

The Impact and Role of High Language Competency and Cultural intelligence on Workplace Communication: An Analysis of Australian Expatriates in Japan

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Given the close business ties between Australia and Japan as well as the continuing increase in the number of Australians working in this country, communication between these expatriates (AEWs) and their Japanese coworkers is receiving more attention because of its impact on business efficiency. This study, which represents the first stage of the author's Ph.D. research project, explores the relationship between Japanese language proficiency and cultural intelligence (Peterson, 2004) through a survey of twelve AEWs and 48 of their coworkers (four for each AEW) in three business organizations in Japan. Although the AEW participants were chosen because of their strong Japanese skills, this paper analyzes differences between those evaluated by themselves and their coworkers as having *advanced* Japanese proficiency and those who possess only *conversation-level* Japanese. It considers the AEWs' use of Japanese in the workplace and their strategies for resolving breakdowns in communication between them and their Japanese coworkers, but focuses specifically on differences in their awareness of the necessity of accommodation of communication style as an indicator of cultural intelligence. The results suggest that the higher their level of Japanese proficiency, the more conscious AEWs are of the need to converge to a Japanese style of communication in order to achieve smooth workplace communication and the more willing they are to do so. In this way, the study supports the view that L2 proficiency is in essence an integral part of cultural intelligence.

職場コミュニケーションにおける高い言語力及び異文化への対応力の影響と役割 ——日本在住オーストラリア人駐在員の分析

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日豪間のビジネス関係およびそれに伴う日本でのオーストラリア人駐在員（以下 A E W）の増加に伴い、AEWと日本人社員とのコミュニケーションがどのようにビジネスの効率性に影響を与えるかが注目されつつある。本研究は筆者の博士論文研究の第一段階であり、ここでは、日本にある三社に勤務する12人のAEWと48人の日本人同僚（AEW 1人につき日本人同僚4人）を対象に行なったアンケート調査をもとに、AEWの日本語能力と異文化への対応力（cultural intelligence）（Peterson, 2004）の関連性について考察する。AEW参加者選考にあたって、日本語運用能力が高いことは必須条件であったが、本論文では、AEW自身、およびAEWと一緒に働いている日本人社員によって日本語運用能力が「上級」と評価されたものと「日常会話が成り立つレベル」と評価されたものとの差を分析する。本研究は、AEWが職場で使用する日本語と、AEWと日本人社員間のコミュニケーション摩擦の解決のためのストラテジー考察であるが、ここでは特に、異文化への対応の指標として各AEWが感じるアコモデーション（適合）の必要性の違いに焦点を当てる。本調査では、AEWの日本語能力が高ければ高いほど、日本人社員との効率的なコミュニケーションのためには日本人のコミュニケーションスタイルに合わせる必要があるという意識、また合わせようとする意志が高くなるという示唆が得られ、第二言語能力が「異文化対応力」の不可欠な要素であるという考え方が支持される結果となった。

INTRODUCTION

The business relationship between Australia and Japan is one significant example of how globalization is changing the nature of the workplace through cultural diversification. Since the 1970s, Australia has watched its trade with Japan continuously develop, and Japan has consistently been Australia's largest export market for over thirty years (Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2006). In 2000, the population of Australian expatriates working and living in Japan (AEWs) stood at approximately 9,000 (Butcher, 2004). By 2003, this number had risen to roughly 11,500 (Japan Reference, 2005). The continuing development of these ties means that an additional increase of AEWs in Japan can be expected.

Considering the culturally diverse context that arises in companies where AEWs and Japanese work together, smooth intercultural communication is an essential component of efficiency in the workplace.

Increased attention has therefore been drawn to the need for expatriates to possess high levels of intercultural competence (Hinner, 1998), which can be defined as a combination of high second language (L2) proficiency and cultural intelligence—the ability to function effectively in a host culture (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). Ferraro (1998) suggests that the development of expatriate workers' L2, their cultural intelligence, and their willingness to modify their communication styles to match those of the local personnel and clients are key factors for expatriates to become effective communicators with local staff and clients alike.

It should be noted that Ferraro's argument seems to place equal weight on all three areas: L2 competency, cultural intelligence and modification of communication style. Butcher's (2004) research on the transnational movement of AEWs also stresses the importance of both language skills and cultural competence for expatriates to communicate effectively with local staff and clients. However, despite the existence of such research suggesting the intertwined nature of language and cultural competence, a perception that they are somehow distinct—that is, that a person can be competent in a second culture without being competent in its language—is still widely accepted.

The current study therefore seeks to explore this assumption by examining links between expatriates' L2 proficiency and their cultural intelligence and investigating the significance of these competencies in the achievement of effective communication in a culturally diverse workplace. This paper focuses on the initial stage of the author's Ph.D. project, which aims to examine the impact of L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence on communications in businesses where Australian expatriates and Japanese work together.

In the first stage of the project, a questionnaire was used to survey AEWs and their Japanese coworkers in three workplaces in Japan concerning their L2 competencies, use of their L2 in the workplace, communication problems between the two groups and strategies used to resolve them, and modification of communication styles. To analyze the relationship between L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence, the flow of inquiry focuses on the accommodation made by AEWs in communication style while using Japanese, their L2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Japanese Studies in Australia

One of the ramifications of the increase in Australians doing business in or with Japan is shown in the expansion of knowledge and expertise related to Japan among Australians since the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to a report prepared for the Australian government on the importance of Asia literacy (Rudd, 1994), Japanese is ranked in the top four priority Languages Other Than English (LOTE) taught in Australia. In fact, in 2001, the Japanese language was the most popular Asian language being studied in Australian universities (Tipton, 2002). One reason for this trend is suggested by Kubota (2003), who surmised that the motivation of career enhancement through Japanese proficiency is strong. However, despite these positive indications of the importance of the Japanese language in the context of Australia's relationship with Japan, there is little empirical evidence that clearly illustrates the impact of the acquisition of L2 proficiency on effective communication with Japanese staff.

There is one paper, however, that offers contextual relevance to the current study: Yoshida's (2003) study of Japanese language learners in Australia. Steering away from the common approach of relying exclusively on self-evaluations of L2 proficiency, it compared evaluations of Australian learners of Japanese by themselves and those made by Japanese native speakers. The learners' Japanese skills were evaluated in terms of grammatical accuracy, grammatical range, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, non-verbal aspects (posture, gesture, facial expression, etc.), back-channelling (*aizuchi*), pause (*ma*) given by the speaker as an expectation of back-channelling, appropriateness of the language used, and expression of attitudes and personality. Overall, the study showed that Japanese language learners and native speakers used different criteria for evaluating competence: while the learners regarded grammar and vocabulary knowledge as the biggest indicators of competence, the Japanese participants evaluated "strategic and social competence" as an essential part of Japanese communication fluency (p. 3). Yoshida connected this finding to the notion that "learners need to develop strategic competence" (p. 17)—that is, the ability to read between the lines or understand the gist of something being said, more than comprehending all of what the interlocutor is saying.

Although Yoshida's (2003) study focuses on language learners, it elucidates some valid differences in how competence is evaluated between non-native and native speakers of Japanese. Assuming that reference to strategic and social competence expectations holds true for all native speakers of Japanese in the context of the current study, it then raises the question: just how aware are AEWs of the strategic and social competence needed to facilitate effective workplace communication with their Japanese coworkers? This is one of the questions this paper seeks to explore.

Research on Communication Between Expatriates and Local Staff

Within the context of expatriate and local staff relations, a diverse range of research areas has been identified, including expatriate management performance; adjustment to the host business culture; cross-cultural management issues; awareness of, as well as sensitivity and adaptability to, a different culture; commitment to the organization; and communication with local personnel and clients (Black & Porter, 1991; Fisher & Hartel, 2004; Sakurai, 2001). However, as previously stated, to date, there has been little research on expatriate and local staff communication.

In relation to the current project, however, studies conducted by Du-Babcock & Babcock (1996, 1999) and Selmer (2006) are of particular significance. Firstly, Du-Babcock & Babcock (1996, 1999) examined the impact and effectiveness of L2 fluency (Chinese and English) on levels of comfort and overall workplace communication between expatriate and local personnel in Taiwan and China. In these studies based on a questionnaire and on-site interviews of expatriates and local staff, workplace communication patterns were categorized as belonging to one of three different types according to the L2 proficiency of the individuals involved in the interactions: "Zone 1" refers to communication between two monolinguals; "Zone 2" indicates communication between partial bilinguals; while "Zone 3" signifies interactions between fully bilingual interlocutors as defined using the Foreign Service Institute Scale. One of their important findings related to expectations toward communication in the workplace. In Zone 3, it was found that the higher the interlocutor's L2 proficiency was, the more positive an impact it had on workplace communication.

