

< REPORT >

CREATING A JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR COMPULSORY SCHOOL:

A Visit to a Public School with Language College Status in Rural Britain

Robert Juppe Jr.

Abstract

Japanese was once a very exotic, mysterious language which could be studied at only the university level. At a lower secondary school deep in the English countryside, however, Japanese has become a very popular academic offering for hundreds of students. This paper explores the problems and obstacles encountered in starting a Japanese language program, gauges student reaction to the language/class, and probes instructors to better ascertain how Japanese, a non-cognate language in relation to English, can be taught effectively in compulsory schools.

INTRODUCTION

“Kiritsu! Mina san, ohayo gozaimasu!”

“Ohayo gozaimasu Chambers sensei!” belted back twenty-five young voices. *“Dozo, yoroshiku onegaishimasu!”*

The teacher scanned the classroom to make certain that all was in order, then switched to English. “All right, class, very good. Take your seats. We have a guest here today.”

So went the opening of a Japanese language lesson held in the computer center at Tavistock lower secondary school in Devon, Great Britain, the UK’s 9th largest school. The language class, for twelve year olds, is part of a new curriculum for this school which received “Language College Status” (one of just fifteen nationwide) by the Department for Education and Employment. Through such programs, students are showered with foreign languages at a young stage in the hopes that they will find one or more upon which they will eventually concentrate. Additionally, the school administration hopes to revitalize the rural institution by providing an international focus. These hopes extend to the future, when school officials envision an alumni pool with an

extensive command of languages, a skill that the administration feels will prove highly advantageous in an increasingly multinational work-world.

Early morning at the Tavistock School is frenetic and bustling. Thousands of children pour into the school via its fleet of buses which service outlying districts. Mist-laced moors surround the town while well-groomed parks and Tudor architecture dominate Sir Francis Drake's birthplace. Upon closer observation, one notices that all of the school's signboards are multilingual: One of the five is Japanese. Hence, all of the school facilities are labelled in the foreign languages taught at the school. *Senior Study Centre*, for example, is also written シニアスタディセンター; the cafeteria has a sign featuring the Chinese characters 食堂. The students seem to have adapted completely to the multilingual labelling; the entire school is posted with the multi-language signs save for the parking lot, which boasts a very proletarian looking "NO ADMITTANCE TO THE STUDENTS".

One afternoon, upon departing with one of the school's instructors from the faculty car park, two students were being reprimanded for trespassing onto the faculty parking lot which was clearly labelled with the forbidding message. After being scolded by the instructor, one of the fifteen year old boys replied with a grin, "Sorry, Miss, I couldn't understand it. I was looking for the French!" It seemed not only a clever argument by the boy to justify his offense, but also a signal that students are aware of the importance vested in foreign languages at the institution.

The emphasis on foreign languages (the students are exposed to five during their first two years of secondary school) is an innovative stroke at internationalizing a traditionally quiet country school. Yano Taro of Kyoto University once characterized internationalization as, "*the effort to introduce international elements to a country of people with the least friction with their identities.*" In this sense, students are learning the languages of their multinational counterparts while elements of international culture encroach in other subjects: *Haiku* in literature, *Hokkaido* in geography, judo in physical education, calligraphy in art, etc. The entire curriculum, in other words, is undergoing a multicultural transformation, and while Japan might not yet have a seat on the UN Security Council, it has made strong inroads in rural British education.

This new emphasis does not mean that education will change solely for the students. The teachers, says Language College Vice-Principal Charlie Naylor, are no longer able to sit on the sidelines and await retirement. The instructors, too, must retrain, they must start thinking about innovative ways to educate children as the 21st century is ushered in. This wave of internationalization, explains Naylor enthusiastically, has swept up all involved in the education process at Tavistock College. From talks with school officials, one gets the feeling that Flex-like foreign language inundation is the program centerpiece.

