

Situational Language Use, Grammatical Competence, and Lexical Knowledge of Japanese EFL Learners

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This research study examines the relative performance of a class of Japanese first-year university students on different sections of an English language test. The test was taken from a current English Language Teaching (ELT) textbook produced by a leading ELT publisher. After studying the textbook course for one year, students took the test as an end-of-year examination. According to contemporary test design standards, students would be expected to perform approximately equally on various sections of the test, which should be constructed to be of similar difficulty. Since the textbook is produced for the international ELT market, rather than being specifically designed for Japanese students, the comparative strengths and weaknesses of Japanese students (relative to ELT students in global contexts) could be established if variations in test results were demonstrated by the Japanese learners on the different sections of the test. In this study, the students displayed significant differences in performance between the Vocabulary and Grammar sections (which required knowledge of vocabulary and the application of grammatical rules) and the Situations section (which required knowledge of common collocates and the completion of formulaic language chunks) of the test. These results suggest that Japanese students are more proficient in their knowledge of single item lexical units and in the application of grammatical rules, and substantially less proficient in the usage of collocation and common formulaic language expressions, than students learning English in global ELT contexts.

Positive and Negative Transfer Situations

Many English-speaking visitors to Japan are struck by the widespread use of English in advertisements and on signs and clothing. The high frequency with which the wording on these advertisements occurs in unlikely combinations (see Hyde, 2002) suggests that teaching of the appropriate usage of collocation has been generally neglected in Japan. Furthermore, the types of error that commonly occur in these advertisements often suggest that an incorrect word-for-word transfer from Japanese to English has occurred. Since the Japanese and English languages are essentially dissimilar, collocations cannot typically be directly transferred between the languages. The following examples illustrate the lack of equivalence that commonly occurs in corresponding lexical items between collocations in the two languages:

- 1) *English:* strong coffee
 Japanese: dense (*koi*) coffee

- 2) *English:* strong yen
 Japanese: high (*endaka*) yen

Collocation may be a relatively difficult aspect of the English language for Japanese students to master since it requires memorisation of individual collocates rather than the application of rules that can often be generalised. Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) from more closely related cognate languages (such as French and German) would not be expected to experience difficulties in forming collocations to the same degree because of the greater correspondence between collocations from cognate languages and hence the more direct possibilities of transfer. The closer correspondence between collocations in the cognate languages is due to the common

Latin, Greek, and Germanic etymologies shared by the European languages. The following translation of the title of a major linguistics journal reveals the many similarities between three cognate languages:

English: International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching

French: Revue Internationale de Linguistique Appliquee Enseignement de Langues

German: Internationale Zeitschrift für angewandte Linguistik in der Spracherziehung

The English-speaking student of French is cautioned against always assuming equivalence between the languages through the notion of the *faux ami* ("the false friend"), but the difficulties with French collocations do not compare with the scale of the pitfalls that are likely to occur when transferring between Japanese and English. So while it is often possible to transfer between English and the other European languages, it is in fact generally safer to presume that no equivalence exists between collocations in Japanese and English. Japanese learners of EFL are unfortunately denied the possibility of direct transfer, because of the significant language distance between Japanese and English. Speakers of cognate languages may often successfully gamble on translating a direct equivalent from their languages to English, and will frequently benefit from the result of a positive transfer process. However, transfer from Japanese to English is likely to be negative; direct transfers that are attempted between the two languages will usually be non-native like. Hence the particular difficulty that Japanese EFL students experience when learning English collocations is apparent.

Contrast with Acquisition in Naturalistic Settings

The difficulty that Japanese EFL learners have mastering formulaic language is further highlighted when contrasted with learners who have learnt English through a process of natural exposure rather than in formal classroom settings. In the process of first language acquisition, pre-literate children usually master language chunks before they are able to separate them into individual words according to the conventions of English writing. Children learning to write English as a first language are not always aware of the boundaries between words in language chunks because the chunks are firmly embedded in their consciousness as single semantic units. In one research study, a child learning to write English rendered “give it” as a single lexical unit “givit” (Stephens & Blight, 2002, p. 82) because of her perception of the single semantic function. Rod Ellis further explains how formulas are commonly acquired in the process of language learning: “It is possible ... that formulas are slowly unpackaged, releasing valuable information, which is fed into the knowledge system the learner uses to produce and understand creative speech” (1994, p. 87).

