

# Comparing the Beliefs and Motivations of Japanese High School Students for English Learning in China and Japan

SEKITANI Koki

## Abstract

This study's intent is to compare the beliefs and motivations of Japanese high school students for English learning in China with those of regular high school students in Japan. Totally, 51 first-year students at a prefectural high school in Japan, and 48 first-year, 38 second-year, and 36 third-year students at Shanghai Japanese High School participated in an investigation comparing the items of "Importance of Grammar," "Relation," "Risk Taking," and "Reflection-Impulsivity." The results showed that students at the prefectural high school in Japan held stronger beliefs about the "Importance of Grammar" than those at Shanghai Japanese High School. No significant differences between the schools were observed for "Relation," "Risk Taking," or "Reflection-Impulsivity." The data gathered in this study suggest the existence of a transfer effect regarding beliefs about the "Importance of Grammar." This transfer effect can be the result of an experience in which Chinese was used for daily life necessities while English was learned as a foreign language.

*Keywords: Japanese EFL learners in China, learners' beliefs, motivations, transfer*

## Introduction

### Background

In April 2011, a high school division of the Japanese school opened in Shanghai, China. This was the first occurrence of such an event in a worldwide context. Since then, the establishment of additional Japanese high schools has been expected in other parts of the world. Although suggesting a direction for English language education is becoming more important, there has been little relevant research concerning high school students in Japanese schools. Therefore, specifying the characteristics of those students and their surrounding environments is an urgent task so that effective educational approaches can be provided for their English learning. The present study aims to compare the beliefs and motivations of Japanese High School Students for English learning in China with those of regular high school students in Japan.

### The Effects of Setting on the Beliefs and Motivations of Learners

It is generally accepted that setting is one of the factors that affects the behavior of language learners, as well as their affective factors. Students at Shanghai Japanese High School and those at regular high schools in Japan alike learn English as a foreign language. One of the environmental differences involved in this study is that students at Shanghai Japanese High School are exposed to Chinese as a second language, but high school students in Japan are not. Therefore, it is possible that the experiences of students that are exposed to Chinese result in transfer effects on the forming of affective factors (such as the beliefs and motivations of English learners), which are different for learners that are not exposed to a second language. Since no previous research has directly tested this possibility, I will first summarize and compare the findings of the literature regarding the affective factors of learners in ESL and EFL settings. Then, I will provide research objectives based on this literature review.

Many researchers have studied the effects of affective factors such as the beliefs and motivations of learners on their second/ foreign language learning. Horwitz (1999) detected a positive relationship between beliefs regarding language learning and experience. Yang (1999) administered a questionnaire to 555 university EFL students in Taiwan and suggested that beliefs about formal structural studies (e.g., learning vocabulary and grammar, translating, and memorizing) tend to discourage the use of functional practice strategies (e.g., watching TV shows or movies, reading, and having conversations in English). Izumi, Shiwaku, and Okuda (2011) examined the effects of living abroad on EFL learners and their beliefs about L2-learning approaches, their use of strategy, and their confidence in L2 use. Their findings indicated that learners who had not lived abroad had stronger beliefs in analytic learning, used analytic learning strategies more frequently, were more nervous and afraid of using English, and were less confident with their English abilities than learners who had lived abroad.

To summarize the abovementioned studies, research has indicated that if learners are exposed to their target language in a second-language learning setting, (a) they tend to be more confident and motivated to use the language for communicative purposes and (b) tend to believe in analytic learning less. This leads to a decrease in the use of analytic learning strategies. However, it would be natural to assume that learners with significant exposure to their target language in a second-language learning setting have higher proficiency. It is therefore unclear whether the abovementioned tendencies are due to proficiency or experience in a second-language learning setting. In this regard, Ogawa and Izumi (2015) analyzed questionnaire responses that were given to Japanese university students. Their study found that higher-level students had stronger beliefs in experiential learning approaches, while those of lower ability believed more strongly in analytic approaches. To the contrary, Hong (2006) suggested that bilinguals have stronger beliefs about the importance of formal learning; this conclusion was based on a comparison between the beliefs of monolingual Korean and bilingual Korean-Chinese university students. To obtain a clear implication about the effects of experience in a second-language learning setting, it is necessary to avoid the compound with proficiency.