THE FLEX APPROACH

The FLEX approach (foreign language exploration/experience) first appeared in the United States following the First World War. The current approach to language learning at Tavistock College seems to resemble FLEX in principle. It was thought under FLEX that students could

study a number of languages for brief periods, and then select those languages in which they had some interest based on this exposure. This concept still surfaces in different forms. In the Shaler school district, a predominantly white suburb of Pittsburgh in the state of Pennsylvania in the United States, a variation of FLEX was initiated during the early 1990s. In order to better understand the early success at Tavistock, a look back at Shaler's unfruitful campaign might prove insightful.

For the academic year 1991-92, the first year students at the junior high school were to rotate the following subjects in six-week modules: French, German, Spanish, Japanese, and Computer and Business Education. (Note that the school was in the process, as were many at the time, of transforming itself into a "middle school". A traditional junior high school is comprised of grades 7, 8, and 9 while a middle school hosts grades 6, 7 and 8. The ninth grade then becomes part of the senior high school, a change reflected largely in shifting demographics.) For each module, the students were assessed grades as follows: E (excellent); S (satisfactory); U (unsatisfactory), the rationale being that strong grade bias would be less likely to affect the final course selection. Contrary to its pluralistic, multiethnic image, the United States places little emphasis on foreign languages as a component of compulsory education. Along with music, physical education, and industrial arts, foreign languages are often labelled "exploratory/special" courses rather than academic. Furthermore, the prevailing preference for Spanish as "the foreign language to take" results not from idealistic hopes of bettering relations with the largest other-language speaking minority in the United States (22% in California, for example, a state which may, in two decades time, face a "Quebecization" problem rooted in linguistic dominance), but rather because it is perceived as being "easier" than the other options. This may demonstrate a low level of motivation for learning foreign languages (Gardner and Lambert).

JAPANESE FAILS TO HOOK MANY

As 8th graders in the Shaler system, students were directed to select the language which appealed to them most. Spanish was the chosen tongue, with 54% opting for it. French polled 36% while German and Japanese drew just 5% each. How do fourteen year old children reach such decisions? Ritsu Shimizu speculates the following calculate into a young person's deliberation:

1. **DEMOGRAPHIC ATTACHMENT.** As the student body is largely caucasian, there is no particular ethnic connection to a language such as Spanish. A widely held assumption in the United States dictates that Spanish prevails because of a strong patriotic connection, a link to heritage; in the Shaler system, no such demographic group (Spanish/Hispanic) exists.
2. **SOCIO-AFFECTIVE FILTER.** It is possible that parental bias toward German and Japanese (i.e., as former WW II foes; the Mexican-American War of 1847 evidently wrought little student hostility) had some bearing on students' decisions, something akin to negative reinforcement. In other words, students took Spanish or French largely because they wished to avoid registering for German or Japanese, if one accepts the socio-affective filter as a valid reason.
3. **SHORT-TERM THINKING.** Being teenagers, the students may not have given this decision a

great deal of thought. They are probably unable to conceive of the need to achieve communicative competence in another language considering their surroundings.

