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Don't Be Afraid To Communicate with Americans: Research About Low Self-esteem Japanese Students in the United States. How ESL Teachers Can Build Students' Self-esteem in the Class.

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Don't Be Afraid to Communicate with Americans

Research about Low Self-esteem Japanese Students in the United States. How ESL Teachers Can Build Students' Self-esteem in the Class.

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ABSTRACT

This project is a research paper about low self-esteem Japanese students who have a hard time communicating with Americans in spite of the fact that their English ability is high enough. It is based on my private teaching experience with one of my Japanese students in Boston. This paper is composed of two sections. The first section shows that low self-esteem can be one of the main obstacles to foreign language acquisition for Japanese students. The second section is about what we can do as ESL teachers.

ERIC Descriptors:

English as a Second Language

Second Language Instruction

Japanese students

Adult Education

Teaching Methods

Experiential Learning.

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This project by Mami Tanaka is accepted in its present form.

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Section I

1. INTRODUCTION

It was last July when I met a Japanese student, M.T., majoring in Journalism at Northeastern University in Boston. She called me because she had been looking for an English teacher who could help her to improve her English communication skills with Americans while she is a senior. She told me that she has been in the United States for about 2 years, but she is still very nervous when she speaks with Americans, even though she is relaxed with international students. Although she wants American friends, she does not have any. She believes that is because of her imperfect English and poor communication skills.

She also mentioned that she is not good at communication even in Japanese. Now that she is a senior, this is her last chance to change herself and enjoy American life with American friends without any language or communication problems. I was very impressed with her seriousness, and she reminds me of myself when I first came to the United States. I think many Japanese students come to the United States to study English with the same hope as hers.

Her English education is very rich and varied. She started to learn English in junior high school in Japan. The way to teach English used in Japan can cause students to have low self-esteem. I will explain about this in detail in Chapter 3: Japanese School Education Systems.

She went to ECC Foreign Language Institute in Tokyo when she was a freshman in junior college. ECC Foreign Language Institute is one of the biggest language schools in Japan and has many branch schools all over the country. I worked there in Hamamatsu for three years before coming to the States.

She went to three language schools in the States. The first one was in Oklahoma. She was firmly resolved to speak only English, even when she talked to Japanese classmates. But it resulted in isolating her from Japanese and other groups. She felt lonely because she did not belong to any national groups.

The second one was the ESL program at Northeastern University in Boston. She was allowed to take a regular course in the meantime there because her TOEFLE (Test Of English As a Foreign Language) score met the requirement. Her listening was much better, and she got used to writing papers in English. But she still wanted to improve her speaking.

She decided to take an ESL course in Alabama during the summer. She had expected that there would not be many Japanese students in Alabama because this is not a tourist spot. Contrary to her expectation, many Japanese from an affiliated junior college in Japan were learning English at this school. She spoke Japanese with them and socialized with them because she knew from her previous experience that she needed friends.

She told me that, despite the time and effort she put into studying English in three ESL programs, her English did not improve enough to communicate well with Americans. I assessed her English ability through free conversation, and found that her English itself is excellent, but she lacks confidence in her English. In fact, she apologized her poor English skills very frequently during conversation with me. After that, I made a lesson plan to build her confidence in her English. About four months have passed since then, and she has changed into a very energetic person with a lot of confidence.

She is not the only Japanese student whose low self-esteem prevents her from improving her English communication skills. Most of my Japanese students have low self-esteem. Most of your students could have this problem, too. In my teaching experience, I learned that self-esteem can be a very important factor for Japanese students in learning a foreign language.

In this paper, I will discuss where low self-esteem comes from, how it affects Japanese students' language acquisition, and how to help them to overcome it.

2. HOW IMPORTANT SELF-ESTEEM IS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

What is self-esteem?

What is self-esteem? Where does it come from? How important is it? Before discussing the influence of self-esteem on foreign language learning, I would like to clarify what self-esteem is first, and then, talk about how it affects our lives.

There are various definitions of self-esteem, but let me refer to Coopersmith's (1967) definition first:

By self-esteem, we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicated the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior.

This explanation makes sense to me. In general, a person who has high self-esteem is considered to be one who evaluates himself as being more valuable and capable than one who has low self-esteem. Self-esteem appears in our behavior and attitude. The president of a huge company behaves differently from a worker newly hired. He or she performs with more confidence and dignity.

While researching self-esteem, I could not find out whether self-esteem starts at zero when we are born or whether people are born with different levels of self-esteem. However, it doesn't seem to grow gradually only by getting older, according to Brown (1994).

He stated that self-esteem can grow by the experiences of interaction with others. For instance, you feel proud of yourself and your self-esteem can be increased when other people compliment you. You might realize that you are better at a certain field, such as making a public speech or working on mathematics, than others. Through these interactions with others, we can increase our self-esteem. It seems that people who have more opportunities to evaluate themselves by comparison to others can increase their self-esteem more easily.

Self-esteem might grow without social interaction. When you set a goal and accomplish it, you can trust your capability. Through repeatedly finishing some tasks successfully, you can improve your self-esteem. But it can be even more effective to be rewarded by somebody in such ways as receiving an award, being appreciated, or being praised.

How does self-esteem relate to our lives? Do we need self-esteem? Matthew Mckay and Patrick Fanning (1987) says:

Self-esteem is essential for psychological survival.
It is an emotional sine qua non--without some
measure of self-worth, life can be enormously painful,
with many basic needs going unmet.

I agree that people can get hurt easily without self-esteem. As a result, some people are unmotivated. One of my Japanese friends gave me an example. He believed that he was short and not good-looking. In addition, he has never had a girlfriend. One day, he fell in love with a very beautiful lady. He was rather sad and unhappy, and gave up approaching her, because he believed he wasn't worthy of her and couldn't attract her. Matthew Mckay and Patrick Fanning (1987) also pointed out that when people judge human capacity and reject part of themselves, they will badly hurt their identity.

What would have happened if my friend had believed that he could attract her? He would have made some effort and she might have been his girlfriend. This

shows how low self-esteem can make one unmotivated and less active on one's own behalf.

Martina Hingis, who is a female world champion tennis player, could be an example of how self-esteem affected her life in terms of motivation. She enjoyed doing all kinds of sports when she was a child, but she didn't practice tennis until she was a teen, which is late in comparison to the other world ranked players. A Japanese television station researched the secret of her success and it found that it was her mother. She was a tennis player, and I think she knew what could grow a great player not only technically but also mentally from her experiences. For example, she never forced Martina to practice it. She taught Martina how to play tennis only when Martina wanted to learn it. Martina enjoyed playing tennis and built her confidence in tennis gradually with her mother's compliment. And then, her mother let her play in a tournament so that Martina could learn that tennis is a game to win or lose when her level is high enough. Her mother always complimented her a lot with a big hug when she won. She remembers that she felt very good after winning a game. Martina challenged herself to play a more difficult tournament that her mother chose than before. In this way, she increased her self-esteem and was motivated to win through all this process.

In my experience, I recognize that self-esteem is very important, especially when I try something new. For instance, when I learned how to drive a car at a driving school, a teacher's criticism made me feel down several times. Of course, I was a beginner at driving, and didn't have confidence in it. But my self-esteem was high enough to help me cope with the difficulty smoothly. I believed that I could do it, and concentrated on improving my driving technique through practice rather than being deeply depressed and stuck. Finally, I got a driver's license with full score. I am certain that my self-esteem comes from my having sufficient experience of accomplishing my goals in the past, and the result would not have been the same without it. My English acquisition was the same, too. Although I was embarrassed at my poor English, I never gave up trusting myself and making efforts. In this way,

taking on something difficult or new involves the risk of failing and hurting your feelings or sense of identity. Therefore, it is necessary to have a certain level of self-esteem to motivated you enough to make mistakes and trust your capability.

In conclusion, it seems that self-esteem affects our motivation and our attitude toward our desire or goal. People with high self-esteem can handle problems more positively and keep their confidence.

Language learning and self-esteem

As I discussed before, a certain degree of self-esteem helps us to be motivated to learn something new. That certainly applies to learning a foreign language. As most of us have experienced, it takes many mistakes and corrections. After interviewing my students, it seems obvious that adult learners feel embarrassed when they make mistakes. In addition, I learned that it is very painful for Japanese to make mistakes in the classroom setting, since they came from a culture of shame, according to Ruth Benedict (1989). Losing face is the last thing one would like to do in Japanese culture.