Interestingly, the exploration by Du-Babcock & Babcock (1996, 1999) of the consequences of language choice by expatriates evoked striking differences in the communication strategies employed. According to the participants (American and Taiwanese), when the expatriates selected English, they were not expected to follow all social norms and rules because they were seen as outsiders by local staff; however, once they started to use fluent Chinese, they were seen as insiders, and because of their ability to pick up on in-group communication, expectations for them to follow Taiwanese business and social norms increased (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996).

Similarly, Selmer (2006) also makes strong claims regarding the influence of L2 proficiency in making workplace communication more effective. In his study, it was found that proficiency in Chinese promoted positive expatriate adjustment. The reason given was that it allowed expatriates deeper exposure to the Chinese culture. As a result, they were able to bridge the gaps between the cultures and establish personal relationships through frequent and direct communication. While there is still not a large volume of research on L2 proficiency in this context, Selmer's study does support the argument that its role and impact must be considered in the analysis of intercultural workplace communication.

On the whole, both of these studies suggest that high L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence play a significant role in successful workplace communication and support the notion suggested in the above-mentioned studies by Ferraro (1998) and Butcher (2004) that these two capacities are strongly connected.

However, due to the method of data extraction employed in both studies, which predominantly relied on self-evaluations and reports by the expatriate participants, the question arises as to how closely their experiences and perceptions correspond to those of the local staff with whom the expatriates work. In an intercultural workplace environment, accurate evaluation of the ability to communicate effectively requires more than just self-evaluation. The perspectives of both interlocutors in an interpersonal dialogue need to be considered. The current study therefore surveyed Japanese who worked with the AEW participants to provide a fuller picture of how the AEWs functioned.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Workplace communication involves interpersonal communication, that is, face-to-face communication between two individuals. Naturally, if the staff is culturally diverse, language and cultural factors will have an impact on interpersonal communication in the workplace. As Varner and Beamer (2003) argue, while language and culture are intertwined and, as a result, shape one another, little attention has been given in research to date to the cultural implications of how language is used. To explore this area, two theories—communication accommodation theory and cultural intelligence—have been chosen to guide the author's Ph.D. project. This section of the paper therefore gives an explanation of these two theories and how they relate to the context of the current study

Communication Accommodation Theory

This theory examines individuals' strategic use of language to achieve a desired social distance (Shepard, Giles & Le Poire, 2001). It divides strategic linguistic behaviors into four main foci: approximation, discourse management, interpretability and interpersonal control. Considering the context

of the current study, the author has chosen to examine one of these main foci—approximation strategies—in order to analyze how AEWs adjust their communication style when using their L2.

Shepard, Giles & Le Poire (2001) identify three main approximation strategies: *convergence*, *divergence*, and *maintenance*. *Convergence* refers to a situation in which one side of a communication dyad modifies some facet(s) of their normal style of communication (e.g., tone, explicitness, implicitness, assertiveness, and accommodation) to match that of the other side. Normally, this is done as a strategy to enhance a feeling of affinity. In contrast, *divergence* is the exact opposite in terms of style, in that it is the practice of purposely adopting a communication style which is different from that of the other interlocutor to establish a clear boundary between oneself and the other person. Lastly, *maintenance* refers simply to the maintenance of one's usual style of communication, neither deliberately converging towards nor diverging from the style of the other interlocutor.

In the literature on intercultural communication, one of the main themes to be derived from communication accommodation theory is the influence of language use and cultural differences when interlocutors from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds communicate. For example, as explained above, Du-Babcock & Babcock (1996, 1999) use this theory in their research on communication between American and British expatriates and their Chinese personnel to explain the expectations of local staff for expatriates with high proficiency in Chinese to adapt to the local style of communication.

In this paper, the author will use this theory to examine whether AEWs who are highly proficient in Japanese choose, either consciously or unconsciously, to accommodate their communication style when they speak in Japanese.

Cultural Intelligence

Thomas and Inkson (2003) define cultural intelligence as the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Development of the repertoire of behavioral skills required to become culturally intelligent comes from a combination of knowledge (of oneself and others) and the application of mindfulness toward one's experiences in the host culture. In other words, this theory suggests that the degree to which a person is successful in cultural environments different from their own is dependent upon their ability to acquire a behavioral repertoire and skills to adapt to the given cultural context, such as a workplace in a host culture (Earley & Ang, 2003; Peterson, 2004).

Varner and Beamer (2003) also argue strongly for attention to be given to “cultural literacy” (p. 49), which is defined in much the same way that Thomas & Inkson (2003) explained their term “cultural intelligence”. Varner and Beamer's (2003) study of the Daimler-Chrysler merger, which involved combining German and American companies, showed that self-awareness and developing awareness of the need for cooperation and integration are important in culturally-diverse workplaces.

A significant part of the process required to develop self- and other-awareness included building intercultural communication strategies and learning to consider culture as an important variable in the workplace setting. Varner and Beamer (2003) suggested that increasing language and cultural training in Daimler-Chrysler would help culturally-diverse work teams in the new company function more effectively.

As both the theories of communication accommodation and cultural intelligence suggest, the ability

and willingness of people in a culturally-diverse workplace to understand their coworkers and adapt to them is important to effective functioning. In other words, if the cultural implications which add meanings and a frame of reference to the language used in a situation are not considered by coworkers, then communication may not run smoothly. Both theories are therefore used to analyze the impact of L2 and cultural intelligence on AEW workplace communication and the link between them in this study.

THE STUDY

As stated previously, the current study is part of the author's Ph.D. project. The entire project aims to illustrate the impact of AEWs' L2 proficiency and the necessity of cultural intelligence for them to achieve effective workplace communication in Japanese workplaces. Accordingly, it focuses not only on the evaluations of AEW Japanese language skills (both by themselves and their Japanese coworkers), but also seeks to highlight awareness of the necessity of accommodation of communication style as one example of cultural intelligence.

The first stage of the project, which is reported in this paper, consists of an exploratory survey of AEWs and their Japanese coworkers. The next phase of the study will involve on-site observation of interactions between a smaller sample of the original AEW and Japanese coworker participants in workplaces in Japan to gather data on the L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence displayed by the AEWs and analyze perceptions by both groups on how effectively the two (L2 and cultural intelligence) are used as strategies to achieve successful, smooth workplace communication.

Questionnaire

To determine the spectrum of individual backgrounds, experiences and perceptions of the participants, the first stage of the research project surveyed the AEWs and their coworkers using questionnaires containing an even mix of closed- and open-ended questions. Two versions of the survey instrument were prepared—one in English and one in Japanese. While the majority of the questions were the same in both versions, there were slight differences, explained below, depending upon the group to be surveyed—AEWs or Japanese coworkers. The English version is reproduced in the Appendix, but space limitations made it impossible to include the Japanese version. The categories of questions contained in the questionnaire were personal information, work experience and current job situation, L2 acquisition background (Japanese for the AEWs and English for their Japanese coworkers), and intercultural communication skills (including Japanese language competency) of the AEWs in the workplace.

The personal information section contained seven questions pertaining to age, gender, marital status, education and language use at home. Next, the questionnaire moved on to the participants' work experience and current job situation, asking questions about visa status, current position (entry-, mid- or senior-level), the type and organization of their current workplace (including subordinate, colleague and superior relationships), and other expatriate experience they have had. The aim of this section was to create a clear image of the workplace dynamic, including the worker relationships, status and previous experience that may have an affect on the attitudes of the AEWs.

The third section focused on language education background—i.e., Japanese language for the AEWs

and English for their Japanese coworkers. In this section, the participants were asked to provide detailed information on the number of years they had studied their L2 in Australia and/or Japan. Most importantly, participants were asked to evaluate the importance of Japanese language skills in their work context and, if they felt it was important, the reasons why. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide information on the percentage of their workplace communication in which they used Japanese, which of the four language skills (speaking, reading, listening and/or writing) they thought were essential to acquire in Japanese, and the amount and content of intercultural training thought necessary to work effectively in Japan. The main objective of this section was to establish a clear image of the participants' perceptions regarding language proficiency and cultural intelligence.

