

English Ability and Language Attitudes in Japan and Jordan

— A Comparative Study of Contextual Variables —

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Abstract

People who are familiar with both Japan and Jordan often comment on the differences in English speaking ability and language attitudes in the two countries. It is generally felt that Jordanian Arabs have a much higher degree of fluency in spoken English than Japanese whereas Japanese sometimes seem to do better in written tests which stress grammatical accuracy.

This study attempts to examine the sociolinguistic environment of each country in order to isolate those contextual factors which are responsible for these perceived differences in English speaking ability. The analysis is carried out using Stern's 1983 model of contextual factors in language teaching, which divides the environmental context into 6 separate dimensions: education, linguistics, society/culture, geography, history/politics, and economics/technology.

In the conclusion, it is suggested that some features of Jordan's English language situation may be relevant in considering how to improve the effectiveness of English language education in Japan.

Introduction

In this paper, we intend to compare in general terms the English education system and sociolinguistic situation of Japan and Jordan, with a view to identifying those environmental factors which have shaped the present English language situation in each country.

Why compare educational systems and language environments in different countries? Stern (1983) responds as follows: "For language teachers, the study of education from

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an international and comparative point of view... is of particular importance because of the international nature of language education." Language education is not something confined just to one's own country, but an educational priority pursued on an international scale by virtually all nations. Rather than each country closing its door to pursue its own programs in the dark, what is needed is sharing of experience between all nations for the improvement of language education worldwide.

Comparative education has developed largely in the 20th century, notably with the founding of the International Bureau of Education in the 1920's and with the setting up of UNESCO's Institute for Education in Hamburg in 1954. The most important work has been done by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement), a group of empirical researchers formed in the 1960's who have carried out international comparative studies on mathematics (Husen 1967), and other school subjects (Walker 1976; Purves & Levine 1975).

The international comparative study of foreign language education and language environments is still in the beginning stages, however. Among the few studies completed are two studies on children (Stern 1967; 1969), one on foreign language teaching in the USSR (Lewis 1972) and a survey on language teaching in European schools (Halls 1970). As yet, the most ambitious study has been done by an IEA team which investigated the teaching of English and French as foreign languages in 15 different countries (Carroll 1975; Lewis & Massad 1975).

This paper does not presume to be as ambitious as any of the above studies. Our goals here are 4-fold:

- (1) to describe briefly the reported differences in English language ability and language attitudes which seem to exist in Japan and Jordan
- (2) to examine the differences in the English language education systems of Japan and Jordan
- (3) to explore the social and contextual variables which have shaped the attitudes and experience of Japanese and Jordanians as regards language, English learning and foreign contact
- (4) to discuss the implications of our study for improving the effectiveness of English language education in Japan

As the scope of this study is exceedingly large, our remarks will be concerned more

with broad generalizations than with complex details. Additionally, some of our observations will have to be rather subjective. We must therefore stress that this study is meant only as a preliminary enquiry, not as a definitive survey.

PART I DIFFERENTIAL ENGLISH ABILITIES AND ATTITUDES IN JAPAN AND JORDAN

Japanese people who have lived in Jordan and Jordanian people who have lived in Japan generally agree that:

- (a) Jordanians seem to be more fluent at speaking English than Japanese
- (b) Japanese sometimes seem to have a better knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary than Jordanians

These perceived differences seem, then, to concern the contrast between fluency and accuracy. Examples are often cited to illustrate these differences. Jordanians with only a very basic knowledge of English, for example, will actively speak in order to communicate their ideas, exploiting their limited vocabulary to the full. Even though their speech may be full of gross errors of grammar, they will still be able to deal in a relaxed and competent manner with foreign native speakers. In contrast, many Japanese will often have great difficulty in putting words together to express their thoughts, even though they may have an encyclopedic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. They tend also to have difficulty communicating face-to-face with native speakers of English, often remaining silent or responding hesitantly. In formal tests, however, they will often show a high degree of formal English knowledge.

Our experiences also confirm the existence of these differences. These experiences consist of:

- (1) several years each teaching post-secondary English in Japan, and almost a decade of observing Japanese people cope (or not cope) in English in North America, Britain, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Soviet Union
- (2) 2 years for both of us teaching English at a national university in Jordan, and experience observing Jordanians speak English in Jordan, Britain, the Soviet Union and Japan

It is felt, then, that Japan tends to produce language learners with a high degree

of formal accuracy while Jordan produces language learners with a high degree of oral fluency. While there has been much debate regarding the correct balance between fluency and accuracy in language teaching (e. g. Brumfit & Johnson 1979), what is of interest to us is the striking difference reported in oral fluency in the two countries.

Byrne (1976) defines fluency as "the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably accurately and without undue hesitation." Levenston (1975) defines it more broadly as "the ability to function in face-to-face situations," while Cohen (1980) considers fluency as just one dimension of pragmatic speaking ability.

If it is felt that Jordanian speakers tend to be more fluent than Japanese, just what does this mean in concrete terms? Some examples should suffice.

In shopping areas in Japan, foreigners often hear cries of "Irasshaimase" with the occasional timid "Hello," or whispered "Gaijin." In the markets of Jordan and the Arab Middle East, one is faced with a great deal more English: "What would you like to buy, Mister?", "Come into my shop and have some tea.", "Come and look. Looking is free. Are you interested in carpets?"

Among people in the tourist trade in Japan, in hotels, gift shops, travel bureaus, etc., a small but increasing number of people can speak simple, halting yet effective English. In Jordan, virtually all people in the tourist trade will speak English, and many will be functionally bilingual in Arabic and English.

Local Japanese shopkeepers are usually friendly and talkative, but very few are able to converse much in English. A visit to the butcher or baker in Jordan, however, can easily lead into a pleasant conversation in good English on one's family, inflation, Islam or the future of the PLO.

In government offices, business, in universities and other professional institutions, one finds similar differences. Some Japanese will speak excellent English, but many will speak very little, while in Jordan virtually everyone will speak some degree of relaxed, fluent English.

It is generally acknowledged, then, that Jordan has attained a level of spoken English fluency which does not as yet exist in Japan. In order to find the reasons why, we will need a comprehensive model to help us analyse the contextual factors involved.

PART II CONTEXT ANALYSIS - A THEORETICAL MODEL

“In language teaching we have to operate with 4 key concepts: language, learning, teaching and context” (Stern 1983). These separate elements make up the 4 dimensions of the language learning/language teaching environment.

The importance of context cannot be overstated. Stern’s general model of language education rightly places context as a pervasive feature surrounding language, learning and teaching (Figure 1). Whereas language, learning and teaching have their foundations in linguistics, psychology and education, we derive our understanding of context from the social sciences, specifically sociology, anthropology and sociolinguistics.