In another study, a five year old Japanese child learning English as a second language in a naturalistic setting demonstrated the early acquisition of embedded sentences, in which “do you” and “how to” were processed as unanalysed units (Hakuta, 1974). Hence both first and second language learners in naturalistic language environments appear to rely on unanalysed language chunks in the early stages of language acquisition.

In contrast to Japanese learners of EFL, for whom the usage of language chunks is relatively infrequent (Ketko, 2000, p. 6), many EFL learners from other language contexts also rely on language chunks as an economical way of communicating their intended meanings before mastering various gram-

matical forms. Myles, Mitchell and Hooper describe the occurrence of language chunks as “a significant feature of early classroom learners’ L2 production” (1999, p. 50). Thus there appears to be major contextual differences between the acquisition of language chunks by first language learners, EFL learners in naturalistic settings, EFL learners studying according to a contemporary communicative methodology, and EFL learners studying in traditional Japanese classroom settings. The learners in naturalistic settings tend to automatically incorporate language chunks into their discourse because of the high frequency with which they occur in their daily language input. However, learners in traditional Japanese classroom settings do not frequently encounter language chunks and furthermore, the instruction and memorisation of language chunks is generally not a major feature of their language curriculum. Instead, Japanese EFL learners are commonly instructed in the direct translation of single lexical items, a method which lexical experts have advised should not generally be followed by language teachers:

Decontextualised learning of individual words such as translation may be adequate for high information words like *penicillin*, while paraphrase and / or contextualisation of more common words like *drug* are usually sufficient to carry the meaning of the term. In general, however, teachers should be wary of presenting uncollocated nouns to their students. (Woolard, 2000, p. 33)

Advantages of Processing Language as Chunks

Language chunks are an extremely common feature of native English discourse that occur in all areas of language usage (Wray, 2000, p. 466). They occur most frequently in informal registers and common forms of colloquial expression, where the lexical units are bonded together in spoken language forms that often occur as non-standard spelling variations

(e.g., *Whaddayamean ...?*, *I wanna ...*, *Are you gonna ... ?*). The frequent occurrence of these non-standard representations in general language use indicates an underlying awareness that the expressions function linguistically as single semantic units. By contrast, the inability of EFL learners to produce or recognise language chunks is frequently due to insufficient exposure to authentic discourse (where the forms commonly occur), and in the case of Japanese learners this problem is compounded by a major dependence on the type of grammar translation exercises that remain common in traditional classroom environments.

Myles, Mitchell, and Hooper (1999) examined the role of language chunks in the acquisition of second language (L2) French by high school children in the United Kingdom over the course of two years. They considered the memorisation of language chunks as a feature of classroom instruction, and the advantages gained by students who learnt many language chunks. The classroom activities were communicative in nature and included talking about family photos, story retelling, information gap tasks, sketching in response to oral directives, two-way tasks, vocabulary tests, and role-plays. They concluded that the incorporation of language chunks into instruction and subsequent discourse practice facilitated the successful acquisition of French:

In our classroom data, it seems that the learners who are able to memorize formulas successfully, and who were still working on them by the end of the study, are also the learners who were earliest to engage in creative construction and who progressed farthest along the developmental continuum during the course of our two-year study At the other end of this continuum we find learners who had abandoned formulas by the end of our study and who seem to be stuck in a pregrammatical V-less stage ... in which they are only able to paste together NPs and PPs. (p. 76)

One of the shortcomings of traditional EFL pedagogies such as the Grammar Translation method, which is still commonly practised in Japan, is the focus on the correspondence between individual word units. Japanese students are frequently required to commit to memory long vocabulary lists comprising single lexical units during preparation for their examinations. Furthermore, a vast amount of English vocabulary (again in the form of single-item lexical units) has been directly adopted into the Japanese language. Native English speakers are frequently surprised by the number of relatively infrequent and even obscure words of English origin which have entered the Japanese language. And even Japanese learners with sizable English vocabularies will find their language production seriously impeded if they are unaware of the collocational fields of the words they have memorized, as discussed by Hill: “learning a new word without some of its collocates is a waste of time, or at least very inefficient” (2000, p. 67).