In the final section, participants were asked questions related to interpersonal communication skills in the workplace. A total of ten questions, both closed- and open-ended, were asked concerning factors contributing to communication breakdown, conflict resolution strategies, Japanese skills required specifically in the workplace, and the proportion of Japanese used in tasks such as meetings, internal negotiations, email, socializing, client relations, and other areas. This led to questions on how successful they thought their own communication (or in the case of the Japanese coworkers—the communication of the AEW they worked with) was in those situations. The last section focused on accommodation in the workplace by both the AEWs and their Japanese coworkers, seeking to find out what kind of modifications were made, by whom, and why they were made. The final question asked which language they thought led to more successful workplace communication. Most importantly in this study, Japanese coworkers were also asked to evaluate their AEW colleagues' L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence.

In evaluating the AEWs' Japanese language competence, participants were asked to choose one of the following three levels: 1) *Advanced* (able to converse in Japanese in all contexts, including business and daily life, with little or no difficulty); 2) *Conversation* (able to conduct basic daily conversation, but not in a business context, and having a lot of difficulties understanding the language if it is not simple); or 3) *Only greetings or not at all*.

Although a number of definitions exist for “*advanced*”, considering the nature of the participants' work, the widely-accepted Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale definitions (previously known as the U.S. Foreign Service Institute Scale) of language proficiency were provided as a reference. This scale describes different levels of abilities to communicate in a foreign language, ranging from Level 1 (elementary proficiency) through Level 5 (native or bilingual proficiency).

The *conversation*-level category used in the current study corresponds to Level 2 of the ILR Scale, which indicates limited proficiency enabling the handling of routine social demands and situations, whereas the *advanced*-level rating was used to indicate AEWs who displayed the traits—such as the ability to communicate with structural accuracy, fluency important to professional needs, the ability to interpret informally and to make appropriate cultural references within the communication—found in ILR Levels 3 to 5, which are labeled “professional working proficiency”, “full professional proficiency” and “native or bilingual proficiency”, respectively (SIL International, 1999).

To create the Japanese version of the questionnaire, the English version was translated into Japanese, back-translated into English to check its accuracy, and then back-translated into Japanese again. Questions pertaining to visa status and other expatriate experience were omitted in the Japanese

version, as the focus was on communication with AEWs and not the overseas experiences of their Japanese coworkers.

The questionnaire also included a written instruction sheet which explained the overall aims of the study and a definition of communication accommodation theory. (See Appendix.) It was sent out to the participants by mail, and participants were given a month to return the completed questionnaire. Due to the cooperation of the organizations involved, all AEWs and Japanese coworkers who received the questionnaire completed and returned it.

In order to include the findings presented in this paper, the Japanese coworker responses were translated into English by the researcher and cross-checked by a fellow bilingual intercultural communication research colleague.

Participants

The participants in the current study and subsequent on-going Ph.D. project were recruited from two Australian companies (a trade consultancy and a building design company) and one Japanese/Australian joint-venture (an export company), which are all based in Japan. The companies were selected because of their proximity to the researcher, their willingness to cooperate with the research project, and most importantly, the fact that their AEWs had high levels of Japanese proficiency. The managers of the trade consultancy stated that having excellent Japanese skills is a prerequisite for their AEWs, as is high English proficiency for their Japanese coworkers. The two AEWs in the other organizations are both in senior positions and, due to the nature of their work, need to interact in Japanese regularly with local staff and clients. In order to gain cooperation, the participants and organizations involved were promised confidentiality as well as summaries of the findings after each stage of the project.

In recruiting the Japanese participants, the author selected the coworkers who worked and communicated the most frequently with the AEW participants on a daily basis in the same workplace. As can be seen from the participants' profiles (presented in Tables 1 and 2), there is a range of relationships between the AEWs and the Japanese coworkers, with roughly half of the Japanese coworkers sharing equal status with the AEWs and the other half working as the AEWs' subordinates.

In total, the sample consisted of twelve AEWs and 48 Japanese coworkers from the three organizations. The number of participants was based on a 4:1 ratio—that is, four Japanese coworkers were recruited to give their perceptions and evaluations of each AEW in the study. This ratio was chosen to avoid bias in evaluations as well as to confirm that the AEWs were in fact highly competent in terms of their Japanese. Additionally, the large number of Japanese participants provided the opportunity to gain deeper insights into the way each AEW was perceived and how they communicated.

The AEWs' responses to the questions concerning their background in Japanese language learning revealed a range of experiences. Eleven of the twelve (approximately 92%) indicated some level of Japanese education in Australia (e.g., high school only, high school and university, or university only). Only one had not undertaken any formal Japanese language training before coming to Japan. Nine of these expatriates (75%) evaluated their Japanese language ability as being at the *advanced* level, with the other three placing their competency at the *conversation* level.

Although self-evaluations are generally considered unreliable, 46 of the 48 Japanese coworkers' evaluations (96%) agreed with those of the AEWs they worked with. The two evaluations that did not match those of the AEWs were for the same AEW. Although AEW #5 and two of his Japanese coworkers evaluated his Japanese proficiency as *advanced*, the other two Japanese coworkers did not. After looking at his other qualifications (over five years of Japanese study at high school and university in Australia, Level 1 Japanese proficiency test and Level 1 JETRO Business Japanese test), the author felt it appropriate to categorize his Japanese proficiency as *advanced*. The possible implications of this discrepancy in evaluations of his Japanese ability will be discussed in the Findings and Discussion section of this paper.

The overall profiles of the AEW and Japanese coworker participants are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 gives information on the AEWs, including their Japanese (L2) proficiency as evaluated by themselves and their Japanese coworkers. Table 2 outlines the profiles of the Japanese coworkers associated with each AEW. The first ten AEWs and 40 Japanese coworkers represent the participants from the trade consultancy, while the remaining two AEWs and eight Japanese coworkers come from the remaining two participant organizations.

TABLE 1: AEW Participant Profiles, Including Language Competency Evaluations

AEW	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12
Age	50s	30s	40s	30s	30s	20s	50s	30s	40s	40s	30s	40s
Gender	M	M	F	F	M	M	M	M	F	M	M	M
L1	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.	Eng.
L2 Level	Adv.	Con.	Adv.	Con.	Adv.	Con.	Adv.	Adv.	Adv.	Adv.	Adv.	Adv.
L2 Education	—	1 - 2 yrs.	5 yrs.+	2 - 3 yrs.	5 yrs.+	1 - 2 yrs.	3 - 4 yrs.	5 yrs.+	3 - 4 yrs.	2 - 3 yrs.	3 - 4 yrs.	3 - 4 yrs.
Education	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	HS	UG
Years in Japan	11 yrs.	7 yrs.	9 yrs.	4 yrs.	8 yrs.	4 yrs.	15 yrs.	6 yrs.	7 yrs.	10 yrs.	14 yrs.	13 yrs.
Length of Current Employment	3.5 yrs.	8 mos.	6 yrs.	2 yrs.	4 yrs.	3 yrs.	5 yrs.	3 yrs.	4 yrs.	5 yrs.	1 yr.	6 yrs.
Current Position	SL	SL	SL	ML	ML	ML	SL	ML	SL	SL	P	GM
Total Work Experience in Japan	11 yrs.	5 yrs.	8 yrs.	3 yrs.	6 yrs.	4 yrs.	14 yrs.	2 yrs.	7 yrs.	10 yrs.	12 yrs.	13 yrs.
L2 Qualifications	—	Lev-el 2 JPE	Level 1 JPE & JETRO	Lev-el 2 JPE	Level 1 JPE & JETRO	—	Lev-el 2 JPE	Lev-el 1 JPE	Lev-el 1 JPE	—	—	—

Abbreviations: Adv=*Advanced level*, Con=*Conversational level*, Eng= *English*, L1= *Mother Tongue*, L2 = *Japanese*, SS=*Secondary School*, V/T=*Vocational/Technical School*, UG=*Undergraduate Degree*, PG=*Post-Graduate Degree*, JPE=*Japanese Proficiency Exam*, JETRO=*Japanese Proficiency Test for Business*, SL= *Senior Level Position*, ML=*Mid-Level Position*, P= *Partner*, GM=*General Manager*, — = *Participant did not provide information regarding this category.*