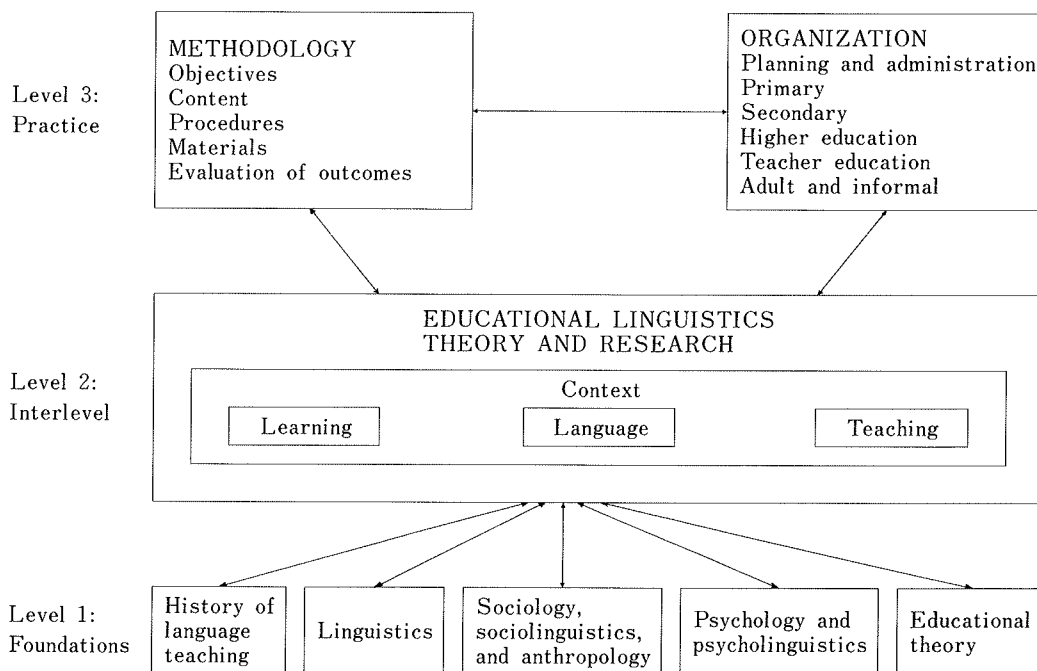


Figure 1. *Stern's Model of Language Education* (1983)

For a proper understanding of differences in English ability, then, we should not concern ourselves solely with the classroom. What is needed is a model that will cover the major contextual variables for Japan and Jordan. Only by examining all relevant factors of the environment can we pinpoint those elements that have brought about the differences in language ability and attitude in the two countries.

Stern's Model of Contextual Factors

For our study of contextual variables, the most relevant model is probably that by Stern (1983) (Figure 2). This is actually a combination of two separate models, one by Spolsky (1974) designed for analysing the contexts of bilingual education, and one by Mackey (1970) which details the different social levels relevant to language education. Though not perfect, this model should do well enough for our general purposes.

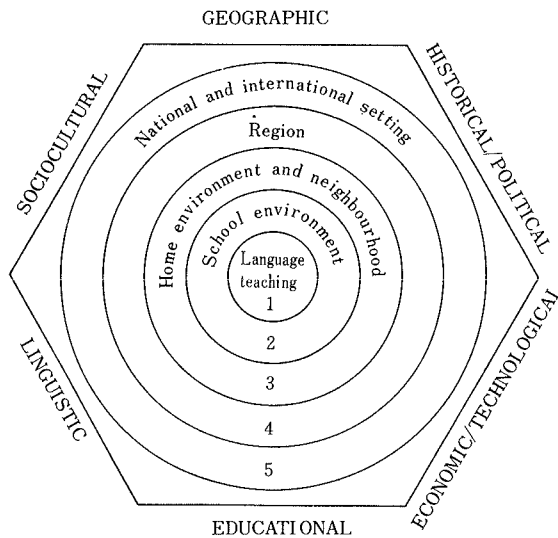


Figure 2. *Stern's Model of Contextual Factors in Language Education* (adapted)

The interior of the model represents the 5 levels within which foreign language education occurs. In the middle, we start with the micro-level of the language teaching situation, slowly moving outwards through the school environment and home, until we reach the regional and national level. To illustrate the model, let us give an example dealing only with the geographic dimension.

<i>LEVEL</i>	<i>EXAMPLE</i>
1. Language Teaching Situation	A university class in English reading
2. School Environment	Tottori University

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 3. Home Environment & Neighbourhood | Home: villages and towns in Tottori,
Shimane, Okayama, other areas
Neighbourhood: Koyama-cho |
| 4. Region | Tottori Prefecture, San'in District |
| 5. National and International Setting | National: Japan
International: North-east Asia |

Our example shows only the geographic dimension. However, this is only one of the 6 dimensions which influence language ability and attitudes, and all 6 are active at each of the above 5 levels. These 6 dimensions can be further sub-divided roughly as follows:

<i>DIMENSION</i>	<i>IMPORTANT SUB-FACTORS</i>
I EDUCATIONAL	(1) Methodology (2) Organizational aspects
II LINGUISTIC	(1) Structural similarity of native & target language (2) Language environment
III SOCIO-CULTURAL	(1) Religious attitudes (2) Cultural Values (3) Social structure
IV GEOGRAPHIC	(1) Degree of geographical isolation (2) Distance from the foreign language community
V HISTORICAL/POLITICAL	(1) History of foreign contacts (2) History of foreign language education (3) Political factors affecting the foreign language
VI ECONOMIC/TECHNOLOGICAL	(1) Economic structure, (2) Level of development

Though all these 6 dimensions may come into play in defining the features of a

particular sociolinguistic situation, not all dimensions may be operative. These 6 dimensions should therefore be thought of as a checklist of possible contextual factors affecting language ability and attitudes, rather than as a list of features that must always be operative in every case.

PART III JAPAN AND JORDAN-AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES

I THE EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION

To begin our analysis, let us start with a comparison of the English language education systems of Japan and Jordan. Here we will again follow Stern, by dividing this into two aspects: organization (referring to the administration and planning of English education at the various school levels) and methodology (dealing with objectives, teaching procedures, content, materials and evaluation).

Organization - Japan

The English education systems of Japan and Jordan are shown in Figure 3. In Japan, except for some private schools, official English language education starts in Junior High School. Surprisingly, though, English is not a compulsory school subject, but an elective. Nevertheless, it is included in almost all high school and university entrance examinations, and so has become a kind of 'unofficially compulsory' subject. The average high school graduate will therefore have studied 6 years of English in school and will take an additional 1 or 2 years at university. English is also commonly taught in specialist 'Semmongakko' colleges and in private language schools.

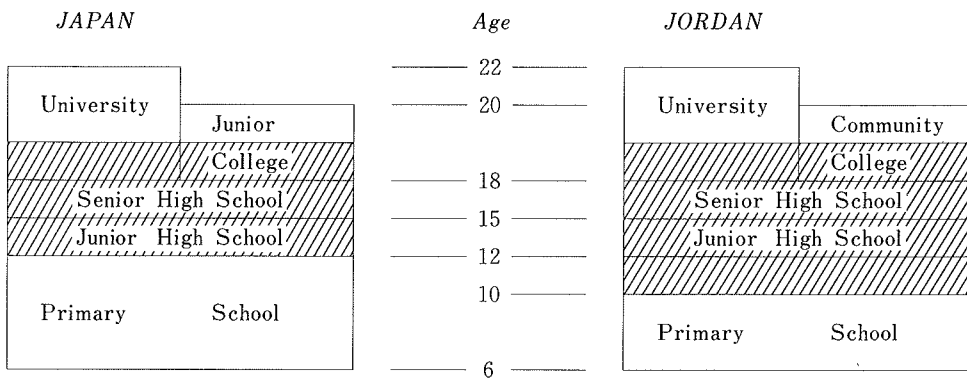


Figure 3. *English Language Education in Japan & Jordan*
(shown by oblique lines)

Since the 1981 curriculum reform, only three hours per week have been allotted to

English in junior high schools. Many people feel this is insufficient, and there are now some movements demanding more English instruction time (Nihon Kyōiku Nenkan 1985). What is sacrificed with this reduction of teaching time is training in listening and speaking skills which are not directly tested on the entrance examinations. Since this schedule is felt to be inadequate even for teaching reading and writing, many schools also give supplementary lessons before or after school, or during holidays.