### **Study Purpose**

The present study aims to compare the beliefs and motivations of Japanese high school students for English learning in China with those of regular high school students in Japan. Such a comparison will enable a minimization of the effects of English proficiency. This is because both of this study's target groups (e.g., Japanese high school students in Japan and students at a Japanese high school in China) learn English as a foreign language under the same Japanese standardized curriculum. Any differences between the two groups would be a result of one group having exposure to Chinese as a second language.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Fifty-one first-year students (i.e., 41 boys and ten girls) at a prefectural high school in Aichi, Japan, and 48 first-year (i.e., 16 boys and 32 girls), 38 second-year (i.e., 22 boys and 16 girls), and 36 third-year students (i.e., 22 boys and 14 girls) at Shanghai Japanese High School participated in this study's investigation.

### **Time of Investigation**

The questionnaires involved in this study were completed in April 2013.

### **Questionnaires**

The questionnaire contained the items "Importance of Grammar," "Relation," "Risk Taking," and "Reflection-Impulsivity" (see Appendix).

“Importance of Grammar” is one of the factors from Belief of English Learning (Sekitani, 2008), and includes six items in total (e.g., “I think correct grammar is important when I speak English”). The participants were asked to respond to the prompt, “I will ask you about how you feel when you learn English.” Responses were selected from a five-point scale ranging from 1 (“not true at all”) to 5 (“absolutely true”).

“Relation” is one of the factors of the Two-Axis Model of Learning Motivation (Ichikawa, 1998), and concerns the degree to which learners are tempted to learn by others. It consists of six items (e.g., “My classmates do, so I am tempted to do”). Participants were asked to respond to the question, “Why do you learn English?” Responses were selected from a five-point scale ranging from 1 (“not true at all”) to 5 (“absolutely true”).

“Risk Taking” refers to the willingness of learners to take risks and make mistakes in order to learn to communicate (Mori, 1999). It includes six items (e.g., “I don’t mind making mistakes if I can learn to communicate”). Participants were asked to respond to the prompt, “I will ask you about what you think about English learning.” Responses were selected from a six-point scale ranging from 1 (“not true at all”) to 6 (“absolutely true”).

“Reflection-Impulsivity” (Takigiku & Sakamoto, 1991) consists of ten items (e.g., “I prefer to get things done as soon as possible rather than to take time for preparation”). Participants were asked to respond to the question, “To what extent are the following statements true to you?” Responses were selected from a four-point scale ranging from 1 (“not true at all”) to 4 (“absolutely true”).

## Results

In order to examine the differences among the four groups of this study (i.e., the first, second, and third-year students at Shanghai Japanese School and the first-year students at a prefectural high school in Aichi, Japan), a one-way ANOVA was conducted for each of the four variables (i.e., “Importance of Grammar,” “Relation,” “Risk Taking,” and “Reflection-Impulsivity”).

Concerning “Importance of Grammar,” a significant main effect was observed ( $F(3, 205) = 3.50, p < .05$ ). Tukey's multiple comparison test showed that the first-year students at the prefectural high school in Japan had stronger beliefs in “Importance of Grammar” than did the second-year students at Shanghai Japanese High School.

Concerning “Relation,” a significant main effect was observed ( $F(3, 205) = 2.55, p < .10$ ). Tukey's multiple comparison test showed that the second-year students at Shanghai Japanese High School had stronger motivations based on “Relation” than did the third-year students.

