

Blind Spots in the Japanese Junior and Senior High School English Language Syllabus: a Preliminary Survey

Second Report*

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4 Prefatory comments

This paper is a continuation and extension of a paper entitled *Blind Spots in the Japanese Junior and Senior High School English Language Syllabus: a Preliminary Survey. Introduction and First Report*, which was published in the *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Kagoshima University (Culture and Social Science)* 38. This introduced the idea of “blind spots” (1.1 to 1.5), principally as areas of the language which were basic and important but which were untaught, under-taught or forgotten by the time the student had reached university, and went on to cover blind spots in the use of tense (2.1) e.g. present progressive for future time, simple present for custom and occupation, greetings in the perfect, and habitual past behaviour with *used to*; in the use of verbs and verbal phrases (2.2) e.g. the existential *there*, request making (particularly with *can* and *could*), *have got*, mistake editing and verification with *I mean* and *you mean*, and onomatopoeic verbs; and finally in the use of certain adverbials (2.3) e.g. *else*, *possibly* etc, *not very*, and request answering formulae such as *here you are* and *be my guest*. By way of an interim summing-up, the third section (3) offered some tentative reflections on these areas, in particular that one reason for the large number of blind spots might lie in the fact that the syllabus as it is organized at present is biased heavily against “notional” and “communicative” considerations and that as a result items such as “request making” which do not fit easily into traditional syntactic-grammatical categories are discarded or left, as it were, in the dark.

The present paper delineates major blind spots in four other syntactical categories: (1) in the use of prepositions and prepositional phrases e.g. before reciprocal pronouns, motion with and without *to*, verbs which take a preposition in English but a direct object in Japanese, the difference between *north of...* and *in the north of...*, spatial uses of *on*, *at* and *in*, the

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distinction between *by* and *on* in transportation, and the use of *on my own*, *by myself* etc; (2) in the use of the definite and indefinite articles and the concepts of singular and plural with particular reference to *other/another/the other* and *the same*; (3) in the use of certain nouns, noun phrases and pronouns e. g. the English for *sato*, *jikka* etc, noun phrases with *what*, *where* etc, *Who...?* as subject/object, ignored vocabulary such as *make*, *sort*, *kind*, *type*, *date*, *signature*, *trousers*, generic pronouns and reflexive pronouns; and (4) in the use of adjectives e. g. *-ed/-ing* adjectives, *similar*, *almost all*, *double*, *what... like?* *which part of...?* and the ordinal numbers *twentieth*, *thirtieth* etc. A few additional examples of verbs and adverbials are also considered. In roaming this large area the present survey also uncovers, *en passant*, notional categories such as the expression of agreement and disagreement, the description of places, the asking for opinions, and the expression of uncertainty and ignorance.

As before, these divisions are not intended to be consistent or precise. It is merely hoped that they will make it easier to treat what is inherently a diverse, if not random, series of items. Problems which occur primarily in written, non-conversational styles have been excluded from this survey, as have those that rear their ugly heads at the more elevated levels of language learning. They must wait for future articles.

Most of the references given in the following sections are not to sources, as such, but to publications which have been consulted concerning the usage of the items discussed. As a matter of principle, I have avoided specific reference to the sources of mistakes or omission. References in square brackets are to publications of a theoretical, academic or lexicographic nature, such as Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, e. g. [Quirk 4. 44]. Those in round brackets are to textbooks of English as a foreign language, such as Bernard Hartley and Peter Viney's *Streamline English Departures*, e. g. (S. E. D. 23. 1). Often, especially in the latter case, only the earliest or most important appearance of an item is noted, the first number referring to the numbered unit, the second to the paragraph, section or model conversation within the unit. A full bibliography is given at the end of this report.

It remains to be said that this list of blind spots reflects of necessity a personal viewpoint, and it is therefore a highly subjective selection. Care has been taken, however, to keep controversial items to a minimum, and it is safe to say that there is broad agreement among experienced English language assistants in Japan that the present Japanese junior and senior high school English language syllabus deals very poorly with the items covered by this survey, though there may very well be disagreement over the relative importance of each item.

5 Report

5.1 Prepositions

5.1.1 The use of prepositions before reciprocal pronouns

[Quirk 6.31]

(S. E. C. 42)

Multi-word verbs are a problematical area for many foreign students of English. In Japanese junior and senior high schools it is the simpler forms, the Type I Prepositional Verbs (PV-I) that seem to cause the most problems, no doubt owing to their frequency of occurrence and to the superficial resemblance they bear to their Japanese counterparts. (See also 5.1.2 and 5.1.3) One particularly pernicious problem is that Japanese university English students regularly omit the PV-I preposition before the reciprocal pronoun *each other* (and also before the virtually synonymous but rarer *one another*). For instance, in the following examples the prepositions *to* and *at* tend to be omitted:

- a) We spoke *to* each other on the telephone.
- b) They looked *at* each other nervously for a few seconds. (S. E. C. 42)

One cause of difficulty here is that whereas *each other* in English is a mere pronoun, its nearest equivalent in Japanese is the adverbial *tagai ni* (“reciprocally”), which, being an adverb, subsumes the preposition that would be necessary before the reciprocal pronoun in English. In example (b), there is an additional cause of confusion in that *look* takes a preposition in English but a direct object in Japanese. (See 5.1.3)

Prepositional adjectives and adverbs are mishandled in exactly the same way. Here are four of the most common instances of this:

- c) We were angry *with* each other.
- d) They weren't interested *in* each other. (See also *-ed/-ing* adjectives 5.4.1)
- e) John and Jane live very close *to* each other.
- f) They are very similar *to* each other. (See also *similar to...* 5.4.2)

In all the above and similar examples the preposition tends to be omitted.

