

Millennium Approaches

Part 2

Teaching English in Japan: An Exercise in Failure

John F. Mancuso

Abstract

The dominant language teaching approach used throughout the nation of Japan, regardless of institution, is the *Yakudoku* (translation reading) Method or the Grammar-Translation Method with the dominant vehicle for teaching the foreign language being Japanese. It is my contention that this archaic, out-dated, ineffectual approach is hindering true language development and will ultimately lead learners indoctrinated in this manner to perceive language not as a living entity, but merely as a system of abstract concepts. It is also my belief that because of this obsolete method, the very reason for the existence of language: Communication, is subliminally being replaced by the concept that form is more important than content. Additionally, the foreign language teacher and classroom are void of any cultural indoctrination in the language being studied. Consequently, language production level is retarded and the unknowing student, once faced with a native speaker, goes from one disastrous cross-cultural encounter to the next. It is my intention, however, that by analyzing and dissecting traditional Japanese language teaching ideas I will not only be “destructing” but rather constructing a new thinking of language teaching for the Japanese populace. It is because at the dawn of this new millennium a new language teaching construct for Japan is overdue.

Introduction

My first thoughts after being met at Narita Airport, in 1989, by several administrators and English professors of a Tokyo-area university was, “Humm, that was strange!” Well, it was—at least in the context of a conversation held entirely in English. The register was highly formal, speech was stilted and the atmosphere tense. My eyes darted left and right and one thought echoed in my mind: Get me out of here. I grabbed onto another native English speaker hired (like me) to design a new curriculum and develop new materials for a program specifically targeting Freshman and introduced her so that I could quickly escape. A few minutes later, she walked up to me and gave me a glaring, “Gee thanks.” I asked

my new colleague how she managed to get away from her group and she told me that she just grabbed another teacher to introduce to replace her. So went my first months in Japan.

Since we were the first group invited to Japan, there were countless welcome parties. Parties where we were welcomed, but also where we were introduced, where we introduced ourselves and where the above scene was replayed numerous times, not only word for word, but most frighteningly gesture for gesture.

I noticed that there were two distinct groups of people. The first group was the Professor (capital P) of English or the Sensei (capital S). The second was the ordinary, non-academic who studied or was still studying English.

The first group, the Professional (capital P) curiously, was less capable of communicating in English than the ordinary Japanese person, even though these people possessed a profound understanding of the literature (be it British or American, the only two that seem to exist in Japan) or a profound understanding of linguistics. Many times they were unable to express even the simplest of ideas. And many more times than I care to remember, these poor users of English said or did something (surely unbeknownst to them) that was an outright insult!

In my brief 15-year career as a language teacher, however, I have developed a language teacher's face: no matter what is said to me, no matter how incorrect or absurd, I react in context to the conversation. (Trying to communicate in a foreign language is embarrassing enough. You don't want your teacher laughing in your face!!) A sad commentary on Japanese language teaching is that out of all the countries that I have traveled to and lived in, Japan is by far a country populated by people who have no understanding of communication. And more than the majority of these poor users of language are themselves "language professionals." The blind leading the innocent. Carriers of disease-riddled theories and methods in search of new hosts.

After nine years it is time to speak. It is time for someone, whose head no doubt will be placed on the sacrificial chopping block, to attempt to open the minds of the lost. The new millennium approaches and with it monumental changes. One of the great secrets of some countries including America, Canada, Sweden, Denmark etc., is in their ability to change—to transform themselves. This chameleon-like metamorphosis can be seen in economic policies, managerial approaches, societal philosophies. Japan, unfortunately, is a country that abhors change. The preservation of the status-quo is paramount: Progress be damned! But Japan has forgotten that in order to move ahead, change is needed, experimentation of ideas with the inadequate ones cast aside and the successful ones implemented. Indeed, sometimes progression is regression. But Japan remains transfixed. The Old, the Seniors, the "Senpai" at the helm, navigating waters as usual. But what Japan fails to see is that year-2000 mammoth iceberg looming in the distance waiting to collide with Japan's titanic stupidity. Education is what will save humanity in Japan and education is what can save Japan from the icy depths of world

indifference, because the global village we now live in has no time to wait for a country stuck in the past.

For a decade those gifted with foresight have been ringing the warning bell for Japan to get its economic house in order. Today, we see the devastating effects of an economy run by outdated models. Japan must implement drastic change now if this country is to avoid a societal catastrophe. I speak here not of just change in language education but in education as a whole. (But this topic will have to wait for another paper.) Still, quelling a societal disaster is intrinsically linked to the advancement of language education.

English has emerged as the de facto lingua franca of all peoples of the world—the Esperanto of the third millennium. Comprehension of this fact will force a people to educate themselves to truly communicate in English thus allowing their society to enter into this global dialog. Any society negligent in English education will be locked out and over-looked. In the global village called earth, any country not joined in this world community is effectively committing societal suicide.

Today, English is used by at least 750 million people, and barely half of those speak it as a mother tongue. Some estimates have put that figure closer to 1 billion. Whatever the total, English at the end of the twentieth century is more widely scattered, more widely spoken and written, than any other language has ever been. It has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language.⁽¹⁾

Clearly, English will be a dominant force for the foreseeable future and a successful future will be had by those who embrace it. Chauvinistic this is not; cognizant this is. Some Japanese mistakenly believe that gaining fluency in a foreign language somehow will make them less Japanese. This notion thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Some Japanese will also attempt to speak the foreign language in a form that is incorrect in order to show compatriots that they have not forsaken their native language and culture.

This tendency, in my view stems from the Confucianistic philosophy that produces a strong 'group mentality,' which forces people to kill their individuality and assimilate into the community they belong to. In a sphere dominated by this mentality, any deviation from conventionalism is frowned upon because an expression of individuality produces unpredictability, which is anathema to a community that prizes mediocrity.⁽²⁾

Gaining fluency in a language non-native to someone, must be viewed as positive. Gaining fluency in the most powerful language spoken today must be viewed as a patriotic act and not as one of treachery or somehow un-Japanese. Acquiring fluency in English will allow speakers to bring their country's views to others who do not share the same culture or same values. In today's democratic global-community, voicing these opinions strikes a balance on the world-stage. In this

coming millennium, speaking English will be the most patriotic act a Japanese (or any other) can carry out.