No significant main effects were observed for “Risk Taking” or “Reflection-Impulsivity” ( $F(3, 205) = 1.11, p = n. s.$ ;  $F(3, 205) = 1.31, p = n. s.$ ). Table 1 and Figures 1-4 summarize the descriptive statistics and the results of the ANOVAs.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics and results of the ANOVAs*

Dependent variable	School and school year	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>F</i> value
Importance of Grammar	PHS 1st year	19.31 (4.03)	3.50*
	SJHS 1st year	18.63 (4.31)	
	SJHS 2nd year	17.00 (4.19)	
	SJHS 3rd year	17.80 (3.78)	
Relation	PHS 1st year	13.25 (4.48)	2.55+
	SJHS 1st year	13.61 (5.12)	
	SJHS 2nd year	13.98 (4.96)	
	SJHS 3rd year	11.00 (5.04)	
Risk Taking	PHS 1st year	29.03 (3.46)	1.11
	SJHS 1st year	28.61 (2.81)	
	SJHS 2nd year	29.02 (4.23)	
	SJHS 3rd year	27.79 (3.38)	
Reflection-Impulsivity	PHS 1st year	23.66 (5.68)	1.31
	SJHS 1st year	24.48 (5.72)	
	SJHS 2nd year	24.74 (3.96)	
	SJHS 3rd year	25.68 (4.46)	

