

For citation:

Okada, Reiko (2012) Understanding the difference of cultures to learn the structure of English. In: Reinelt, R. (ed.) (2012) *Foreign Language Teaching and New Media – What have they Gained?* Rudolf Reinelt Research Laboratory EU Matsuyama, Japan, p. 46 – 53.

Understanding the difference of cultures to learn the structure of English

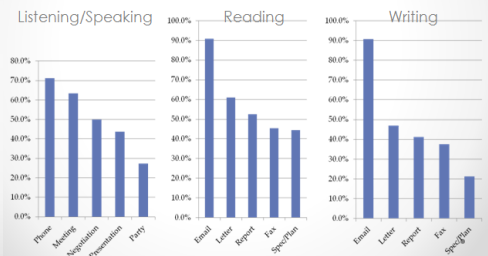
Reiko Okada
Tokai University
reiokada@tokai-u.jp

OUTLINE

1. Necessity of writing in English and problems for Japanese students
2. Differences of English and Japanese structures and common mistakes
3. Differences in cultural background
4. Introduction of cultural differences
5. Students' feedback
6. Future research

Necessity of writing in English

Survey of 7,354 Japanese workers
by Koike et al. (2010)



Problems in learning writing in English in Japan

- Limited exposure to English
- Little practice of writing in English
- Different sentence structures from Japanese
- Rote memorization of each grammar rule
- English is a distant language for Japanese (Otani, 2007)

English is a distant language for Japanese

Difficulty level of languages

106 English native speakers who have studied two or more foreign languages including Japanese:

French: 1~2
Russian: 2~4
Chinese: 5~7
Korean: 9~10
Japanese: 10

Otani(2007)

Mistakes by lower-level students

Yuti p.c used every day that used not yesterday

This night raining. This ~~is~~ unblela. rent OK?

this table on telephon my telephon

On the table telephone is my telephone.

I like game name is TERA

Purpose of this presentation

To show what I tried once and am going to try this semester, hoping that it will help Japanese students learn English structure, and hear comments, advice and suggestions from the audience.

Japanese students' common mistakes

Baba(2005)

1. Lack of subjects or verbs
2. Wrong subject
3. Wrong parts of speech
4. Wrong word order
5. Wrong usage of "be"

Mistakes affected by the structure of the Japanese language

1. **Lack of subjects** or verbs
2. **Wrong subject**
3. Wrong parts of speech
4. **Wrong word order**
5. Wrong usage of "be"

Data collection

4. エリは毎日パソコンを使いますが、昨日は使いませんでした。	Eimer	* I like game name is TERA. I play game every day. is I play 5 hours everyday. Do you like game?
6. 明日は大学へ来ないつもりです。	Naoya	Yes, very like game. I play Call of Duty, MW2 every day. Do you play the game?
6. 彼女の弟は2年前高校生でしたか?	Satoshi	Yes, I play the game is Kirby's Dream land. I like kirby.
7. 私たちは8月にハワイに行くことに決めました。		What do you like collector?
8. A: エアコンをつけてもらえますか? B: はい。		
9. ゆうへ遅く寝たので、今朝10時まで起きられませんでした。		

Sentence structures that cause mistakes

	English	Japanese
①	S-V-O	S-O-V (O-S-V) (_ O-V)
②	Subject + Verb	Topic + Comment
③	Noun + modifier	Modifier + Noun

① Position of S, V and O

- E: Tom hit a home run. SVO
 (Subject) (Verb) (Object)
- J: (1) Tom-ga home run-wo utta. SOV
 (Subject) (Object) (Verb)
- (2) home run-wo Tom-ga utta. OSV
 (Object) (Subject) (Verb)
- (3) (X) home run-wo utta. _OV
 (Subject) (Object) (Verb)

Mistakes affected by (S)-O-V

- Yuri pc used every day that used not yesterday
 S O V
 Yuri uses her PC every day, (but) she didn't use it yesterday.
- Because went to bed late, this morning didn't get up at 10.
 (S) V (S) V
 Because I went to bed late, I didn't get up at 10 this morning.
- This night raining. This unblela. rent ok?
 O V
 It will be raining tonight. Can I borrow(rent) this umbrella?

② Subject or Topic (Li, 1976)

Different grammatical relations:

- (1) Subject-prominent language (subject-predicate)
 Subject plays a major role and Verb determines the subject.
- (2) Topic-prominent language (topic-comment)
 Topic plays a significant role in the sentence construction.