From my observations, students who have low self-esteem tend to feel embarrassed, depressed, and stupid more often and easily than ones with high self-esteem. The way they respond to negative feedback is different.

While students who have high self-esteem don't care much about their mistakes and go to places where they can socialize with Americans to improve their English, students who have low self-esteem tend to hang out with friends from the same country and avoid damaging their identity. They are more sensitive to the responses that they have from Americans and tend to get hurt very easily. One of my students, M.T., told me:

Americans must think that I am stupid, because I speak poor English. I think they laugh at my English behind my back. I criticize myself that I can't speak English well even though I live in the States for two years. I usually feel depressed after thinking like this.

Another interviewee, A.H., who was a research fellow at a hospital, said to me:

I was very depressed and frustrated, because I couldn't understand what Americans spoke to me. I lost my sleep because I couldn't get along with them in our laboratory. Why am I so stupid? I felt depressed and hurt when they didn't

understand my English. I hate it when I repeated what I said, but they gave up communicating with me.

Her situation was very hard. She came to a research laboratory in the United States to attempt researching something that she had never done before. It is very difficult for her to work in the States due to her lack of knowledge about research and American education. Furthermore, she has not only the language barrier but also the cultural and communication gap between herself and her American co-workers.

As Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning (1987) stated above, her life was very painful in the States. She thought she was worthless since she couldn't meet her supervisor's requirements. She became sick and gave up working at the laboratory.

I assume that her low self-esteem about English is one of the main causes of this outcome. She told me that she couldn't believe her English could improve or that she could communicate well with Americans, because she had hated English since she was a junior high school student in Japan. When I tested her, I found that her English was fine, but she believes that her oral skills are not enough. It is because she doesn't have confidence in her communication skills, even in Japanese. It makes sense to her that she has a communication problem in English and this belief makes her very nervous talking with Americans.

After interviewing both A.H. and M.T., I found an interesting similarity between them. Both believe they are not good at communicating with others in Japanese. It seems that communication skills have relations with self-esteem about language learning. I will explain this in detail in Chapter 4.

Who can learn languages successfully? Do students who have high self-esteem learn a foreign language well?

There was a very interesting piece of research done by Adelaide Heyde (1979) to figure out the answer of this question. She used American college students learning French to see if self-esteem affects oral skills. She divided the students into three groups with different levels of self-esteem and compared the results. She found that the group of students who have higher self-esteem had a better performance than group of ones with lower self-esteem. She also said that Watkins et al (1991), Brodkey and Shore (1976), and Gardner and Lambert (1972) did similar research and their results support her finding that successful language acquisition and self-esteem seem to interact.

However, not all persons with high self-esteem will necessarily be successful at learning languages. For instance, one of my ex-co-workers from Vietnam has very high self-esteem. Nevertheless, she still speaks broken English in spite of her residence in the States for more than ten years. One of my students from China was very active and was not afraid to make mistakes in my class. However, he repeatedly made the same errors, and it was hard to say that his English improved more quickly than that of a student with low self-esteem in my class. From my observations, it seems to be very significant that a language learner maintain not only a certain level of self-esteem, but also the ability to learn from mistakes rapidly, in order to acquire a foreign language successfully.

Douglas Brown (1994) stated that successful learners can use numerous self-help strategies for coping with the stresses of daily living caused by their language barrier. It is true that there are many strategies to cover poor vocabularies. Some might use gestures or visual aides to avoid using unfamiliar words. People with confidence can see the situation calmly, without hurting their feelings, and do what is needed to improve their language ability. As a result, they are not to afraid to make mistakes, knowing that making a mistake and learning from that experience is

an essential process of foreign language acquisition.

As I mentioned earlier, learning a foreign language involves a lot of stress. Therefore, I think that knowing how to handle this stress is one of the keys to success. People who have good communication competence have the potential to be successful language learners since they know how to avoid embarrassing themselves. One of my students, for example, asks a native speaker how to pronounce a word before reading it out by himself. By doing this, he can avoid mispronouncing words. Another student describes a thing or situation and asks a question like, "What do you call it?" and "How do you say it?" before embarrassing herself with her limited vocabulary. Also, she can learn a lot by asking these questions. Both students use native speakers as language teachers all the time, and it is a good strategy to reduce the stress from embarrassment and to take advantage of learning opportunities.

Another advantage of a good communicator is that she knows how to keep up a good relationship with native speakers despite her language handicap. Native speakers could tend to misunderstand non-native speakers if they are not interested in the conversation or if they don't like them because non-natives don't respond much. I often see native speakers confused by non-natives' non-response. They wonder what they think and how they feel during the conversation.

However, if a non-native responds frequently, throwing in interesting questions, the conversation can be very impressive. It doesn't matter how well non-natives speak a target language, but how well they can communicate. A good communicator will have more opportunities to practice his language with natives so he can improve it more quickly.

In conclusion, a student who has not only high self-esteem but also good communication skills is potentially a more successful language learner for three reasons. The first reason is that his confidence helps keep him learning through mistakes. By repeatedly correcting his errors, he can improve his language more quickly than one who is afraid to make mistakes. His confidence also protects him from learning a language painfully. The second reason is that he can make a less

stressful environment for himself by using the tactics described above. The third one is that he has less problems communicating with natives and learns from them. It seems that the successful language learner learns a target language in a healthy way. It is extremely helpful if one can avoid having one's feelings hurt while trying to learn a language.

3. WHERE DOES THEIR LOW SELF-ESTEEM COME FROM?

The previous chapter indicated that self-esteem is one of the important factors for successful language acquisition. Unfortunately, my students, M.T. and A. H. don't seem to be successful examples. The interesting fact is that they are not exceptional Japanese ESL students. Most of my Japanese students expressed their lack of confidence to me while they were learning English. In fact, I also felt the same feeling in the past, and it took a while for me to overcome it. In this chapter, I would like to discuss what could have caused these students' low self-esteem by referring to the results of my interviews with five Japanese ESL students who have low self-esteem living in the States. I will then suggest solutions that worked well for my Japanese students.

Japanese Society and Self-Esteem

All five of my interviewees brought up the Japanese educational system as a cause of their low self-esteem. It is interesting that Japanese people who have low self-esteem living in Japan gave me the same response. Besides this factor, two interviewees also think their parents are a main cause. Through further interviews and research, I found out that both school systems and parents are strongly affected by three characteristics of Japanese society: group-orientation, shame, and Confucianism.

I discovered that my interviews were representative of how Japanese young people interact with parents and teachers. I believe that societies and cultures have a powerful influence on their members, since men are social beings. Therefore, this chapter begins by introducing four characteristics of Japanese society -- characteristics which are very different from those of American culture--which relate to Japanese low self-esteem. I will then, explain in detail why and how these factors have a great impact on students' low self-esteem through Japanese school systems

and parenting. I think this might help native English teachers to understand where Japanese students' low self-esteem comes from.

Group Orientation

It is commonly known that Japanese culture is group-oriented while American culture is self-oriented. Japanese people value keeping harmony in the groups to which they belong more than asserting their individual selves, while Americans tend to emphasize their self-concept and are more aware of self-esteem.

To maintain group harmony, people are expected to look alike and behave in the same way within the group. To foster this sense of belonging to a group, most Japanese schools have their own uniforms and strict school rules. Extensions of this custom can be seen at most of Japanese companies. Female employees are forced to wear a uniform while males wear a suit.

The treatment you receive for differing from others is cruel. You can expect to be isolated, ignored, or bullied by the rest of the members. It is a serious social problem that a group of Japanese students will verbally or physically bully one student who looks different or behaves differently.

In my school days, a tiny or fat student easily became a target to be bullied. Unlike the situation in America, an opinionated or a self-conscious student was not liked in Japan. As a result, some of them were ignored, others were hit and kicked after school. This sometimes leads to dropping out and suicide, and it is one of the serious social problems in Japan. In this way, the proverb, "The nail that stands up will be pounded down," accurately represents Japanese society.

In America's climate of individualism, it is expected to think first of oneself and have one's own opinions. Children are encouraged to be aware of what they think and what they want. It is not surprising that ten-year-old American students debate politics in the class, thanks to the value attached to sharing and respecting their own opinions.

In contrast, in a group society, being conscious of being part of group is essential to maintaining good relations. Learning discipline is very significant at school and home in Japan, and having one's own opinions is discouraged. Even if they do have their opinions, it is very rare to see Japanese express opposite opinions in public, in order to avoid conflicts with others. People are afraid to be regarded as selfish or hard to get along with, which makes it very difficult to survive in the group later. It is much easier to give up one's opinions and agree with consensus in a meeting. In this society, it is hard to create one's own idea and express it. Therefore, Japanese students seem to miss a chance to build their confidence. This environment discourages Japanese to be proud of their opinions and enhance their self-esteem.