4. INSTRUMENTAL APPLICATION. Complementary perhaps to the rationale provided in reason number three, students may see a correlation between their grades and successful futures, but no connection to use in a future career (such as international business). Put more simply, the students seek “A” marks which will prove beneficial in future educational pursuits in the near future. (It should be noted that according to Gardner and Lambert, motivation and attitudes **independent** of aptitude and intelligence contribute to the success of students mastering second languages. Making the “safe” choice may run contrary to contemporary research.)
5. INTEGRATIVE APPLICATION. Students may select a certain language to become part of a perceived grouping, to become part of another language community. Some may believe that Spanish can be used within the borders of the United States, and that it will be truly more useful than the other languages offered. Third year students participating in a questionnaire at Tavistock indicated that Japanese seem to be successful, conscientious, efficient people; perhaps there was a desire to become part of this language community, in the British case. Also, a number of students interviewed mentioned a distaste for studying French, perhaps reflecting notions held of their neighbors.
6. ANXIETY-DRIVEN RATIONALE. Students may have been interested in avoiding the mysterious, the “unknown”, the seemingly impossible, by not opting for Japanese. A non-alphabet language such as Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or any pictogram-based tongue may intimidate a young person. The head Japanese instructor at Tavistock explained that for this reason, the teachers try to make the study of Chinese characters (kanji) non-threatening.
Shimizu revealed that one of the students, upon selecting Spanish, indicated that she had done so, “because my sister had. Spanish is easy and she can help me with my homework.” This runs contrary to the reasoning of one of the first year students at Tavistock, Phil Smith, an engaging student of Japanese. “My sister takes German,” he began. After a pensive pause, he conceded: “It sounds horrible!”
7. ALIENATION. Taking a course such as Japanese in the United States often involves mixed grades. A ninth grader, for example, might be taking the class along with seventh and eighth graders. This involves disengagement from one’s peer groups, a concern that evidently weighs heavily on the minds of the lower secondary students (and Japan is often criticized for being “group oriented”).
8. COGNATE vs. FOREIGN LANGUAGES. Japanese is a very distant foreign language, what is termed a “Category 4 Language”. Students rightfully discern that more time will be required to achieve mastery over this language than will be needed for, say, French.
9. CONTINUITY. Students might wonder whether they will be able to continue with Japanese upon advancing to upper secondary school. Japanese instructors are often part-time teachers, or teachers of other subjects who take on Japanese in addition to their main assignments.

At Shaler, teachers tended to promote their subjects like commodities, according to Shimizu.

Some stressed the usefulness of the languages they were teaching; some tried to alleviate student anxiety and fear of difficulty. In this particular adaptation of FLEX in the United States designed to spur student appreciation for the study of foreign languages, Japanese fared poorly. It is impossible to pinpoint precisely why, but the popularity of the course remained low.

FLEX COMES TO TAVISTOCK

On September 1, 1996, Tavistock launched a bold initiative. First-year lower secondary students were to take two unit hours of French per week, and two of Japanese. As second year students, they continue with French and Japanese, but also add a trimester of Greek, German, and Spanish respectively. In the following year, the students choose the languages in which they have an interest.

To carry out this plan, a Japanese language staff of two was created. The head instructor teaches Japanese exclusively while the other has some French and German classes as well. (Note that from September, a third instructor will join the department.) Together they teach some 450 students.

Crispin Chambers, the head instructor, is an affable, enthusiastic teacher. While he wholeheartedly supports foreign language education, he admits that he sometimes questions the concept of “showering languages” upon the students. By assailing the students with a plethora of foreign languages, he wonders if interest will diminish by the time they reach the A standard. If one considers that students are bombarded with five languages during the first two years of secondary school, overwhelming them would seem possible.

“It gives them a taste,” counters vice-principal Charlie Naylor. “This curriculum offers them a smattering of languages, an exposure. The traditional schools don’t offer innovative programs like this.” He is proud that they are teaching everybody from, “the children of high court judges to farmers’ kids”, and emphasizes that it doesn’t matter what language they are learning so long as they are learning language. This, by Naylor’s reckoning, will enable them to learn language more adeptly later, it will help them appreciate language itself, and it will provide them with the skills to master multiple tongues.

This fits in with what truly appears to excite Naylor: An international outlook which the school has ostensibly embraced and continues to nurture. He sees exchange, future employment opportunities, and the economic vitality of local Devon hinging on this cultivation of international attitudes and skills. “The jobs may be in France in twenty years. Our kids will have the skills to cross borders and accept those jobs.” His enthusiasm is infectious; his desire to build a first-rate program taking advantage of high-tech opportunities appears strong.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION CENTRE

The International Communication Centre is a testimony to support. Behind powerful financial backing from the Daiwa Foundation, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, and the British government,

Tavistock has built an impressive language center stocked full of computer terminals. But in the application of funding, another paradox exists: While the students clack away on state-of-the-art computer terminal keyboards, there are no books for the students for the Japanese classes (there are, however, “communal” texts that are shared by the classes). Also, it cannot help but be noticed that the students have no personal locker space; in fact, they have no lockers at all. Even in March, the students appear burdened as they tote their belongings about the school nomadically. Yet in the Centre, students are able to plunk down their gear and tap into live NHK broadcasts (via satellite) and they are able to video-conference with students in classrooms halfway around the globe. So long as funding is available, the students will have these options at their disposal.