In senior high schools, English is normally taught for 4 or 5 hours per week. The average class size is about 45 for both junior and senior high schools. It is increasingly common to divide students into class according to proficiency.

In universities, all students are required to take English as part of their general education. In most cases, these courses are independent from each other, and there is little program coordination, which tends to reduce their effectiveness.

Organization - Jordan

In Jordan, English is officially a compulsory subject. English is first taught in the 5th grade of elementary school, two years earlier than in Japan, and continues to be an important subject throughout secondary school. Compulsory education lasts until the end of junior high school at age 15, by which time students have had 5 years of English. Fewer students in Jordan continue on to senior high school compared with Japan (Japan-94%, Jordan-an estimated 70%). Senior high school graduates will have done 8 years of English study in all. In secondary school, students have 3 to 4 classes of English a week, each lasting roughly 45 minutes, with a class size of about 40.

At the university level, English is also a required subject whose importance differs according to the student's university and faculty. Jordan has 3 national universities, each of which counts both English and Arabic as official languages of instruction, although in practice only one of the three makes extensive use of English in teaching. The reasons for using English are (1) because many Jordanian professors learned their subjects in English abroad in the UK and US, and thus feel more comfortable teaching in the language they studied in; (2) because in certain technical fields only English textbooks are available as yet, with Arabic translations now being prepared; and (3) because foreign teachers are hired in most faculties to teach specialist subjects in English, though it is hoped to eventually replace these with qualified Jordanian staff.

Methodology - Japan & Jordan

Objectives In the 'Course of Study' issued by the Japanese Ministry of Education, the overall objectives for foreign language study are given as being "to develop students' ability to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it, to deepen their interest in a language, and to understand the daily life and way of thinking of foreign people" (1978; English translation 1983). The objectives of English language education are further specified as being "to develop students' ability of hearing, speaking, reading and writing in English." Although stress on a balance of the 4 skills is part of the objectives, in reality a lot of time and effort is spent on preparation for entrance examinations, so that oral-aural skills tend to be somewhat neglected.

The objectives of English language teaching in Jordan follow roughly the same lines as those in Japan. Emphasis is placed on developing a general English language ability leading to all-round competence in the 4 skills. As in Japan, actual classroom practice tends to focus more on reading, writing and grammar.

Procedures, Content and Materials In Japanese schools, English is taught mainly through the traditional grammar-translation method. Although most high school teachers have access to audio-visual equipment, it is generally left to the individual teacher to decide whether to use this or not. Since World War II, the English taught in schools in Japan has been American English. In junior high schools, an English reader is used which introduces the way of life in Western countries. In senior high school, a grammar book is added to this. It is also common for students to study materials prepared for the entrance examinations.

Jordan has been under the influence of British education, so that British English is normally taught in schools. In terms of audio-visual equipment, Jordanian schools are not as fortunate as Japan. Textbooks are standardized and consist of 6 parts: reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar exercises, dictation, composition and discussion. In addition, reading skills are taught with an anthology reader and a short novel such as George Orwell's 'Animal Farm'.

The chief difference between Japan and Jordan concerns method. In Jordanian schools, much less emphasis is placed on English translation, partly since this is not tested on the graduation examination. A more important difference concerns the language of instruction. Whereas in Japan the language used by the teacher for teaching English is pre-

dominantly Japanese, in Jordan a high proportion of school teachers use English to at least some extent in the classroom. Though a few will teach only in Arabic, many will use both languages in class, and some will use mainly English, reserving Arabic only for supplementary explanation.

Differences also exist at university level. In Jordan, university English is taught within the framework of a coordinated program with specific aims while in Japan English at the 'kyōyō' general education level is taught in separate courses by independent professors. University level English in Japan tends to focus largely on reading and translation, with much of the content being literature. In Jordan, general compulsory English courses have two main thrusts. One is general English ability (EFL), which in Japan is often left to the few foreign teachers. The other focus is ESP, English for Specific Purposes, where academic and technical English is taught to students as a language skill necessary for their university specializations. ESP English is taught both at the general level (e.g. 'English for Science'). or at more specialized levels (e.g. 'English for Engineering' or 'English for Medicine'). Little ESP teaching seems to exist in Japan at the university level.

Evaluation In both Japan and Jordan, the evaluation of English education in schools is done through formal written examinations. In both countries, these exams are a crucial factor in determining students' future careers, though in Jordan related social problems such as bullying and suicide do not seem to occur. Whereas in Japan the key examination is the university entrance exam, in Jordan it is the high school graduation examination, called the 'Tawjihi', which decides whether a student can enter university or not.

Interestingly, a Jordanian student's faculty is decided not by his own preference, but also by his Tawjihi score. Each faculty requires a minimum score for admission, with 95 for Medicine, 90 for Engineering and 82 for English, etc. However, a student who wants to study English literature as his major may be forced by his family to take the higher status Medicine or Engineering if his Tawjihi score is high.

Our brief survey of the education system in each country shows some similarities. The organization of English education seems roughly the same, as are objectives. Both societies place great value on a single examination in deciding students' future status and careers. Both examinations tend to neglect oral/aural abilities.

Important differences also exist, notably Jordan's earlier start with English, greater use of English in Jordanian classroom, and EFL/ESP teaching at university. Another great difference not yet mentioned is overseas study, which will be taken up under the economic/technological dimension.

On the whole, then, we have found some factors in the education system which help account for the differences in English ability and attitudes in Jordan and Japan. By themselves, however, these do not seem to explain such wide discrepancies in English speaking as we described earlier. We must therefore now turn to contextual variables outside the education system, starting with the linguistic dimension.

II THE LINGUISTIC DIMENSION

(1) Structural Similarity of Native Language to English

Contrastive analysis as first put forward by Lado (1957) discussed the concept of 'degree of difficulty' of a foreign language based on the 'closeness' or degree of structural similarity between the learner's native language and the foreign language. If the two languages are similar in structure, there should be 'transfer' and learning should be facilitated. If quite different, then there is 'interference' with learning hindered to some extent.

We cannot do a thorough contrastive analysis for either Japanese/English or Arabic/English in this short paper. One short example of syntax should suggest the situation, however.

<i>LANGUAGE</i>	<i>Question Word</i>	<i>Copula</i>	<i>Article</i>	<i>Noun</i>	
English	Where	is	the	book ?	
German	Wo	ist	das	Buch ?	
French	Où	est	le	livre ?	
Spanish	¿ Dónde	está	el	libro ?	
Arabic	‘ayna	∅	al	kitāb ?	
Russian	gde	∅	∅	kniga ?	
	<i>Noun</i>	<i>Topic Marker</i>	<i>Question Word</i>	<i>Polite Copula</i>	<i>Question Marker</i>
Japanese	hon	wa	doko	desu	ka ?