5.1.2 Motion with *to* and without *to*

An important distinction closely related to the previous item (5.1.1) is between nouns etc, which may take a preposition, and adverbs, which generally speaking cannot. See Quirk 7.70 for exceptions. Japanese university students often blur this distinction and create sentences like “She went the station” (omitting the preposition before the noun) and conversely

“She went to home” (inserting a preposition before the adverb). This is an obvious instance of the unconscious influence of Japanese, where many adverbs contain the preposition (the “particle” *ni*) within them.

The problem occurs most frequently after verbs of motion such as *go*, *come*, *run*, *drive*, *fly* and *hurry*. The following is a selection of common expressions where the distinction between adverbials (on the left) and nouns (on the right) is often ignored.

+ ADVERBIAL (no preposition)	+ NOUN (preposition necessary)
They went home	They went to Mitsukoshi
hurried back	drove to her mother's home
flew abroad	flew to America
drove there	hurried to the University
came in	ran to the library
went out	etc.
ran upstairs	
came downstairs	
went shopping	
came swimming	} with <i>come</i> and <i>go</i> only.
went fishing	
etc.	

It is of course possible to combine some items from the left column with those in the right column (usually in that order) as in: *she went home to her mother's*; *she flew abroad to America*; *he ran upstairs to the library* etc. Also, *he went shopping in Mitsukoshi*; *he went fishing in the sea* etc. (Combinations within a single column are also occasionally possible, e. g. *he went out shopping*; *he flew to America to his mother's home*.)

A related problem occurs with the use of the verb *visit*, which should be followed by a noun without a preposition, as in *he visited America*. Japanese university students often mistakenly treat this verb as though it were syntactically equivalent to *go*. (The use of adverbials such as those in the left column immediately after *visit* is, in fact, possible under a variety of narrowly defined circumstances, but is so rare that it can be safely ignored in Japanese schools.)

5. 1. 3 Think about

[Swan 485]

(*Gambits L 22, 44, 45*)

There are several common Type I Prepositional Verbs that, though not strictly speaking “blind spots” in the sense described in the prefatory comments to this paper, are nevertheless misused by Japanese students with a certain frequency and regularity. The most common of these are *think about, talk about, look at, look for* and *listen to*. As in 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 the preposition often gets omitted, though when the mistake is pointed out it is usually corrected quickly. It seems to occur mostly with PV-I verbs, like those listed above, which take a preposition in English but a direct object in Japanese.

5.1.4 *North of Tōkyō / In the north of Tōkyō*

[Quirk 9.10]

(*L. P. D.* 9, 10)

Japanese university students often seem to find it difficult to express geographical positions in relative terms. This is especially true in English, but also seems to be true to a certain extent in Japanese as well! Expressions such as the following are particularly problematical:

- a) Hokkaidō is *north of* Tōkyō.
- b) Ueno park is *in the north of* Tōkyō.

In English there is a clear and very useful difference in meaning between sentence (a) and sentence (b), which is brought about by the use of *in the*. This distinction is basic and important, and should be easy to understand and teach, and yet it seems that it is not being taught in many junior and senior high schools. In (a), *north of* may be considered as a complex preposition (Quirk 9.10) with a function and meaning similar to that of *above*. In (b), *the north* is a noun phrase referring to one area of Tokyo (*hokubu*), and *in* is the preposition. It may be helpful from the Japanese point of view to remember that *in the north* has a sister form, *in the middle* (see 5.1.5).

The difference between (a) and (b) is an example of a distinction considered to be semantically necessary in English even at the most casual level of conversation, but which is blurred by Japanese students, possibly because it is often considered unimportant in colloquial Japanese.

5.1.5 Locative *on, at* and *in*

(*E. F.* 5) (*L. P. D.* 8, 20, 41, 42, 47, 49, 56, 60)

The following uses of the place prepositions *on, at* and *in* are tricky and often confused, but if properly explained should not be difficult to understand. The chief difficulty is in recalling

the correct preposition at the appropriate time. Japanese students do not get enough practice in this. Many standard ELT grammars, such as Allsop or Swan, give useful lists of prepositional expressions, and yet overlook some of the commonest and trickiest distinctions. Consider, for instance, the following:

- a) *On* the left/right (Also *To*)
- b) *At* the top/bottom
- c) *In* the middle (See also 5. 1. 4)

5. 1. 6 *I went by car / I went in her car*

[Swan 70. 1] [Allsop 2. 3. 3c]

At Japanese schools, constructions such as *to go by car*, *by train*, *on foot* etc. are drilled so thoroughly that it is often forgotten that these prepositions can only be used when talking about the method of transportation, and cannot be used when referring to a particular vehicle or vehicles. "I went by the car" is not correct English. "They came by cars" is also incorrect by virtue of the final "s". A different set of prepositions is needed when a determiner or modifier is used.

<i>TRANSPORTATION METHOD</i>	<i>PARTICULAR VEHICLE (S)</i>
They went <i>by</i> taxi.	They went <i>in</i> taxis.
I have never travelled <i>by</i> car.	I have never been <i>in her</i> car.
Did she leave <i>by</i> train?	Yes, she left <i>on the</i> last train.
We came <i>by</i> bus.	We came <i>on/in the</i> 27.