A VISIT TO A LESSON

It is a cold, blustery March morning, and a first year lesson is underway in the computer room. Each child is seated at a private terminal. There is no sharing, no battling over the mouse units. On this particular day, the students are practicing writing kanji characters, the next ten in their arsenal delineated by the program *Easy Educational Language*. Today’s menu is as follows:一, 右, 雨, 円, 玉, 音, 学, 火, 花, 下. Many children seem to be working diligently, many are chatting, many are doing activities totally unrelated to the assignment. Chambers sensei, as the students refer to him respectfully, sits in the front inspecting students’ work and discussing their progress. He also spends a great deal of time fiddling with a BROMCOM unit (an electronic regulated attendance system) a gadget designed to make attendance-taking easier, centralized, but which seems to make work yet more burdensome for the already overly taxed instructors. The BROMCOM electronically registers students’ presence-class by class- in a central office, and tracks them period by period. Upon remarking to him that this scarcely seems a time-saver, Chambers replies that it also brings revenue into the school. In this day and age of increasingly strong capitalistic presence in public schools, I am afraid to ask how.

I stop by one terminal and ask a student to summon up *YAMA* (山) from his program. He casts me a puzzled look, and then asks, “Uh, sir, what is *YAMA*?” As it was the first character that I could recall learning, I explain that it means “mountain” and he replies, “Oh, we haven’t learned that one yet!” It seems that each character recognition system has its own priorities.

An assistant, Takanori Kawamura (who is Japanese), circulates about the floor as if combing a department store for shoplifters. He inspects students’ work and corrects their pronunciation of the characters, though few seem to desire much interaction with him. He is on three months’ leave from a company back in Japan, and came to work at the school “for the experience”. I notice that he hangs about idly for much of the lesson, often staring blankly into space or out a window. As it is the last day of his term, he seems more preoccupied with what lies ahead (travel around the European continent).

The word *AME* (雨) pops up on a young girl’s screen. I ask her to read it; she mispronounces it OMI. She admits that she has not yet learned to read the hiragana perfectly. Across from her, two studious lads have completed the ten characters assigned them, and are discussing them

scientifically, comparing them to other kanji previously learned. They are deeply involved in this task; I ask them if they are content with what they are doing, and both flash enormous smiles. “I love studying *kanji*,” says one boy. “It’s like art, and it’s like a secret code.”

Another boy shows me his workbook, which contains not only very well-written kanji, but a full page, color-pencil drawn rendition of a *shinkansen* (bullet train). He has obviously spent a great deal of time on it. “I’d like to ride it one day, sir,” he remarks to me earnestly. Chambers has not only got them working with their own angles of interest, he has spent a good deal of time instilling in students a fascination for the culture.

Chambers concludes the busy fifty minute session with a *sanbonjime* (a clapping ritual done to honor the close of an event; in this case, they are paying homage to Mr. Kawamura, who is to depart that afternoon). The students are clearly intrigued by this ritual, the process, and the explanation given by Mr. Chambers. Meanwhile, Kawamura *sensei* grins from ear to ear, obviously pleased with the show of enthusiasm on his behalf. He concludes with a firmly barked, *Ganbatte kudasai!* (Best of luck to you all!).

Chambers sensei looks tired at the end of the lesson. He has been admonishing students to brush up on their penmanship, redirecting students who have meandered off into irrelevant programs on their terminals, assisting slower learners. He gives a great deal of himself to the students and he manages the class splendidly.