Subject or Topic (Li, 1976)

E: Subject-prominent

We met Mary today.
 (Subject) (Predicate)

J: Topic-prominent & subject-prominent

gakkoo-wa (boku-ga) isogashi-kata.
 School topic marker I subject-marker busy past tense
 (Topic) (Comment)

Mistakes affected by Topic-Comment

- Because went to bed late, this morning didn't get up at 10.
 Topic Comment
- I can't get up at 10 o'clock because last night is late in the bed
 Topic Comment
- This night raining. This unblela. rent ok?
 Topic Comment Topic comment.

③ Position of Nouns and Modifiers

E: The book on the desk is mine.

The book to read today is an important book.

The book given by Mr. Brown is difficult.

The book I bought yesterday is useful.

(Noun) (Modifier)

J: Desk-no ue-no hon-wa bokuno-da.
 desk on book mine

kyoo yomu hon-wa daijina hon-da.
 today read book important book
 (Modifier) (Noun)

Mistakes affected by M+Noun order(1)

On the table telephone is my telephone.

The telephone on the table is my telephone.

I bought read book in train.

I bought a book to read in the train.

Do you play the game?

Yes, I play the game is Kirby's Dream land.

Yes, the game I play is Kirby's Dream land.

Mistakes affected by M+Noun order(2)

Mary make pizza is very delicious

The pizza Mary makes is very delicious.

I like game name is TERA

The name of the game I like is TERA

I ate Italian food yesterday very delicious

The Italian food I ate yesterday was very delicious.

What to teach?

Baba(2005) suggests:

Sentence structures of English,
such as "who+ did+ what" and word order,
comparing with the Japanese structure.

Okada's suggestion.

Cultures of Western countries,
especially individual-oriented mind,
comparing with Japanese group-oriented culture.

Why cultures before structures?

Language

⇒ Verbal expression of culture

Structure of a language

⇒ Style of communication in the culture

If we understand how people think (or their culture)
in that society,

⇒ we can get a general idea about their
communication style

Background cultures of English and Japanese

Western world	Japan
Individual-oriented	Group-oriented

Hofstede's comparison

Table 1 Culture Dimension Scores for Twelve Countries (0 = low, 100 = high)

Orientation	Power Distance	Uncert Avoidance	Individualism	Masculinity	Long-term
Arab countries	80	68	38	53	
France	68	86	71	43	
Germany	35	65	67	66	31
Great Britain	35	35	89	66	25
Netherlands	38	53	80	14	44
Hong Kong	68	29	25	57	96
Indonesia	78	48	14	46	
Japan	54	92	46	95	80
Brazil	69	76	38	49	65
Mexico	81	82	30	69	
U.S.A.	40	46	91	62	29
West Africa	77	54	20	46	16

MANAGEMENT SCIENCE/Vol. 40, No. 1, January 1

Why are Japanese group-oriented?

Geographically and historically isolated from all the major countries
 ↓
 Highly homogeneous society
 ↓
 Like a single great family
 ↓
 Emphasis on the **group** where each belongs

Cultures affect communication style

	Western world	Japan
Culture	Individual-oriented	Group-oriented
Communication style	Direct, Clear Individual assertion Understand by words Logic, fact	Indirect, Vague Harmony, Cooperative, Avoid confrontation Understand by instinct Implication, Feeling

To look at Japanese culture objectively

Survey with 8 Japanese and 12 foreigners in Tokai University

"Suppose you live in an apartment building. After you go to bed, you hear loud noise upstairs, which bothers your sleep. You have work tomorrow and have to sleep now. What would you do?"

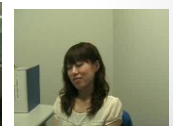
Japanese answered ...

I am afraid of talking to the person directly, so I wouldn't.

I would go to the janitor.



I would plug my ears and try to sleep.

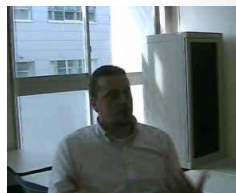


I would do nothing.

An Australian and a British answered ...



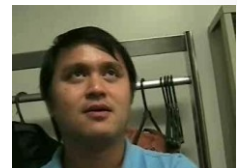
I would politely let them know that they are making too much noise...



I would go upstairs, knock on their door, and ask them "Please be quiet because I'm trying to sleep."

An Arabian, Chinese and Laos answered...

I would ask politely to keep quiet.



I would go direct to knock at the door, and ask, "May I ?", "Please avoid to make a noise. It's night time and we need to relax and..."

Group-oriented culture has brought ...

To operate the group system successfully

- ⇒ avoid open confrontations
- unfold one's own views
- indirect communication
- vague implication

(Reischauer, 1978)

Individual-oriented culture

Cultural diversity

- ⇒ verbal skills are necessary
- clear & direct
- logic & facts

Comparison of expression style (Ito, 2008)

(Japanese)

(English)

Kanta lent me this umbrella.
この傘、寛太さんが貸してくれたんです。

We wanted to bring back the umbrella we borrowed.