TABLE 2: Japanese Coworker Profiles—Organization 1

Organization	1										2	3
Japanese Coworkers	#1- #4	#5- #8	#9-#12	#13- #16	#17- #20	#21- #24	#25- #28	#29- #32	#33- #36	#37- #40	#41- #44	#45- #48
Ages	40s	30s	40s	40s	20s	30s	40s	30s	30s	40s	40s	30s
	30s	20s	40s	30s	30s	20s	30s	30s	30s	30s	30s	20s
	30s	30s	30s	30s	40s	30s	30s	40s	30s	30s	30s	30s
	40s	40s	40s	40s	30s	40s						
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	M	M	M	M	F	M	F
	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	F	M	F	F	F
	M	M	F	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
	F	F	M	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
L1	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese
Education	PG	PG	PG	PG	UG	PG	PG	UG	PG	UG	PG	PG
	PG	UG	PG	UG	UG	UG	PG	PG	UG	UG	PG	UG
	UG	PG	UG	UG	PG	UG	PG	PG	PG	PG	UG	PG
	UG	PG	UG	UG	UG	PG	UG	PG	PG	PG	UG	PG
Length of Current Employment	8 yrs.	9 yrs.	10 yrs.	8 yrs.	5 yrs.	7 yrs.	8 yrs.	2 yrs.	8 yrs.	4 yrs.	8 yrs.	9 yrs.
	4 yrs.	3 yrs.	12 yrs.	3 yrs.	5 yrs.	2 yrs.	4 yrs.	3 yrs.	4 yrs.	4 yrs.	4 yrs.	3 yrs.
	5 yrs.	4 yrs.	3 yrs.	5 yrs.	7 yrs.	5 yrs.	9 yrs.	5 yrs.	7 yrs.	9 yrs.	5 yrs.	4 yrs.
	10 yrs.	8 yrs.	3 yrs.	6 yrs.	8 yrs.	10 yrs.	3 yrs.	11 yrs.	10 yrs.	7 yrs.	10 yrs.	8 yrs.
Current Position	SL	SL	SL	SL	ML	SL	SL	ML	SL	ML	SL	SL
	ML	ML	SL	ML								
	ML	ML	ML	ML	SL	ML	SL	ML	SL	SL	ML	ML
	SL	SL	ML	ML	SL	SL	ML	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL

Abbreviations: L1=Mother Tongue, UG=Undergraduate Degree, PG=Post-Graduate Degree, SL=Senior Level Position, ML= Mid-Level Position

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a description and discussion of the results obtained from the questionnaire. Based on the central goal of this paper—illustration of the link between language proficiency and cultural intelligence—the results are analyzed in terms of the impact of AEW language proficiency and cultural intelligence on interpersonal communication in a culturally diverse workplace, in addition to attitudes toward communication accommodation among AEWs and their Japanese coworkers.

The profiles of the participants, including their foreign language education, present position and other fundamental data elicited in questions 1 through 24 on the questionnaire, have already been summarized in table form in the Participants section (Tables 1 and 2). This section will therefore focus on the last two sections of the questionnaire, specifically questions 25 through 41. (See Appendix for complete questionnaire in English.)

Firstly, question 25 asked AEW participants to choose one of five ratings of the importance of their own knowledge of Japanese in their work context, ranging from “Not important at all” to “Absolutely essential”. Considering the fact that nine of the twelve (75%) AEW participants were evaluated as being at the *advanced* level in terms of their Japanese ability (see Table 1), it was expected that they would place a high importance on Japanese language proficiency. The responses confirmed this assumption, with all nine AEWs whose Japanese was evaluated as *advanced* rating it “Absolutely essential”. In contrast, the remaining three AEWs, whose Japanese was evaluated as being at the *conversation* level, all rated Japanese language skills as just “Important” in their work context.

Participants who had rated the use of Japanese as “Important”, “Very important” or “Absolutely essential” in question 25 were asked to explain why they felt it was important in the next question. Since all twelve of the AEWs had rated it at least “Important”, they all answered question 26, but as in the answers to the previous question, there was a clear distinction between the AEWs in the two Japanese proficiency level groups. Answers by the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese included comments such as “You really need to be at a high level so that you can take full advantage of the environment” (AEW #1), and “being able to converse freely in Japanese at a business level makes you independent and able to be self-sufficient in your work” (AEW #3).

On the other hand, the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese proficiency downplayed the importance of Japanese language skills. For example, AEW #2 wrote: “I see the Japanese language as a tool that helps at times to smooth out communication, but it’s nothing more than a handy tool”. Likewise, AEW #4 commented, “being able to speak Japanese helps, but the proper level of business acumen is more important to me”.

Question 27 asked participants to name other business skills that are vital in the Japanese workplace. Here, the responses elucidated some perspectives that the AEWs with *advanced*- and *conversation*-level Japanese had in common. Ten of the twelve AEW participants mentioned that knowing the differences between Japanese and Australian negotiation styles, decision-making processes and methods of building trust was imperative. Interestingly, 42 (approximately 88%) of the Japanese coworker responses matched the AEW responses to this question, with the word “consensus building” (*nemawashi*) often featured in the responses that mentioned the need to understand differences between the decision-making processes of the two cultures.

Question 28 asked participants to estimate the proportion of communication which is conducted in Japanese in each of the following situations: when they are talking with coworkers, when they are talking with clients, and in other situations. Responses from the ten AEWs and 40 Japanese coworkers in the first and largest participant group (those who worked at the trade consultancy company) indicated that overall, approximately 57% of their workplace communication was conducted in Japanese.

However, as might be expected, there were noteworthy variations in the proportion of Japanese used by the AEWs with different Japanese proficiencies. The seven AEWs in this company with *advanced* Japanese skills tended to use more Japanese, at an average of 64%, whereas the use of Japanese by the three AEWs with *conversation*-level proficiency was lower, at 41%. The other two participant organizations each had only one AEW and four Japanese coworkers. Both AEWs in these two organizations possessed *advanced*-level Japanese skills and stated that approximately 90% of their communication was conducted in Japanese. These results suggest that Japanese language proficiency may be more important for isolated AEWs than for those in firms with a number of expatriates.

Not surprisingly, evaluations of the importance of language skill acquisition for working in Japan made in response to the first part of question 29 varied depending on the Japanese level of the AEW. The AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills and their Japanese coworkers emphasized the importance of language proficiency again, as they had in question 27, with an emphasis on an equal balance of the four skills. Conversely, the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese, perhaps as self-justification or due to their reliance on their Japanese coworkers' English skills, did not stress the importance of acquiring Japanese. The following comment, made by AEW #2, is representative of this trend: "With my Japanese coworkers being so proficient at English, I don't feel the need to have a high level of Japanese."

On the other hand, the vast majority (45, or about 94%) of the Japanese coworkers surveyed stressed the importance of prior training and/or education in the Japanese language. The Japanese coworkers at the trade consultancy organization, for example, offered support for the value of high L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence derived from prior education in their responses. For instance, Japanese coworker #26 wrote, "I find that my Australian colleague is more adaptive because of the language and cultural training he has done". Similarly, Japanese coworker #21 stated, "You really notice the difference in attitude and willingness to modify one's own style of communication to the situation when comparing Australian colleagues who have had proper Japanese and cultural training to those who haven't." These responses support the view that not only does high L2 proficiency have a positive impact on workplace communication, but it is also deeply interwoven with cultural intelligence.

A response of an AEW with *advanced* Japanese also suggested such a link:

training in language and culture (business) should be done for all expatriates in any company—e.g., differences in negotiation skills, attitudes toward humility, patience, commitment, and perseverance. The impact of being able to speak at a high level lets you explore the cultural rules more too. (AEW #3)

Despite the difference seen in the importance placed on language skills in the responses to the first part of question 29, answers to the second part of that question, which concerned the importance of intercultural business skills, revealed a common perception by both groups of AEWs (those with

advanced- and *conversation-*level Japanese skills). As they did in response to question 27, all of the AEWs stated that knowledge of Japanese styles of negotiation and decision-making was imperative.