“I’m trying to ease the kids into Japanese, not push them. We want to convince them that it is not as difficult as they seem to think; we want them to opt for Japanese later.” Some of the teachers were skeptical of Japanese when it was first introduced; many claimed that it would not catch on, that students would lose interest within several weeks. Chambers’ approach to luring students into the Japanese program is ingenious: He is trying to get students to enjoy the language on their own terms, he appeals to what they are interested in and draws them toward study of the language. If a student has an aptitude toward art, he encourages them to draw the *kanji* with great flourish. If they lean toward hard sciences, he gets them to analyze the characters as if they were ancient hieroglyphics.

STUDENT LANGUAGE SELECTION

Why are students drawn to Japanese at Tavistock? Chambers speculates several reasons. Firstly, the students seem to find it exotic. As of yet, there are few in Britain who can boast a mastery of the language; learning the tongue will set students apart from others. This penchant for the exotic at a young age seems to run counter to the American students; at Shaler Junior High School, for example, a pack mentality appears to prevail. Students seem to avoid the different, the unusual.

Secondly, parents in Devon recognize that Japanese could be a marketable skill. They encourage their children to take Japanese largely due to its perceived appeal in the service sector (tourism is big in these parts). Thirdly, Japanese seems to hold great interest for students who enjoy art (drawing). The staff allows the children to play with *kanji*, to draw and doodle. Even the

introverts among the class are drawn to this aspect of the language. The scientifically minded take an enormous interest in the characters. They analyze and study them to no end. Fourthly, slower learners enjoy working with *kanji* as it puts them on equal footing with their peers. Dyslexic students have no problem writing *kanji*. Student esteem in such cases, notes Chambers, can rise.

Chambers also cites unwavering support from parents as positive. Some of the parents themselves have expressed an interest in taking Japanese courses at the night school that the college operates. While the current staff is overburdened with their students, Chambers' wife, also a former Japan hand, helps out with such courses.

PROBLEMS?

Both Chambers and the other full-time instructor, Anu Jain, agree that problems exist. Firstly, they both agree that in theory, inundating children with languages is beneficial, but the reality is that children can get confused. As Mandarin Chinese and Russian are to be added from September, this confusion might only be exacerbated.

Secondly, the school is at present committed to an international course. Funding is more than adequate. The danger exists, however, of these sources of funding lessening, or even desiccating. Should such problems befall them, the academic direction of the school could indeed shift. An outsider does get the sense that the administration is overwhelmingly positive about the focus the school has taken. At the same time, however, a gap appears to exist between the idealistic bliss of the goals and the day-to-day difficulties implementation involves. While Naylor energetically explains the pursuit of video conference partners, a student is being scolded by a fatigued-looking teacher for wearing an incomplete uniform. As is the case with many of the students, his necktie has been clipped in half, an ostensibly popular fashion trend in the school (and irreversible, unless the presently stylish lot plans to tape the missing piece back on). The generals have plotted a bold course, but there appear to be defectors among the foot soldiers.

Thirdly, other teachers- language teachers included- seem threatened by the progressive strokes and allocation of funding. They seem skeptical of pursuing funding exclusively for the economic hot-spots of the coming century: Japan and China seem certain to be key players given current forecasts. It might be this uncertainty that appears to nag at Chambers; one starts to hope that the school is developing firm and focused principles rather than pursuing fads. Language study appears to be a linchpin of the academic program, and it would be difficult to find a more adept team than one finds in Chambers and Jain.

THE ASSISTANT

A Japanese assistant appears to be a permanent fixture for the Japanese program, yet another potential source of envy from teachers outside of the department. Following Kawamura's departure, a nine-month intern was scheduled to come. Chambers complains that they are not consulted in the selection, but merely told; Jain seems less perplexed by this and more concerned

that the assistant stay for a substantial time period. "I have done a full circle," confesses Chambers, who had taught in Japan on the BET scheme (British English Teachers' scheme) a decade ago. "Ten years ago, I was causing havoc for some poor Japanese teacher. Now I have a Japanese assistant causing havoc for me!" he laughs. He then admits in a more serious tone that these sensei are not in fact educators, but merely professional people interrupted in paying their way for the designated term of stay. Ironically, Chambers has echoed a problem about which Japanese teachers of English have complained for years: They want ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) who are trained in the teaching of foreign languages.