Other languages, however, will not vanish from the shores of this nation in the coming millennium, on the contrary, for Japan, languages like Chinese and Spanish will be similarly necessary. Equally important for the future of the Japanese is the concept that venturing out of your own language and culture will allow you to better see in. Studying languages and cultures other than your own strengthens your national self-identity.

Presently Japan is at a cultural crossroad. Japanese youth are rebelling in ways never before seen: crime, delinquency, drug abuse and prostitution (Enjo Kosai) are rampant, but yet the bureaucracy that shapes this country does not acknowledge the dangerous trend before it. It is difficult to change national policy once set in place, but once the human mind has been forged, it is next to impossible to modify! Those Japanese young enough and open enough to view themselves and their country as a contributing member of the world community are the future of this country. Just like the students of the professors who greeted me at Narita Airport when I first arrived in Japan.

A teacher, however, belongs to a different group. A group that must never allow its mind to calcify. A teacher must always be flexible, nimble and ready to change curriculum, course content, teaching ideologies and methods at a moment's notice. Sadly, Japanese teachers will be a contributing factor to Japan's cataclysmic societal meltdown. It is because these very people entrusted to educate and assist enlightenment are themselves gate keepers of the past. Dinosaurs of decayed dictums unwilling to open their eyes to the present and embrace new ideas. The trends are clear, the evidence bountiful. Millennium approaches and with its dawn rests the fate of this nation.

An Historical and Cultural Perspective

It can be said that "modern" language teaching began in Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912). It was at this turbulent time in Japanese history that, once faced with the West, the country was shocked into drastic modernization. Because Britain and the United States were perceived as the most dominant of industrialized nations, English was adopted as indispensable "for importing the Western technology necessary for modernization."⁽³⁾ During this time, language study was centered on reading and not on conversation.

It was not until the Taisho era (1912-1926) that the concept of conversing in a language was introduced by Harold E. Palmer and his Oral Method. It is said that the use of the monolingual approach to English language teaching as a second language, "became the hallmark which set ELT apart from foreign language teaching in Britain."⁽⁴⁾

It seems, however, that his enthusiasm for oral methods did not always suit

the established patterns of relationships in Japanese classrooms. To work properly, oral activities require both linguistic self-confidence and a certain amount of histrionic gusto. As a native speaker, Palmer did not have to worry about the former, and as a keen amateur actor he no doubt exhibited plenty of the latter. His Japanese customers, however, preferred reading and 'felt that the oral method was valid only when a native English speaker conducted the class.'⁽⁵⁾

This notion of using the Direct Method (question and answer) as the main vehicle to Japanese proficiency in English was presupposed by Palmer as being the most effective route for competency.

The Direct Method, as we have seen, originated in a desire to do something that the [Japanese] schools of the time were not doing, and probably could not do, namely to teach foreign language as practical skills for everyday purposes of social survival. Questions of educational value and 'worthwhile-ness' were irrelevant, what mattered was the ability to communicate effectively in ordinary ('trivial') life. In a Japanese school, however, with complex traditions of behaviour quite unlike European schools, and with teachers who had little confidence in their spoken fluency, it was unrealistic to hope that the validity of the method would overcome the bruising of sensitivities that would accompany an attempt to implement it.⁽⁶⁾

Indeed, it is this cultural mindset of the Japanese that continues to hinder them and set them apart from other nationalities and from being competent in conversing in languages other than Japanese. Professor Yoko Matsuka of the Matsuka Phonetics Institute considers Japanese people to be, "a nation of perfectionists. The problem is, if you want fluency, then accuracy has to go. If you're always worried about accuracy, you'll never get to the fluency level you're aiming for."⁽⁷⁾

In the typical language classroom, " 'Classical' Japanese teachers of English believe :

1. L1 as a medium of instruction.
2. L1 as a medium of thought.
3. Language is acquired mainly through memorization.
4. Emphasis on translation.
5. Manipulation of language elements as an end in itself.
6. Grammar is a key to L2 learning.
7. Intensive study of L2 material.
8. Stress on correctness.
9. L2 as an object of study.
10. Teacher centered classroom procedures.⁽⁸⁾

Compounding the difficulty of getting a Japanese student to become proficient in

the second language is what,

Anderson has described [as] four categories of communicative style and how they bear on classroom behavior of Japanese students learning English. He identifies group-mindedness as the tendency for students to be highly aware of the expectations of their peers. A related category is consensual decision-making, which results in a tentative style of communication interaction. The category of formalized speech-making, according to Anderson, accounts for the reluctance of students to speak unless well-prepared. Finally, listener responsibility means there is a greater obligation for the listener to understand, than for the speaker to explain.⁽⁹⁾

There are five important points to keep in mind when describing the typical Japanese, college age, language student. They are :

1. Respect for teacher as authority (in both knowledge and power).
2. Hesitant to communicate interactively. (Ping-Pong versus bowling).
3. Follows instructions exactly (little variation or individualization).
4. Unwilling to make mistakes, make guesses or ask questions.
5. Hesitates to respond unless called upon.⁽¹⁰⁾

It is all of the above factors of history and cultural indoctrination that the Japanese must overcome for the coming millennium in order to be successful second language speakers.

The Yakudoku & Grammar-Translation Methods

Traces of European Language teaching of the nineteenth century can be found in the Japanese version of Yakudokuho or translation reading method.

Yakudoku more accurately reflects an earlier European scholastic tradition of classical hermeneutics, and in fact derives from methods of decoding ancient Chinese text developed in Japan many centuries ago. In its most explicit version it is a three-stage operation, involving first a word-by-word translation of the target sentence, then a reordering of the words thus derived, and finally a recoding into Japanese syntax.⁽¹¹⁾

The Japanese goal is to focus more on the content of the passage being translated than on gaining proficiency in the functions of the language used in the selection.

Yakudoku undoubtedly constitutes a rigorous mental discipline that can be argued to have an educational value comparable to that associated with the study of classical languages in post-renaissance Europe. However, there is little doubt that it introduces marked distortions and inefficiencies (and not only in reading) if language learning is viewed in communicative terms.⁽¹²⁾

The grammar-translation method is different in that grammar, vocabulary and examples of translations are used in order to demonstrate the correct use of the language.