Question 30 asked in which areas the participants felt training was necessary. Reflecting the responses to prior questions, the most frequent response (55, or approximately 92%) was the need for training in building trust relationships and resolving communication breakdowns. However, a notable difference was found between AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills and those with only *conversation-*level Japanese skills in the reasons mentioned for such training. In further support of the entwined nature of language proficiency and cultural intelligence, AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills stated that only with a high level of L2 proficiency could they begin to understand and negotiate communication in the workplace to build trust. In contrast, the three AEWs with *conversation-*level Japanese proficiency claimed that language skills are not paramount, while being conscious that the issue of trust-building in a Japanese workplace was essential in establishing smooth work relationships with their Japanese colleagues.

In the context of the author's research, perhaps the most significant data to be elicited came in the responses to questions 31 and 32, which concerned causes for communication breakdowns and strategies to resolve them. Question 31 provided a list of six possible factors which could conceivably contribute to communication breakdown with coworkers from the other culture and asked the participants to circle those which, in their experience, had done so. The factors listed were language barriers, self-disclosure, work ethic (behavioral norms), trust and loyalty (work relationships, values, etc.), individual decision-making and organizational decision-making. A seventh option, "Others", was also provided, with space to write in a different answer. Here again, clear differences were evident in the responses from the different groups.

As might be expected, all three AEWs with *conversation-*level Japanese circled language barriers as one area contributing to communication breakdown, while none of the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills did. Naturally, the ability to disclose oneself properly and appropriately is influenced by language and cultural competence, so self-disclosure was also cited by the three less-proficient AEWs as an area in which communication breakdown had occurred, but not by the nine highly-proficient ones.

In contrast, and possibly due to their more in-depth participation in workplace communication in Japanese, eight of the nine AEWs with *advanced-*level Japanese pointed to the individual decision-making process as the biggest cause of communication breakdown. Further elaboration on this by five of these eight respondents was received, with a strong indication that they felt an expectation by their Japanese coworkers to conform to the Japanese style of pre-meeting consensus-building known as *nemawashi* ("loosening the roots" or "doing the groundwork").

Of the AEWs with *advanced-*level Japanese proficiency, only AEW #5 diverged in his response to this question, picking two categories—"work ethic" and "trust and loyalty"—as the causes of communication breakdowns. AEW #5 is the expatriate who had substantial Japanese language education experience (high school and university) and had passed high-level proficiency tests (Level 1 of both the Japanese Proficiency Test and the JETRO Business Japanese Proficiency Test) and whose Japanese level was evaluated by himself and two of his coworkers as being *advanced* but was seen by two other coworkers as being *conversation-*level. His case will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

When comparing these responses to those of the Japanese coworkers in the Japanese version of the questionnaire, a number of similarities and differences became apparent. Firstly, language barriers were cited as the reason for communication breakdown by ten of the twelve Japanese coworkers who worked with the three AEWs who had only *conversation*-level Japanese. Conversely, none of the 36 Japanese participants who worked with the nine AEWs who had *advanced*-level Japanese skills cited language barriers as a cause of communication breakdown. The following elaboration is representative of the comments made by these Japanese coworkers:

Our workplace communication runs very smoothly because my Australian colleague not only speaks, writes and reads Japanese well, but he also knows how to communicate in a Japanese way. He doesn't overstate things and lets us read between the lines. When it's a touchy subject, his skill in using our style of communication helps to maintain harmony, which is really important. (Japanese coworker #45)

While comments like this confirm the assumption that high Japanese proficiency plays a role in maintaining an environment free of language barriers, there were areas which these 36 Japanese coworkers did cite as contributing to communication breakdown even though they were dealing with the AEWs with *advanced*-level Japanese skills. For example, 24 of the Japanese coworkers mentioned problems with decision-making, and all of them were coworkers of the eight AEWs who cited this area as contributing to communication breakdown. This translates into a 75% agreement between the responses of these eight AEWs and their coworkers. Furthermore, differences in work ethic, or day-to-day work behavior norms, were alluded to as another area in which communication breakdowns occur by 25 of the 40 coworkers of AEWs with *advanced* Japanese.

Communication breakdown occurs in any workplace, but it is the strategies or measures that people consciously take to resolve them that are important. Accordingly, question 32 asked participants to indicate which of five possible ways to resolve communication breakdown they use. The methods listed included modifying your language (verbal/non-verbal); modifying your communication style (pronunciation, tone, directness etc.); asking the Japanese colleague to adapt to your style of communication; asking for advice from other people; and discussing a problem, but not modifying your own communication style. A sixth choice, labeled "Others" and followed by a blank space, was also provided to allow participants to mention any other individual strategies they may use.

For the AEWs with *advanced*-level Japanese skills, modifications in language and communication style were the two most common responses—each chosen by eight of the nine AEWs (89%) in this group. If we analyze this data in terms of Communication Accommodation Theory, we find that convergence was clearly the approximation strategy preferred by AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills.

Interestingly, the participant who did not choose either of the two responses chosen by all of the others in the group of AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills was the same one whose answer to question 31 had diverged from the group. Instead, he selected option 5, indicating that although the problems which led to the communication breakdown were discussed, he made no change in his communication style as a result of these discussions. This suggests that a certain amount of maintenance is evident even among expatriates with *advanced* L2 proficiency, perhaps in accordance with the communication

goals of the individual.

It should be noted that this is the same AEW—AEW #5—whose Japanese proficiency was evaluated as being at *conversation*-level by two of his colleagues despite the fact that he had passed the Level 1 exams for both the Japanese Proficiency Test and the JETRO Business Japanese Test. Perhaps his reluctance to converge to Japanese communication style was the reason, or one of the reasons, that these two colleagues did not feel his Japanese was at the *advanced* level—supporting Yoshida’s (2003) findings that Japanese native speakers emphasize “strategic and social competence” in evaluating Japanese fluency. In other words, it can be surmised that because he did not conform to a Japanese style of communication or show a willingness to converge in Japanese, the cultural intelligence of AEW #5 may have been perceived as being lower than other *advanced* level AEWs.

As for the AEWs with only *conversation*-level Japanese, all three indicated that when they were faced with breakdowns in communication, they either asked their Japanese coworker to adapt to their own style of communication or they sought advice from a third party. Thus, like AEW #5, they seemed to favor maintenance of their own style of communication in the workplace. Overall, the AEWs’ responses to this question support a strong link between L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence.

As for the Japanese coworkers’ responses to the same question, a reflection of their cultural background—with its emphasis on harmony and avoidance of confrontation—was apparent. Of the 36 who evaluated the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese, 27 (75%) reported that they discussed the problem but made no change in their communication style. The remaining nine Japanese participants evaluating the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills all chose the option which indicated that they asked the AEWs to adapt to a Japanese style of communication, but added comments that suggested that they take a “non-confrontational”, “wait-and-see” approach. For example, Japanese coworker #31 wrote: “I sometimes find that giving something time to die down and not actively getting involved in the verbal resolution helps more than anything else.”

On the other hand, ten of the twelve (83%) Japanese coworkers who worked with the three AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese indicated that they modified their communication style. Thus, a strong pattern of accommodation by participants with strong L2 skills—both the AEWs and Japanese coworkers—emerged, again reinforcing the notion of the interlaced nature of the language skills and cultural intelligence required for effective intercultural communication.

Question 33 asked participants which L2 skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) they need in their current workplace. Unsurprisingly, there was a difference of opinion evident between those with *advanced* Japanese and those with *conversation*-level Japanese ability. While those with *advanced* Japanese felt each of the four language skills was important, the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese only saw speaking and listening as important.

Thus, the responses by AEWs with *advanced* and *conversation*-level Japanese proficiency thus far show a clear difference in each group’s willingness to modify their communication style in Japanese. Keeping this pattern in mind, the author will now move on to analyze the responses to the remaining questions by looking at whom the AEWs are accommodating to in terms of language choice and other modifications of their communication style.

The participants' willingness to accommodate was further explored in question 34. Where question 28 had asked AEWs to estimate the amount of Japanese they used in communication with their Japanese coworkers, with Japanese clients, and in other situations, question 34 probed the proportions of their use of Japanese and English in carrying out specific work-related tasks. These were: 1) Meetings with coworkers, including superiors; 2) Internal negotiations with the same coworkers; 3) Socializing with staff and clients; 4) Reading and writing emails, business letters and documents; 5) Telephone calls and meetings with clients; and 6) Other situations (which participants were asked to specify). AEWs with *advanced* Japanese showed a tendency to use Japanese more in their day-to-day tasks, internal negotiations and socializing with their Japanese coworkers than those with *conversation*-level Japanese did. Their overall average of Japanese use was 82%, compared to an average of only 40% for the same types of workplace communication by AEWs with only *conversation*-level skills. When considered in conjunction with the results for question 32 on measures taken to resolve communication breakdown, these responses seem to suggest that greater use of Japanese in work-related tasks involves increased exposure to situations in which AEWs may feel called upon to modify their communication style to converge with that of their Japanese coworkers.