The role that the assistant plays in the teachers' courses is up to the individual instructor. Chambers seems to prefer a student-centered environment with the assistant serving as a trouble-shooter; Jain seemed keen on practicing her Japanese and conversing with the assistant in Japanese at every opportunity. Kawamura, the outgoing assistant, seems content with both roles. Officially, three roles are specified for the assistant: 1. To help with resources/resource development. 2. To correct and assist the students with their Japanese. 3. To generate enthusiasm for the subject (Japanese). While observing the lessons, I would say that the second reason was Mr. Kawamura's forte.

TEAM-TEACHING CULTURE

Just as *kokusai rikai kyoiku* (education for international understanding) is a subject which troubles Japanese teachers, internationalization looms as a key component behind the Tavistock educational philosophy. One of the critical aims of their educational program, asserts Chambers, is instilling in students an interest in the culture connected with the language of study.

As a team-teaching partner for a class of twelve year olds for a day, Chambers and I decided to reverse an activity which I had done previously in Japan: Culture Bag. It is a simple yet potentially stimulating activity in which students are encouraged to guess at the applications and functions of items used in everyday life in another culture.

The activity was done as follows:

1. Students were divided into small groups (three or four students per group).
2. Each group was given an item/object to inspect/study. After several minutes, they were to give a brief report on their item/object. Each group was to speculate as to what the item was, and how it was used in everyday life.

Due to the great distance between my home and Devon, I could regrettably not bring much. The items in the Culture Bag were: 1. A plastic bottle of green tea. 2. A pair of thick white socks that are currently popular among female high school students (*rusoksu*). 3. A package of dried snack squid (*hoshiika*). 4. A heat pad that a student might keep in his or her pocket to warm the hands during winter. 5. A package of shrimp crisps. 6. Throat lozenges (*nodoame*). 7. An envelope used for presenting a cash gift at weddings. 8. Mosquito coils (*katorisenko*). 9. A can of rice wine (containing the fin of a blowfish) with a heating compartment attached to the bottom of the can. By pushing a button on the bottom of the can, the contents could be heated within several

minutes.

The reaction to the activity was tremendous. The ideas that the students concocted were both interesting and creative. For example, the group examining the bottle of green tea guessed that it was a bottle of dish detergent or lime juice. Yet another group suspected that it must be olive oil, an exotic green liquid by their reckoning. Another thought it to be a mint beverage.

The dried squid puzzled the students. The following were the most memorable guesses: 1. It was a package of emergency cloth to be used to patch up a rip or tear in an article of clothing. 2. It could be used in a pinch as a toupee (the students genuinely believed this to be its function). 3. They were a raw form of noodles.

The group with the throat lozenges was the most academic. After spying *nodoame* on the package, they set out to find the word *nodo* in the dictionary (their sleuth-work, curiously, ended here; unfortunately, not one of them got the idea that they should search for *ame* as well). They guessed, correctly, its function to be medicinal.

The group with the envelope guessed correctly that it would likely be used at a wedding. Interestingly, they found it wasteful that the envelope would then be discarded. The small group of girls thought it would be practical to use the decorative clasp on the front as a hair clip, and suggested that I report their recommendation to all Japanese women upon returning.

A comparative/contrastive discussion on weddings ensued. Students were intrigued by the idea that monetary gift amounts are fixed, and that many weddings are restricted in time. Also, the idea of multiple speeches perplexed them, as this practice promised to detract from the festive aura of the occasion, in their young eyes.