The method is so ordinary that it is sometimes difficult to see what all the fuss was about. Each new lesson had one or two new grammar rules, a short vocabulary list, and some practice examples to translate. Boring, maybe, but hardly the horror story we are sometimes asked to believe. However, it also contained seed which eventually grew into a jungle of obscure rules, endless lists of gender classes and gender-class exceptions, self-conscious 'literary' archaism, snippets of philology, and a total loss of genuine feeling for living language.⁽¹³⁾

And this is where the native speaker comes in to the Japanese picture. In 1989, The School Course Guidelines, put forth by the Ministry of Education, incorporated the idea of using native speakers of English, German and French to come to Japan, for a specified period to work along side Japanese language teachers in junior and senior high schools. The programs that were created are called, Japan English Teaching Program or JET and Assistant Language Teacher Program or ALT. The majority of people who are hired by the Japanese government are fresh out of university and have no practical knowledge of language teaching, although MOMBUSHO guidelines strictly outline that participants must have "qualifications as language teachers or who have studied the teaching of English, French or German as a foreign language or are motivated to study it."⁽¹⁴⁾

There is no doubt that the loop-hole that allow JET and ALT candidates into the Japanese education system is the, "motivation to study it [language teaching]." It should then come as no surprise that the two programs are plagued by problems and is constantly criticized by students that have classes with JET and ALT participants, Japanese junior and high school teachers and from the very JET and ALT participants themselves.

Translation in Language Teaching

As an undergraduate student at Queens College in Flushing, N. Y., in 1985, I had the opportunity to take several classes with Dr. Gregory Rabassa who is a faculty member in the Romance Language Department. If you are not aware, Dr. Rabassa is presently considered to be one of the most renowned translators of literature in the world today.

I will never forget the first class of Dr. Rabassa's translation course. Even though he is not a native speaker of Spanish, all the classes I took were given in Spanish. The class was filled to capacity; all of us waiting for the master to make his entrance. There was nervous chatter from some recounting their more memorable encounters with the maestro. A hush fell over us as he entered and

took his position at the head of the class. He looked up and said, "Most or probably all of you will not be able to translate. Maybe one of you will." I, like almost everyone else in the class was left dumbfounded. In the classes that followed, however, Dr. Rabassa demonstrated what he meant by his first statement. His translations were always better than the examples that were written by us which were on the blackboard.

I know that I do not have the capacity to sufficiently render a text written in Spanish to English. However, when it comes to simultaneous interpretation, I show mastery over this skill that I have never formally studied. My mother, a native speaker of Spanish, is incapable of doing either. She always becomes frustrated because the translated language never sounds correct to her. But I could learn to translate written text and my mother could practice both written and spoken forms to satisfy a reader or listener with the main idea of what is being recounted in the foreign language.

The main point here is that translation is, at a very basic level, a skill that can be learned and at the highest level, an art form (which many times do not resemble the original) like the magnificent examples that Professor Rabassa has had published. It is interesting to note, that several of the languages, like Portuguese and Russian for example, that Dr. Rabassa translates from, he is absolutely incapable of speaking!

Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language. Each exercise involves some kind of loss of meaning, due to a number of factors. It provokes a continuous tension, a dialectic, an argument based on the claims of each language. The basic loss is on a continuum between overtranslation (increased detail) and undertranslation (increased generalizations).⁽¹⁵⁾

Some of the more bizarre forms of English that are polluting printed matter and offending the ear drums of native speakers, in Japan, are in direct connection to translation. Here is a small sample of this truly unique Japanese variant of the English language :

1. Cut and Parm
2. We lent a boat that have double cockpit. Enjoy twilight tour on Sun Francisco Bay. Good feeling from the U.S.A. TO THE WILD.
3. Designed for fashion minded people. This will refresh your senses.
4. (Sample menu fare at a restaurant in Shinjuku)

Wiener Coffee.....	¥600
Shrimos Pilaf	¥1380
Cheese An Assortment.....	¥650
Crab meet Rise Gratin.....	¥1680

Mix Pizza	¥850
Potato and Bacon Burn of Cheese	¥800
5. Challenge Mate Club. Challenge kids. We have challenge spirits. ⁽¹⁶⁾	

Japanese language teachers that use translation as a technique in their class do not acknowledge the complexity of the translation process. To begin with, should you render a faithful or free translation? What register should you use? Should idioms or colloquialism be used or not? How do you incorporate cultural characteristics? How can you foresee who the audience will be or should a certain audience be targeted? The considerations that one has to ponder before translating are far too burdensome and artificial for the language learner.

Translation theory derives from comparative linguistics and within linguistics, it is mainly an aspect of semantics; all questions of semantics relate to translation theory. Sociolinguistics, which investigates the social registers of language and the problems of languages in contact in the same or neighboring countries, has a continuous bearing on translation theory. Sociosemantics, the theoretical study of *parole*—language in context—as opposed to *langue*—the code or system of a language—indicates the relevance of real examples—spoken, taped, written, printed. Since semantics is often presented as a cognitive subject without connotations, rather than as an exercise in communication, semiotics—the science of signs—is an essential factor in translation theory.⁽¹⁷⁾

Another dilemma that a student will be faced with is that a word or phrase will have different meanings to different people. The American philosopher, C.S. Peirce, who is considered the founder of semiotics, studied this important area of discourse.

He stressed the communicative factor of any sign: ‘the meaning of a sign consists of all the effects that may conceivably have practical bearings on a particular interpretant, and which will vary in accordance with the interpretant’—no sign, therefore, has a self-contained meaning. Typically, to the reader an iced lolly may mean a flavoured frozen confection on a stick (as a non-participant, the purpose of the object is not important to him), but to the manufacturer it means a profitable source of income, to a housewife a messy nuisance for which she gets a demand all the year round, to a child a satisfying cold drink on a stick which lasts a long time. If one puts oneself as a reader of a translated text in place of the manufacturer, the housewife or the child, the importance of Peirce’s theory of meaning for translation theory is clear.⁽¹⁸⁾

Finally, from a purely cognitive position, translation will interfere with the internalization of the second language thus hindering acquisition. Any “teacher”

using translation in a language class, then is being injurious to the people who are attempting to learn the language. This method of language acquisition must stop at once or the Japanese will forever be associated as a people incapable of using a language other than their own!