It is almost as if "by car" etc are fixed two-word adverbs which do not tolerate alteration of any kind, whether this be by an intervening article or by a change to the plural. In this sense, one might consider "by" to be an "adverbial particle".

It should also be noted that the prepositional phrase *on foot* is not often heard nowadays in the conversation of native English speakers, presumably for the simple reason that it is often easier to use the verb *walk*.

- a) Shall we take the car?
 No, let's go on foot. \implies No, let's *walk*.

The same is also increasingly true for the expression *to go by plane*. Here, *to fly* is often felt to be more convenient, as in:

- b) They're going to *fly* to Bermuda. (S. E. D. 28. 3)

5.1.7 Temporal *in* and *ago*

[Smith 7.3, 1.10] [Swan 87.8] [Power 3, 29]

(E. F. 9) (S. E. C. 10)

There is a slight but widespread misapprehension in Japan surrounding the use of *in* with regard to future time. *This class finishes in fifty minutes* means exactly fifty minutes and cannot mean twenty or thirty minutes. Similarly, *He is coming in four days* means four days and not two or three. These latter interpretations are fulfilled by the use of *within*.

When the Japanese want to be precise about future time they often use “after” or “later”. Both are grammatically incorrect if one is speaking from the standpoint of present time. The correct preposition is *in*.

The converse of *in* is *ago*, e. g. *This class began fifty minutes ago*. The use of “before” here constitutes another very common mistake. See Swan 32.3.

5.1.8 *On my own* and *by myself*

[Allsop 551 d]

I have never heard a Japanese student of English use either *on my own* or *by myself*. This is strange because these are both extremely common expressions in conversational English. They are virtually synonymous and interchangeable in most situations. (There is a slight difference in nuance between the two, but it is not necessary to teach this at the junior high school and senior high school level.) *Alone*, which most Japanese seem to know, is in actual usage far less common than either *on my own* or *by myself*, since it is often felt to carry an unwelcome connotation of loneliness or, alternatively, of uniqueness.

a) A: Did you come with your mother?

B: No, I came *on my own*.

b) D: Did someone help you with this homework?

E: No, I did it all *by myself*.

c) G: Where were you last night?

H: We spent the whole night all *alone* in that big castle; it was very scary.

(The *all* in the last two exchanges is a common colloquial intensitive with the meaning of “entirely”.)

Although the above examples illustrate the most common form of these expressions, they are also found in the plural and in the second and third person. E. g. *they did it by themselves*; *Did they go there on their own?*

Since both *on one's own* and *by oneself* are equally common, it is important that both be

learnt and that no confusion arises in the choice of preposition. As a rule *own* is preceded by *on*; *self* by *by*.

5.2 The use of the definite and indefinite articles, and the concepts of singular and plural [Quirk 5.26-59] [Swan 67, 68]

The problems that foreign learners of English face concerning the definite and indefinite articles and the concepts of singular and plural are notoriously difficult to overcome. This is especially true for the Japanese, because such determiners as there are in their own language are rarely used, and there is no regular means of expressing the distinction between definite and indefinite, or indeed between singular and plural. The Japanese particles *wa* for “known” and *ga* for “unknown” fulfill a role that may in some sense be considered to compensate for this, but there is no reliable correspondence between these particles and the concepts of definiteness or number. There is, however, a structural similarity in that *a/the*, singular/plural, and *wa/ga* are all mutually exclusive pairings: just as in English a noun cannot be both definite and indefinite, so in Japanese it cannot take both *wa* and *ga*, but beyond this it is difficult to make any direct comparison between these concepts. (For an analysis of how the Japanese honorific prefixes *O-* and *Go-* partially correspond to the definite articles of European languages see Patrick Le Nestour’s amusing “To Restore to Honour a Dishonoured Honorific”.)

Another problem for Japanese learners of English is that *a* and *the* often undergo phonetic reduction which nearly always involves vowel change, and they are pronounced at such speed that speakers of Japanese (where such phenomena are less marked) assume they are not really necessary. In the classroom, the only way to deal with this false assumption is to insist that in English articles and the plural forms are indeed essential to the language, and to draw the students’ attention to them whenever they occur, both in written and in spoken English. It is extremely difficult for any foreign language learner over a certain age to even think about the meaning of a word or idea which has no obvious counterpart in the learner’s own language, but the attempt must be made, or the problem will remain forever a blind spot.

The following sub-sections deal with just two instances of article use which are particularly problematical in Japanese junior and senior high schools, and a mastery of which should go some way to helping the learner deal with the many other uses of the definite and indefinite articles.

5.2.1 *Other / another / the other*

[Quirk 6.58] [Smith 15.5]

One particularly frequent problem with regard to the use of definite and indefinite articles is the distinction between *other...*, *another...*, and *the other...*. Japanese university students rarely use these expressions correctly though they should be easy to understand if presented carefully:

- a) There were two astronauts. One was a man; *the other* a woman.
- b) There were three waitresses. One came from Japan, *another* from Germany, and *the other* (*the third / the last*) from Britain.
- c) He wasn't the man who did it; it was *another* man (= *someone else*).
- d) This post is only for Japanese: *other* nationalities need not apply.

Some Japanese students have become so confused by their years of learning English that they resort to all purpose portmanteau constructions such as "the another ones."

5.2.2 *The same*

[Quirk 5.43; 7.35] [Smith 19.3] [Swan 541]

Another common blind spot relating to the use of the definite article is that Japanese students often omit *the* before *same*.