The Grammar Translation method does not adequately promote the processing of language chunks as meaningful units of discourse. As Watanabe comments, Japanese students “tend to process English sentences in a word-by-word manner” (2002, p. 77). As a consequence of the single item processing they are taught, their language production is in fact impeded, as was observed by Ketko in her study of Japanese learners of English (JLEs): “The limited chunk use by the JLEs indicated that they had to compose most sentences from scratch, thus slowing down language production time” (2002, p. 7). The word-by-word translation method being currently used in Japanese schools is the product of a pedagogical approach that favours the rendering of precise literal meanings in the first language above the development of second language production skills:

As it stands now, students are filled with the need to memorize and practice decontextualized sentence patterns that do not carry much value on the entrance exams and remember a host of one-to-one translations for lexical items as well as their pronunciation, solely a bottom-up approach. (Guest, 2000, p. 28)

Woolard blames these types of grammar transformation exercises for the frequent occurrence of mis-collocation by Japanese students (2000, p. 30). Furthermore, he argues that traditional grammar teaching is also responsible for the “large amount of improbable language our students produce” (p. 45), an argument that can be readily extended to explain the unlikely combinations of English words in advertisements throughout Japan. English grammar and vocabulary have been diligently covered by teachers during the standard course of education, but collocation has been generally neglected, resulting in the frequent occurrence of mis-collocation in both classroom settings and environmental contexts.

If language is not learnt and processed as units of meaning above the single-item level, the process of communication can become time-consuming and frustrating for learners who are required to laboriously search their mental lexicons for direct English equivalents of their intended meanings. The traditional focus on grammar and the accompanying neglect of language chunks also restricts fluent communication by placing an unnecessary processing burden on the learner. As Rod Ellis observes, “Learners, like native speakers, learn formulas because it reduces the learning burden while maximizing communicative ability” (1994, p. 86). Conzett (2000) advocates extending students’ knowledge of collocation as an integrated component of language programs. Another ELT researcher, Nick Ellis, also stresses the importance of learning language chunks: “The more automatic their access, the more fluent is the resultant language use, concomitantly freeing attentional resources for analysis of the meaning of the

message, either for comprehension or for production planning” (1996, p. 115). Similar benefits are also observed by Wray: “We reduce strain on our memory by holding information inside a formulaic sequence, so that it will be easy to recall later” (2000, p. 474). Burns and De Silva further argue that the function of multiword units is: “easing the task that speakers and writers have in producing language under pressure” (2001, p. 21).

Ketko (2000) observes the common occurrence of multiword language chunks in native-speaker discourse, and comments that the frequency of language chunks occurring in Japanese EFL learners’ discourse is significantly less than in native English speakers’ discourse. The Japanese EFL learners in her study experienced an increased memory load as words were processed individually rather than in combinations as language chunks. Other researchers also comment that the treatment of language chunks in EFL textbooks is usually inadequate relative to their frequency of occurrence in native-speaker discourse (Sansome, 2000, p. 63). This situation, however, is not necessarily the case, since textbooks could be potentially selected on the basis of their promotion of collocational expressions (Hill, 2000, p. 59). Hoey (2000) contrasts the presentation of vocabulary learning in a number of current language textbooks, ranging from frequent activities that involve memorizing single item word lists to the much more useful tasks requiring students to form collocations using lists of given words. Sansome specifically describes the difficulties encountered by EFL students in comprehending phrasal verbs (which are one form of collocation): “this group of phrasal verbs can cause problems even for students above the intermediate level who have not, despite several years exposure to English, acquired the underlying pattern and internalized it” (2000, p. 64). Another researcher, who also notices that Japanese learners are frequently unaware of common collocations, specifically advocates the instruc-

tion of consciousness-raising activities designed to significantly increase their awareness of this key area of language use (Kato, 2003).