The Missing Cultural Component

“Communication [is] the ways in which man reads meaning into what other men do. Language is the most technical of the message systems. It is used as a model for the analysis of the others. In addition to language there are other ways in which man communicates that either reinforce or deny what he has said with words. Man learns to read different segments of a communication spectrum covering events of a fraction of a second up to events of many years.”⁽¹⁹⁾

People do not realize the extraordinary control their culture has over them. The silent rules that govern our every gesture. The invisible hand that molds our every facial expression. The unheard voice speaking our every utterance. These rules allow us to enter into the collective, the society. Together there is no difference, we are one, united as a people.

Once separated, however, from the collective and placed into a different group, those traits that once united now separate and distinguish us as the outsider. What was once common is now unknown and subject to speculation. The strong grip of culture that anchored us is at once transformed into a moss-covered incline with nowhere to stop us from sliding to the abyss of cultural uncertainty.

The blind whose expertise lie in the field of grammar do not comprehend the totality that is the communication experience. The grammarian believes simply that communication is the skill of placing words in their correct syntactic position: follow the grammar rules and you will be able to communicate. On one level, albeit simplistic, this appears reasonable if it were not for the fact that communication is an extraordinarily complex series of events. The Japanese grammarian's feeble understanding of the complexity of communication lures the unsuspecting into the lion's den. The professor of literature in Japan is no different, spending the majority of class time dissecting sentences and examining fragments of prose. The literature class in Japan is transformed into a biology laboratory with texts functioning as petri dishes and dictionary and grammar texts operating as microscope.

Users of the foreign language are unfortunately never taught the enormous potential hazards of speaking the foreign tongue. The non-native user is never taught that those having been brought up with the language will be truly speaking it: using this mode of communication naturally without any hesitation nor any thought, acting and re-acting as spontaneously as the words spilling forth from their mouth. One mistake is all that is needed for the non-native speaker to provoke the native language user. A simple glance, wrongly timed can transform

the speaker's intended meaning. Unfortunately placed stress or intonation can metamorphosize the utterance. Incorrectly ordered words or mistakenly chosen ones can create ambiguity. Indeed, countless dangers are hidden before the foreign user of language.

“Any culture is primarily a system for creating, sending, storing, and processing information. Communication underlies everything. Although we tend to regard language as the main channel of communication, research reveals that anywhere from 80 to 90 percent of information is communicated by other means.”⁽²⁰⁾ This being true, we can say that only 10 to 20 percent of communication consists of verbal language. This is an extraordinary fact! How many grammar teachers comprehend the significance of this truth?

I am reminded of the very first English departmental meeting I attended, at my present work-place. This June meeting was for the committee to write the English component for the entrance examinations that would take place the following February and March. The meeting lasted some 90 minutes and during this time I was asked and contributed nothing. Indeed, not being able to communicate in Japanese, I had no idea what was being said nor could I even think of speaking. I sat, quietly as the chair spoke and gave us organizational instructions to follow for a meeting that would take place in September. Several months later, a Japanese colleague mentioned that at a meeting I seemed very angry. It was quite possible, we are human and we do, at times, become upset. However, I would definitely have remembered being or becoming “angry” at a meeting. Indeed, the other native English speaker, a Briton, did not perceive anything amiss with me. At the time of this conversation I could not recall the incident. It was not until several days later I remembered that, the meeting in question, must have been the entrance examination meeting. In fact, I would not have even remembered this event had it not been for the fact that the meeting was the very first one that I had attended; a very memorable event. I spoke to my colleague again and said that I had not been angry. If anything, I was excited (being the first meeting). It was not for some four years later that I fully understood what was seen by my Japanese colleagues. I had just ended a grueling discussion with an intimate friend concerning a familial problem I was faced with. We were walking back to the train station in west Shinjuku when we passed a modern office building with a facade made of a glass-like material. At a distance I could see us walking closer to the building and when we came upon the building, for the first time I realized what others were seeing. I was frowning and yes, looked extremely upset, you could even say intimidating. I was not upset; I was contemplative (Figure 1). I was deep in thought and was listening attentively to my friend as he continued to give me advice and as I continued to analyze what he had been saying for the past several hours. Seeing myself for the first time startled me and for the very first time in my life I could understand some of the reactions I had received from Japanese people.

In a public speaking class I teach, I immediately understood why students would

stop, at times, mid-utterance when, standing in front of the class delivering their speech and coming upon me as they scanned the audience. I am always at the back of the class, alone at a desk, taking copious notes on their performance. Since I only have a few minutes to listen, think and then analyze what the speakers are saying and how they are saying it, I am concentrating deeply, trying to write as much as I can in the shortest possible time. What the students are seeing and what they are reacting to is my expression. The difference in my appearance is striking (in Figure 2). What still boggles my mind, however, is that, at my first meeting, not one of my Japanese colleagues came up to me and asked if I was all right. If someone had perceived that I was upset or angry, why didn't someone ask if I was all right?

The Japanese ethnocentric view of the world is evident in this non-response response. The aversion to confrontation is equally apparent. I think that the reader will agree that any English speaker (indeed any human possessing humanity) would at the very least inquire as to a person's state of being, if found in the same situation. "The Japanese preference for communication by indirect, nonverbal means is often manifested in the use of gestures. While Americans and other Westerners tend to gesture to emphasize the meaning of what they are saying, Japanese often employ gestures in place of direct spoken expression."⁽²¹⁾

Additionally, the Japanese concept of *ishin denshin*, which is loosely translated as non-verbal communication is misunderstood by Japanese; the assumption being that the same non-verbal cues are used by all peoples of the world.



Figure 1. The Thinking Mancuso.



Figure 2. The Happy Mancuso.

After a meeting at another Japanese university, a Japanese colleague casually turned to me and asked what my thoughts were on language teaching. In the middle of my answer, a native-English speaking colleague interjected and added his own opinions. I quickly rebutted and in several seconds we were engaged in a lively discussion. Our Japanese colleague threw up his hands and said, "Please I

didn't intend to start an argument." I turned to my Japanese colleague and said that it is enjoyable to have a heated discussion. However, he would have none of it. He apologized profusely and walked away. My only thought was, "Sad, he can use the language, but he doesn't have any idea how to speak it."