+ $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$ 

\*PHS: prefectural high school in Japan

SJHS: Shanghai Japanese High School

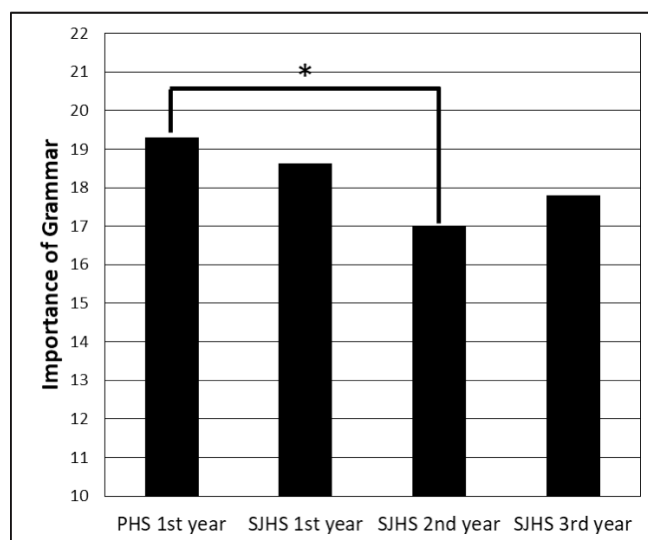


Figure 1. Comparison of Importance of Grammar

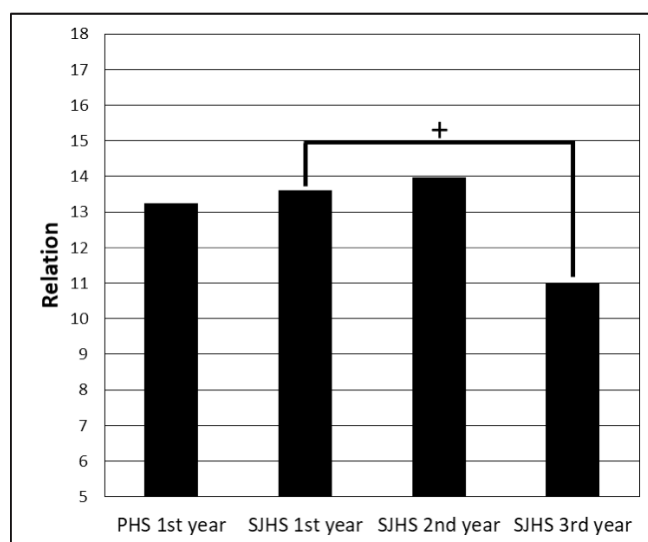


Figure 2. Comparison of Relation

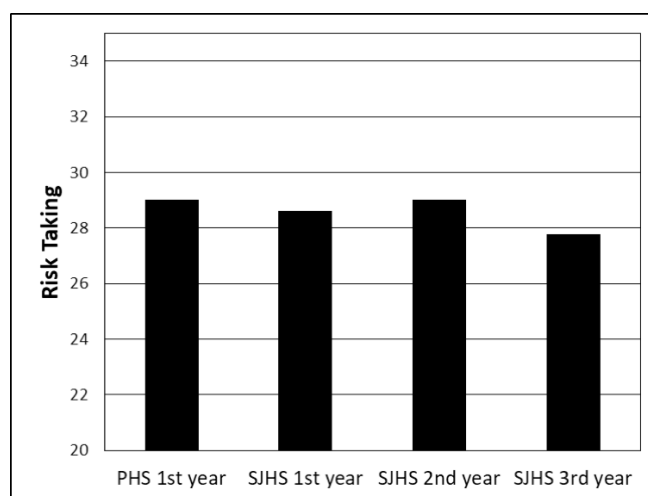


Figure 3. Comparison of Risk Taking

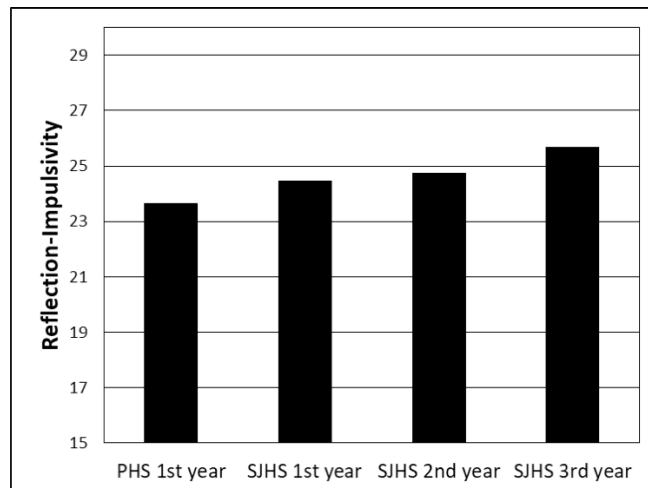


Figure 4. Comparison of Reflection-Impulsivity

## Discussion

The results show that students at a regular high school in Japan held stronger beliefs about “Importance of Grammar” than did students at Shanghai Japanese High School. These results correspond with the findings of Izumi, Shiwaku, and Okuda (2011) involving the assumption that there was a transfer effect from the experience of using Chinese for daily life necessities to English learning as a foreign language. The assumption is made more convincing by the fact that the gap in English proficiency levels between the groups was minimized. However, it should be noted that differences in beliefs about “Importance of Grammar” were detected only between second-year students at Shanghai Japanese High School and first-year students at a regular high school in Japan. More research is required to generalize and reinforce the abovementioned assumption.

As for “Relation,” which is one of the “Content-Detached” motivations (Horino & Ichikawa, 1997), the present study failed to detect a difference between students at Shanghai Japanese High School and those from the regular high school in Japan. However, a difference in “Relation” was observed between first and third-year students at Shanghai Japanese High School. This is likely because third-year students (most of whom prepare for college entrance examinations) are more autonomous learners and less likely to be passively motivated by the temptations of others.

No significant differences were observed in either “Risk Taking” or “Reflection-Impulsivity.” This is likely because these traits are innate, and thus not easily affected by the environment.

The present study was the first attempt to examine a transfer effect of the second-language learning setting on foreign language learning by comparing the beliefs and motivations of Japanese High School Students for English learning in China with those of regular high school students in Japan. This study was able to provide relevant knowledge regarding its purpose. Finally, implications for further research should be addressed with the remaining tasks. First, measurements should be conducted for affective factors such as the beliefs of learners and motivations for learning a second language (e.g., the Chinese language for students at Shanghai Japanese High School), as well as EFL so that any possible transfer from their affective factors for the second language to those for EFL can be detected. Second, it is anticipated that the process involved in such transfer will closely be examined through longitudinal studies.