Question 37 asked what types of modifications were made by the AEWs and their Japanese coworkers, to see if there is a difference in awareness of the need for accommodation between the two groups. The AEWs with *advanced* Japanese described a number of modifications they made, including "helping others to save face by not overstating a point in possible instances of conflict" (AEW #12). Even AEW #5, who for the most part seemed less willing to accommodate to Japanese communication style, wrote that he modifies his "style of communication in Japanese to instill a sense of group and affinity".

It should be noted that the willingness to modify their style of communication on the part of AEWs with *advanced*-level Japanese did not appear to vary by gender or position in the company. All but one of the AEWs in this group were in senior-level positions or higher, and the group consisted of both males and females.

Two comments by Japanese coworkers about the AEWs they work with—both of whom have *advanced* Japanese skills—suggest that the efforts at accommodation made by the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills are recognized. The following response by a Japanese who works with AEW #10 at the trading consultancy clearly contrasts the way Japanese workers have to accommodate to their Australian clients with the mutual accommodation that takes place between the AEW and his Japanese coworkers, including herself:

I feel as if I'm successful in my communication with the AEW workers because we adapt to each other's communication style, e.g., listening, change in tone, direct to indirect approach, gestures, etc. Also, we are aware of the intercultural context. But when it comes to Australian clients (in Australia), it's a different story. We do all the accommodating. (Japanese coworker #32)

The following response of Japanese coworker #48, who works with AEW #12 in the Japanese/Australian joint venture export company, also shows recognition of the ability of an AEW with advanced Japanese skills to accommodate:

There are no barriers in our communication because he knows how to adapt to our preferred style of communication. He's more Japanese than Japanese people at times, which tells me that he must be making a conscious effort to keep our communication running smoothly. (Japanese coworker #48)

Overall, the Japanese coworkers who evaluated AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills characterized their colleagues' Japanese proficiency and cultural intelligence as being the keystones to the little amount of accommodation that was required of themselves. This was in dramatic contrast to those who worked with the AEWs who had only *conversation*-level Japanese; their responses suggested that these AEWs placed more expectation on their Japanese coworkers to converge no matter which language was used.

This difference between the two groups of AEWs was also evident in responses to question 38, which asked about changes in communication style depending upon the language used for communication and also inquired which language the participant felt led to "successful" communication. Eight of the nine AEWs with *advanced* Japanese proficiency said Japanese led to successful communication and consciously recognized modifications by themselves, while the other AEW with *advanced* Japanese skills, AEW #5, opted for an even mix of the two languages. In contrast, the responses from the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese and their Japanese coworkers indicated that English was preferred and that modifications in tone, speed and explicitness were required by Japanese coworkers when using Japanese with AEWs in this group.

Question 39 asked how differences in communication style are handled. Again, a clear difference was found in attitudes toward accommodation between the two groups of AEWs. The response of AEW #2 is characteristic of the mindset of the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese. He wrote:

My Japanese colleagues know that my Japanese isn't that good, so they seem more willing to adopt a direct, easy-to-read style of communication that I'm used to in English. (AEW #2)

This is in sharp contrast to the thoughts of AEWs with *advanced*-level Japanese (except for AEW #5, who chose maintain his usual style of communication in many cases). The following response was typical of the other eight AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills.

If it were in English, I would take a more direct approach, although I would still modify my tone, vocabulary and approach like I do in Japanese. I would also give more background information to give it credibility, which seems important in Japan. (AEW #11)

Additionally, in the trade consultancy organization, which required its Japanese staff to possess a high level of English proficiency, the Japanese coworkers noted that communication with AEWs "felt" different depending on the language used. In most cases, the indirect nature and necessity to read between the lines in Japanese were given as reasons why it felt different. This consciousness shown by the Japanese coworkers of communication accommodation clearly illustrates the impact that high L2 proficiency has on overall communication strategies.

In response to question 40, which asked participants to select from five possible reasons why particular styles of resolving communication breakdowns were chosen, eight of the nine AEWs with *advanced* Japanese proficiency suggested that by modifying their verbal and non-verbal communication

as well as their communication style to that of their Japanese coworkers, they hoped to increase understanding and the feeling of affinity in the other person so that s/he would be more cooperative. In other words, these AEWs were emulating a Japanese style of communication in order to achieve their communication goals. This strategy was in general evaluated positively by their Japanese coworkers, who praised them, for example, for “their ability to use L2 to explore Japanese culture more deeply” (Japanese coworker #47, in response to question #38). Thus, it was evident that the AEWs with high L2 proficiency were aware of the characteristics of Japanese communication style and, in general, felt a necessity to accommodate to it in order to achieve various communication goals in the workplace.

The lone exception to this trend was again AEW #5, who explained that he did not always change his communication style because his level of Japanese language allowed him to choose when he thought it was appropriate, depending on his communication goals. In follow-up conversations, AEW #5 said that what is important is getting the job done, and he just uses Japanese as the tool to communicate what needs to be done. Since this particular participant’s job focuses more on taking care of Australian clients and their home office than some of the other AEWs working at the same company, he appears to feel that his role is conveying to his colleagues what the expectations of the Australians are. This may account for his reluctance to modify his communication style, although this tendency could also just be a result of personal preference or his own particular style of interpersonal communication.

In contrast to the majority of the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese proficiency, all three of the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese skills restated the importance of their Japanese coworkers adapting so that they would be able to communicate better with other Australians (coworkers and clients) at work. This difference suggests that they don’t consider the impact of their Japanese to be as valuable in promoting successful workplace communication as the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese proficiency do.

It is almost too obvious to state that making an effort to adapt to the other side helps make communication smoother. This notion not only falls in line with the basic reason given for convergence within communication accommodation theory, but also with the claim made by Varner and Beamer (2003) that individuals in intercultural workplaces consciously shape and develop their communication strategies to match the context.

The final question asked the participants to share any other thoughts they had on intercultural communication. A number of the responses suggested that both AEWs and their Japanese coworkers felt that accommodation on one side tended to be reciprocated by the other side. For example, AEW #11, who had *advanced*-level Japanese skills, wrote:

I know that if I show the willingness to copy their style of communication, my Japanese colleagues sometimes try to be more explicit when explaining or discussing a matter of urgency. (AEW #11)

Similarly, one of the Japanese participants commented:

The communication between myself and my Australian colleague doesn't feel any different to when I'm communicating with fellow Japanese staff. She constantly shows an effort to adapt, but at times where she needs me to adapt, for example to be more to the point, I feel willing to do so. (Japanese coworker #7)

However, even AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills hinted that there were limits to their willingness to modify their style of communication, as can be seen in the following response given by AEW #12.

If you show a tolerance for ambiguity, there are times when your Japanese colleagues will let you get away with being blunt. I try to remain mindful of the environment being Japan, but there are times when I just have to spell things out to save time. (AEW #12)

These final comments create an image of give-and-take between the Japanese coworkers and the AEWs with strong Japanese abilities, with neither side doing all of the accommodating.

In presenting the results of this study, the perceptions and evaluations of AEWs with *advanced* and *conversation*-level Japanese have been contrasted to show 1) the impact of Japanese proficiency on this particular workplace dynamic (Australian expatriates working in a Japanese workplace), and 2) the link of L2 to cultural intelligence in terms of communication accommodation strategies. It was found that attitudes toward accommodation and the strategies employed to resolve communication breakdowns differ dramatically between the participants in the two proficiency groups. The results suggest that the higher their level of Japanese proficiency, the more conscious AEWs are of the need to converge to a Japanese style of communication in order to achieve smooth workplace communication and the more willing they are to do so. In this way, the results support the view that L2 proficiency is in essence an integral part of cultural intelligence.