Westerners tend to have a conversation like a game of tennis, where the turns rotate back and forth with great frequency. The Japanese normally do not engage in direct responses, but tend to voice their thoughts individually, separately and from the same starting point, much like bowling.⁽²¹⁾

One final example occurred while I was entered into an MA course at NYU. A parking lot I always used had a new worker. He was young, extremely tall, slender and had blond hair. What indicated to me that he was a foreigner and starting his very first job was his immaculately starched white shirt and perfectly fitted uniform with matching bow tie. All the other attendants shunned the uniform, especially the corny tie! In New York City, if you are not aware, parking lot attendants of the major car park chains are pleasant courteous people, (an anomaly for NYC) because the customer is paying a premium to park there. The blond greenhorn worker greeted me with a snarling, "Wait!! I'm busy!! I can't help you now!!" And he ran off. My immediate reaction was fury albeit internal. The least he could have done was take my key, find out when I expected to return to pick up my car and give me the ticket. When he returned I had calmed down, but in the interim I was trying to place his accent. He was definitely Eastern European. That evening when I returned to pick up my car, I asked him where he was from and he said that he was from Poland. I then asked him how long he had been in the States and he said that he had arrived the week before. The following Monday the manager was parking cars. I asked about the Polish kid and the manager said that the poor boy was badly beaten up by a customer he had insulted. It happened his second day on the job! The manager felt responsible for not explaining how to treat American customers. When the boy recovered and returned to work, he was a changed person. He was kind, patient and above all courteous. The Polish youth was lucky: his lesson in America culture had only cost him a broken nose. So many others are not as fortunate!

So clear to me is the power of culture, that one best heed the warning and not speak until certain of what one wants to say. When two people first come together, whether they are from the same or different cultural group, one question will establish a relationship or not: Do I like this person or not? People do not judge another's communicative ability, lexical prowess or cultural understanding. We base all our relationships on like or dislike and this is based on a cultural construct and nothing else. That is why, as language students we must all obey the power of culture.

The Key to Language Study

Figures three and four illustrate the interactions I have observed and personally experienced between native speakers of a language and non-native speakers. The myriad of problems that arise are not so much a question of cultural intolerance (that is a completely separate situation) but rather of cultural ignorance on the part of both native and non-native speakers.

Without a doubt all parties are responsible for a successful encounter, however, in figure three I assign no responsibility to the native speaker. Figure three is provided to illustrate why communication problems arise between people of different cultures in the first place. As I mentioned already, a native speaker will be speaking the language naturally without any thought to the words or actions being produced. If the native speaker has no understanding of either the culture of the non-native speaker or comprehends the possibility that a misunderstanding might occur, I have thus, assigned zero responsibility to this speaker. Most cross-cultural encounters are represented by figure three. People from different cultural backgrounds meet, exchange information and part. It is because of this ignorance and naiveté that problems arise between these two communicants. If they are lucky and possess self-control, the situation will conclude and they will part without incident. If they are not lucky, the problem then will play-out with an unknown conclusion. This is the danger of cultural ignorance, and the danger all non-native users of language face when attempting to interact with a native speaker.

The non-native speaker, therefore, must be more savvy. Having been properly indoctrinated in the culture of the language being spoken, by the language teacher, the non-native speaker will be able to decipher the barrage of cultural information presented. This, however, unfortunately is not the case.

But herein lies the problem: students studying in Japan are not taught inter-cultural communication skills. Grammar is presented, the language is dissected and translated and the lesson is completed. Fooled and lulled into a state of inebriation by the seemingly simple appearance of grammatical structures, the dipsomaniac speaks never imagining that what is being said will be misunderstood. A grammatically flawless sentence does not mean comprehension!

The idea of culture being an inseparable component of language is considered revolutionary (both positive and negative meanings of the word) in Japan. For me, my first class always begins with the phrase: Language is culture! All problems faced in the world between peoples of different cultures attempting to communicate across their cultural divides are exacerbated by cultural ignorance. The language classroom, therefore, must be the forum where the student is taken, step-by-step through the process of decoding culture.

Figure four is presented to illustrate what should be an everyday circumstance, as we reach the culmination of this century and cross the threshold to the next.

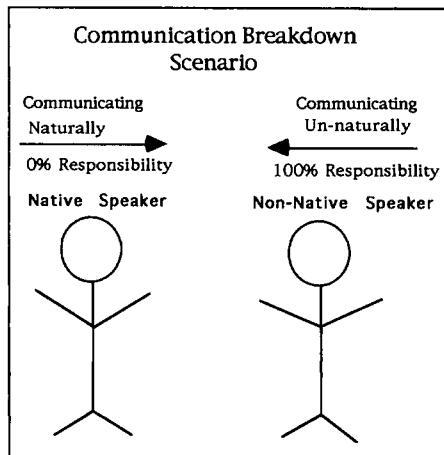


Figure 3.

When entering into any situation, whether it is with a person of the same cultural group as our own or cross-culturally, we should go into the situation with some degree of sensitivity. Clearly I understand that not every situation warrants us to have our “cultural sensitivity radar” on. Many times the brief encounters we enter into, buying bread at a local shop; and standing on a train platform, asking when the next train is due, all call for limited cultural sensitivity.

It is important to note that here, cultural sensitivity, is not referring to the maxim, When in Rome do as the Romans. Clearly, this saying is misunderstood by most people of the world. This famous maxim is referring to your public face. That is, when in Rome and you are outside, in the public eye, it is prudent to do as a Roman or you will not only draw unnecessary attention to yourself, possibly violate some ordinance, but most importantly create negative feelings by your cultural insensitivity. If you are in Rome, out of the public view, and you are speaking Japanese (be you Japanese or not), it would be outrageous to act in any other way except as a Japanese. Thus, When in Rome do as a Roman, simply means: When in a foreign place, follow all local customs as to avoid any troublesome difficulties. But, when in Rome and you are speaking Swahili, you had better do as a Kenyan does!

Almost all of my Japanese colleagues call me, “Mr. Mancuso” or at times, “Professor Mancuso.” Our entire relationship, however, is based in English. When I first arrived at my present place of work, I was criticized (not directly) for using first names with my colleagues in the English department. Naturally, I use the honorific suffix of “-san” or title “Sensei” with my colleagues who I only speak Japanese with. This is only a simple example, but one that goes to the heart of the misuse and misunderstanding of culture in Japan. In my Japanese class, conversely, I refer to myself as Mancuso, John and my teacher as Yoshida-san or Yoshida-sensei. This is natural because our entire relationship takes place in the Japanese

context.