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## Appendix

### Question Items Used in the Questionnaire

#### Importance of Grammar

- (1) I think making grammatical mistakes is no problem as long as I can make myself understood.  
(意味が通じれば文法が間違っても問題はないと思う)
- (2) I think grammatical accuracy is not necessary when I speak English (reversed).  
(英語を話すときは文法的な正確さは必要ないと思う)
- (3) I think correct grammar is important when I speak English.  
(英語を話すとき、正しい文法は大切だと思う)
- (4) I think learning grammar is important in order to master English.  
(英語ができるようになるには文法を学ぶことは大切だと思う)
- (5) I don't like studying such trifles as grammar (reversed).  
(自分は文法など細かいことを勉強するのは好きではない)

(6) I cannot be satisfied unless I completely understand grammar.

(自分は文法的に完璧に理解できないと気がすまない)

### Relation

(1) I think it is natural: everybody does it.

(みんながやるからなんとなくあたりまえと思って)

(2) I would like to accompany my friends in my school.

(友達といっしょに何かをしたいから)

(3) I would like to be regarded as a member by my parents and favorite teachers.

(親や好きな先生に認めてもらいたいから)

(4) People around me do so.

(まわりの人たちがよく勉強するので、それにつられて)

(5) I think it is strange if I do not follow people around me.

(みんながすることをやらないと、おかしいような気がして)

(6) I feel sorry for my parents and teachers if I do not study.

(勉強しないと、親や先生にわるい気がして)

### Risk Taking

(1) I don't mind making mistakes if I can learn to communicate.

(私はコミュニケーションできるようになるなら、間違いをおかすことを気にしない)

(2) It's a waste of time to work on problems that do not have a single clear-cut answer.

(一つのはっきりとした答えのない問題に取り組むのは時間のむだだ)

(3) If you don't understand something when you are learning English within a short amount of time, you should keep trying.

(短い間に英語を勉強しているときにもしわからないことがあれば、努力し続けるべきだ)

(4) I don't mind appearing foolish if I can make myself understood.

(私は自分の言いたいことがわかってもらえるなら、ばかだと思われても気にしない)

(5) You learn a lot by having mistakes corrected.

(間違いを訂正してもらうことによって多く学ぶものだ)

(6) When doing a reading assignment, I look up almost all unknown words in a dictionary.

(読解の課題をするとき、私は知らない単語をほぼすべて辞書で調べる)

(7) If you don't understand something well during the first reading, you will get more the second time.

(初めて読んだときに理解できなくても、二回目にはもっとわかるものだ)

### Reflection-impulsivity

(1) I would not be satisfied without thinking things over well.

(何でもよく考えてみないと気がすまない方だ)

(2) I would rather spend enough time on everything to think things over well.

(何事も時間をかけてじっくり考えたい方だ)

(3) I would rather think deeply.

(深く物事を考える方だ)

(4) I would rather spend enough time to think carefully before deciding.

(何かを決めるとき、時間をかけて慎重(しんちょう)に考える方だ)



(5) I would not be satisfied without examining every possibility.

( すべての選択肢（せんたくし）をよく検討しないと気がすまない方だ )

(6) I am a careful person.

( 用心深い方だ )

(7) I often reconsider before taking an action.

( 実行する前に考え直してみることが多い方だ )

(8) I would rather plan beforehand when shopping.

( 買い物は、前もっていろいろ計画してからする方だ )

(9) I would rather take an action before planning (reversed).

( 計画を立てるよりも早く実行したい方だ )

(10) I often take actions before thinking well (reversed).

( よく考えずに行動してしまうことが多い方だ )