Confucianism and Hierarchy

Japanese culture as well as Chinese and Korean culture is highly influenced by Confucianism, which stresses social relationships and conformity with the hierarchical family and social relations. Unlike the emphasis of equality in the States, difference of rank and status are considered natural and inevitable in the traditional Japanese family, company and school. Consequently, Japanese are very status conscious and are expected to know how to behave according to their rank.

Basically, rank depends on age, sex, and social status. The elder is positioned as top in a family or a school setting. A senior student is supposed to be respected by a junior student. However, the position is more concerned than age in a Japanese company. A younger president ranks higher to be respected than an older director. Gender is also a key factor in rank. A Japanese female tends to be treated as lower than a Japanese male, due to the long history of the Japanese male-oriented society. For example, most grandfathers have more authority than grandmothers to make a decision in a traditional Japanese family.

The expectation of behavior varies by the rank within the hierarchy. The person located lower in the hierarchy has to respect and obey the person higher in the

hierarchy. In exchange for loyalty, the lower can be protected by the higher if they belong to the same group, such as family or company. The lower can count on the higher for advice and financial help when they are in trouble or in need of help. People simply reaffirm a relationship, treating a person as he or she expects or feels entitled to be treated. A person may be irritated or confused if the expectation isn't met.

The disadvantage of these hierarchical relationships is that the lower the person is, the more dependent he or she becomes, since he or she has less opportunities to make a decision. Also, it is very difficult for people who are lower in status to have and express their own opinions.

Some American ESL teachers told me that they were very upset when they asked Japanese students for their opinions. Although Americans like to understand who they are by sharing what they think, Japanese students just respond with something like "I don't know." This might sound very passive or rejecting to native teachers, but the students are just behaving as they did in Japan, where a teacher is a respected figure due to the higher position in a hierarchy. A student expects to follow what a teacher thinks and decides he or she should do. It is not as common as in the States that students think and share their honest opinions to a teacher in the class.

Face and Shame

The concept of "face" is very significant in Japanese culture, and it seems to relate to Japanese low self-esteem. John C. Condon (1984) states that the word "face" expresses very well the sense of how someone is seen or sees another in Japanese society, which emphasizes groups, such as the family, school, and company. He also said that:

From the Japanese perspective, therefore, how one treats others and is treated by them is of supreme importance, and so to slight another or to feel slighted, to cause embarrassment or be

embarrassed, disturbs the delicate web of relationships which are essential to survival.

Ruth Benedict (1967) also stated that proper behavior is enforced through outside social pressure in Japan, and called Japanese culture as Culture of Shame. By contrast, American culture is a Culture of Guilt, where internal feelings--guilt--guide behavior. In a Culture of Shame, people are afraid of being embarrassed, due to their concern about what others think of them. Japanese parents tell their children not to do something embarrassing, or "people will laugh at the parents." That means that the family is shamed if children are embarrassed in public, since embarrassment is shared within the group. A person has to endure not only the sense of humiliation, but also the blame from members of the group, if he makes mistakes or misbehaves in public. This is what we call "losing face," and what Japanese people avoid the most.

I think this "face" concept matches a group society well. It seems very effective to make us very sensitive to what others think, which is the basic cultural value in Japan. On the other hand, it doesn't appear to be helpful in enhancing self-esteem. I believe that the repetition of experiences to accomplish their goals enables people to build self-esteem, as we saw in the example of Martina Hingis in Chapter 2. However, I think this "face" concept makes it more difficult for Japanese than for Americans to try a new challenge, fearful of what others may think of the results. It seems to make sense that Japanese businessmen avoid expressing their opinions against the rest of the group in the business meeting. This also might discourage Japanese students to learn a foreign language through mistakes. Because of the "face" concept, Japanese might miss more opportunities to build their self-esteem, in comparison to Americans.

Criticism

Criticism is unavoidable in Japanese society. People are criticized more

frequently than in the United States. Weakness is much more stressed than strength. My research still needs to continue clarifying where this critical tendency in Japan comes from, but I think this might be the influence of group society with the emphasis on discipline. The main reason is that criticism works well to maintain discipline and harmony within the group. Criticism by other members is one of the punishments that people fear for breaking group rules or misbehaving. Moreover, criticizing others is the easiest way to raise one's own worth. In this society, the nail standing out would be pounded down, but pulling others down is also used as a safe strategy for promotion or success without any harm. Criticizing not only others but yourself is also helpful, to see if your behavior is acceptable or not. It protects you from painful blame by others before the blame starts.

Although criticism functions well in Japanese society, the negative effects to self-esteem are enormous. First, a tremendous amount of criticism can attack self-esteem easily when there is a chance. Lack of positive feedback makes this worse. Second, it creates many unreasonable "shoulds," and attacks us if we don't do what we "should." This makes our lives, and maintenance of adequate self-esteem, harder. Third, criticism makes a record of our failures, and makes it difficult for us to remember our strengths or accomplishments, according to Matthew and Patrick (1987). One of my interviewees, A.H. is an example. You will see more details of her case later, in the section called "Parents," but, in short, she can't build up her confidence easily, despite her accomplishments as a doctor. She is likely to pay attention to critical voices rather than positive feedback. The critics compare her to the ideal, and she feels she is nothing if she is not the ideal.

In conclusion, criticism can be one of the great causes undermining the sense of worth in Japanese society. It not only creates impossible standards of perfection but also destroys our self-esteem. And then, it prevents us from recovering from the damage easily. I think the Japanese tendency of focusing on the weak spots makes it harder for people to enhance their self-esteem. Japanese people are expected to cope with high pressure to meet unrealistic "shoulds" based on criticism from both

society and themselves, and without balanced positive feedback.

Parents

Parents are very influential in determining their children's interests, values, and decisions. Studies of young children show clearly that parents' style of child-rearing during the first three or four years determines the degree of self-esteem that a child starts with. Lefrancois, Guy R (1949) stated if you struggle to achieve good self-esteem, it comes from the condemning, judging voices you carry inside, the voices you heard in childhood. I agree that children are guided by their parents to see themselves as a stupid or smart, worthless or lovable, competent or incompetent.

These theories make me assume that Japanese students with low self-esteem were possibly exposed to a high amount of negative feedback, such as criticism and judgmental voices, from their parents in their childhood. One of my interviewees, A. H., is a good example. She thinks that her mother had a great impact on her low self-esteem, and explains as the following in my interview:

I think my mother is a typical Japanese mother. She always finds and blames my faults. I don't remember much that she complimented what I had done in my childhood. Despite my high social status as a doctor in Japan, I still don't have enough confidence about myself, because I grew up with her criticism and always suffered.

A.H. came to the States as a research fellow. She described her personality as nervous, unconfident, and serious. She was a very smart and hard-working student in my private class. On the other hand, it seemed that she was as hard on herself as her mother was. I was a little bit surprised that she didn't have enough confidence about herself, considering her high social status as a doctor in Japan.

As she pointed out during my interview, one of the main causes is repeated criticism, without sufficient praise, from an authority figure, her mother, during

childhood. She picked up her mother's habit and continued to judge herself, believing in her mother's criticism. As I stated in the earlier section, "Criticism," criticism has the frighteningly toxic effect of keeping records of failure while making it hard to remember strengths or accomplishments. A.H. seems to have paid too much attention to her weakness and is not able to think highly of her accomplishments.

In contrast, the example of Martina Hingis in Chapter 2 is the case of a child who grew up with enough compliments as a reward, which ended up helping her to increase or maintain a certain level of confidence. She is motivated to try something new or more difficult without any fear of mistakes. Certainly, she had hard times, such as losing games or being in a slump, but her confidence could either prevent her from damaging her self-esteem or help her to recover from the damage easily.

Besides exposure to parents' repeated criticism, another aspect of traditional Japanese child-rearing might be a factor which hurts Japanese children's sense of worth.

Most Japanese parents believe that children are supposed to follow the rules they set according to Confucianism, where children must respect parents in a family. Although American parents are more likely to treat a child as an independent self, to help him or her to fit into an individualistic society, Japanese parents expects a child to behave exactly as he or she is told to do. On my first visit to the States, I was amazed at how my American friends talked to their children. They answered their children's "why" questions patiently and reasonably, which is rarely seen in a typical Japanese family. The following is a conversation I heard:

"Don't play ball on the street after dark, Mike."