And this brings us to an important concept which is—situational dialects. An entire treatise can be dedicated to this topic, a key concept to true language acquisition. Explaining this idea, Dr. Edward Hall writes,

“There are hundreds if not thousands of different situational frames in cultures as complex as our own. These frames are made up of situational dialects, material appurtenances, situational personalities, and behavior patterns that occur in recognized settings and are appropriate to specific situations. Some common settings and situations are: greeting, working, eating, bargaining, fighting, governing, making love, going to school, cooking and serving meals, hanging out, and the like. The situational frame is the smallest viable unit of a culture that can be analyzed, taught, transmitted, and handed down as a complete entity. Frames contain linguistic, kinesic, proxemic, temporal, social, material, personality, and other components.”⁽²³⁾

Looking at your typical day, from the moment you get up to the moment you go to bed, therefore, can be seen as one long situational dialect—one long seamless stream of one situation that flows into another. Dr. Hall continues by saying,

People anywhere in the world master hundreds of what we came to call “situational dialects” which are used in specific situational frames, none of which is the language taught in the classroom. More important, the classroom is the only place where the classroom form of the language will be found. It is a monument to the human intellect that it has been able to overcome the handicap of classroom instruction and move into the living language.⁽²⁴⁾

And finally,

What the neophyte or outsider needs to know is: What do I say and what do I communicate by my posture, intonation, gestures, and clothing in this particular situation? He also must be able to read his interlocutor’s speech as well as his behavior, regardless of whether he is of the culture or a foreigner. New situations require the learning of new situational dialects—for example, meeting the new in-laws when class or ethnicity is different. In fact, anything that one does for the first time.⁽²⁵⁾

Understanding cultural dialects will unlock the soul to the heretofore invisible meaning of what appears before the recipient of a message.

Thus, the fourth figure refers to situations with more profound implications: discussing negotiations and contracts, establishing relationships both public and private, and encounters that will have more than a moment’s duration, to name just a few. To reiterate—This fourth figure is what all humanity, at the very least,

should be striving toward at the close of this century. Dr. Hall's final remark of his book, *The Dance of Life*, is all the more striking as we see cultural and ethnic intolerance spread to many locals throughout the world: I for one do not think for a moment that He [God] intended us to blow each other off the face of the earth.

The language student must be taught to think before speaking, not just of structure and syntactic components, but most importantly about culture and the intended meaning, both verbal and silent. However, before a student can learn, the teacher must first be taught.

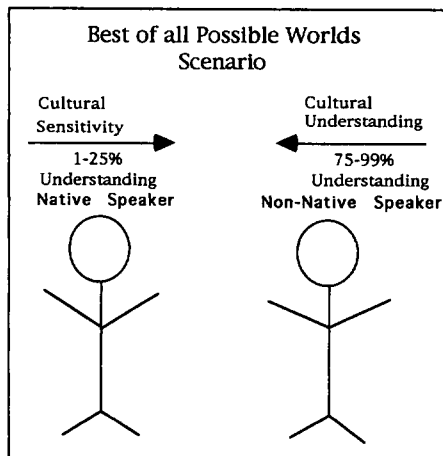


Figure 4.

A New Construct for a New Millennium

What follows are my ideas for what is urgently needed to reform and rectify areas that are flawed in Japanese language education.

A construct for The Ministry of Education:

- The Ministry of Education (MOMBUSHO) must release its iron grip on educators so that they can elaborate on existing materials that reflect the school and local of its residents and students.
- Abolish the testing of English as a requirement for entry into senior high school and university.
- The Japan English Teacher (JET) Program and Assisted Language Teaching Program (ALT) must be abolished with the money saved used for education of Japanese language teachers.

A construct for Japanese textbook publishers:

- Use successful approaches to language study.

- Hire well-known and successful language textbook writers and material developers.

A construct for all language teachers:

- ONLY the target language is to be used in the classroom.
- Teacher education in modern, up-to-date language teaching methods and techniques must be mandatory for anyone that will teach a language class. This must apply for all teachers at all levels of education (elementary to university).
- Understanding that learning a second (or third, fourth etc.) language is not tantamount to naturalizing to the country of the language you are presently studying. In Japan English must be seen as a means for Japan to have its agenda recognized on the world stage.
- The culture of the language being studied must be presented in the class so that proper understanding of the differences and similarities (if any) with the host language are evident.

A construct for elementary school language teachers:

- Center on enjoyable language activities.
- Focus on communication.
- Do NOT test students, but evaluate their progress and group them accordingly.

A construct for junior and senior high school language teachers:

- Continue to focus on communication.
- Make all lessons enjoyable with the focus on improving ability rather than on a grade.
- Introduce creative and expository writing.

A construct for university language teachers:

- Japanese university teachers must break the archaic idea that teaching is simply an exercise that they must do in order to put food on their table while they pursue their real interests.

Conclusion

You might be thinking, “Now why on earth would someone write and publish a paper like this?” The answers are simple—democracy, constructive criticism, and my love of Japan and its people.

Japan, although democratic, is a country where the democratic idea of debate is

shunned, the give and take of discussion non-existent and the free-flow of ideas purged. Japanese, at all levels of society, practice self-censorship. You might counter and say that this is the Japanese way. I would agree if the first or second millennium were approaching. But, the year is 1998 and the third millennium approaches. The world is far different and the old ways of the world no longer hold true. I am not stating that the Japanese change their ethnicity. But for Japan to be successful, important areas of discourse must be modified.

Recently, in a meeting attended solely by English teachers with myself and one British colleague (the only other non-Japanese), I recommended that the discussion take place in English. "Here's a novel idea." I said, in a typical ironic New York manner, "Why not speak in English?" Since we were discussing an area of quite some contention, I thought the culture of English would be a liberating factor and people would be better able to openly and directly voice their opinions. Of course in order to do this, you first have to comprehend how to communicate in the English context. Immediately, one of my Japanese colleagues exclaimed (in English) "This is Japan. Why should we speak English?" To be fair, my colleague told me (privately) that she wanted to "save face" of those not comfortable and those not able to speak in English, for which I could only think, "If you're not going to use the language or if you are not capable of using the language, then why teach English or any language at all?" The lengthy meeting ended, as so many Japanese meetings, with nothing resolved and with the entire subject tabled for yet another meeting.