The use of *same* without *the* is extremely rare and is restricted to certain highly formal or colloquial instances of ellipsis (for which see the *Shōgakukan Random House English-Japanese Dictionary*). Thus it would seem to be rational to teach *the same* as one entity of which the two elements are, as a rule, inseparable. Though *the* may be replaced by a possessive or demonstrative pronoun, and may be followed by intensives such as *very* or *self*, such cases are rare and can safely be ignored at least at the junior high school level.

The fact that university students nearly always omit *the* before *same* shows that insufficient attention has been paid to this basic point at junior and senior high school. The following is a selection of the variations one comes across in the university English conversation class; only the first is correct.

- A is *the same as* B.
- × A is same as B.
- × A is as same as B.
- × A is same with B.
- × A is same B.

A lot of the confusion seen here could be eliminated if only *the same* were taught as one

indivisible unit (as for instance *by car* is being so effectively taught — see 5.1.6). It is instructive that of all the citations of *same* in Quirk et al. not one is without *the*.

5.3 Nouns, noun phrases and pronouns

5.3.1 The English for *jikka, kuni, sato* etc

[Smith 14.5]

Few dictionaries give adequate translations for these often used expressions. *Native place, hometown* and the like are not often to be heard in the conversation of native English speakers. The following presents a selection of more acceptable translations put in the context of “going home”:

I’m going home.

I’m going (home/back/back home) to see my parents/grandmother etc.

I’m going (home/back/back home) to where I was born (and brought up).

I’m going (home/back/back home) to where I used to live (when I was a child etc).

I’m going (home/back/back home) to where my parents live / used to live.

I’m going (home/back/back home) to where my grandmother lives / used to live.

I’m going (home/back/back home) to our house in the country.

The above uses of *home, where* and *used to* are blind spots in themselves, and as such are discussed in sections 5.1.2, 5.3.2 and 2.1.4 respectively.

5.3.2 *Wh*-clauses

[Quirk 15.5 (f)] [Power 38]

(*Dialogues* 8)

Subordinate interrogative clauses with *what, where* etc are often felt to be more natural than the semantically equivalent noun, especially in the spoken language. Consider the following examples:

NOUN

WH- clause

? It’s not content but manner.

It’s not *what you say* but *how you say it*.

? This is my childhood home.

This is *where we used to live when I was a child*.

? I asked about the hall’s capacity.

I asked *how many people the hall held*.

Translations from Japanese noun phrases are particularly difficult. Phrases like “the paper’s content” or “the teacher’s saying” should be rephrased using *what* as in (a) and (b).

a) Never believe *what you read in the newspapers*.

OR Never believe *what the papers say*.

b) I didn't understand *what the teacher said*.

There are many similar examples where what is expressed in Japanese as a noun or noun phrase needs to be rephrased as a *wh*-clause in English.

5.3.3 *Who...?* as subject / object

[Quirk 6.2, 36-38; 8.25, 80] [Swan 135.3] [Thomson (1960) 32]

(*S. E. D.* 30)

The present standard English usage of *who* as both subject and object seems for some reason to have caught the Japanese by surprise. Questions such as *Who does Charles love?* are misinterpreted with predictable regularity as *Who loves Charles?*

The following patterns need more drilling than they are getting at the moment:

- a) A: Who does Charles love?
B: He loves Fiona.
- b) A: Who loves Fiona?
B: James does.

From the Japanese point of view these questions are extremely confusing, especially if they follow each other in quick succession. The former use of *whom* in (a) made things much clearer for the Japanese, but unfortunately this is no longer considered standard English.

5.3.4 *Make / sort / kind / type*

(*S. E. D.* 19; 31) (*Breakthrough 2 3*)

Very few university English majors know the use of *make* as a noun. Yet this is quite as common as *sort*, *type* or *kind*, and just as easy to learn.

- a) A: What *make* is your television?
B: It's a Sony.
- b) A: What *make's* your car?
B: It's a Rolls-Royce.

Sort, *kind* and *type* are more likely to be followed by *of*:

- c) What sort of game is cricket?
d) What type of pen is that?
e) What kind of people are they?

It is probably safe to teach junior high school children that *make*, *sort*, *type*, and *kind* are synonymous, with the proviso that *make* refers to manufactured goods.

5. 3. 5 Date

Japanese students find it difficult to spot the difference between *date* and *day* in such questions as *What's the day today?* and *What's the date today?* This is of course a phonetic problem but it is aggravated by the fact that they have not had enough exposure to the noun *date* in its primary meaning. (There are no problems when it is used in the sense of “having a date with someone”!)

(See also 5. 4. 7 Ordinal numbers)

5. 3. 6 The day before yesterday etc

[Quirk 9. 40]

The day before yesterday and *the day after tomorrow* are also blind spots in Japan. This may be because they are so logical and look so easy on paper that students do not bother to practise saying them. They need to be practised as phrases, not broken up into words. (See 5. 2. 2 *The same*)

Three days ago and *in three days time* are the next in the series and should be learnt in the same way (See 5. 1. 7 *in*).

5. 3. 7 Can I have your signature?

[Smith 19. 13; 19. 14]

“Can I have your sign?” is a question every foreigner living in Japan has experienced. A good answer might be “I’m Taurus” (the sign of the Zodiac).

What the Japanese questioners probably want to say is:

a) Can I have your *signature*?