Research Study

Research Questions

1. Do Japanese EFL learners achieve different results on the grammatical, vocabulary, and situational sections of a general language test designed for the international EFL market?
2. What can be deduced (or inferred) from the test results about the relative proficiency of Japanese EFL learners in areas of grammatical, lexical, and situational language knowledge?

Linguistic Terminology

The type of language expression typically employed in situational contexts is here being labelled *formulaic language chunks* and refers to groups of words that typically co-occur within the given language contexts. These language expressions can also be termed *collocations*, which are defined in the Oxford Collocations Dictionary as “the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing” (2002, p. vii).

Researchers have also previously used a variety of similar terminologies, including: *multi-word units*, defined as “fixed forms that commonly recur and consist of more than one word” (Burns & De Silva, 2001, p. 21); *multiword chunks* (Ketko, 2000); *formulaic speech* (Ellis, 1994, p. 84); and *formulaic sequences* (Wray, 2000, p. 464). Detailed discussions of these terminologies are available in the original sources, as well as in Ellis (1996, p. 97), and Myles, Mitchell, and Hooper (1999, p. 50).

The Language Test

The language test used in this study was an end of year test synthesized from two progress tests (Progress Test 2, Progress Test 3) provided in the Teacher's Book of the *Lifelines Elementary* textbook (Hutchinson, 1999). *Lifelines* is a current EFL textbook published by a leading ELT publisher (Oxford University Press), which is designed for the international EFL market, rather than having a specific focus on the Japanese EFL market. The textbook provides instruction in British English and is employed in various global EFL markets, particularly in European and Asian settings. In the promotional literature, *Lifelines* is described as a general English course which:

presents the basic structures of English and develops them through a variety of different contexts. Emphasis is also placed on enlarging the students' knowledge of vocabulary, and on developing their ability to communicate effectively. (Hutchinson, 1999, p. 4)

Functional language is taught in specific language contexts or communicative situations (e.g., <shopping>, <meeting people>, <arranging a meeting>, <offering and accepting>). These language contexts are introduced through listening and speaking activities integrated through the course, which seek to present and practice the functional language in realistic interactions as they occur between people in daily life.

The *Lifelines* test format consisted of three components, the Grammar section, the Vocabulary section, and the Situations section, with written answers being provided to each section. The Grammar section consisted of ten questions requiring students to supply correct grammatical structures in response to language prompts. The questions included providing correct verb forms for nominated verbs and short answer responses demonstrating correct use of positive and negative structures, constructing

questions to match the given answers, identifying and correcting grammatical mistakes, rearranging words into correct word order, providing past simple verb forms, insertion of frequency adverbs into given sentences, and completing sentences by adding a preposition from a given list. The Grammar section did not require any creative or original language use, but required students to perform various grammatical transformations which followed the pattern of the examples provided in each question. There was one possible correct answer to each question.

The Vocabulary Section consisted of three questions. The first question was a spelling exercise, requiring students to spell jumbled words correctly. The second question was a lexical classification exercise, in which students grouped words according to several category headings. The third question required knowledge of ordinal numbers to be demonstrated. The Vocabulary section also did not require creative or original language use, and there was also just a single correct answer to each question.

The Situations section of the test was designed to measure learners' competence in the use of formulaic language chunks which are employed in specific usage contexts. It consisted of two questions. The first question required students to match a set of given statements with an appropriate response from the list of given responses. This question aimed to test a form of pragmatic competence requiring knowledge of appropriate responses which would be used in particular situations. There was once again just a single correct answer to each question. The following example demonstrates the type of statement / response pattern being paired together from the list of given statements and responses (Hutchinson, 1999, p. 151):

- 3) A: I'm feeling hot.
B: Take your coat off then.