"Why, Mom? I wanna play ball now. Dan and Rick
are playing right there!!!"

"It is dangerous. There are still many cars on the street.

It is hard for drivers to see you playing and stop a car
immediately when it's dark. I don't want you to be run over."

"I understand, but I still feel like playing now."

"How about playing at a playground two blocks away?"

It is still much brighter with some lights and safer."

"OK, I will let Dan and Rick know. I'm gonna go out."

"Come back in an hour. Dinner should be ready then."

"OK, Mom."

I was impressed at the mother's attitude toward Mike. She not only convinced Mike not to play ball on the street after dark, with clear explanations, but also suggested another option to respect his wishes. This conversation sounded open and fair between a parent and a child. I learned that each of them has a right to express their opinions and talk them over in my American friend's family. In contrast, typical Japanese parents regard a child's "why" questions as a noisy annoyance. They become irritated and end up labeling him or her as a bad child. The following is an example of conversation between parents and a child in a traditional Japanese family.

"Don't play ball on the street after dark, Akira."

"Why, Mom? I want to play ball now.

Ken and Ryo are playing right there!!!"

"I said "No." "No" is "No."

"I wanna play now, Mom."

"You are a bad boy, because you don't listen to me.

No dinner for a bad boy."

After this conversation, it doesn't make sense to Akira why playing ball on the street after dark is not acceptable to his mother. In other words, he doesn't understand that what he is is okay, but what he does is not okay. It is common that a

mother finishes an exchange like this with anger or rejection.

In this way, Japanese parents seem to avoid clear explanations. Instead, they end the conversation as quickly as possible by using vague statements such as "Don't do that," and "You would be disliked by XXX." or "Don't do that, otherwise XXX will get angry," or "Don't do that, or people will laugh at you." These responses represent the value of group society and the "Culture of Shame" in Japan, where a person should consider what others think of him or her first, in order to get along with others.

I think this way of treating children could obviously have negative effects on their self-esteem. First, it might cause a child to blame not only his behavior but also his own worth, well into his adulthood, since parents don't clarify the difference between inappropriate behavior and the basic goodness of the child. Second, the value of consciousness of others could make it harder to respect the choice and desire of the individual, which is important to build self-esteem. By this type of child-rearing, a child ends up learning not self-concern but self-control and discipline.

In summary, it is possible that the low self-esteem seen in some Japanese students may be part of the impact of their parents in their childhood. They might grow up with frequent criticism, a lack of positive feedback, or insufficient distinction between behavior and worth from their parents. I think it is worth remembering that this style of upbringing originates from Japanese group-oriented society.

The Japanese Educational system

The results of my interviews showed that the Japanese educational system in public school could be one of the greatest factors that influence Japanese low self-esteem. In order to show how influential Japanese schooling is on Japanese people and society, first I would like to describe the difference between Japanese schooling and American schooling, and then explain how Japanese schooling affects students' self-esteem.

The Japanese school day is longer than the American one. Japanese public school students take classes on a full-time basis. They finish classes sometime in the afternoon, depending on the grade. Most junior and senior high school students are expected to belong to a club after school and engage in activities with club members and a teacher who is in charge of the club, after school on weekdays and almost all day on weekends if it is a sports club.

Japanese school life requires a lot of group activities, which help them to build intimate relationships with their teachers and classmates at school. Unlike American students, Japanese students belong to an assigned class and take scheduled classes in an assigned seat in the classroom where they belong, except when moving to a music room, laboratory, gym, or athletic field. Therefore, several teachers visit their classrooms each day to teach a subject. They have a classroom teacher to take care of their school lives, and he or she plays the roles that a school counselor, academic advisor, and guidance counselor would play in the States. In elementary school, a classroom teacher spends almost all day with his or her students, because he or she teaches all the subjects. In short, a teacher plays an important role in students' lives through intimate relationships.

A teacher is an authority figure to be respected, due to the influence of Confucianism in Japan. Their social status is high enough to be respected, and it is taken for granted that students will obey their teachers. For instance, all the students stand up and bow to greet a teacher and show their respect at the beginning of the class, and in appreciation at the end of the class. A teacher is called "Teacher" by students instead of using his or her last name. I notice that this custom is common in Asian countries. My Vietnamese and Chinese students called a teacher in the same way in the adult school where I taught in the States. As you can see by how students call a teacher, there is a difference in their respective statuses as leaders and followers. It might be different nowadays, but, when I was a student, violent punishment such as hitting and kicking was permitted to maintain the teacher's authority and help students to correct their attitude.

Traditional emphasis on education, which makes Japanese desire to get the best possible education, also gives a teacher more authority. Students make up their minds which school entrance examination to take in accordance with not only their academic records but also evaluation records called "Naishinsho," which a teacher writes about a student's attitude and school activities. Naishinsho is one of the significant factors in determining if they can pass the test or not. Their function and status in society after graduation depend upon their educational background, and a teacher plays a key role in the students' future.

The teaching method in Japan is also quite different from the way of teaching in the States. Class is taught on a lecture basis, under the teacher's control. A teacher will be very angry, or even give a punishment, if a student doesn't pay attention to him or her, for example, by chatting or looking somewhere else. Japanese students get used to following a teacher's instructions carefully. Students wait to answer a question until a teacher calls a student's name, while American students get used to taking the initiative to voice their opinions or questions. The traditional Japanese attitude seems very passive compared to the American attitude. It stems from the emphasis on discipline in the Japanese educational system, and it is very important to learn the proper form in Japanese school. Just as school uniforms and rules represent a Japanese school, discipline and appropriate attitude as a member of a group are essential to being a good student in Japan.

In the Japanese teaching method, there is not much discussion, while American students learn not only to form their ideas and opinions but also to express them in class. Japanese students recite rules or information that they have memorized, which is useful for mathematics and science, but not for English and politics.

I read in an interesting article that an American teacher, visiting an art class in a Japanese elementary school, was very surprised by two things. One was that students wait to draw a picture until a teacher tells them to start, then, sit still at their seats until all the students finished drawing. The second was that all the

pictures looked exactly the same as the one that the teacher drew as an example on the board. This is normal in a Japanese school, and proves that the Japanese educational system stresses the value of discipline, which stems from group society.

Discipline and self-control are highly valued in order to create harmony in a group. While American students learn to work individually and find answers themselves, it is essential for Japanese to learn how to work together and help one another at school. For this purpose, there are many opportunities to work in groups in Japanese school life.

The smallest and most significant unit is "Han," a group of four or five (depending on the size of the class) students, each of whom belongs within the class. This group is essential for their school lives. They eat lunch together by moving their desks to look at each other. A Han group cleans one part of the school building during cleaning time, one of the duties for Japanese students. A Han group is often required to work together and help each other when a member has trouble in following instructions or catching up on a class assignment. There are many opportunities to express and talk over opinions in the Han, too. Group members are changed by a teacher every term, three times a year, and students learn how to get along with various kinds of people through these opportunities to share their school lives.

Belonging to a class also means a lot in Japanese students' school lives. Classmates share a class schedule as well as a classroom for a whole year. There are many school events in Japan, and Japanese students participate in them by the class. They practice very hard together for competitions such as athletic meetings and chorus festivals. They plan and carry out what they decide to do for cultural festivals by the class, while they enjoy spending time together in one-day school trips and school excursion trips where they travel farther and stay more than a day.

Club activities after school are another group activity. In my school days, most students belonged to their favorite club. Students deepen friendships and learn interpersonal skills through club activities. If a student belongs to a sports club, practice and discipline are much more strict. He or she learns to be polite to older

students. Such experiences help a student get a good job at a prestigious company, where a polite attitude and strong interpersonal skills will help him or her easily fit into the company's seniority system.

As a member of a group, the "Kakari" system gives students a sense of responsibility and contributing to their classmates and school. Students can decide which kakari, that is which responsibility within the class, to take at the beginning of the term. A couple of students share the responsibilities to take care of a part of school life to help their classmates. For example, the English kakari is a student in charge of English, who is supposed to ask the English teacher in advance what he or she is going to teach and what the homework will be, then let the rest of the class know by writing it on the big notice board in the classroom. Kakari activity is one of the items required to be evaluated by a teacher at the end of the term in school records as well as in Naishinsho.