My little sister was with me, so it was helpful. メイがいたから助かったの。

We didn't have one.

(But I'm afraid he got soaking wet.) でも寛太さんが、濡れちゃって。

(But I'm afraid he got soaking wet.)

I am grateful.
ありがとうございました。

Anyway, please thank him for us.

Difference of expressions (1)

"Direct or Indirect"

E: "Will **you** marry **me**?"

(Subject and object --- Clear)

J: 「一緒になろうよ。」

"Let's be together."

(Who and who? --- Vague)

Difference of expressions (2)

"Yes or No"

E: "Didn't you watch that program?"

"**No**, I didn't."

I didn't watch it.
(Individual-oriented)

J: "Ano bangumi-wo minakatta-desuka?"

"Hai. Mimasen-des hita."

Yes, I didn't see it."

I agree with you.
(Group-oriented)

Difference of expressions (3)

"Main word(noun) First or Last"

J: 先月、病气だったトムのお母さんを訪問したときに、トムと一緒にお昼を食べていた**女性**のことを知っているわ。

(Modifier)

(Noun)

(Noun)

(Modifier)

E: I know **the woman** who was eating

lunch with Tom last month when we

visited his mother who was ill in bed.

Group-oriented culture

Emphasis of the group
 ↓
 Important is harmony, cooperation, and understanding without words
 ↓
 Not direct expression.
 High context language
 Nonverbal forms of communication

Cultures affect their language structures

Individual-oriented culture:
 State clearly, logically, directly.
 Subject + Verb at the beginning
 Important nouns first, modifiers last

Group-oriented culture:
 No need to say everything
 No need to express directly, clearly
 General atmosphere of the group
 Important words at the end

Students' feedback

英語の伝達方法は、きりしているのに対して、日本語はなめて曖昧な感じが思いました。

Compared with the clear expression of English, how vague the Japanese language is!

トトロのアメ(とっても美味するとき)
 日本人に違いがでるのかとおどろきました。

I was surprised to know that the subtitle in English is so different from the Japanese original expression.

表現できない事からの不思議が解決された。

Now I know why I can't express myself well in English.

Students' feedback

工	IT	技	術	者	とし	て	、	世	界	の	人	々	と	い	っ	し	よ		
に	任	事	を	す	る	に	は	、	言	語	も	そ	の	理	解	す	る	た	け
で	は	な	く	表	現	方	法	の	文	化	、	考	え	方	の	違	い	と	つ
い	て	よ	く	理	解	を	し	な	け	れ	ば	な	ら	な	い	。	例	え	ば
日	本	人	は	重	要	な	こ	と	を	最	後	に	述	べ	る	が	、	あ	る
国	で	は	重	要	な	こ	と	は	最	初	に	述	べ	る	。	そ	の	よ	う
な	他	の	国	と	の	違	い	を	理	解	し	、	自	身	の	こ	と	は	客
観	的	に	理	解	し	て	い	く	こ	と	が	今	後	世	界	と	関	わ	る
た	め	に	重	要	と	な	る	。											

Japanese people say an important thing at the end, but in other countries, at the beginning.

It is necessary to understand ourselves(our culture, our words) objectively.

Students' feedback

はい、日本語を英語では言葉のなすへ方が違
 う日本語は少しずつ説明を(と)辞書の(に)対し
 て英語は、初めに本題を説明の(を)あ(る)こ(の)
 ような(違)い(を)よく(め)英語を(学)ぶ(に)い(く)べ(さ)だ

In Japanese, we speak little by little toward the main idea, but in English, important ideas come first of all.

今日は日本人の叫聲(けいせい)が、
 英語では、初めに本題を説明(せつめい)の(を)あ(る)こ(の)
 ような(違)い(を)よく(め)英語を(学)ぶ(に)い(く)べ(さ)だ
 英語では、初めに本題を説明(せつめい)の(を)あ(る)こ(の)
 ような(違)い(を)よく(め)英語を(学)ぶ(に)い(く)べ(さ)だ

I don't talk much, so I've thought saying reasons every time in English is waste of time. But today I realized that was wrong.

Discussion

Students study English for six years before university.

- memorize detailed grammar rules,
- don't notice the basic differences of the structure.



University students should learn background cultures.

- their own culture
- culture of English speaking countries



Will it help students learn the general expression style and structure of English?

To teach Japanese culture together with western culture in order to give students a general basic idea of structural difference.

I am planning to try it with my students this semester and see if it helps them learn structure of English.

I would like to hear a lot of comments, advice and suggestions from the audience.

.

.