LIMITATIONS

Although the above findings suggest a strong link between L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence, with greater understanding of the second culture and willingness to accommodate to its style of communication shown by AEWs with higher levels of Japanese proficiency, the current study has several limitations. First, the size of the sample was small, and therefore the results may not be representative. Also, since the method of data collection was a questionnaire that elicited self reports and evaluations by the AEWs and Japanese coworkers, its reliability can be questioned. This paper can only safely report on what AEWs and their Japanese coworkers *say* that AEWs do, not what they actually do or have done. In order to overcome this limitation, I plan to record actual interactions in the workplace during the next stage of this project, which will be based on an ethnographical design.

Furthermore, even though all of the Japanese coworkers were asked to complete the questionnaire individually, the study did not establish a system of checking to make sure that they did not work together on the questionnaire. This could mean that even though each AEW was evaluated by four Japanese coworkers, different perspectives were not actually gathered.

Finally, when examining a workplace dynamic, the issue of power relations also needs to be considered. As Table 1 shows, all of the AEW participants are in some type of managerial position, which means that they are all decision makers. Their role as power holders obviously affects communication in

the workplace, and it might be supposed that because of this position, they may feel less of a need to accommodate to their Japanese coworkers' communication style than AEWs who worked as subordinates to Japanese bosses might. This is a factor that should be considered as the project enters the next stage.

CONCLUSION

Using a questionnaire to survey twelve Australian expatriate workers (AEWs) and 48 of their Japanese coworkers (four for each AEW) and investigate language use and modification of communication style in communication between the AEWs and their Japanese coworkers in three workplaces in Japan, the current study has attempted to challenge the common assumption that L2 and cultural intelligence can be analyzed separately.

Although all of the AEWs in the study were selected because of their high level of Japanese proficiency, they were divided into two groups based on self evaluations and the evaluations of their coworkers, and the responses of AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills were compared to those with *conversation*-level Japanese. Clear differences between the two groups emerged in terms of the importance they placed on Japanese language skills in their work and the proportion of Japanese used by the AEWs, with the higher proficiency group valuing language skills more and using Japanese more in the workplace. The vast majority of the Japanese coworkers surveyed also stressed the importance of prior training and/or education in the Japanese language.

The causes of communication breakdowns in the workplace and strategies to resolve them were also examined, and again, clear differences emerged between the two AEW proficiency groups. While language barriers were cited as contributing factors in communication breakdown by all three AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese, as well as ten of the twelve Japanese coworkers who worked with these three AEWs, language was not indicated as a problem by any of the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills or by the Japanese participants who worked with them.

In contrast, eight of the nine AEWs with *advanced*-level Japanese pointed to the individual decision-making process as the biggest cause of communication breakdown, as did 24 of the Japanese who worked with these eight expatriates. In particular, these AEWs mentioned problems with expectations by their Japanese colleagues to conform to the custom of *nemawashi*.

In dealing with communication breakdowns, all but one of the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills used convergence as a strategy, whereas all three of the AEWs with only *conversation*-level Japanese indicated that in such situations, they either asked their Japanese coworker to adapt to their own style of communication or sought advice from a third party. It was also found that the AEWs with *conversation*-level Japanese placed more expectation on their Japanese coworkers to converge no matter which language was used.

Thus, it became clear that the AEWs with high L2 proficiency were aware of the characteristics of Japanese communication style and, in general, felt a necessity to accommodate to it in order to achieve various communication goals in the workplace. This willingness to modify their style of communication on the part of AEWs with *advanced*-level Japanese did not appear to vary by gender or position in the

company. It seems that greater use of Japanese in work-related tasks involves increased exposure to situations in which AEWs may feel called upon to modify their communication style to converge with that of their Japanese coworkers.

While the results were limited to reports of what the participants thought they did, the mindset evident among the AEWs with *advanced* Japanese skills suggest that their L2 proficiency and cultural intelligence work in tandem. It appears that the higher their L2 proficiency, the more AEWs will be able to learn when and why to accommodate their communication in Japanese—knowledge which is a sign of enhanced cultural intelligence. The Japanese coworkers responses confirmed this with numerous illustrations of how they felt an *advanced* level of Japanese helped AEWs facilitate smooth workplace communication. For this reason, in future research on intercultural communication, it would make sense to consider these factors to be interrelated.

From the questionnaire results alone, it would not be feasible to argue that without a high level of L2 competence, an optimum level of cultural intelligence is impossible to achieve. However, what can be said is that the connected nature of language proficiency and cultural intelligence stimulates a conscious awareness of the need for accommodation. That accommodation, in turn, acts as an important tool in achieving effective intercultural workplace communication.

It would not do to overlook the case of the participant who had *advanced* Japanese skills but consistently showed less readiness to accommodate to Japanese style communication than the other eight AEWs with *advanced* L2 proficiency. This difference may be a result of different goals or personal preference, but it suggests that although strong L2 skills are necessary to the development of cultural intelligence, they are not sufficient to ensure cultural accommodation, since personal choice and individual character also come into play.

While it is recognized that this study was limited to reported perspectives by the participants, the fact that such a high percentage of the participants from both sides stated that a high level of L2 proficiency did in fact assist in exploring cultural factors more deeply warrants more in-depth examination of this workplace dynamic. Consequently, these findings will be used as a base of analysis in the final stage of the author's Ph.D. project. Taking a smaller sample from the original participant population (two of the three offices with two AEWs and eight Japanese coworkers), the project will shift to an ethnographic style of inquiry.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY ON INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN EXPATRIATES & THEIR JAPANESE CO-WORKERS WORKING TOGETHER IN JAPAN

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This survey is part of a Ph.D. research project in which I as the researcher—(please see end of this survey for a brief profile) aim to investigate how Australian expatriates (AEWs—Australian nationals that have been employed either in Australia or in Japan and whose first language is English) and their Japanese co-workers (JWs—Japanese nationals in the workplace whose first language is Japanese) define successful communication and what communication strategies they use to achieve it.

In this research, communication between AEWs and JWs is defined as “intercultural communication” and “co-worker/colleague” is defined as a person whom you work with inside your organization including managers, same level workers and junior level workers. The focus of this research is on the intercultural communication and communication strategies (e.g., verbal, non-verbal adjustments, etc.) used by AEWs in Japanese in their workplace communication.

The purpose of this survey is to obtain a clear picture of intercultural communication between Australian expatriates and Japanese co-workers and also to devise a tool to measure their communication success by examining how communication competence is evaluated and perceived by both parties. The survey results will be analyzed.

DETAILS

- (1) This survey is written in English for Australian expatriates and in Japanese for Japanese workers. It will only be distributed among workers in the office participating in the research.
- (2) A Confidentiality Statement and Consent Form are included separately to the survey form. These forms require the signature of participants in this research. The names, titles and other personal information of all participants will be kept confidential and will not be publicized in any way (paper, presentation, and the thesis itself) without prior permission from the participant. Any information provided regarding the organization (comments on working relationships, ethics, etc.) will also not be mentioned without permission from the participant.

INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) Please respond to each question by selecting the statement that most appropriately reflects your circumstances.
- (2) Please respond to the survey and send it along with the Confidentiality Statement and Consent forms by return mail using the enclosed stamped envelope within one month of receipt.
- (3) To those who would like to obtain a summary of the results, please tick the box on the final page, and write your name and email for delivery.

This study has been cleared by one of the human ethics committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are, of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with the researcher (contactable on 090-1724-2288). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on 61-7-3365 3924.

PART 1: ABOUT YOU

1. What is your nationality?
 1. Australian
 2. Other (please specify: _____)
2. Which is your age group?
 1. Under 30
 2. 30-39
 3. 40-49
 4. 50-59
 5. 60 and over
3. Sex
 1. Male
 2. Female

4. What level of education have you reached?
 1. Completed secondary school
 2. Completed vocational, technical school education (tertiary)
 3. Completed University education (tertiary-undergraduate)
 4. Completed Postgraduate education
5. Who have you come to Japan with?
 1. By myself
 2. With my spouse
 3. With my spouse and child/children
6. What is your first language?
 1. English
 2. Other (please specify: _____)
7. What other language(s) do you use at home?
 1. English
 2. Other (please specify: _____)

PART 2: ABOUT YOUR WORKPLACE AND ORGANIZATION

8. What is your current position (please provide a brief explanation of nature of work and tasks involved)?
9. Please give a brief outline of the number of staff in your workplace, including the number under, above and equal to you.
 1. Above=
 2. Under=
 3. Equal to=
10. What is the approximate ratio of expatriate managers to local staff managers (Japanese managers)?