In conclusion, the difference between Japanese and American educational systems derives from the values and needs of each society. Group-oriented society needs school to teach discipline and maintenance of harmony in the group, while an individual-oriented society expects the school to develop the students' own private interests by accepting differences among people and independence in the end. Therefore, teachers place a lot of importance on the qualities that make each student special in the United States, while in Japanese schools, they treat students as subordinates and force them to believe that people should be the same.

Now, I would like to describe which part of the Japanese school system could destroy students' self-esteem, according to the results of my research. Lack of opportunities for discussion or debate in the class is one thing. Because of the emphasis on discipline and recitation, it is very hard for Japanese students to learn to form their own ideas and opinions. I believe that repeatedly experiencing the acceptance of their own ideas and opinions would make them feel that they are valuable and proud of themselves. These feelings are necessary to enhance students' self-esteem, and the lack of such opportunities should be regarded as a great concern.

Another possible factor damaging Japanese students' self-esteem is the way they are treated by their teachers at school. A typical Japanese teacher tends to focus on a student's negative sides and to criticize, while American teachers try to find the positive sides and develop their students' strengths. It is common that a Japanese student who is good at mathematics but not at English is only criticized for mathematics. From my observations, it is obvious that Japanese students have fewer chances to be complimented than American students. It is taken that no compliment as reward is given for good scores. The way a teacher treats mistakes or failure is also severe. Making mistakes is considered by a culture of shame as shameful rather than as a process leading to success. As a result, students seldom dare to express their answers or opinions in a class, for fear of being laughed at or criticized.

In summary, I believe that Japanese low self-esteem is closely related to the Japanese educational system. The stress of discipline, memorization of information, and interpersonal skills easily damage the sense of worth rather than help to enhance self-esteem. I hope you can imagine how difficult it is for Japanese students to fit in at an American school, and vice versa.

4. WHAT CAN HAPPEN TO JAPANESE STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH COMMUNICATION WITH NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS IN ENGLISH?

As you can imagine, or may have experienced, it is exciting as well as difficult to communicate in a foreign language. It makes sense that most Japanese people face difficulty in mastering English communication due to the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, you might have wondered why, at the beginning of this paper, both M.T. and A.H. stated that they lost confidence or very often felt depressed when they talked with native English speakers in English, although they were OK with conversing with non-native speakers in the States. This chapter will tell you when, how, and why they damaged their self-esteem with native speakers, and will present suggestions for your class. The next chapter will present a detailed account of the curriculum I developed that was successful with my students.

Whom do you prefer speaking English with, a native or a non-native speaker?

Out of curiosity, I asked this question to eight people who had come to the States within the last two years from Mexico, Italy, Spain, China, and Japan. The results were interestingly different from my expectations. All of them told me that they preferred talking to a non-native speaker whose English is fluent to talking to a native speaker. I thought most of them would rather speak with natives in order to improve their English more quickly.

The first reason is that it is easier for them to understand non-native English than native English. It seems that native speakers' use of unfamiliar slang and difficult vocabulary becomes an obstacle to their understanding. In addition, fast connected speech with modification such as linking words or phrases and reduction of function words makes it harder for international students to comprehend native English. For example, "All of her friends came in to take a look at it last night." sounds like "oliverfrenz keimin ta teikalukkali lasnai," and it is far different from

what the non-native learned at school.

Another advantage of non-native English is that they can imagine what the other would like to say much more easily, since they learned English through a similar process. Non-natives have experienced making an effort to understand their classmates with strong accents and trying to express their opinions about similar topics in ESL classes. These experiences help them guess what other international students are trying to say even in broken English. On the other hand, it is necessary to be articulate in order to communicate with natives.

A third reason is that non-natives are worried that native speakers will become angry or withdraw from the English conversation. All of them told me that they had experienced feeling bad when a native speaker got irritated or gave up the conversation because of their poor English abilities. The natives don't mean it, but non-natives' inferiority complex about their English makes them very sensitive to natives' reactions, and makes them lose their self-esteem easily. In contrast, non-native speakers seem more patient with broken English, with compassion gained from their own experiences. Also, non-natives are not as nervous with each other as they are with natives. They feel more relaxed, with a sense of camaraderie with others who have had the same experience learning English. Therefore, they don't mind making mistakes in front of them, since English is a foreign language for both of them.

Communication with native speakers does not have only negative effects on non-native speakers. Non-natives can build up their confidence in English by accomplishing a task, making themselves understood. One of my Japanese interviewees, Y.S., explained that he felt very good and confident right after he could get something done with natives in English; for example opening a bank account, claiming a mistake on the bill, or having an enjoyable chat with a stranger or friend. The sense of accomplishment is greater with native speakers, since it proves clearly that your English is good enough to communicate with them.

Japanese students versus native speakers

From my teaching experiences, I sense that the Japanese inferiority complex about English is much more severe than that of English learners of other nationalities. As you see from the examples of M.T. and A.H. in Chapter 1, most Japanese students who learn English only through Japanese compulsory education believe their English skills are not good in spite of the fact that their grammar and reading skills are excellent compared to those other nationalities. Nowadays it might be better with more emphasis on oral English in the school curriculum and many chances to travel abroad. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that most Japanese people still have a strong inferiority complex about English communication.

This reality makes them very sensitive to natives' reactions. Using the results of my interviews, I categorized the following three situations in which my Japanese students feel the most hurt through conversation with native speakers. In each case, I offer a description of what is happening and suggest what is helpful to deal with that situation.

Situations when my Japanese students feel hurt with native speakers

Situation 1: "Huh?"

Reason

The intonation of English "Huh?" is exactly same as Japanese sarcastic "Hah?," but the meaning is different. Native speakers say "huh?" simply to ask you to say what you said again. But in Japanese, "hah?" carries a negative message such as, "Why are you saying that?," "What are you thinking?," or "Are you stupid or something?" So Japanese people think that native speakers are angry at them with some reason. Therefore, they tend to blame their poor English skills during the conversation.

Suggestions

As an ESL teacher, it is significant to clarify that “Huh?” doesn’t mean to deny or ridicule people in English. It is helpful for them to be aware of this misunderstanding, and realize the real messages this word conveys. Showing examples of dialogue in a class could be a good way to let them get used to the American way of “Huh?”

Situation 2: “I don’t understand you.” “So what do you want to say?”

Reason

These sentences make Japanese students feel that their English can't be understood by natives. Sometimes it is true that natives can't catch their English, but sometimes a difference in communication styles is the problem. In Japanese culture, most topic sentences appear at the end of writing or speech while most Americans expect to hear the purpose and point at the beginning. Therefore, Americans might ask these questions if they are not clarified at the beginning. Another difference of communication style is that Japanese are not trained to pinpoint what they would like to say, because of their sensitivity to what others think about them. They are primarily concerned about upsetting others or being blamed, and end up choosing indirect expressions. In the American way of communication, people are more free to express their thoughts straightforwardly without being afraid of hurting or upsetting others. Therefore, Japanese indirect statements may sound so vague or unclear, in addition to having limited vocabulary, that native speakers can't comprehend them. While “I don’t understand you” is simply a request for more explanation in the United States, this is a wounding phrase that people hesitate to say in Japan. Accordingly, Japanese students are shocked and hurt at this straight forward expression.

Suggestions

It is important for ESL teachers to explain that it is very common in American culture for people to ask these questions, not to hurt or embarrass you at all, but to

understand you better. It is worth reminding students that it is expected to clarify the purpose and point at the beginning and end of English speech as well. Americans consider individualistic outspokenness a virtue, as opposed to the Japanese view.

Situation 3: Losing one's temper, ridiculing, refusing to talk

Reason

Japanese don't value showing their emotions, which is viewed as something that breaks the harmony in interpersonal relationships, especially if you have low social status. However, they are used to being scolded by authority figures such as parents, a teacher, and a boss, ever since they were children. As a result, they have a habit of blaming themselves first when somebody is angry. When Japanese students see a native speaker upset, they might automatically feel that it is their fault, and reach the conclusion that their poor English communication skills made it happen. It is natural for native English speakers to express their feelings openly, but Japanese cultural values reinforce powerful self-criticism when facing such reactions.

Suggestions

I suggest devote at least one class to studying the differences between individualistic and group-oriented societies. Don't forget to touch on the expectations of each society, and tell why native speakers are free to express their feelings. You could refer to my lesson plan in Chapter 5 as an example.

Section II

5. WHAT CAN WE DO AS AN ESL TEACHER TO INCREASE JAPANESE STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM?

I believe that the loss of confidence in communicating with native-speakers stems from lack of experience and information about the American way of communication. This section will first present information on the American way of communication that my low self-esteem Japanese students found helpful, then provide lesson plans that successfully increased their confidence.