In this meaning, *sign* is acceptable only as a verb:

b) Could you *sign* here, please?

(For these uses of *Can* and *Could* see 2. 2. 2)

5. 3. 8 Trousers

[Smith 20. 29]

(S. E. D. 8; 24)

This is an elementary item of vocabulary for some reason totally unknown in Japan. No doubt the influence of the exclusively American English “pants” has had a role in confusing the issue. There is also a difficulty of pronunciation, particularly the fact that the [tr] is not

the alveolar plosive followed by a palato-alveolar frictionless continuant the Japanese expect, but a single palato-alveolar affricate like “ch”. This may have helped to keep this word in the dark in Japan.

5.3.9 *You* as a generic pronoun

[Quirk 6.21, 56]

(*Dialogues* 8)

We, you, they, and one are all used as generic pronouns in English. *You*, which is probably used more frequently than any other in colloquial English, is misinterpreted most frequently by Japanese students. *One* is well understood, but “the use of generic *one* is chiefly formal, and is often replaced colloquially by *you*.” (Quirk 6.56)

Here are a few common examples of this use of *you*:

- a) *You* can never tell.
- b) It's not what *you* say, it's how *you* say it. (*Dialogues* 8)
- c) How do *you* spell the word “glass”? [Hughes 10.3.1]
- d) *You* have to be careful with *your* money. [Quirk 6.21 [4]]

Note: In this usage *you* is never stressed.

5.4 Adjectives

5.4.1 *-ed / -ing* participial adjectives

[Smith 9.13] [Quirk 7.15-19, 47, 58, 81] [Bright: Appendix II]

(*S. E. C.* 37) (*E. F.* 7)

There is a great deal of confusion among Japanese students between adjectives ending in *-ed* and those ending in *-ing*. A very common mistake in Japan is *I'm exciting* instead of *I'm excited*. The root of the problem is that in English, verbs of emotion such as *tire, bore, excite, interest* are transitive, whereas in Japanese these verbs are all intransitive when in their simplest form. However, this sort of grammatical explanation seems to have very little effect on Japanese students. What they need is plenty of practice in using these words after various subjects. For the sake of pedagogical simplicity these subjects can be divided into *I* and *it* groups as follows.

- | | | |
|----|-----------|-------------|
| a) | <i>I</i> | <i>IT</i> |
| | I'm tired | It's tiring |
| | I'm bored | It's boring |

I'm excited

It's exciting

I'm interested

It's interesting

It should also be noted that both groups of adjectives can be made into adverbs (with a corresponding differentiation in use) by the simple addition of *-ly*.

- b) i He listened *interestedly* (=he was *interested*)
 ii He spoke *interestingly* (=what he said was *interesting*)

(Surprisingly, the use of prepositions after *-ed* participial adjectives is not a blind spot. Nearly all students are well aware, by the time they reach university, that *interested*, for instance, takes *in*. It is the distinction between *-ed* and *-ing* that confuses them.)

5.4.2 *Similar (to...)*

[Quirk 13.46; 16.67] [Smith 19.15]

(S. E. C. 65)

This is a basic expression one would expect all high school and university students to know. Very few do. Part of the difficulty for the Japanese is that in their own language this concept is usually rendered not by an adjective but by a verb (*niru / nite iru*). This may be an underlying reason for the seeming diffidence with which the Japanese treat this simple and important item of vocabulary. They seem particularly reluctant to try out such phrases as *very similar* or *too similar*. This again may be connected with the fact that in Japanese *similar* is a verb form.

Similar is often used in contrast with *the same* (see 5.2.2):

- a) They are not exactly the same, but they are *similar*.

5.4.3 *Almost all etc*

[Smith 1.15] [Quirk 7.56, 62n; 8.111-114, 126] [Power 4]

It is more important than most Japanese English speakers realize not to confuse the adjective *almost all* with the adverb *almost*. For some reason, no doubt owing to confusion with the Japanese *hotondo*, the *all* is often omitted where it is necessary in English.

I can do no better here than to quote directly from Wallace W. Smith's excellent *America kōgo hyōgenhō kyōhon* :

Wrong: Almost my friends are beautiful girls.

Right: **Almost all my friends** are beautiful girls.

Almost all of my friends are beautiful girls.

Almost all of them are rich too.

Be very careful when using ALMOST. ALMOST is an adverb and cannot come directly before a noun. This is one of the most persistent mistakes made by Japanese using English; it is often made even by English teachers! Remember: ALMOST ALL.

Serious misunderstanding can result from misuse of these items. “The students almost graduated” would mean that they didn’t graduate. What the speaker probably wants to say is: *Almost all the students graduated.*

Almost all is not the only blind spot in this area. Here are some more examples which cause problems in Japan:

a) *Almost everybody* came.

Almost nobody came. [Quirk 7.62 [c]]

Here is a selection of similar expressions. The negative forms (on the right) are particularly susceptible to error.

b)	Almost all	Almost no/none
	Almost always	Almost never
	Almost everyone	Almost no-one
	Almost everywhere	Almost nowhere
	etc.	

Of the above *almost never* is almost never used correctly. Here again confusion with the Japanese use of *hotondo*, which is often used as though it contained the concepts *all*, *always* etc, is probably part of the reason.

5. 4. 4 Double

[Quirk 6.64 [c]]

(S. E. D. 7)

The important use of *double* in spelling out words and numbers seems to be virtually unknown in Japan. The result is that *double-L* is heard not as “LL” but as “W”. Likewise, “007” (“double 0 seven”) is misheard as “W seven”.