Students thought the hand-warmers to be remarkably clever and useful, though most of them thought of Japan as a semi-tropical country with a climate more akin to Singapore. They did not like the idea of eating dried squid, and they found the idea of wine with the fin of a fish inside for flavoring to be repulsive. The more they talked about the items from the bag, however, the greater their appreciation for Japan as a different culture seemed to become. Also, many seemed to deepen their understanding of Japan in deductive fashion. For example, if hand-warmers are used, they reasoned, then the country must experience chilly weather at some point during the year. As with the Japanese students, they were encouraged to ask question about the objects, to view them as representative of another culture rather than frightful and alien in an egocentric cultural context.

In one respect, the English students differed from their Japanese counterparts. They were unable to function in an orderly fashion in groups. It took considerably more time to organize the groups, get them to focus on the task, and prepare reports. Perhaps like American students, they lack in repetitive practice (with respect to group activity). This does not seem to be the case with young Japanese students. Furthermore, their attentiveness to other groups' presentations seemed very low. (Also, despite pleas from me not to open any of the packaging on the items, many groups could not resist the temptation brought on by youthful curiosity).

These are merely observations from several class visits, and can hardly serve as a basis from which sweeping conclusions are to be drawn. The overall mood of the class sessions was positive,

and there was one striking similarity with Japanese students that was common to all classes: They asked very similar questions of me. Who was my favorite singer? What football club did I support? What sports could I play? Could the students keep the objects for themselves? Could they open the squid and taste a bit?

STUDENT IMPRESSIONS OF THE JAPANESE PEOPLE

A simple questionnaire was administered to a grade 9 class which was subjective in nature. The main aim of the survey was to get some idea of how students viewed the Japanese (having never been to the country, but having studied the language for more than a year at Tavistock). Even if the sample was extremely limited, the students' impressions are interesting:

1. What kind of place do you imagine Japan to be?

Busy, crowded (the two most frequent responses). Other responses:

- lots of electrical stuff
- rainy
- highly cultured, beautiful countryside
- poor, with old men with long beards talking about the past

2. *What sort of people do you imagine the Japanese to be?*

Kind, strict, polite, disciplined, hard-working, intelligent. These were common to virtually every response, but the following comments were also included on some papers:

- they are not as extroverted as us
- they are more spoiled by their parents than us
- they have dark eyes, they are shorter than us

3. *What impressions do you have of Japanese schools?*

Clean, tidy, disciplined students. Students behave well. Also:

- Japanese students are cleverer than we are
- Pupils have to clean the school each day
- Much more pressurized (NOTE: It was not specified precisely WHAT was more "pressurized"; presumably, the student lifestyle.)

4. *Where do your impressions and knowledge about Japan come from?*

School and television were the two most common responses. A few mentioned books.

The students seemed to know a great deal about Japan, which is perhaps the most significant of the student feedback. Also, while Westerners can hold iconoclastic ideas about Japan (*e.g., karate, Godzilla, judo, Toyota, kimono, chopsticks, etc.*), the surveys were devoid of such references. These young people seem to be learning a great deal about the world in which their Japanese counterparts are raised, they are learning about an alternative social reality through the study of the language. This is why the study of Japanese is so endearing to many at Tavistock: It is taught not merely as a language, but as means of communication for a unique society and culture. Vice Principal Naylor commented about it, "not mattering what language they take", but here, it does seem to matter: Chambers and Jain are attracting students to the Japanese course in large

numbers by integrating the language with the culture. This has been a key factor in the success of Japanese in rural England.

GROWING PAINS FOR JAPANESE

The department has weathered the early predictions of failure, though Chambers would admit that they are not yet out of the woods, so to speak. Both he and Jain bemoan the lack of a base, a room in which the Japanese program could be centered. At present, they are assigned rooms on a daily basis, which means that they are unable to affix hiragana charts on the wall, hang posters, give the room an Asian feel. Jain in particular believes that this will both enhance student appreciation for culture and deepen interest in the language. Instead, the instructors tote the communal books about as they are shuffled from classroom to classroom.