Figure 4. *Example Showing Differences in Linguistic Structure*

In this example, the structural similarity between English, French, German and Spanish is striking and indicates a low degree of learning difficulty according to our contrastive hypothesis. Arabic also shows a close similarity to English, closer even than Russian which is an Indo-European language like English, although Arabic belongs to the Semitic language family. Japanese, by contrast, stands out immediately as a language with a very different structure. Though we can't of course generalize from one isolated example, a contrastive study of Arabic and Japanese would show that in terms of syntax at least Arabic is 'closer' to English than Japanese. According to the contrastive hypothesis, this would indicate more difficulty for Japanese in learning English than for Jordanian learners, thus supporting Reischauer (1978) who states that in the English language game, "the cards are largely stacked against the Japanese."

The theory of contrastive analysis, however, has generated a great deal of debate, with conflicting claims made for its validity (Lado 1957; Politzer 1968) and counter claims playing down its importance (Ritchie 1967; Richards 1971; Gradman 1971). Stern (1983) states "linguistic similarity is no absolute guarantee that the second language will be easily learnt," while some researchers feel the native language is not at all a critical factor in language learning (Carroll 1975).

The linguistic structure of Japanese *may* have a part in English learning difficulty, but other linguistic factors also play an important role.

(2) Language Environment

The language environment of a society has a serious effect on foreign language learning. Here there are 4 features we would like to look at: linguistic membership, linguistic homogeneity, social bilingualism and available language resources.

Linguistic Membership

Every language community is like a club. The Japanese language club is large (120 million members) but quite isolated, consisting of one nation, Japan, an outpost in Brazil, and small pockets in New York, California, Dusseldorf, etc. The Arabic language club to which Jordan belongs is smaller than the Japanese club (100 million speakers), but is spread out over 19 different Arab nations plus parts of Iran, the USSR and sub-Saharan Africa. If we consider Arabic's role as the language of Islam, then our club membership rises to 500 million, including such countries as Turkey, India, China and Malaysia. By virtue of language membership alone, then, Jordan appears much

more international than Japan, a factor which may influence attitudes towards foreign people and foreign languages.

Linguistic Homogeneity

Both Japan and Jordan exhibit high degrees of linguistic homogeneity, with both countries having over 99% of their populations speaking the native language. This kind of homogeneity, however, can lead to an acceptance of universal unilinguality and may cause psychological resistance to foreign language learning (Stern).

Social Bilingualism

Though both Japan and Jordan are linguistically homogeneous, there does exist a difference in the extent of social bilingualism existing in each country. Reischauer states that the number of Japanese who speak foreign languages is quite small, and describes the Japanese involved in international bureaucracy, business and science as having only 'minimally adequate' foreign language skills. Since 1978, when Reischauer was writing, the situation has undoubtedly improved somewhat, but the number of people who could be described as functionally bilingual in English and Japanese must be extremely low.

In Jordan, however, among the urban educated classes (and a number of the less well educated), English-Arabic bilingualism is accepted as a common fact of life. Some concrete examples of this were mentioned in Part I. Some reasons for this have to do with our next topic, available resources.

English Language Resources in the Community

(a) Opportunities to Use English: Resident English-Speaking Foreigners

Figure 5 below shows the comparative statistics for English speakers resident in the two countries.

JAPAN: Total population 117,884,000 (1981)			JORDAN: Total population 2,300,000 (1982)		
USA	23,266	} .029%	USA	1,600	} .1%
UK	5,321		UK	850	
Australia	1,272		Philippines	3,000	} .25%
Canada	4,000		Germany	595	
India	2,137	Turkey	200 ?		
Philippines	6,729	Others	2,000 ?		
Germany	2,846	} .018%	-----		
Others	10,000		Total	8,245	.36%
Total	55,571	.047%			

Figure 5. *English-speaking Residents in Japan and Jordan*

Sources Japan: Nihon-Sono sugata to kokoro
Jordan: MEED/Personal estimates

It must be stressed that these statistics are very rough. Nevertheless, Jordan does seem to have a considerably higher population of foreign residents proportionally than Japan, even though the actual numbers in both cases are quite small.

Another relevant difference concerns the distribution of these foreign English speakers. Both countries have foreigners working in education and business. Japan has in addition a large population of American military in various bases, but these have only local contact and no national influence.

Jordan, however, has a quite interesting pattern of distribution. Because Islamic tradition frowns upon single Arab women mixing with men in public, certain professions have had to import and employ foreign women. Thus, many Jordanian nurses and waitresses are Filipino girls, maids are from Sri Lanka, and airplane stewardesses are often European or American women. All of these groups speak English but little or no Arabic. Jordanian Arabs flying on the Jordanian national airline are therefore sometimes forced to use English. It is hard to imagine such a situation in Japan where JAL stewardesses would tell Japanese passengers, "Sorry, you'll have to speak English. I don't know any Japanese."

(b) Role Models

To do anything well, it is helpful to have good role models who can be imitated. The importance of this in the language environment is stressed by Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982). Figure 6 below shows a comparison of English-speaking role models at various social levels.

ROYALTY	Jordan: King Hussein and Crown Prince Hassan educated in England. Both fluent in English. Queen Noor born and raised in US. Royal family often shown speaking English publicly in media. Japan: Prince Hiro educated at Oxford. Royal family rarely shown speaking English publicly in media.
GOVERNMENT	Jordan: Prime Minister and government officials virtually all fluent in English. Occasionally shown speaking English in media. Japan: Variable English ability among government officials and politicians. Very few functionally fluent. Rarely shown speaking English.
MEDIA	Jordan: People in news and entertainment mostly fluent, sometimes shown. Japan: Small but growing number of English speaking newscasters, actors, musicians etc shown using English.
SCHOOLS	Jordan: Most teachers have a functional English speaking ability. Japan: Small number of teachers with functional English speaking ability.
FAMILY	Jordan: Most families have one or more English-speaking members. Japan: Small number of families with English-speaking members.

Figure 6. *Role Models and Public English Exposure*

From the information above, Jordan seems to have a very rich language environment in terms of English-speaking role models. From the level of the family to that of the government, public figures seem to have both a good English ability and are visible speaking English in the media and elsewhere. Jordanian learners thus have only to look around to see successful examples of people communicating smoothly and naturally in English with foreigners. Japan, by contrast, does not as yet have this kind of language environment. Even where good speakers of English exist, they seem not to be often shown speaking English in public.

(c) **Media**

Just as an environment can be rich or poor in terms of role models, so also can it be rich or poor in foreign-language media resources. Figure 7 below details the general situation in Jordan and Japan.