(a) 10% (expatriate managers)	90% (local staff managers)
(b) 30% (expatriate managers)	70% (local staff managers)
(c) 50% (expatriate managers)	50% (local staff managers)
(d) 70% (expatriate managers)	30% (local staff managers)
(e) 90% (expatriate managers)	10% (local staff managers)
11. What is the approximate ratio of expatriates to local staff at your company?

(a) 10% (expatriates)	90% (local staff)
(b) 30% (expatriates)	70% (local staff)
(c) 50% (expatriates)	50% (local staff)
(d) 70% (expatriates)	30% (local staff)
(e) 90% (expatriates)	10% (local staff)
12. Please give a brief breakdown of the nationality of staff and their relationship (no. of subordinates, colleagues or superiors) in your workplace.
 1. Australian= __ subordinate: __ colleague: __ superior: __
 2. Japanese= __ subordinate: __ colleague: __ superior: __
 3. Others= _____ (please specify: _____)
subordinate: __ colleague: __ superior: __
(please specify: _____)
subordinate: __ colleague: __ superior: __
13. How long have you been working for the present organization?
_____ years _____ months
14. What is your present visa status in Japan?
 1. Permanent Residence Visa (for Japan)
 2. Japanese Spouse Visa
 3. Diplomatic Visa
 4. Work Visa
 5. Other (please specify: _____)
15. Were you employed locally (within Japan) or in Australia
 1. Australia
 2. Japan
16. Which type of industry do you work in?
 1. Construction
 2. Manufacturing
 3. Trade
 4. Retail
 5. Wholesale
 6. Other (please specify: _____)

17. Have you worked in Japan before as an expatriate prior to your present work?
1. Yes
 - (type of work: _____)
 - (length of employment: _____)
 1. No
18. Do you have experience working as an expatriate in any other countries?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. If yes, what other countries have you worked in? Please give a brief outline of the type of work, language used in the workplace, mixture of local and expatriate staff and length of employment?
 - COUNTRY:
 - TYPE OF WORK:
 - LANGUAGE USED:
 - STAFF: EXPATRIATE STAFF= ___ % LOCAL STAFF= ___ %

PART 3: LOTE (Languages Other Than English) BACKGROUND-JAPANESE LANGUAGE

19. Had you ever studied Japanese language before you joined your present organization?
1. Yes
 2. No
20. Have you ever studied in Japan?
1. Yes
 2. No
21. If yes, what have you studied?
1. Japanese Language
 2. Others (please specify):
22. What level have you studied at in Japan?
1. Primary school
 2. Secondary school
 3. Tertiary school (university, technical college etc.)
 4. Postgraduate
 5. Others (please specify):
23. How many years of formal study in Japanese language have you had?
1. 1 year or less
 2. 1~2 years
 3. 2~3 years
 4. 3~4 years
 5. 5 years and over
24. What Japanese language related qualifications do you have (please circle as many as appropriate)?
1. TAFE diploma level
 2. Bachelor degree level
 3. Masters degree level
 4. Japanese Proficiency Exam (Level 1/ Level 2/ Level 3/ Level 4)
 5. JETRO Business Japanese Proficiency Test (J1+/J1/J2/J3/J4)
25. How important do you feel Japanese language is in a work context at your present organization?
1. Absolutely essential
 2. Very important
 3. Important
 4. Handy, but not essential
 5. Not important at all
26. If you answered 1, 2 or 3 for the above question, please state why you feel it is important.
27. What other business skills do you regard as important in the Japanese workplace?
28. What kind of situations and how much (%) do you need to use Japanese language at your current workplace?
1. Communication with JWs approx _____ %.
 2. Communication with Japanese clients approx _____ %.
 3. Others _____ approx _____ %
29. What areas of language skills acquisition (e.g., speaking/listening only, reading/writing only or balance of speaking/listening/reading/writing) and intercultural business skills training (e.g., negotiation style, decision-making process, workplace communication, etc.) do you feel are important? If possible, please explain why you think those areas are important.
1. Language skills acquisition:
Reasons of importance:
 2. Intercultural business skills:
Reasons of importance:

30. As an AEW, how much training, specifically in terms of working in Japan, do you think is necessary and in what areas overall? Please explain in your own words.

PART 4: ABOUT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE WORKPLACE

31. Do any of the following areas ever contribute to a breakdown in communication between yourself and JWs? Please circle as many as applicable to your situation.

1. Language barrier (verbal and/or non-verbal)
2. Self-disclosure (how much information you give about yourself at work)
3. Work ethic (work behavior norms)
4. Trust and loyalty (how working relationships are built, values etc.)
5. Individual decision making (the process and style)
6. Organizational decision making (the process and style)
7. Others:

32. What kind of strategies/measures do you take to resolve breakdowns, difficulties in communication with Japanese colleagues? Please circle as many as applicable to your situation

1. Modification of language (verbal and non-verbal)
2. Modification of communication style (pronunciation, tone, speed, direct vs. indirect)
3. Ask the Japanese colleague to adapt to your style of communication
4. Seek the help or advice of a third party
5. Discuss the problem, but make no change to your communication style
6. Others:

33. What kind of Japanese language skills are necessary for you in your current workplace environment?

- Reading/Writing skills
 1. Necessary (To what extent/level: _____)
 2. Unnecessary
- Listening comprehension skills
 1. Necessary (To what extent/level: _____)
 2. Unnecessary
- Speaking skills
 1. Necessary (To what extent/level: _____)
 2. Unnecessary

34. Please indicate the approximate % of Japanese and English used for the following work tasks.

1. Meetings with superiors, colleagues and subordinates (Japanese ___ % English ___ %)
2. Internal negotiations with superiors, colleagues and subordinates (Japanese ___ % English ___ %)
3. Socializing with staff and clients (Japanese ___ % English ___ %)
4. Reading/Writing: emails, business letters and documents (Japanese ___ % English ___ %)
5. Telephone calls and face-to-face meetings with clients (Japanese ___ % English ___ %)
6. Others (please specify: _____) (Japanese ___ % English ___ %)

35. How successful do you perceive yourself in terms of communication in the situations mentioned in Q35?

1. I am able to communicate freely with no problems in either language
2. I do not have too many problems, although if the conversation is in Japanese I have to get the other person to adjust their level so that I can understand
3. English is fine, but I do not have a high enough level of Japanese to conduct any of the above.
4. Others (please specify: _____)

36. How do you perceive your level of Japanese language proficiency (incl. conversation, reading/writing and listening skills) for workplace interpersonal communication?

1. Advanced level—I am able to converse in Japanese in all contexts (business, daily life etc.) with little or no difficulty as I use Japanese the majority of the time.
2. Conversation level—I am able to carry basic daily conversation but not in a business context and have a lot of difficulties understanding the language if it is not simple.
3. Only greetings or not at all.

37. Please describe, if any, the kind of modifications (i.e., use English/Japanese, easier level of English/Japanese, adjustment in tone, speed, use of more/less gestures, copying the other person's style etc) in communication style are made by your Japanese colleague and yourself when conversing in the workplace.
JWs:
You:
38. Considering the answers you gave to Q37, please answer the following questions regarding communication style.
- Does the communication style of JWs change when using English versus Japanese?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 - If you answered "Yes", please give a brief description of how JWs change their communication style.
 - Which language leads to 'successful' communication with JWs ?
 1. Japanese
 2. English
 - Please explain why you chose the language you did.
39. Please give a brief explanation of how you handle communication style differences when communicating in English and Japanese?
- Communicating in English:
 Communicating in Japanese:
40. For Q39, please explain why you chose that particular style of resolution.
1. by modifying my verbal and non-verbal communication, I can get the other person to understand me quicker
 2. by modifying my communication as close to the other person's style as possible, the feeling of affinity increases and the other person becomes more cooperative.
 3. by getting the other person to adapt to me, I feel that they will be able to communicate better with other Australians (co-workers and clients) at work
 4. because I want to avoid confrontation where possible
 5. because I feel that it is important to recognize each other's differences and that we have a relationship of trust which allows us to talk openly without having to adapt our communication styles
 6. Other (please specify):
41. Are there any other thoughts, etc., you can share about interpersonal communication and expatriate issues in Japan. If so, please feel free to write below.