The American way of communication

Small talk in American culture

I think making small talk is essential to communicating with native speakers. People will open a conversation in the park, on the train, or in a waiting room in a hospital--almost anywhere and anytime in America. It can possibly lead to a friendship. A lot of my Japanese students confessed that they felt awkward when native-speakers around them started small talk. In Japan, people would rather not talk with a stranger or a person that they are meeting for the first time, out of shyness, and they feel comfortable with silence, in contrast to Americans. Informing students of the significant role that small talk plays in American society encouraged my students to learn and practice it. Here are my lesson plans for small talk that I used, for which I got good feedback.

Lesson plan for small talk I

Purpose: Comprehend small talk and its function in American culture

1. Explain what small talk is and what it is for.
2. Play the tape recording small talk (You can make a tape, but it is easier to use a listening tape or movie that you have)
3. Let students fill in this chart according to a conversation

When	Where	Who	What's the first statement?	What did they talk about?

Purpose: Check students' listening level, weakness

4. Check how much they caught and explain by playing the tape

Purpose: Make them understand what a tape said, how conversation went

5. Practice in pairs

Purpose: Put into practice

6. Give homework to observe native speakers' small talk and fill in the chart

When	Where	Who	What's the first statement?	What did they talk about?

7. Check the homework: Exchange info either in pairs or as a group

A teacher looks around a class and sees what they got

8. Let a student speak in a class and follow up info if any

Purpose: Present popular topics, useful statements for small talk

9. Practice some of the topics in pairs

One plays the role of a person starting a conversation, and then switch roles with different topic

Lesson Plan for Small Talk II

Purpose: Use small talk to open a conversation with native speakers that they would like to make friends with

1. Ask and imagine when, who, where, what and how a student has a possible chance to start conversation about.

Who(relationship)	When	Where	What(Topics)	How

For example, M.T. wrote:

Who(relationship)	When	Where	What(Topics)	How
Michael(classmate)	Break	On campus	Class assignment	"Hi, Michael" with smile
Shiela(classmate)	Break	On campus	Class assignment	"Are you in my Political Science class?"

2. Present additional examples or information if any in pairs or in class

Who(relationship)	When	Where	What(Topics)	How
Michael(classmate)	Break	On campus Hallway Cafeteria Library	Weather Class: Assignment Professor Classmates Hobbies Go for coffee some time	"Hi, Michael" with smile
Shiela(classmate)	Break	On campus Hallway Cafeteria Rest room	Weather Class: Assignment Ask her to show her notebook	"Are you in my Political Science class?"

3. Role play: Practice a couple of topics. Some students feel more comfortable making scenarios in advance than playing by ear.

How to respond to an American

Some of my Japanese students told me that native speakers unfortunately stopped conversations even though the Japanese wanted to continue, because natives thought that either they or the Japanese students weren't enjoying the conversation or were feeling uncomfortable. It is true that wrong messages come across between native speakers and Japanese students due to cultural differences. To meet my Japanese students' strong needs to get rid of this kind of misunderstanding, I explained how misunderstanding could happen and presented examples of responses to give appropriate messages to native speakers. The information below was what all of my Japanese students hadn't known but they really wanted to know in communicating with native speakers, and it could be worth spending some time to introduce it in an ESL course.

Different functions of silence

In America, silence is considered as being rather negative and to be avoided as it is without any specific purposes. It is hard for native speakers to bear being silent for a long time in regular conversation, and it is comfortable to fill it with something. Contrary to this, silence is very natural and positive in Japan, so that talking little is a virtue. Silence is used as one of the important parts of communication in Japan, and Japanese people are relaxed and comfortable through silence. They prefer to be quiet with close friends. This different role that silence plays in each society creates misunderstandings very easily. The example of my Japanese male student, M.N., can explain what could happen to people from each culture. M.N. went to an American party for the first time in the States. He had a pleasant chat with a male native speaker there, and felt very comfortable with him. Therefore, he got quiet with the intention of relaxing for a while and was

going to talk again when something popped up. Contrary to his expectation, the male native speaker rushed to leave him as soon as he got silent. M.N. wondered why he left him suddenly, even though he wanted to continue talking to him. After my explanation, M.N. understood that the native speaker had thought M.N. had not enjoyed talking with him, and, as a typical American, had felt uncomfortable being silent with him. I have noticed from my experiences, that most Japanese students don't know the effects of different cultural values toward silence and I think it is very helpful for Japanese students to be aware of this fact and learn how to respond to native speakers. Aside from this, it sometimes happens that Japanese speakers end up being silent unintentionally, because they don't understand what a native speaker said or they don't know how to respond to it in English. Although it is a hard task to catch up with a native's speed and rhythm, I present some tips on expanding a conversation despite the student's lower level.

Tips to expanding conversations

Nodding or giving simple words with appropriate eye contact

Not only native speakers, but also people in general, like to talk with a good listener. Even simply nodding or saying "Wow," "Ah-ha," "Oh my God," "Really?," "No kidding," and "No way" occasionally, with eye contact, makes a big difference. These words certainly encourage natives to speak more than no response at all. If a student doesn't have confidence in speaking in English, it is OK to engage in listening or watching the native speaker's mouth to see how to pronounce. Tell students that they don't need to understand 100 percent of what native speakers say. Just let it go. Remember that hearing live English is a great opportunity to practice listening and pronunciation.

Here are simple but useful words to use as a response:

"Wow," "Ah-ha," "OK," "All right," "Oh yeah?," "Oh no,"
"Gee," "Really?," "Right," "No kidding," " No way," "Are you sure?,"
"Sure," "I see," "I see what you mean," "I understand," "Interesting,"
"Great," "Good," "Sounds interesting," "Sounds great,"
"That's interesting," "That's great," "That's so bad," "That's so sad,"
"Are you OK?," "I am sorry to hear that," "I think so, too,"
"I am not sure," "Are/were/do/did you?," "How interesting."

Asking for repetition

Some Japanese students hesitate or miss a chance to ask a native speaker to repeat what he or she said, fearing they might anger the speaker. They think it is their fault that they couldn't catch what he or she said the first time. Or they might have experienced that a native speaker got upset when asked to repeat something again and again. Whether a native speaker or not, it is undeniably irritating to be asked to repeat something too many times. It is not advisable to encourage Japanese students to ask for repetition every time they need it until they understand completely. Therefore, I usually tell my Japanese students to take into consideration whom they are talking to. If it is with a close friend, it could be Okay to ask many times or frequently, while once or twice might be reasonable with a person who they meet for the first time. From my experience, I learned that a native speaker doesn't mind explaining unfamiliar things again to make you understand in English, if it is not too many times.

The following are useful phrases that can be used to ask for repetition:

"Pardon?," "Pardon me?," "What?," "Where?," "Who?," "Excuse me?,"
"Say that again?,"
"What did you say? / When did you say?/ Where did you say?,"

"You went where?" "You did what?"

"Could you repeat that again?"

"Would you mind repeating that again?"

Repeat a key word or sentence that you are interested in

To repeat or paraphrase what a speaker says shows a listener's interest, or can show reactions such as surprise, excitement, and compassion. For instance, repeating "New York?" with rising intonation indicates surprise. It gives a speaker the impression that the listener is listening actively, with interest, and would like to continue the conversation as well. I think repeating or paraphrasing what a native speaker says is a very good exercise to brush up on English, as well as a good method to see how much the students understand. In addition, it is an easy way to ask for repetition to confirm what the speaker said, instead of using the phrases above. If you say "New York?," most speakers will either respond, "Yeah," or correct it by saying, "No, Newark," and keep going. If you are not sure what a native speaker said or can't manage to say anything in response, because the speaker is speaking too quickly, the following phrases could be useful starters to paraphrase with during the conversation:

Useful expression for paraphrasing:

"Let me see if I understand you ...," "So you say ...,"

"I would like to see if I am following you or not."

Asking a question related to what the native said

It is pleasant for anyone to be asked some questions about what is said, which indicates that a listener is interested in the topic and would like to know more.

This encourages a speaker to talk more. Listen carefully and ask

"Wh-questions" (what, who, why, when, and where?) related to the topic.