	<i>JORDAN</i>	<i>JAPAN</i>
English Newspapers	1 daily paper 1 weekly paper	4 daily papers several weekly papers
English TV	1 foreign language channel 5 – 6 hours English programming nightly 1 language teaching prog.	No separate foreign channel Occasional English programming on NHK or with bilingual broadcasting NHK language teaching programs
English Radio	BBC available The FM station is in Eng.	FEN American Forces Radio BBC available
English Cinema	English movies have original soundtrack — not dubbed Few English movies; cinema going not popular	English movies have original soundtrack — not dubbed Many English movies: cinema going fairly popular

Figure 7. *English Language Media in Jordan and Japan*

Both countries have a variety of media in English, though patterned slightly differently. The biggest difference is with television, where of the two Jordanian TV channels, one is largely in English, showing 5-6 hours of American, British and local English programming each night. Jordanian learners wanting exposure to English have only to turn on their TV sets to get several hours daily of live English. Although Japan does have some English language programming, it is proportionately much less than Jordan, and not all areas of the country can receive the 'nikakokugo' bilingual

English broadcasting.

Our brief survey of the language environment has highlighted several distinct differences in Japan and Jordan. Let us now move on to look at the effect of social and cultural variables in determining language ability and attitudes.

III THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

(1) Religious Attitudes

"Allah akbar. la illah-a ila Allah. Mohammad ras'ul Allah" God is most great. There is no God but God. Mohammad is the messenger of God. This simple statement is the basis of Islam and the religious foundation of all Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries. It is written on the national flag of Saudi Arabia, appears on computer printouts and is broadcast 5 times a day from mosques throughout the Islamic world. Our students in Jordan even insisted on printing it on the blackboard and on their homework exercises. Together with the Ramadan month of fasting, this slogan symbolizes the all-pervasive influence of religion in the Arab world, in marked contrast to the comparatively weak influence of religion in Japan.

What does religion have to do with language ability and attitudes? Let us discuss some aspects of this as it relates to Japan and Jordan.

Religious Attitudes to Language Like Christianity, Islam is a religion in which the 'word of God' was revealed to man, spread by word of mouth from person to person in a largely illiterate society, was memorized, recited and discussed by common people, then was finally written down into a holy book. In the case of Islam, Allah-the one true God-dictated the contents of the Koran to Mohammad in Arabic, thus making Arabic a holy language. All of these facts led to a high degree of oral memory and to sharp skills of debate among the Arab people.

Japan, in contrast, has never had one single holy book. No Shinto Gods dictated long sacred rules in Japanese to Honshu farmers from behind rocks or trees. Though Buddhism brought some holy writings to Japan, memorizing and reciting were left largely to the priests, while public debate on religion was discouraged by decrees such as Prince Shotoku's that "Harmony is to be revered."

Religious attitudes to English naturally differ in the two countries. In Jordan, English is considered an important tool for development and international communication but is not holy like Arabic. A few Arabs even feel English is a threat, conveying as it does anti-Islamic Western ideas such as immodest sexual relations, materialism, lax morals, etc. Accordingly, much debate in Jordan is now going on over the appropriate role of English in education. In Japan, no such religious conflict now exists, though such debates did occur in the Meiji Period when English was seen as the language of Christianity.

Religious Attitudes to Learning and Teaching We often tend to forget that modern education originated mainly for the study of religion. The great European universities were originally Christian theological colleges, for example, while in the Arab world education originally meant the study of the Koran, and education in the old Japanese 'terakoya' dealt with buddhist precepts. In both Japan and Jordan, therefore, great respect has been accorded to education, and both countries have a religious-based tradition of respect for teachers which is sadly lacking in the West. This, however, has led to the present teacher-centred education system and may tend to hinder student independence. Though both Japan and Jordan stress written learning and memorization, due partly to religious tradition, Jordan's tradition of oral memory and recitation may have given her a better base for acquisition of oral skills. In any case, it is common for students in both countries to come to the teacher just before a test to ask "What do we have to memorize?"

Religious Attitudes to Foreign People It is postulated by Samson (1950) that Shinto polytheism made it possible for Japan to accept other religions and other cultures more easily than an uncompromising monotheism might have. Thus, teaching English in Japan has not confronted the religious resistance that exists to some extent in Islamic countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

(2) Cultural Values

Culture as an anthropological term covers the whole life and civilization of a people. Therefore, in comparing cultural values, we will limit ourselves to a few points which seem most relevant to language ability and attitudes.

Attitudes to Speech and Silence

Japan and Jordan seem to have almost opposite attitudes to language. Reischauer

remarks on the Japanese suspicion of verbal skills and confidence in 'haragei' and non-verbal understanding. Cates and Takagi (1980) describe Japanese culture as a culture of empathy, stressing meaningful silence and implicit understanding, in contrast with the Western 'civilization of the dialogue.'

Jordan, however, as an Arab nation, shares in the great verbal heritage of the Arabs. Mansfield (1980) describes in detail the Arab love of intoxicating rhetoric and the negative value of silence - Arab values that go back to the pre-Islamic period.

Attitudes to Self-Expression and Reasoning

Reischauer notes in Japanese culture a strong aversion to open displays of feeling and opinions, linked to the value placed on social harmony and the dislike of open confrontation. Reasoning is conducted through suggestion and inference, and ambiguity is common (Shigeta; Doi in Condon 1974).

Arabs have no such inhibitions, placing a high value on self-expression, argument and eloquent analytical debate. Similarly, self praise, rather than quiet modesty, is highly valued.

Formality, Conformity and Self-Consciousness

Japanese society is said to be a society of rules, what Hall (1976) calls a 'high-context' culture, with great importance attached to meticulous observance of procedure. Everything, whether tea ceremony or tennis wear, has its own rules, and everything must be done 'just so.' Non-conformity leads to censure, while conformity often produces a self-consciousness about not doing things correctly. This leads to 'tongue-tied perfectionism' and thus interferes with language learning.

Arab culture is also somewhat formalistic and conformist, but not nearly to the same extent, and without such extreme self-consciousness. Jordanians have no hesitation or inhibitions about speaking a foreign language, and tend to focus more on communication than on the grammatical accuracy of their sentences.

Attitudes to Foreigners

Japanese concepts of 'uchi' and 'soto' are said to discourage casual contacts. Nakane (in Condon 1974) adds that contact with foreigners is often avoided due to a nervousness and ignorance about how to act. Japanese feelings of privacy also inhibit relations with foreigners.

Arab attitudes to foreigners are partly based on the desert values of the nomadic

Bedouin. The desert is an inhospitable place, where generosity and hospitality towards strangers are highly valued. Thus, where in Japan it is unusual to invite strangers to one's home, in Jordan it is an honour, a duty and a blessing. There is an Arab custom whereby strangers must be given room, board and full hospitality for 3 days before a host can ask their business. Foreigners in Jordan are regularly invited to Arab homes, and opportunities for meeting foreigners and speaking to foreigners and speaking foreign languages are not avoided but are actively sought out.

Attitudes to Learning

Both societies place a high value on education, both traditionally and for acquiring social status. Reischauer feels learning in Japan is an intuitive process, based on transmission of skills from master to disciple through example and imitation. The nature of Japan's kanji writing system he also feels contributes to a tendency towards rote learning and a visual written orientation.

Arab society views learning as a process involving analysis and verbal explanation. Rote learning is also important, but will be oral as well as written.

Cultural Uniqueness and Assimilation of Foreign Concepts

Reischauer asserts that the Japanese have a special sense of distinctiveness as a nation, which constitutes a barrier to international communication. Japanese who learn foreign languages are sometimes looked down on and called names such as 'eigo-ya,' since it is felt such foreign knowledge will dilute their 'Japanese-ness'. Though Jordanian Arabs would also insist on their uniqueness, no such problem exists.