And while the teachers are somewhat wary about potential problems with funding, they are heartened by access to high-tech facilities (e-mail, satellite television, video conferencing). Japan is not a mystical, distant land; within the walls of Tavistock, students are able to connect with Japan and its people quite readily.

It would appear that the goals set by the administration at Tavistock are being achieved, but credit should go largely to the dedicated and carefully planned efforts of the instructors who are careful not to intimidate students with a wholly complex-looking writing system. As with cherry flavored cough syrup, the teachers are getting students- even slow learners- to digest material and take a liking to it.

CONCLUSION

It would seem that the Japanese language and culture are in for an educational blossoming of sorts. With an increasing number of qualified instructors entering the work forces in Western countries, Japan is being transformed from an isolated, mysterious, little-known island to a widely studied member of the international community. The following conversation (transcribed and edited) took place with two first year students, Phil Smith and Tim Richardson.

JUPPE: So how do you like your languages?

SMITH: I hate French. I love Japanese. It's like..... you can draw, you can doodle, and nobody understands it. It's just..... the language, it's really good.

RICHARDSON: Yeah. It's like, nobody knows it, and with a, like a friend who knows it, we can go around and like use it as a secret language.

JUPPE: Let's hear something in Japanese. (*The two look at one another; through some sort of undetected signal, Smith takes the cue to start*).

SMITH: おはようございます。私はPHILです。こちらはTIMです。

RICHARDSON: はじめまして。(*Pause; he appears to be racking his brains for something to say*).

JUPPE: Say something about your hobbies.

SMITH: Oh, we haven't learned that yet. We have a program called *Easy Language Japanese*, and

it's got stuff like sports.

RICHARDSON: It's nouns and then you've got a few sentences.

JUPPE: What do you like better, working in here (the computer room) or working in the classroom?

SMITH: Here.

RICHARDSON: Here.

JUPPE: Do you guys spend a lot of time studying outside of class?

SMITH: Well, we have 10 words and we have to learn them for a test.

JUPPE: That sounds hard.

RICHARDSON: Yeah, we have to learn the romanji and then the kanji. After that, the hiragana.

JUPPE: Do you know all of the hiragana yet?

SMITH: No, not actually. We have a chart, but we haven't learned them all yet. We can look them up. We know, like, the main ones that come up the most and like, words like おはよう。

JUPPE: Do your parents like the fact that you're learning Japanese?

SMITH: Yes, they support me a lot. They think it's, like, a good idea. They sometimes test me on my Japanese. They, like, think it's good to learn something difference.

RICHARDSON: Yeah, they help me, too. I repeat the kanji over and over. (*Presumably to his parents*).

JUPPE: Are you guys going to keep up with Japanese.

TOGETHER: Yes.

JUPPE: What about French? Do you like it?

SMITH: No. The teacher is boring.

RICHARDSON: Um, the teacher's pretty strict, not nice.

JUPPE: How do you learn it?

SMITH: Well..... we have, like, a book, and we read it and repeat words.

JUPPE: Say something in French. (*Both pause*).

SMITH: Bonjour, je m'appelle Phil. (*Pauses*) I, uh, really try at Japanese because I like it. In French, we learn animals and things, but never learn how to talk.

Strangely, they have not learned much conversational Japanese, but they have failed to realize it. Their motivation seems strongly connected to the teacher, to the way the material is presented. Quite clearly, the Japanese program is off to an excellent start at Tavistock College.

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APPENDIX

PHOTOGRAPH 1- Phil Smith (left) and Tim Richardson (right) proudly display their community Japanese text, *Kimono*, and a kanji notebook.

PHOTOGRAPHS 2, 3, 4- Students during a computer laboratory lesson busily learn Chinese characters.

PHOTOGRAPH 5- A senior high first year class takes a break prior to resuming computer-facilitated study using the text, *Japanese for Busy People*.

PHOTOGRAPH 6- An ever-energetic Chambers sensei (left) poses with two first year junior high school students.