Making excuses

Japanese culture doesn't value making excuses. As you see in the custom of "hara-kiri" and in the virtue of talking less, apology without an excuse is the appropriate attitude in Japan when people make mistakes or cause trouble. For Japanese, making an excuse gives the impression that you are unreliable, contemptible, or irresponsible. Therefore, it makes sense that my Japanese students misunderstood American people get wrong impressions. They need to know that American people expect to listen to an honest explanation or excuse along with an apology, and it is one of the important factors in building close relationships with them. Sufficient explanation makes native speakers understand who you are and what happened to you; they appreciate it as a form of sharing. Keeping them honestly informed is essential to building a friendship.

Give examples of situations by using the following phrases, and let students practice how to make an excuse. Remind your students that it is not an exercise in how to lie or avoid responsibilities. They will learn eventually how acceptable it is to give reasonable excuses.

Situation 1: I am late for class, because

- a. Get up late in the morning.
- b. Train was late
- c. My car had a problem
- d. Other reasons

Situation 2: I missed or will miss the deadline, because

- a. Don't know what to write
- b. Need more time to rewrite it
- c. Computer is broken

- d. Have been sick for a while
- e. Other reasons

Situation 3: I am quiet, because

- a. Don't understand what you said
- b. Don't know what to say (in English)
- c. Tired (with a reason why)
- d. Feel relaxed
- e. Other reasons

Situation 4: My English doesn't come easily during conversations

- a. Just came back from Japan recently
- b. Watched Japanese movies last night
- c. Talked with Japanese friends for a long time yesterday
- d. Tired(with a reason why)
- e. Other reasons

These are very useful to know when you would like to fill in the silence:

"Well, let's see."

"Let me think first."

"Let me think how to explain/ what to say."

"I don't know/I have no idea how/ what to say in English."

Share experiences to expand a conversation

I learned that native speakers express their feelings and opinions openly but also enjoy listening to others. On the other hand, Japanese consider what is appropriate or what they are expected to say first, and say only what they think is all right. This is the essential tactic for Japanese to survive in a group-oriented society where maintenance of harmony is indispensable. I

found that how my Japanese students, regardless of their English abilities, respond to native speakers is clearly different from how natives respond to each other which gives the impression to natives that they are bored. To see the comparison, I give two sample dialogues. The first one is a casual conversation between a native speaker and a Japanese student, and the second one is between two native speakers.

Conversation A N: native speaker J: Japanese student

N: "What's up?"

J: "OK."

N: "How was your weekend?"

J: "It was good. How about you?"

N: "I went hiking. It was great."

J: "OK. Oh, did you do your homework at English 101?"

N: "I guess so. It was tough wasn't it?"

J: "Yes, it was very difficult."

Conversation B Between native speakers

N1: "What's up?"

N2: "I went to my sister's wedding party last weekend.

It was great, but I am a bit tired from meeting so many people."

N1: "I understand. I was very exhausted when I went to my brother's, too. But his wife was beautiful in her brand-new dress."

N2: "My sister was very beautiful, too. Everything was perfect. The wedding party was at my dad's second house on Cape Cod, along the beach. The weather was gorgeous, you know, blue sky, no clouds, beautiful beach.

The weather man said it was going to rain, but we were lucky to have had such lovely weather."

What I notice is that Japanese students answer faithfully only what is asked, as they did in Japan, since their culture respects responding concisely and only when it is necessary. On the other hand, native speakers talk more frankly, as it comes up. In my class, I told my students that there are many chances to expand a conversation with their favorite native speakers by asking questions, sharing their feelings, opinions, and experiences, or presenting examples. You can refer to my lesson plans for details, but in a nutshell, tell your students that sharing is appreciated in the United States, and forget about talking less.

How to speak out in a class, including agreement and disagreement

American students have been trained how to express their opinions since they were children, while Japanese students study by memorization or drill. To master the American way of participation in class, it is necessary to learn from their American classmates. This is what I instructed my students.

1. Observe your class and ask these questions:
 - Who would you like to be in the class?
 - Why so? What are his or her strengths?
 - How does he or she start, express, and end statements in the class?
2. Take notes when you hear useful expressions, the timing to start talking, and the way he or she talks.
3. Practice how to state opinions in your words by referring to sufficient information that you have picked up from native speakers
4. Find an opportunity and take a chance.

Useful expressions:

"Speaking of ...," "I have a question about that,"

"That may be true, but ...," "That's a good point, but ...,"

"Maybe, but ...," "What about ...?,"

"I agree with this point, but I disagree ...,"

"I don't see it that way, I think that"

Don't be afraid to make mistakes

As I explain in Chapter 3, Japanese people are afraid to make mistakes. However, it is an essential step to improving in a foreign language. Your students should know that native speakers are more interested in enjoying communication with them than in paying attention to their mistakes. It is natural that even native speakers make mistakes as well, and they don't expect Japanese students to speak impeccable English at all. So, it is significant to keep in mind the purpose of communication with native speakers all the time. Students who can't stop criticizing their own mistakes are only hurting themselves. It is not helping them improve their English skills.

Useful way to handle making mistakes:

Just say, "Excuse me," or "Sorry," and go on when you make mistakes.

Ask native speakers, "How do you say that in English?" when you don't know the right way to say something.

Say, "Thank you for correcting me." or, "I really appreciate it." to native speakers when they correct your English

Take notes and repeat it immediately when a native corrects your English.

Explain how difficult it is to communicate in English so that native speakers can be aware of it.

Individualistic and group-oriented society

As you see in Chapter 3, the different cultural backgrounds of Japan make it difficult for Japanese students to master the American way of communication. It is extremely helpful to inform them of the differences and expectations in American society. This exercise summarizes what I wrote about it in Chapter 3, and I recommend you go back and read Chapter 3 if you need more explanation about the categories that I use in the chart below. All my students gave me good feedback, saying that they noticed how they misunderstood Americans and learned their communication style, influenced by American culture, after this exercise. You can modify this chart to fit the backgrounds of your students. Enjoy the discussion!

1. Give the story A and B to students.

Story A: I am Ayako Sato from Japan. I came to the States a month ago.

What surprised me about Americans is that they start talking about themselves even though I don't ask them to. With Japanese friends, we take turns talking by asking each other, but Americans turn the conversation to talk about only themselves.

Story B: I am Toshio from Japan. What makes me feel uncomfortable with

Americans is that they start talking even though I haven't finished my sentence yet. It gives me the impression that they are irritated to hear my poor English, and they intend to rush the conversation. I know my English is slow, but I would like them to wait for my complete statement.

2. Ask students what they think about these stories and other things that make them surprised or feel uncomfortable.
3. Write a chart like one below on the board. You can either write only in the gray area, so that you can draw out answers from the students, or fill out the whole chart with information. Explain each column by presenting examples such as the

ones you got from students earlier.

Countries	USA	Japan
Cultural Orientation	Individualistic	Group Oriented
Consciousness	Self	A member of group, others
Communication Style	Direct communication	Indirect communication
Response to Strangers	Talk Friendly	Polite but quiet
Values	Equality, freedom	Harmony
School Emphasis	Creativity Independency	Discipline, learn the proper form
Belief about people	People are different	People are same
Age	Not sensitive to age	Seniority system
Culture of	Guilt	Shame
Silence	Negative, awkward	Meaningful, comfortable

4. Upon your students' responses, you can go back to the exercises in "Small talk" and "How to respond to Americans" that I introduced earlier in this chapter

Lesson plans to enhance self-esteem

In the process of making the following lesson plans, the book, *Control Your Depression*, by Peter Lewinsohn, et al. (1992), offered me useful ideas. Although several exercises introduced by this book were intended to help depressed people to increase their confidence, I believed that some parts of them could be used for my Japanese students who have low self-esteem as well. For example, I made use of his chart of an Activity Schedule Plan for my lesson plans, since it is an effective way to

observe students' daily patterns of action and motivate them to increase positive actions. I suggest you read his book and other self help books if you want to make new lesson plans for this purpose.

Personal Action Plan

This exercise is not only for students to plan strategies to achieve their goals to help enhance their confidence, but also for a teacher to know what would meet their needs in a class. It is effective to use this lesson plan not only at the beginning of the semester but also in the middle of the term, when students get unenergetic or the teacher is at a loss for what to teach. I wrote the detailed instructions below for each category in case it is difficult to fill in. You can refer to a copy of what M.T. wrote as an example. This exercise can give a teacher clues to what information or exercises satisfy the students' needs, and actually a lesson plan of "Small Talk" was made from the information I got from my students in this exercise.

1. What would you like to accomplish while you are in the States?

What are your goals?

At this stage, I just want students to see what they would like to accomplish or what they expect to do while they are in the States. Therefore, feel free to write anything popping up on this sheet as a draft. They don't need to write anything formal. It is helpful to ask them questions such as, "Why did you decide to come to the States?," "What do you hope to do at the end of this semester or before going back to your home country?."