5. 4. 5 Asking for and giving opinions; *What...like?*

[Quirk 11.15 [a]] [Swan 299]

(S. E. D. 20 (Teacher’s Edn.)) (*Breakthrough* 2 3)

a) A: *What was the weather like?*

- B: It was beautiful.
- b) D: *What* were the people *like*?
- E: They were very friendly.
- c) G: *What* was the hotel *like*?
- H: It wasn't very good.

These and similar questions are very common in spoken English, but provoke blank faces in Japan. *What...like?* is more common than *How...?* and is introduced very early in English as a foreign language textbooks such as *Streamline*, where it appears in lesson 20 of the first book (*Departures* (Teacher's Edition)). (*What...like?* cannot however be used in greetings or when enquiring after someone's health. In these cases "How...?" must be used.)

"How about...?" is overused in Japan, and is very frequently misused. Out of context it is meaningless, unless it is accompanied by an offering gesture, as in *How about some more beer?* The nearest equivalent in Japanese is *ikaga?* But Japanese students often forget this and say things like "How about Korea?" or even worse "How about your wife?" This sort of question often leaves the native English speaker bewildered. What the Japanese speaker is presumably trying to say is:

- d) *What* was Korea *like*?
- and in the second case:
- e) *How* is your wife? (Is she well?)

5.4.6 *Which part of Japan do you come from?*

Which part of... is another "blank stare" question in Japan. Japanese students tend to say instead *Where in....* This is acceptable, but not very common, and may not always be understood. *Which part of...* should be taught as the correct English for *...no doko*. One of the reasons for this blind spot is that this meaning is not given prominence in the dictionaries. *Shōgakukan Random House* gives for *part* the meaning "region" but only has examples in the plural. This is misleading. *Which part of...* is an extremely common form and should be given more prominence in dictionaries and textbooks.

5.4.7 *Athletic*

[*Shōgakukan Random House*]

(*S. E. D.* 14)

Athletic is an adjective meaning "strong and active." As such it is a blind spot in Japan, where it seems to have taken on a totally different meaning as a *gairaigo* noun. Common

uses such as *My husband's very athletic* (S. E. D. 14) or *How athletic you are!* are not understood by Japanese university students.

5. 4. 8 *Rainy, foggy, snowy, windy, blustery, sunny* etc

(S. E. C. 48)

Cloudy is well known in Japan. *Rainy, snowy* and *sunny* are less well known. *Foggy, windy* and *blustery* nearly always provoke blank faces. These weather adjectives form an easy little group and could be taught as such at an early level.

- a) ...it may be *foggy* during the morning.
- b) ...it may be *windy* later in the day.
- c) It will be *warm and sunny*...

Wet and *dry* when referring to the weather form another blind spot. *Wet* is very similar in meaning to *rainy*, and *dry* to *fine*, although *cloudy but dry* is sometimes heard on the weather forecasts.

- d) In the north of England it will be a *wet* day.
- e) East Anglia will be generally *dry*.

All the above examples are taken from *Streamline English Connections*, unit 48.

5. 4. 9 Ordinal numbers: *20th, 30th* etc

[Quirk 6. 63, 6. 64 [a], 66]

It should be noted that the spelling of *20th, 30th* etc is *twentieth, thirtieth* etc, in other words that the ending is *eth* not *th*. Also the pronunciation is [ˈtwentɪeθ] or [ˈtwentɪəθ], with a secondary but necessary accent on the second [e] or [ə]. Few Japanese students of English have noticed these points, and as a result, the second [e] is nearly always omitted in Japan both in speech and in writing. See Quirk 6. 64 Note [a].

It should also be noted that in careful speech dates are always preceded by *the*, whether this is written or not, and likewise followed by *of* if the month comes afterwards.

	<i>WRITTEN</i>	<i>PRONOUNCED</i>
a)	1st April	the first of April
b)	May 20	May the twentieth

“May twenty” is sometimes heard in fast speech, but this is a form of ellipsis, and can lead to misunderstanding.

6 Verbs and adverbs (Contd.)

Thirteen major blind spots with regard to the use of tense and certain other idiomatic functions of verbs and adverbs have already been discussed in 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3. The following section treats several verbs which are minor blind spots not in a functional sense but purely as items of vocabulary, and then goes on to cover some miscellaneous adverbs and adverbial constructions.

6.1.1 *Bring and take*

[Swan 117]

Although most Japanese university students of English understand the difference between *come* and *go*, they nevertheless make many mistakes in this area. For some reason the problem seems to be even greater with *bring* and *take*, though these are semantically parallel to *come* and *go*. The least confusing mnemonic is the word "Take-away". *Take* like *go* always implies some form of separation, objectivity or coldness. Consider the following examples:

- a) I'm going to *take* him out for dinner. (Separation from the home, from the listener)
- b) I'm going to *bring* him for dinner next weekend. (We are (all) coming together for dinner at home) (S. E. C. 32)

6.1.2 *Put on and wear*

[Swan 185]

One often hears Japanese students making sentences like "He came in putting on a hat". What the speaker is probably trying to say is:

- a) He came in wearing a hat.

Wear is a verb of stance like *carry*, *hold* or *keep*. It may be replaced by the preposition *with*. *Put on* is a verb of motion like *take off*, *tie up*, or *collect*. It marks movement from one state to another.