Another difference concerns assimilation of borrowed concepts. In Japan, borrowed goods, ideas and words are 'Japanized'. English words like 'sewing machine' are thus katakana-ized, abbreviated and sometimes changed in meaning to become words like 'mishin,' which cause interference when speaking English. Jordanian Arabs will at times sprinkle their Arabic with English, but without this kind of distortion.

We have discussed just a few of the Jordanian and Japanese values which affect language ability and attitudes. It seems clear, however, that Jordan, with its stress on verbal skills, articulate self-expression, unselfconscious individualism and pro-foreign attitudes, has a big advantage over Japan in the English language game.

(3) Social Structure

Language ability and attitudes are often influenced by the social structure of a community. Figure 8 below gives a rough breakdown of Japanese and Jordanian society in terms of ethnic origin, religion, age and social class.

	ETHNIC COMPOSITION		RELIGION		AGE		SOCIAL CLASS	
JAPAN 120 million	Japanese	99.4%	Buddhist	81%	under 15	23%	"Middle class" 90%	
	Korean	0.5%	Shinto	79%	15 - 64	68%		
	Chinese	.05%	Christian	0.8%	over 65	9%		
	Ainu	.002%						
	Others	.048%						
JORDAN 2.5 million	Jordanian	45%	Muslim	93%	under 15	47%	Urban	47%
	Palestinian	54%	Christian	7%	15 - 64	50%	Rural	46%
	Circassian	.01%			over 65	3%	Bedouin	7%
	Others	.09%						

Figure 8. *Social Stratification in Japan and Jordan*
 Sources Encyclopedia Britannica Micropedia (1979)
 MEED/Nihon-Sono sugata to kokoro

We have already mentioned the ethnic homogeneity of both countries, with Japan being 99% Japanese and Jordan 99% Arab. In Jordan, however less than 1/2 of the population is native Jordanian, with Palestinians making up roughly 54%, 440,000 of whom are classed as official refugees. This fact has forced Jordan to become internationally-minded to a greater degree.

Religion we have discussed already. The AGE column shows Jordan to have almost 1/2 of its population under age 15, reflecting the high birth-rate in the Arab world, where families of 10 and 15 children are not uncommon.

More relevant for us is Japan's 'middle class consciousness,' frequently cited by opinion polls. Jordan, by contrast, has 3 rather distinct social groups: the urbanized city people, the rural village farmers, and the nomadic bedouin of the desert. Social class has been cited as an important factor in language learning. Bernstein (1964; 1971) and Burstall (1974) state that children of higher social classes possess a more articulate and 'elaborated' language ability than lower class children, and that this affects both native and foreign language learning and use. Our previous discussion of cultural values indicates that culture may override this thesis for Jordan and Japan. In

Jordan, though, class does seem to play a role in English ability, since bilingual Arabic/English ability seems most prevalent in urban areas among the educated classes and least among the Bedouin.

IV THE GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

Various scholars have noted the influence of geography on language (Trudgill 1974; Saville-Troike 1982). Geographical location plays an important role in determining what foreign cultural and linguistic influences a nation is exposed to. Here we would like to examine two sub-factors.

(1) Geographical Isolation

A look at the maps in Figures 9 and 10 shows the locations of Japan and Jordan.

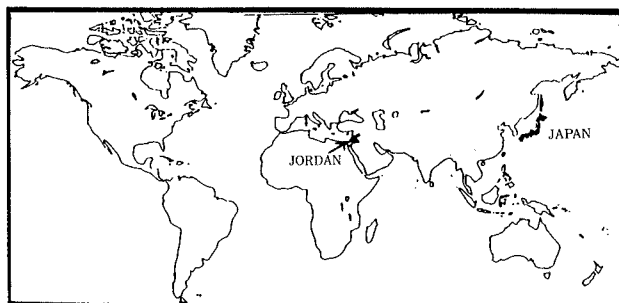


Figure 9. *Location of Japan and Jordan* Figure 10. *Jordan and the Middle East*

It has often been stated that a critical factor in Japan's linguistic and cultural development has been its distance from the Asian mainland—neither too far, which might have led to total isolation, nor too near, which might have led to constant military conquest and occupation. Japan's distance from Asia permitted occasional contact, but also allowed it the luxury of developing on its own unmolested.

In contrast to this, Jordan's location has given it a very vulnerable accessibility and high exposure to foreign influences, lying as it does at the crossroads of the African and Eurasian land masses. As Goldschmidt (1983) says, "Rarely in the past 4 thousand

years have the peoples of the Middle East known any respite from outside pressures or influences. (Instead they) have often known foreign conquest, outside domination, and a continuing exchange of people, goods and ideas with both the East and the West."

Foreign consciousness in Japan, a border-less island country, is thus naturally quite different from that of Jordan. This applies not only to such phenomena as borders but permeates all aspects of individual and social consciousness. Media is but one example- whereas in Japan one can only watch Japanese TV, in Jordan it is possible to watch 2 Jordanian channels, Syrian TV, Israeli TV and even Lebanese TV.

(2) Distance from English-speaking Countries

Neither of Jordan's or Japan's immediate neighbours are native English-speaking countries, the nearest being Britain and the US/Canada respectively. Both countries therefore experience roughly similar conditions of geographical distance from English-speaking nations. As Stern and others have pointed out, however, geographical distance is no longer the barrier that it was in the past, due to the development of modern communications and transportation. There is also the influence of historically-conditioned social perceptions. Hong Kong, for example, is geographically quite distant from Britain. Historical and political factors, however, have brought about a perceived closeness to Britain which accounts for the widespread usage of English there. Given the power of history and politics to overcome geography, it is appropriate for us now to turn and examine this dimension of Stern's model.

V THE HISTORICAL-POLITICAL DIMENSION

Geography is the board upon which the game of history is played. Geography sets down the terrain and the conditions. History determines how these are exploited, whether the barriers serve to isolate, or how and when they are overcome.

The interplay of these two factors, history and geography, determines the character of cultural communities and their attitudes to other linguistic groups. Let us briefly see how history has influenced linguistic ability and attitudes in Jordan and Japan.

(1) History of Foreign Contacts

JORDAN

The historical events which did most to shape Jordan's attitudes to foreign nations

and language can be summarized briefly as follows:

(a) **Long History of Foreign Domination** “Jordan has often been invaded or has been a passageway for armies on their way to somewhere else. Each civilization has left its traces” (MEED 1983). Japan, for better or worse, has been spared this, due to its different geographical situation. Figure 11 below shows this difference strikingly.

JORDAN – FOREIGN DOMINATION			JAPAN – FOREIGN DOMINATION
Canaanites	Babylonians	Crusaders	Early migrations & invasions
Hyksos	Persians	Mamlukes	United States
Egyptians	Greeks	Ottoman Turks	
Hittites	Romans	British	
Hebrews	Byzantines		
Assyrians	Islamic Arabs		

Figure 11. *Foreign Contacts through Domination & Occupation*

In both countries, the most recent cases of domination were by English-speaking nations. British control in Jordan was not only much longer than Japan’s occupation (Britain-25 years; US-7 years) but was also of a different character. Where Japan was occupied by an enemy country after a long war, an occupation which left Japan with a strong pro-American character, Jordan was not occupied solely in a military sense, but was rather entrusted as a mandate state to Britain, whose task it was to guide Jordan to independence. Jordan’s long contact with Britain allowed her to acquire some knowledge of the West and of the English language.