In an August 7 article published in the Daily Yomiuri, Mr. Shinji Fukukawa, chairman and chief executive officer of the Dentsu Institute for Human Studies in Tokyo, wrote:

It seems inevitable that communication ability will become increasingly important to maintain sound international relations. . . There is no time to waste. Communication skills—in diplomacy, human relations and technology—must be improved [in Japan] to develop trust and social and economic stability at domestic and international levels.⁽²⁶⁾

The hierarchical structure of Japanese society and social interactions are also an important factor in regarding Japan as undemocratic. Teachers at educational institutions, for example toward the lower end of this hierarchical pyramid, are waiting for their turn to come so that they will be able to implement their ideas. The wait could take years, however, maybe even as long as a decade or two, but the Japanese are a patient people. What this younger population of educators forget, though, is that with age comes inertia and indifference to make any meaningful change. Thus, for a country to be truly democratic, all people involved in shaping its policies must be included in the process and not left solely on the periphery.

Constructive criticism or as I like to say, creative criticism is also important in

today's world. This notion is not merely criticism. For example, "This is bad! That doesn't work. The color is wrong." Constructive criticism is important since a suggestion or suggestions are offered so that what is wrong can be improved. How can you improve something if you are not clearly told what is wrong? Constructive criticism is an important exercise and one that must be an integral part of any organization for the coming century. A case in point is Streamline, an innovative US Internet business hailed as being the standard in Web-based companies. Streamline constantly works to make their service better each time a customer logs-on to their server.

The company is fanatic about measuring customer satisfaction. It's Web site has a tool that lets customers use Java-enabled smiley faces to rate each interaction. And DeMello [founder and CEO] keeps looking for ways to innovate. 'We're not perfect,' he says. 'I want to get as much feedback as I can. We're even considered setting up a "Streamline Screamline." It would be a place where people could vent when we disappoint them. We've done a good job with customer service. But until we're perfect, it's not good enough.'⁽²⁷⁾

The Japanese perceive any criticism, however, as displeasing. In writing a paper like this, I risk being completely misunderstood because a paper written which highlights the bad, even though suggestions for improvement are offered is just not done in this country. What could be my fate for stating that the Japanese approach to language teaching is not effective? Censure, ostracism, or worse, expulsion from the educational institution where I am presently teaching could be my reward for attempting to offer my professional suggestions. So many foreigners, because of these risks, walk the easy road of silence. I only hope that readers will refrain from judging me before contemplating what I have offered here.

Some Americans are taught, directly as well as subliminally, that America is the greatest, most powerful of all countries in the world. Many Americans want to be number one in everything they do. However, in the United States this idea is taken to extremes. Nationalism is looked down on by most of the world, however, for an American it is considered patriotic. To this end, Americans are bombarded in radio, print and TV news as well as from Hollywood movies and TV programs by negative images of the world. With the vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, America took Japan as a replacement. These negative words and images have been as direct as the Lee Iacocca advertisements that aired at the height of "Japan bashing" telling American that they have an inferiority complex about Japan. Some of these images have been slightly toned down and comically disguised as in "Back to the Future" (part one), when Michael J. Fox greets his Japanese boss in Japanese and is quickly terminated. A more direct negative comment is the Danny Devito film, "Other People's Money" when he, in a Japanese sushi restaurant, complains that Japan could never be a great country if they do

not use forks. As a matter of fact, the entire film is peppered with these comments. The list is endless, especially in the last ten years.

The propaganda used so well in America was extremely evident to me while I was living in Saudi Arabia. I was not only surrounded by Saudis, but also other nationalities from the Arabian peninsula as well as Iraq, Iran and Islamic countries from the African continent. Up to that point in my life, I had never been embraced by a more hospitable group. As for my Saudi hosts, I can only speak positively about them. They truly are a beautiful people, which is in direct contradiction to what the American media (and others) would have you think.

I, like so many other Americans, had a rather negative impression of Japan and the Japanese. I am different from the typical American, however, in my desire to travel and live for an extended period of time in a foreign country. You can imagine my shock at understanding that Japan was nothing as I had been “taught” to perceive it. Apart from politicians, the Japanese, one on one, are without a doubt the most open, honest, emotional and generous people I have ever had the great fortune to meet and live among. I had originally only come here for a two year tenure. Now, more than nine years on, I can truly say that I have a deep emotional connection to this wonderful country and to its enchanting people. This paper is nothing more than what I hope will be a continuing positive contribution to a country I have come to love.

It is because of this affection that I have for Japan and the Japanese that I fear for their future. It is true that from all sectors of the Japanese populace a cry is being heard for drastic transformation. It is my hope, however, that those with the power to initiate change will hear these pleas and begin a new reformation. A reformation that will catapult this great nation to a new age in history because time waits for no one and the zenith of this century is upon us. In short, this reformation must begin now for the very fact that—millennium approaches.

Appendix 1

A First-Aid Kit for Inexperienced Language Teachers

This is a smorgasbord of books and papers that can serve as a quick shot of information to the art of language teaching. Indeed, the ideas, methods and techniques contained within these books can be adopted to teach any language. I urge the novice language teacher to approach this small collection with an open mind.

1. *Methods that Work : A Smorgasbord of Ideas for Language Teachers*, By : John W. Oller, Jr., & Patricia A. Richard-Amato, Newbury House Publishers, 1983, ISBN : 0-88377-330-9.
2. *The Natural Approach : Language Acquisition in the Classroom*, By : Steven D. Krashen & Tracy D. Terrell, Alemany Press, ISBN : 0-13-612029-6.

3. Language Two, By: Heidi Dulay, Marina Burt & Stephen Krashen, Oxford University Press, 1982, ISBN : 0-19-502553-9
4. The Functional Notional Approach : From Theory to Practice, By : Mary Finocchiaro & Christopher Brumfit, Oxford University Press, 1983, ISBN : 0-19-434106-2.
5. Suggestive Accelerative Learning Techniques, By : D. H. Schuster & C. E. Gritton, Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1986, ISBN : 2-88124-054-2.
6. Accelerating Learning : The Use of Suggestion in the Classroom, By : Allyn Prichard & Jean Taylor, Academic Therapy Publications, 1980, ISBN : 0-87879-249-X.
7. Communicative Language Testing, By : Cyril J. Weir, Prentice Hall International, 1990, ISBN : 0-13-155284-8

Appendix 2

A List of TESOL Distance Learning Programs

I understand that taking a leave from teaching is close to impossible for many people. Thus, I have offered an alternative here. Distance learning is the next wave in education and one that we, as teachers must seize in order to allow us to enhance our teaching.