The distinction between these two is made very clearly in Japanese by the distinction between *kaburu* / *kiru* / *haku* and *kabutte iru* / *kite iru* / *haite iru*. Unfortunately this distinction breaks down in present participle clauses, and this is where the mistakes between *wear* and *put on* occur most often. Special care needs to be taken in teaching the present participles *putting on* and *wearing*.

6.1.3 *How do you spell that?*

[Hughes 10.3.1]

(S. E. C. 2) (*Spectrum* 1 1. c)

Spell is a verb, and in this meaning cannot be a noun. Japanese usage leads the Japanese to say *What is that spell?* which, if interpreted literally would mean something quite unintended! It is important that *How do you spell that?* be practised whole and regularly so as to overcome the tendency to impose a Japanese construction on it. The following examples illustrate correct usage.

- a) *How do you spell* the word 'glass'?
- b) *How* is 'giraffe' *spelt*?
- c) *Spell* it in English.

etc.

(Hughes 10.3.1)

Could you spell... is another very common construction. In *Spectrum* it appears on the very first page:

- d) *Could you spell* your last name, please? (*Spectrum* 1 1. c)

6.1.4 *What does your watch say?*

The use of the verb *say* in such expressions as *What does your watch say?* *What does the newspaper say?* etc does not seem to be well known in Japan. "What is the time by your watch?" is correct but not common.

Here are some common uses of *say* in this meaning:

- a) What does your watch *say*?
- b) The newspaper *said* he died yesterday.
- c) The television *said* he died the day before yesterday.
- d) My dictionary *says* that "athletic" is an adjective.

6.1.5 How to say *abunai!* in English.

"Dangerous!" does not make sense in English. "That's dangerous" sounds too objective. "Danger" is often seen written up on a signboard, but is not used in speech. "You are in danger!" is recommended by Power (Unit 1), but there is surely an error of context here. This takes too long to say, and has none of the immediacy of *abunai!* The following are better translations:

- a) Look out!
- b) Watch out!

- c) Careful!
- d) Be careful!
- e) Watch what your doing!

What in Japanese is an adjective, in English becomes the imperative form of a verb.

6. 1. 6 Expressing agreement and disagreement with *I agree!*

[Swan 33]

(*Survival English*)

I agree! is a very convenient way of expressing agreement with opinions of an abstract nature. "I think so", which the Japanese often use, is too weak, and implies a certain measure of doubt since the stress falls on "think". It is often followed by "...but I'm not quite sure." *I think so too!* is much better.

- a) A: I think health is the most important thing in life.
B: *I agree. / I think so too.* (*Survival English. Agreement and disagreement*)

Disagreement can be expressed simply and politely by:

- b) *I don't agree.*

Agree is a simple verb that is easy to use and to understand. It is strange that many university English majors are not familiar with this word and the above uses of it.

6. 1. 7 *Enjoy yourself*

[Quirk 6. 25 [a]] [Swan 202]

(*S. E. C. 26. 5*)

In standard English *enjoy* usually takes an object, which is very often *it* or *yourself* etc. "I went to the party, but didn't enjoy" is non-standard English.

The following are examples of correct usage:

- a) I went to the party, but didn't *enjoy it*.
- b) I went to the party, but didn't *enjoy myself*.
- c) We went to a party last night. We *enjoyed ourselves* very much. (*S. E. C. 26. 5*)

6. 1. 8 *What do you think? / How do you feel?*

[Smith 8. 14]

Although there are many exceptions, it is a good idea for conversational purposes to stick to the above distinction. "How do you think?" is likely to be answered "With my brain."

- a) *What do you think* about the Koreans?

I think they're wonderful people.

- b) *How do you feel* about having Reagan as president?

I feel really uneasy.

6. 1. 9 *I'm not sure* and *I've no idea*. Expressing uncertainty and ignorance.

(*Survival English*)

I'm not sure, expressing uncertainty, and *I've no idea*, expressing ignorance, are two large blind spots for Japanese students of English. *I'm not sure* corresponds to the Japanese *yoku wakarimasen*, and *I've no idea* corresponds to *sappari wakaranai*.

Here are some examples of their use:

- a) A: Is it going to rain?
 B: *I'm not sure*.
 D: Is London bigger than New York?
 E: *I'm not quite sure*. (*Survival. Certainty and uncertainty*)
- b) G: How far is it to Mars?
 H: *I've no idea!* (*Survival. Ignorance*)

6. 2. 1 *for instance...* and *such as*

[Quirk 8. 137, 139, 17. 73, 86] [Swan 172. 3d]

For example is known in Japan. The generally synonymous *for instance* and *such as* are hardly ever recognized when they appear in speech, especially at the beginning of an utterance or as interrogative interjections: *For instance?* *Such as?*

6. 2. 2 *Soon / immediately*

[Quirk 8. 55, 15. 29]

The Japanese often use the word *soon* when what they really mean is *immediately*. This may be because of confusion with the Japanese word *sugu*, which sounds similar to *soon* and has a deceptively close meaning, but which is in reality closer in meaning to the English *immediately*. The difference can be seen from the following examples:

- a) Frank *immediately* hurried away to find a doctor. (Quirk 8. 55 (a))
 b) She's coming *soon*. Let's wait till she comes.