(b) **Long History of International Trade** Jordan’s favourable position at the crossroads of ancient and modern trade routes has given it long exposure to foreign languages and cultures.

(c) **Internationalizing Influence of Islam** Jordan’s conversion to Islam in 636 AD had several important results. First, the local population became part of the expanding Arab empire, thus acquiring a new cosmopolitanism. Secondly, the people absorbed Mohammad’s beliefs in cross-cultural tolerance. Thirdly, the evangelizing nature of Islam promoted the development of foreign language skills and contact with foreigners.

(d) **The Crusades** These first direct contacts with Western Europeans were negative and created suspicion between the Arab East and Christian West. Lasting 200

years, these campaigns brought rough Christian armies from Europe who fought Islamic Arabs, Byzantine Christians and each other for reasons of religious zeal and political avarice.

(e) **Cultural Isolation During the 400-Year Ottoman Turkish Occupation** Abu Jaber (MEED 1983) describes this period lasting from 1516 to 1916 by stating, "Jordan became a stagnant backwater...and lost touch with the outside world." This naturally led to a loss of language skills and international consciousness.

(f) **The Arab Revolt and British Domination** With the assistance of the British, through men like T. E. Lawrence, the Arabs ended their long Turkish subjugation and suddenly found themselves facing a modern world. Like Japan earlier, a great drive to catch up with the superior West began. Mixed feelings were felt towards the British, who assisted with economic progress but also kept Jordan under colonial rule and sowed the seeds for future conflict by allowing Jewish immigration into Arab Palestine.

(g) **Independence, Conflict and Refugees** Jordan became independent in 1946 and two years later the British withdrew from Palestine, allowing the superior Israeli forces to defeat the weak Arab armies and drive 500,000 Palestinian refugees into Jordan. The 6-Day War brought a second Israeli victory, and the capture and illegal occupation of the West Bank. Since then, the issue of peace in the Middle East, coping with a large refugee population, and protecting the Palestinians' rights have forced Jordan to become dependent on international aid and involve itself in international diplomacy, which have been strong motivating factors in English language learning.

JAPAN

Reischauer cites the following historical events which have helped to form Japanese language abilities and attitudes.

<i>HISTORICAL EVENT</i>	<i>RESULT</i>
(a) Cultural borrowing from China (Kofun and Nara Periods)	i) respect for foreign superiority ii) translation as basis of language study iii) custom of Japanizing foreign ideas/ words
(b) Large-scale overseas trade	j) increased international contact cre-

(13th-16th centuries)	ated need for foreign language skills
(c) First European contacts and the Christian century (1542-1636)	i) increased international awareness ii) development of foreign language skills
(d) Self-imposed Isolation (sakoku 1636-1853)	i) loss of international contact/awareness ii) foreign language study = translation
(e) Opening of Japan and the Meiji Restoration (1853-1912)	i) shame at forced opening and at Japan's underdeveloped state became motivation to 'catch up' with West using English ii) great international awareness/interest
(f) 20th Century Imperialism and World War II	i) development of anti-English attitudes ii) raised awareness of Asia through war
(g) Occupation and Post-War Recovery	i) pro-American attitudes ii) raised international awareness by trade iii) English & foreign languages promoted

Looking back over the histories of Japan and Jordan, we can see both similarities and differences. Both countries had a long period of isolation followed by a sudden confrontation with the developed West. For both, English has been a means for national development. However, Jordan's longer history of foreign contacts and long British dominance have given her different language attitudes and abilities than Japan, with her limited foreign contact and long tradition of translation.

(2) History of English Language Education

English education in Jordan only began to develop after World War II. With the

coming of Palestinian refugees in 1948, a growing awareness of Jordan's development needs, and the assumption of the throne by British-educated King Hussein, English took on a new importance and English language education was extended through the school system. Because of inadequate educational facilities, however, many Jordanian students were forced to go abroad for education, often choosing the US or Britain. This old 'tradition' of overseas education continues even today and has profoundly influenced English abilities and attitudes in Jordan.

Japan has had a much longer experience with English education, starting in 1860 with translation studies at the Tokugawa 'Bansho Shirabe Dokoro'. The Meiji era brought an English boom, with universities teaching English, foreign teachers hired and English as a 9 hour-a-week compulsory school subject. Pre-war nationalism produced anti-English attitudes, but progress continued after the war with the introduction of the Michigan method and increased hiring of foreign teachers.

Despite Japan's longer history of English education, Japanese do not seem to be better at speaking English, which shows the importance of other contextual variables.

(3) Political Factors

Japan and Jordan both face political pressures which necessitate an international outlook and a knowledge of English. Jordan's role in the Arab-Israeli dispute requires English ability for international diplomacy, specifically with Britain and the US. For Japan, the major political reasons for needing English are (i) for trade issues, (ii) for dealing with its benefactor, rival and critic, the US and (iii) for dealing with its international responsibilities in the world community. For both countries, then, political motivation for learning English is high.

VI THE ECONOMIC-TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSION

(1) Economic Structure

The economies of Jordan and Japan make both countries dependent on the outside world but in different ways. MEED (1983) notes that Jordan suffers from 3 serious handicaps which affect her language needs.

§ Few natural resources-Jordan is a desert kingdom, not a rich Arab oil state

§ The Arab-Israeli Wars-500,000 refugees, loss of territory and of 40% of GNP

§ Export of manpower - 1/6 of Jordanian workers are working abroad

The first two factors are partly responsible for the last one. Limited domestic job possibilities in Jordan force 250,000 workers abroad, mainly to the rich Arab oil states. This is 1/6 of the total population, equivalent to 20 million Japanese working overseas. Naturally, the money they send home to Jordan is one of the main sources of national income. Not only does this make Jordan highly international, with virtually every family having someone working abroad, but it also is a critical motivating factor for learning English, since English ability and high educational skills are partly what Jordanians are hired for.

Japan has no military conflicts or migrant labour, but does have a lack of natural resources which have forced her to look overseas. As a manufacturing and trading nation she is forced to acquire enough language ability to acquire raw materials from around the world, sell and service her products abroad, and keep up to date with international technological developments. As in Jordan, economic forces require ability in English.

(2) Level of Development

Foreign languages are needed for economic development and for acquiring technology from more developed countries. Figure 12 below suggests the situation in both nations.