The second question of the Situations section required students to provide missing words to complete various conversations. In order for students to correctly complete the dialogues, they were required to be familiar with the types of language expressions and interactions that occurred in each context. The students' familiarity with the given language contexts would guide their lexical selections to correctly complete the conversations. While there was once again generally just a single correct answer, a few alternative choices were possible on a few question items.

The underlying competence required to complete both questions in the Situations section was a form of pragmatic knowledge concerned with the use of formulaic language expressions. Students were required to draw upon their situational knowledge and to complete various collocations in order to provide the appropriate responses. In the second Situations question, direct prompts were not provided for the missing words, resulting in the task being something more than a passive skills exercise, although some of the questions would not have been expected to stretch the ability of tertiary students. The following example provides one particularly simple response pattern (Hutchinson, 1999, p. 152):

- 4) *In a Clothes Shop:*
A: Can I help you?
B: Yes. How _____ are these jeans?

It is noteworthy that the types of language exercise being tested in the Situations section of the *Lifelines* tests are currently of significance to EFL learners in Japan, since similar questions are now appearing in Japanese university entrance examinations (Guest, 2000, p. 25). The recent inclu-

sion of situational language use in the university examinations provides evidence that knowledge of formulaic language chunks is being recognised by Japanese educational authorities as an essential element of general linguistic competence. The comparative performance of Japanese EFL learners on the Situations section of the *Lifelines* test is hence directly relevant to the contemporary field of EFL education in Japan.

Method

Participants

The EFL learners who participated in this study were a class of first year students, aged between eighteen and nineteen years old, studying a compulsory freshman English course within the Faculty of Business Administration at a private university in western Japan. They had two ninety-minute English classes a week, with the *Lifelines* course being used in just one of these classes. The students had all previously studied English for three years in middle school and three years at high school prior to entering university. Their English language proficiency would be rated at the false beginner level, since they had experienced limited instruction based on contemporary communicative methodologies.

Procedure

The test was administered as an End-of-Year test after two full semesters (comprising a total of 28 lessons) studying the *Lifelines* course. Nineteen students completed the two semesters of the course and took the test in the final lesson. The tests were collected and graded by the teacher according to the answers provided in the Teacher's Book. The mean scores were then calculated for each section of the test, and a graph produced to represent the mean scores on each section. The mean scores occurring on each

of the Situations questions were then calculated and represented graphically. Finally, the data were also investigated in terms of high scores, low scores, the range of results produced by individual students, and the distribution of the mean scores within the given score ranges.

Limitations

1. The test was administered to just a single class of learners, so the results obtained on this study may not be generally indicative of the results that would be achieved by other Japanese learners in similar learning contexts. However, since an average first-year class was chosen for this investigation, the results are regarded as being likely to provide insight into the type of results that would be expected on a large-scale study.

2. It has been assumed that each of the three sections of the test are of similar difficulty, and that variations in performance on the different sections of the test are indicative of different ability levels on the underlying language activities. This assumption is based on the international marketing of the textbook, which is designed to be used by learners in global contexts. However, it may be true that EFL students in other countries could experience similar difficulties with the Situations section of the test. We have not administered the test to students in other countries, so we are not certain that discrepancies in results between the sections reflects different ability levels in the corresponding exercises. Variations in performance on the different sections of the test could possibly also reflect an underlying weakness in the test construction, whereby the Situations section could be uniformly more difficult for all students, although this scenario is regarded as unlikely since it would reflect a major flaw in test construction by the international publisher of the textbook.

3. The *Lifelines* course may not have provided adequate or appropriate

instruction in the Situations section of the language curriculum, which would also result in students performing poorly on the final section of the test. However, since the teacher in this study regarded that an appropriate component of class time had been directed at this learning goal, there is no specific indication that this problem has in any way contributed towards the test results.