It will be apparent from these examples that *immediately* is sooner than *soon*. Thus *immediately* is often used in commands such as:

- c) Do it now; *immediately!*

6. 2. 3 *Nowadays*

[Quirk 8. 55]

(S. E. D. 35)

Nowadays is a very common colloquial expression which is curiously absent from Japanese university students' vocabularies:

- a) Black and white televisions are very rare *nowadays*.
- b) I never see you in church *nowadays*. (S. E. D. 35)

Nowadays has a slightly broader meaning than "these days" or "recently" and as such is probably a more useful word for junior high school students to learn. It occurs early on in the *Streamline* series, far earlier than any of the many other similar expressions that there are in English.

6. 2. 4 Expressing concurrence with *so* and *neither*

[Quirk 12. 29, 13. 36] [Swan 406, 557]

(S. E. C. 31)

The initial additive adverbs *so* and *neither* are known by most students, but it is not realized how useful they are in conversation. They need to be drilled thoroughly, as in the example below (See S. E. C. 31).

- a) A: I like fish.
B: *So* do 'I.
- b) D: I haven't got a car.
E: *Neither* have 'I.

Streamline English Connections and the accompanying workbook provide several pages of excellent drilling material, which also includes the following "mirror-image" version of the above drill:

- c) G: I don't like fish.
H: 'I do.
- d) J: I've got a car.
K: 'I haven't.

In expressing both concurrence, as in (a) and (b), and contrast, as in (c) and (d), it is important to stress the subject (as indicated in the above examples by the primary accent marker (')).

6. 2. 5 *Have you ever...?*

[Quirk 2. 54] [Allsop 8. 4. 5] [Swan 210]

(S. E. D. 67)

- a) A: Have you *ever* been to Sydney?
 B: No, never. / No, I haven't *ever* been there.
 or B: Yes, I have.

Ever may only be used in questions and in sentences with a negative, comparative or conditional implication. The affirmative uses *forever*, *ever since* and *ever after* are exceptions. Japanese university English language majors show surprise when told this. They often make mistakes like: "I have ever..." and seem reluctant to accept that this is ungrammatical.

In the following sentence the verb is positive but the meaning negative:

- b) Few people have *ever* seen the other side of the moon.

The negative implication arises from the fact that *few* means *not many*. If we change *few* to *a few*, which has a positive implication, then we can no longer use *ever*:

- c) A few people have seen the other side of the moon.

Japanese students also need practice in combining the present perfect with the past when talking about experience:

- d) A: *Have you ever* been to Sydney?
 B: Yes, *I have*. *I went* there last year.

6. 2. 6 The use of *of course* as a polite reply to requests

[Quirk 8. 100]

(S. E. D. 15, 23, *passim*)

Ways of answering requests are crucial to successful communication on even the most basic level. *Of course* is a particular blind spot for the Japanese in that few realize it can be used as a polite reply to many types of request. The typical Japanese answer to requests made in English is "Please!" This is wrong. "Please" can be used to make requests; it CANNOT be used in reply. (See also 2. 2. 2 and 2. 3. 4). A list of possible correct replies to requests is given in 2. 3. 4. Of these *of course* is particularly frequently used, and yet almost totally unknown in Japan. This may be because the Japanese are taught in junior and senior high school (and even at university) that *of course* "equals" *mochiron*, and so they are at a loss to interpret more polite uses. Let us consider the following possible uses of *of course* as polite replies to requests:

- a) A: May I have some more cake?

B: *Of course!*

b) D: Can I try them on? (— in a shoe shop)

E: *Of course.* (S. E. D. 15)

c) G: Could you pass the salt please?

H: *Of course!* Here you are. (S. E. D. 7)

None of these very common uses of *of course* corresponds to *mochiron* in Japanese. In (a) *Of course!* corresponds to the Japanese *zeshi/dōzo*. In (b) *Of course* corresponds to *yoroshii desu yo!* In (c) *Of course!* corresponds to *hai/dōzo*.

7 Closing remarks

A lot of work has been done on English teaching methodology particularly in the last few years in Japan, and this is certainly bearing fruit. However, by concentrating so much on improving teaching methods we are in danger of leaving *what is actually taught* out of the picture. It is a worrying fact that in Japanese junior and senior high school English language textbooks there is still a strong bias towards outdated and literary/formal uses of the language, which in many cases actually hinders the successful acquisition of communication-orientated English. Ironically, owing to the continually improving teaching methods, we are in danger of teaching more effectively with each passing year what still remains a defective syllabus.

The present examination system must bear part of the blame for this. However, if we accept the examination system as it is, then it is apparent that one major cause of “blind spots” in the syllabus, of the bias against “communicative” English, is the fact that native English speakers are not consulted at an early enough stage in the setting of university entrance examinations and in the production of junior and senior high school textbooks, whose content is itself determined in large measure by these same entrance examinations.

It is not that foreign lecturers are never consulted. Indeed their names are often to be found alongside those of the authors in the back of school textbooks. The point is that this “consultation” is too late and too superficial, and rarely relates to the structuring of the syllabus as a whole.

An associated difficulty here is that there are simply not enough native English language speakers in Japan with the necessary experience and knowledge of both English language teaching techniques and of the Japanese language to make an effective contribution, and if such people are to be found, they are not in, or near, positions of power or influence in the

academic/publishing world.

The result is that though “new” English language textbooks by different authors come out annually (!) in Japan, they all contain the same bias, the same errors of commission and omission, in short, the same blind spots year after year.

What now needs to be done is to pinpoint exactly where, what and why these blind spots are, and then to suggest ways of dealing with them, ways of getting the balance in English education in Japanese schools right. It is hoped that this preliminary survey has made a start in doing this.

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