I have divided this section into two parts: distance learning courses with a headquarters in Japan and courses with a head office outside of Japan. It is important to keep in mind that every course has different requirements. Some courses do not require any residence time; other courses require the candidate to travel to the home-campus several times or to sit for the final interview and examination.

In Japan:

The British Council-Cambridge English School
2 Kagurazaka 1-Chome
Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0825
Telephone : (03) 3235-8011
Fax : (03) 3235-0049
Courses : CTEFLA

The University of Birmingham
David English House
Polesta Bldg
7-5 Nakamachi
Naka-ku, Hiroshima City 730-0037
Telephone : (082) 244-2633
Fax : (082) 244-2651
e-mail : deh-kt@mx.meshnet.or.jp
Course : MA in TEFL/TESL
The Distance Learning Center

1-4-3-202 Maruyamadai
Wako-shi, Saitama 351-0112
Japan
Tel : (048) 463-3077
Fax : (048) 464-4199
<http://www.distance-learning.org>
e-mail : info@distance-learning.org

International Language Centre Tokyo
Iwanami Jimbocho Building 9F
Kanada Jimbocho 2-1
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0051
Telephone : (03) 3264-5935
Fax : (03) 3264-7852
Courses : DTEFLA (Part time)

Language Resources-Kobe
Taiyo Building, 6 F
1-2 Kitanagasa-Dori,
5-Chome Chuo-ku
Kobe 650-0012
Telephone : (078) 382-0394
Fax : (078) 371-2681
Courses : CTEFLA (Part time) DTEFLA (Part time)

Other Parts of the World:

Aston University
Department of Languages and European Studies
<http://www.les.aston.ac.uk/home.html>
e-mail : lsu@aston.ac.uk

City College Manchester
Distance Learning Programs
<http://www.manchester-city coll.ac.uk/distlear/tesol/overview.htm>
e-mail : pedge@manchester-city-coll.ac.uk

Deakin University
Faculty of Arts-Postgraduate
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/default.html>
e-mail : adrian@deakin.edu.au

Indiana University
School of Education
Graduate level credit that will help meet certification and
recertification requirements for elementary and secondary
reading and Language Arts curricula.

http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/disted/menu.html

e-mail : disted@indiana.edu

International House

<http://www.international-house.org>

e-mail : central.dept@ihlondon.co.uk

Offers the Cambridge Certificate.

Macquarie University

School of English, Linguistics and Media

Department of Linguistics

National Centre for English Language Teaching & Research

<http://www.elm.mq.edu.au>

e-mail : David.Blair@mq.edu.au

University of Birmingham

School of English, Center for English Language Studies

<http://sun4.bham.ac.uk/CELS/TESFLOLP.htm>

e-mail : deh-t@mx.meshnet.or.jp

University of Leicester

Continuing Professional Development Education Courses

<http://www.le.ac.uk/education/courses/ma4.html>

e-mail : hw8@le.ac.uk

University of Manchester

Centre For English Language

<http://www.man.ac.uk/CELSE/>

e-mail : CWIS@man.ac.uk

University of Pennsylvania

Graduate School of Education, Language in Education Division

Spring and Fall Distance Learning courses available. Summer sessions on site required.

<http://www.upenn.edu/gse/LED/>

e-mail : jlinnell@sas.upenn.edu

University of Sheffield

Educational Studies

Adult Continuing Education

Distance Learning Unit

Distance Learning Courses

Education and English Language Teaching M Ed

<http://www.shef.ac.uk>

e-mail : R.Sharratt@Sheffield.ac.uk

University of Surrey

English and Applied Linguistics
<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/ELI/eli.html>
 e-mail : g.fulcher@surrey.ac.uk

University of York
 Department of Language and Linguistic Science
<http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/lang/>
 e-mail : linguistics@york.ac.uk

Appendix 3

A Digest of Internet English Teaching Resources

This is another smorgasbord of Web sites that are related to English language teaching and resources for the language teacher. I would like to take this opportunity to thank one of my colleagues, Midori Machida (a true Internet authority), for recommending many of these sites.

The University of Oregon
 Teaching Effectiveness Program
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~tep/>

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
<http://www.lang.uiuc.edu/r-li5/esl/>

ESL Discussion Center
 Topic : Teaching-Learning Material
<http://www.eslcafe.com/discussion/wwwboard11/wwwboard.html>

TESL/TEFL/TESOL/ESL/EFL/ESOL Links
 This site has over 2,000 Links of Interest for Teachers of English as a Second Language. The page is also maintained by The Internet TESL Journal and it is frequently maintained, so there should be few dead links.
<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/ESL3.html>

TESOL Online
<http://www.tesol.edu/index.html>

TEFL Professional Network ELT Resource
<http://tefl.com/courses/courseja.htm>

Footnotes

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2. Okano, Yutaka, *Twenty Years of Frustration*, S.U. Press, 1996.
3. *Japan : An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, p. 343.

4. Howatt, A. P. R, *A History of English Language Teaching*, p. 212.
5. *ibid.*, p. 233.
6. *ibid.*, p. 234.
7. Galer, Sara, *Being A Broad*, No. 11 September 1998, p. 33.
8. Redfield, Michael, 1993, *What Japanese College Students Think about English*, Presented at JALT 1993 Conference, Omiya, Japan, October 1993.
9. *ibid.*
10. Sakamoto, Nancy, Naotsuka, Reiko, *Polite Fictions*, 1982, p. 80-83.
11. Hino, N, *Yakudoku : Japan's Dominant Tradition in Foreign Language Learning*, *JALT Journal*, 10 : 1/2, p. 45-55.
12. Law, Graham, *English for Culture-Specific Purposes.*, Tokyo JALT Regional Conference, February 20, 1994, Bunkyo Women's College.
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15. Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to Translation*, p. 7.
16. Gauthier, Mark, *Making it in Japan*, p. 11-12.
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- John F. Mancuso can be reached via snail mail at : Hitotsubashi University, Foreign Language Institute, Naka 2-1, Kunitachi-shi, Tokyo, 186-8601, Japan and via e-mail at: pc00131@srv.cc.hit-u.ac.jp