Results

The class results on the *Lifelines* test (see Figure 1) show comparative differences on the various sections of the test. High results were achieved on the Vocabulary (92%) and Grammar (82%) sections of the test, while there was a marked reduction in scores for the Situations (59%) section. Students appear to be highly competent in responding to the first two types of question, but show significantly weaker performance in providing language expressions used in the various situational contexts.

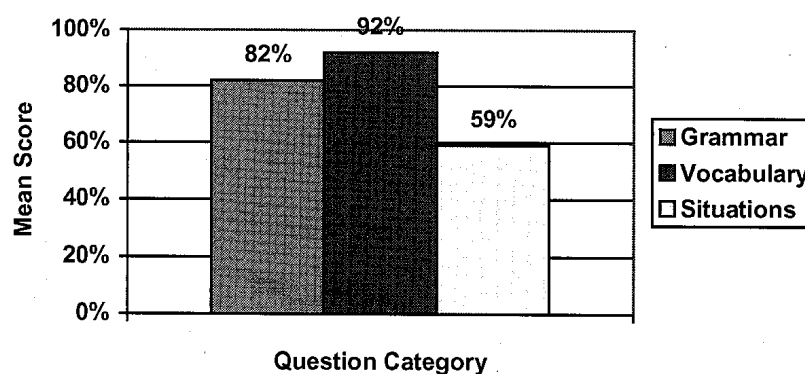


Figure 1: Student Results by Question Category

When the students' comparative performance on the two Situations questions is subsequently examined (see Figure 2), the students performed very well on the first question (Q14), but relatively poorly on the second question (Q15). Furthermore, the mean score on the first Situations question

(83%) was similar to the mean scores for the Vocabulary (92%) and Grammar (82%) sections, so the low overall score for the Situations section is due solely to the students' performance on the second Situations question. Indeed, their mean score on the second Situations question (49%) is substantially below the mean scores for the Vocabulary section (92%), the Grammar section (82%), and the first Situations question (83%).

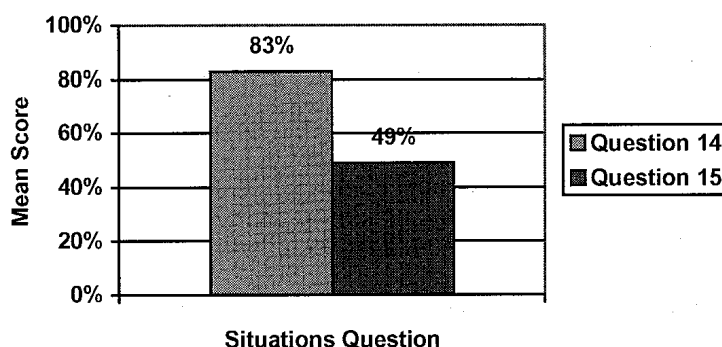


Figure 2: Student Results by Situations Question

Possible reasons for the students' substantially lower performance on the second Situations question (Q15) need to be considered, in relation to both the other two sections of the test (Grammar, Vocabulary) and the first Situations question (Q14). To assist this investigation, the students' results were further compared in terms of the range of scores achieved by individual students on the first two sections, and the two Situations questions (see Table 1).

On the grammar test, a high score of 92% was achieved and a low score of

Table 1: Student Results by Range

	Grammar	Vocabulary	Sitns Q-14	Sitns Q-15
High Score	92%	100%	100%	84%
Low Score	73%	75%	70%	36%
Mean Score	82%	92%	83%	49%

73%, giving a spread of 19%. The mean score occurs in the centre of this range, at 82%. The vocabulary results are somewhat similar, although the spread increases to 25% from a high score of 100% to a low score of 75%, with the mean score above centre at 92%. The spread increases further on the first Situations section to 30%, with a high score of 100% and a low score of 70%, with the mean once again centred in the distribution at 83%. There is then a marked increase in the range on the second Situations question, with a spread of 48% (between 84% and 36%). Furthermore, while both the high score and low score are substantially less than on the other parts of the test, the mean score additionally occurs below the centre of this range at 49%. The significance of these results becomes more apparent when the data is presented graphically, with the range between high and low scores clearly evident, and the mean scores also positioned along the range line (see Figure 3).