	JORDAN	JAPAN
Literacy (1971)	46%	100%
Doctors (1970)	1 per 3,810	1 per 893
TV (1971)	1 per 46	1 per 4.3
Telephone (1971)	1 per 76	1 per 4
GNP (1970)	\$ 250 per capita	\$ 1,920 per capita

Figure 12. *Some Indications of Social Development in Japan & Jordan*
Source Encyclopedia Britannica Micropedia (1979)

Because of its lower level of development, Jordan has a great need for English since:

- § imported technicians and scientific personnel are largely English speakers
- § foreign technical books and materials are largely in English
- § military training is carried out partly in English-speaking countries
- § large numbers of students go overseas to developed nations for study, many to English-speaking countries

This last factor is a critical one in explaining Jordan's English ability and attitudes. Jordan's 3 universities can at present only take in 1/4 of her students. This means that 75% of Jordanian students are forced to go abroad for their higher education, a large proportion to the US and Britain, so that foreign language skills are vital for academic and social success. Returning graduates are admired for their worldly experience, new qualifications and foreign language skills in Jordan, in contrast to Japan where graduates returning from overseas often face discrimination in the job market and are sometimes thought to have lost some of their 'Japanese-ness'.

Related to overseas study is international marriage. While some Japanese students overseas marry and bring home foreign spouses, in Jordan a large proportion does, so that American, German, French and Russian wives can be found even in small villages. Since Arab men marrying abroad do not have to pay the huge 'bride payment' expected when marrying Arab girls, this international marriage may not be solely for romance. Some Arab states have even prohibited international marriages because too many local Arab girls were being left unmarried. Since two of King Hussein's four consecutive marriages were international, this reaction has not occurred in Jordan.

VII SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Since our analysis has ranged widely from culture and economics to geography and education, it might be best to summarize what seem to be the main environmental variables affecting English ability and language attitudes in Japan and Jordan. This we have done below in chart form.

<i>DIMENSION</i>	<i>JAPAN</i>	<i>JORDAN</i>
<i>EDUCATIONAL</i>		
Organization	§ 6 years school English	§ 8 years school English
	§ 1-2 years at university	§ 1-2 years at university
Methodology	§ general 4-skill objectives	§ general 4-skill objectives
	§ translation emphasized	§ translation not emphasized
	§ teaching mostly in Japa-	§ teaching in English & Ar-

	nese at all levels	abic: some univ. lectures in English
	§ exams neglect oral skills	§ exams neglect oral skills
	§ little university EFL/ ESP	§ university mostly EFL/ ESP
LINGUISTIC		
Structure	§ Jap-Eng extremely differ- ent	§ Arabic-English quite sim- ilar
Language environment	§ linguistically homogeneous § little social bilingualism § few English role models § some spoken English in media	§ linguistically homogeneous § much social bilingualism § many English role models § much spoken English in media
SOCIO-CULTURAL		
Religion	§ verbal skills not stressed § respect for teachers § no hostility towards En- glish	§ verbal skills encouraged § respect for teachers § some hostility towards English
Cultural Values	§ silence valued § feelings/opinions suppress- ed § ambiguity/suggestion val- ued § formality/selfconscious- ness § foreign contact avoided	§ verbal skills valued § feelings/opinions express- ed § directness/analysis valued § little selfconsciousness § foreign contact valued
Social structure	§ 'middle class' attitudes § study abroad a disadvant- age	§ wide variety of social classes § study abroad a big advan- tage
GEOGRAPHIC		
Isolation	§ high degree of isolation	§ high degree of accessi-

		bility
Distance from English nations	§ long distance away	§ long distance away
HISTORICAL - POLITICAL		
Foreign contact	§ limited contact historically	§ extensive contact historically
	§ contact through translation	§ contact through spoken language
	§ 7 year US occupation	§ 25 year British control
	§ 200 years isolation	§ 400 years isolation
English education	§ long history of Eng education	§ short history of Eng education
Political factors	§ great need for English for trade and diplomacy	§ great need for English for trade and diplomacy
ECONOMIC - TECHNOLOGICAL		
Economic structure	§ few resources/need for trade	§ few resources/need for trade
	§ no export labour	§ export labor needs English
Development level	§ no critical need of English for development	§ critical need of English for development
	§ sufficient funds & facilities for domestic education	§ 75% of students must study overseas

We began our study with the intention of isolating the contextual variables which would explain the perceived differences in spoken English ability in Japan and Jordan. From our summary chart above, the key features which help to explain the greater English-speaking ability of Jordanians seem to be:

- (1) 2 extra years of school English, and extensive use of English by Jordanian teachers in the classroom
- (2) the teaching of spoken English (EFL) and ESP at university, and the teaching

of some university courses in English

- (3) the structural similarities between English and Arabic
- (4) Jordan's rich language environment, with its urban English bilingualism, many English-speaking role models and high exposure to spoken English on TV
- (5) the influence of Islam on developing oral memory and oral skills
- (6) Jordanian cultural values which respect verbal skills, self expression, analytic logic, unselfconsciousness, foreign contact and foreign language skills
- (7) Jordan's geographical accessibility and its resulting cosmopolitan attitudes
- (8) Jordan's long history of direct foreign contact, including 25 years of British control
- (9) Jordan's economic structure which necessitates English ability for its export labourers and requires large-scale overseas study, largely in the UK and US
- (10) Jordan's need of English skills for economic and technological development

After our lengthy survey of English in Japan and Jordan, we have discovered some factors which may account for Jordan's high level of spoken English. What implications do these factors have which might help to improve the effectiveness of English language education in Japan?

There is an old Christian prayer which goes like this:

Lord, give me the strength to change what can be changed, the courage to accept what can't be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.

It is easy to see what can't be changed in Japan. We cannot rewrite Japanese history, alter its geography or change the structure of Japanese syntax. A close look at the above key features in Jordan, however, does suggest a few points which could lead to more effective English education and increased spoken English skills in Japan. Let us phrase these points as general suggestions:

- (1) Encourage Japanese teachers to use English as much as possible as the language of instruction in secondary schools and in universities
- (2) Consider giving equal weight to EFL/ESP programs to match the importance given to English linguistics and literature at universities
- (3) Consider the establishment of an English lecture series, or of entire courses in English, to be taught by Japanese or foreigners at the university level

- (4) Encourage more public exposure to successful English-speaking Japanese role models
- (5) Encourage the development of English TV programming, and especially the spread of bilingual English-Japanese broadcasting
- (6) Encourage more positive attitudes and policies towards overseas education
- (7) Encourage the development of curriculum programs which teach how to deal in English with Western logic and verbal expression

These suggestions cover different aspects of the English language context in Japan. Some are educational (1,2,3,7) while some are linguistic (4,5) or socio-cultural (6). Some of them involve changes in social values (6), in educational policy (2,3,7) or in classroom practice (1). Some, like (4), the suggestion on role model exposure, are already starting to be implemented. In the past, Japanese speaking English in public were rarely shown on TV, for example, although there are Japanese public figures with a good knowledge of English. Now, TV newscasters on NHK and other stations are sometimes shown interviewing Asian and Western scholars and politicians in English through live satellite hookups. This is a healthy trend, showing Japanese students of English that a good English ability is not only attainable, but also necessary for international communication.

Our 7 ideas above are merely tentative suggestions which we feel may be worth discussing. Of course, Japan is not Jordan and features of the Jordanian context which seem to promote good English ability and language attitudes may not always be applicable to Japan. Nevertheless, we feel that comparative studies of English language education in Jordan and other foreign countries are something worthwhile for Japan. Japanese people have a considerable talent for taking the best features of foreign countries and adapting them to improve social systems in Japan, something they have done successfully many times in history. If this also can be done to improve English language education in Japan, then perhaps this short paper will have made a small contribution.

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