2. What are the obstacles or problems in accomplishing those goals?

Let students analyze what prevents them or what they lack.

3. What do you need to do or what help do you need?

Some students gave up their goals and just complained without thinking

how to solve their problems. Give them time to spend thinking seriously what they need and how they can get it with your support.

4. **Make your final action plans to pursue your goals**

Finalize what students plan to do with concrete information on when, what, where, who, and how so that they can take action easily.

5. **Rank the priority**

It is hard to accomplish the entire action plan at the same time. Rank the top priority number 1 and order the rest of goals.

M.T. 's example

What would you like to accomplish while you're in the States? What are your goals?	What will be obstacles to accomplishing them?	What do you need to do or what help do you need?	Final action plans to pursue your goals	Rank the priority
I would like to have confidence in anything	<p>Sensitive to what other people think about my statements, my reactions and so on. I compare myself with others.</p> <p>I feel shamed of making mistakes.</p> <p>Don't have much time to be exposed to English</p> <p>I don't understand native English yet</p>	<p>Ask somebody what others think about me.</p> <p>Advice</p> <p>Make more opportunities to speak English</p> <p>Study hard</p>	<p>Ask a teacher what others think about me when I am worried.</p> <p>Ask a teacher what to do</p> <p>Get advice from a teacher to make more opportunities to speak English especially with native speakers.</p> <p>Ask a teacher to introduce useful expressions that native speakers are likely to use during a class.</p>	
I would like to learn photography	Lack of knowledge	Take a class Somewhere	Get a brochure at an adult school	

Personal Action Plan Sheet

What would you like to accomplish while you're in the States? What are your goals?	What will be obstacles to accomplishing them?	What do you need to do or what help do you need?	Final action plans to pursue your goals	Rank the priority

English Skills Questionnaire

If your students write that they would like to improve their English skills in their Personal Action Plan, this questionnaire is useful first to evaluate their English level, and then, find out what activities will help increase their English skills. Furthermore, it can lead students to find what to write on the Activity Schedule Plan sheet and Rewards sheet that will be introduced for the next two exercises.

Rate yourself as follows:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 0 | I can't do this at all in English |
| 1 | I can do this a little in English (less than 30 percent) |
| 2 | I can do this about a half in English (30 to 50 percent) |
| 3 | I can do this more than half in English (50 to 70 percent) |
| 4 | I can do this about 70 to 90 percent in English |
| 5 | I can do this perfectly (90 to 100 percent) in English |

Write your rating next to each item below:

Level Check	Scale
✧ Thinking not in native language but in English	
✧ Introducing myself to someone	
✧ Seeing a doctor and talking about problems	
✧ Understanding news on TV	
✧ Understanding soap operas	
✧ Understanding drama	
✧ Understanding American movies	
✧ Understanding local newspapers	
✧ Understanding the Wall Street Journal	
✧ Understanding Time magazine	
✧ Writing official letters	

- ◇ Reading and writing email messages
- ◇ Opening or closing a bank account
- ◇ Complaining by telephone
- ◇ Complaining to landlord when something is broken
- ◇ Speaking up with your opinions
- ◇ Expressing agreement or disagreement in a meeting or class
- ◇ Leaving a message on the phone
- ◇ Understanding the messages on the answering machine.
- ◇ Asking for directions and understanding what is said
- ◇ Writing letters, cards, or notes
- ◇ Asking for help or advice
- ◇ Showing interest in what others have said
- ◇ Having people show interest in what I have said
- ◇ Saying "no" when you mean it
- ◇ Telling other people about your feelings
- ◇ Giving praise or compliments
- ◇ Having a chat with other international students
- ◇ Having a chat with native speakers

Events to increase the frequency of:

- 0 This has never happened in the past 30 days
- 1 This happens once a month
- 2 This happens every two weeks
- 3 This happens once a week
- 4 This happens a few days a week
- 5 This happens almost every day

Events Schedule

Scale

- ◇ Listening to English tapes
- ◇ Watching TV
- ◇ Watching movies
- ◇ Reading newspapers
- ◇ Listening to the radio
- ◇ Having a chat with native speakers
- ◇ Having lunch with native speakers
- ◇ Going to an American party
- ◇ Going to an international party
- ◇ Listening to English radio
- ◇ Getting together with international friends
who are not from your home country
- ◇ Getting together with native friends
- ◇ Going to the movies
- ◇ Going to a bar and talking to a stranger
- ◇ Talking on the telephone
- ◇ Initiating a conversation with a stranger
- ◇ Talking with a classmate or co-worker
- ◇ Joining a group at a short break or lunch break
- ◇ Going to international club meeting or events
- ◇ Making a speech or presentation
- ◇ Speaking up with your opinions
- ◇ Expressing agreement and disagreement
- ◇ Writing letters, card, pr notes
- ◇ Having a telephone conversation
- ◇ Writing official letters

Look at the statements with a rating of less than 3 in both parts of the questionnaire. They are the things that you need to consider for improving your English.

Activity Schedule Plan

Students will decide what activities they would like to increase on a daily basis. It is easier to choose the results from the previous questionnaires, but you can add others that are especially related to the final action plan that they wrote in "Personal Action Plan." Fill in the activities to increase on the sheet below. Before marking the box of the day when it is done, go to the next exercise, "Rewards," to set a specific goal.

Activity Schedule Plan

Activity	Day																																	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31			
1																																		
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Rewards

Some students with low self-esteem tend to be hard on themselves and don't know the importance of rewarding themselves for their accomplishments. They think they are not worthy, or they have a habit of blaming themselves. Let them realize that all of them are worthy. A system of rewards can be one of the most effective ways to encourage them to pursue their goals. Make a contract statement like the one below. You can write anything that you would like to accomplish, such as something related to the Activity Schedule Plan. One simple reward statement for one required behavior is reasonable on a contract. Making more than two contracts at once could confuse them, and I really recommend finishing one contract before making another.

Required Behavior If I, M.T., make more than ten marks on my weekly plan
check sheet:

Reward I will reward myself with a special burger for lunch at the
restaurant in the Park Plaza Hotel on the weekend.

Required Behavior If I, _____,

Reward I will reward myself by

Imagine an ideal person

Visualization is a more healthy and powerful technique than criticism for achieving a goal. Let your students create a positive self-image, which makes them believe they can accomplish it.

With relaxing music

1. Ask your students to imagine an ideal person and give him or her a name.
2. Let them draw his or her picture on a piece of paper.
3. Tell them sit down comfortably and ask:

"What is he or she like?," "What can your ideal person do?,"

"What is he or she doing now?."

And then, instruct them to visualize his or her behavior in detail

If students have difficulty imagining this, it would be helpful for a teacher to give them hints such as the following statements:

Your ideal person is going to a party. Imagine what he or she wears, whom he or she is with, and what he or she is saying. He or she has just arrived and rung the bell. What is the house like? ", "Who is the host and how does the host welcomes him or her? How does your ideal person respond?

Give them 5 to 10 minutes for visualization. And then, have them share what they imagined with the class. It might be hard to imagine for the first time, but doing this exercise repeatedly helps a student to see clearly what he or she wants and helps the student believe that he or she can accomplish it. Tell your students it is very effective to do this exercise before they sleep and when they wake up.

6. Conclusion

Living in a foreign country is the best environment to acquire a foreign language, but there are difficulties to overcome, such as culture shock and language problems. I think an ESL teacher plays a unique and significant role for international students, besides teaching a language. He or she is a sort of mediator between native speakers and students. That is, an ESL teacher can understand both points of view when one doesn't fit smoothly into the other, and can provide warm support.

In this paper, I have attempted to show what I have learned about playing this role for Japanese students of English. As I stated in the "Introduction," I found that lack of confidence kept my Japanese students from improving their English. In order to overcome it, I believe that repetition of these steps--setting a reasonable goal, making action plans, giving rewards for success--can, with a teacher's encouragement, enhance students' sense of worth. Besides that, knowledge of American ways of communication is essential to interaction with native speakers. I am very happy to see my students enjoying American life through their efforts with my lessons. I can't guarantee all of my lesson plans would work out for you, but as least I hope my thesis can help you to understand their cultural backgrounds and help you to find solutions. I spent a much longer time completing my thesis than I had expected, but I learned many things while working on this research. Finally, I would like to thank all of people who helped and encouraged me to accomplish it in spite of their busy schedules.

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