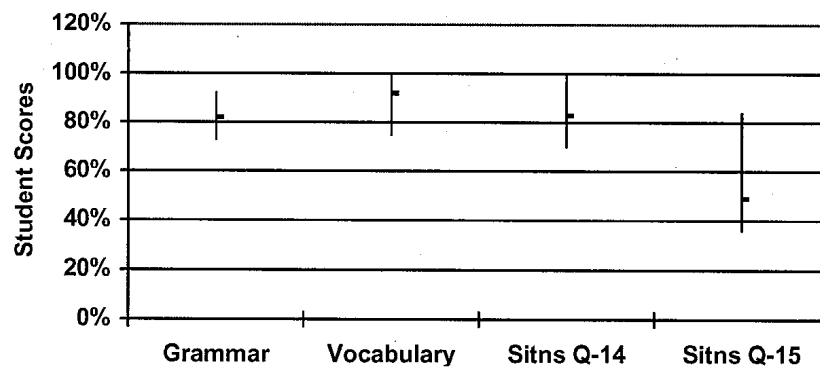


Figure 3: Student Results by Range

Discussion

The comparative results on various parts of the test show that the majority of students are substantially less able at responding to the second Situations question (Q15) than to either the first Situations question (Q14) or the

other two sections of the test (Grammar, Vocabulary). The students achieved substantially lower high scores, low scores, and mean score results on the second Situations question. There are also unexpected major differences in the results on the two Situations questions. While the mean score on the first Situations question (Q14) is equivalent to the mean score on the Grammar section and the range is equivalent to the range occurring on the Vocabulary section, both the mean score and range on the second Situations question (Q15) are markedly different from the results achieved on any other part of the test.

We closely examined the Situations questions in order to postulate reasons for the different results achieved by the students. The first Situations question (Q14) involves matching statement and response pairs, both of which are provided to the students in jumbled lists. Students read all the given statements and responses, and match the corresponding pairs together (e.g., <I'm very tired / You shouldn't go out tonight then>, <I'm feeling hot / Take off your coat then>). The second Situations question (Q15) is markedly dissimilar from both the first Situations question and the other sections of the test in the requirement to produce original language expressions, and although responses are still only required at the single word level, completing the expressions requires knowledge of the language chunks that occur in each situation. The second question is consequently more than a passive skills exercise because, unlike the other questions on the test, the students are not selecting an answer from a list of given answers, or alternatively, there are no direct cues provided to the answer. It is also interesting that while the requirement for students to provide an answer from their own linguistic knowledge makes this question somewhat more challenging, their very good results on the Vocabulary section of the test do not suggest that the students should experience difficulty

in providing single item lexical responses to the second Situations question.

It follows therefore that their vocabulary knowledge is a form of receptive ability, which occurs as an earlier acquired learning stage than productive vocabulary knowledge. While students can usually recognize the correct choice of words, their vocabulary skills do not extend to producing the correct lexical items or expressions to match a given situation. This form of passive vocabulary knowledge has most likely been acquired through six years of translation exercises at the secondary schooling level. Students can generally recognise the words because they have encountered them previously in a translation activity, but have not proceeded to commit the words to long term memory where they can be actively used in language production exercises. This difference demonstrates a significant limitation associated with the translation methodology, whereby lexical expressions are not effectively retained because they have not been actively practised by students in language production exercises. Production activities are required to help students commit the vocabulary items to long term memory, and these have not been provided to students during their secondary education. The translation method has taught students to recognise words and expressions, but falls short of providing activities for the students to actively learn the context and usage of the lexical items. Since the students have not effectively learned the vocabulary, they are less able in responding to test questions which measure production skills, although these are indisputably a fundamental component of communicative language ability. The translation methodology has not addressed a key area of foreign language acquisition, and the Japanese students consequently score poorly on a question on a language test which is designed for an international market, where students are usually taught according to contemporary communicative language teaching methods.

