X		X
17	Shota		X	X	X
18	Shin		X		X
19	Sora	X	X	X	X
20	Nao	X		X	X
21	Mao	X	X	X	X
22	Atsuya		X	X	X
23	Noriko	X	X	X	X
24	Asako	X	X	X	X