Table 2: Single-item vs. Collocational Lexical Knowledge

Vocabulary section	<p><weather> dry, cloudy, sunny, wet, warm <places> museum, library, hotel, cinema, shop <rooms> kitchen, hall, dining room, bedroom <ordinals> twenty-third, forty-second, ninth</p>
Situations Q15	<p>Yes, perhaps you're <right>. I <bet> it was. What was the weather <like>? Not very <often>. It <costs> a lot of money. <How> can I help? Can I <try> them on? Yes, <of> course.</p>

It is highly significant to this investigation that the usage of language chunks being tested in the second Situations question has been demonstrated as an area of comparatively limited knowledge. Since correct answers require knowledge of the underlying formula or collocation, the students clearly need to learn more of these expressions. The students have not effectively memorized the relevant language chunks, collocations, or formulaic expressions, so they demonstrate comparatively weaker performance on these test results than on the Vocabulary section, which specifically tests the form of single-item lexical knowledge which they have practised. This difference in forms of lexical knowledge is apparent (see Table 2) in examples taken from the Vocabulary section of the test, and the second Situations question (Q15). Whereas the Vocabulary section tests discrete knowledge of lexical sets, the Situations question requires the completion of set expressions, so that correct responses require knowledge of the collocations which occur in each language context.

Conclusions

The results of this investigation demonstrate an important imbalance in the form of instruction currently being provided to Japanese EFL students, the relative weakness that Japanese students have in the area of situational knowledge, and some specific limitations that can be associated with the Grammar Translation method of language instruction, which remains the prevalent form of language education provided to students in Japan during their six years of secondary education. In order to redress this crucial balance, and to develop competence in both grammatical and situational knowledge spheres, students need to be exposed to more authentic discourse, rather than to the contrived sentence patterns that are currently used to teach grammar and translation in Japanese classrooms. Students should also experience greater exposure to high frequency language patterns through alternative techniques of instruction, such as data-driven learning (e.g., Hadley, 2002; Holden, 2003). The relevant types of language patterns could be identified through usage of concordances that provide a wealth of collocations. Students should also learn to identify collocations themselves, rather than relying on the teacher to provide contrived textbook style examples of sample language structures.

Ideally situational competence and the use of language chunks should be taught early in the EFL curriculum, well before students are able to use concordances. A communicative teaching method ensures that language is taught in context and that language chunks are appropriately presented from the outset of learning. Ketko suggests using student-friendly exercises and games to raise learner awareness of language chunks, including *scrambled sentences* (using language chunks instead of letters), *hangman* (also using language chunks instead of letters), and a de-lexicalized *word*

race in which students compete to produce language chunks beginning with a common element (2000, p. 9). Researchers have provided an extensive list of practical suggestions for the types of activities that can be employed to facilitate students' awareness of language chunks (e.g., Burns & De Silva Joyce, 2001; Kato, 2003).

There are many arguments advocating the use of language chunks in the early acquisition of a foreign language (Myles, Mitchell, & Hooper, 1999). In various countries, learners use language chunks that they have acquired early in their learning as a communicative tool well before the acquisition of complex grammatical structures. However, Japanese students seem to progress contrary to this pattern, with secondary education concentrating somewhat exclusively on the application and knowledge of grammatical rules. The students consequently demonstrate superior competence in grammatical transformations compared to their ability in completing language chunks commonly used for communicative purposes. Unfortunately, the superior grammatical knowledge does not translate into a useful tool for oral competence, but impedes the communication process because of the internal analysis that must be done as part of the language input and processing. A greater emphasis on the use of language chunks in communicative situations from early stages in Japanese classrooms is consequently recommended. This addition to the curriculum would also help students to significantly economise in the effort required to learn English, and knowledge of collocations would additionally be useful when learning various grammatical forms. The significant burden on the memory in communicative situations would be reduced, which would enable students to regard English learning as a less onerous, more meaningful, and more enjoyable part of their education.

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