

# **The Complexity of Knowing and Serving Japanese Returnees: Issues of Language Maintenance or Attrition**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on how psycholinguistic, educational, and social factors can influence Japanese returnees' levels of language attrition or maintenance. First, varieties of Japanese returnees from psycholinguistic, educational, and social perspectives are discussed. Second, each factor and its bearing on the attrition/maintenance of their second language is covered. Japanese returnees are diverse in terms of their psycholinguistic profile, making the profiles too diverse to come up with generalizable solutions that work for any returnee. As with the social perspective, the degree of dissonance felt by the returnees differs case by case, and any given event that a returnee may feel discomforted by, may promote a returnee to strive towards maintenance or improvement and another returnee to act in ways that may cause attrition. Provided this complex situation, it is argued that the only possible educational solution to maintenance and attrition is for each returnee to think long term.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since no human being can exist at precisely the same place at the same time as another, it is natural for every one of us to develop in ways different from each other such that we perceive objects, events, and concepts differently. Japanese returnees illustrate this point. Nukaga and Tsuneyoshi (2010) state that “the Japanese returnees (*kikokushijo*) are usually children of businessmen families who have spent part of their life abroad” (p. 213). Goodman (1990) elaborates on the age factor, stating that “officially, Japanese become adults on the first Coming of Age Day (15 January) after

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their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and, although there are exceptional cases of students retaking their university entrance exams into their early 20s, it would be reasonable to see 20 as the upper age-limit for the category of *kikokushijo*” (p. 12). Nukaga and Tsuneyoshi (2010) state that any Japanese who has been brought up for some time abroad in his or her childhood and has returned to Japan could be referred to as a returnee, and in daily conversations, the term is even used to refer to adults. Under such a definition, first, Japanese returnees or *kikokushijo* will be identified from psycholinguistic, social, and educational perspectives in that order. Then, issues that have a bearing on their second language maintenance or attrition in each category will be covered as a whole.

## **IDENTIFYING THE *KIKOKUSHIJO* FROM THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

According to Kess (1991), psycholinguistics is a field of psychology that can be separated into the theoretical and the practical. This paper will focus on the practical side, and applies linguistic and psychological knowledge to problems with second language maintenance or attrition. The components of psycholinguistic perspective to be discussed are 1) age, 2) length of incubation, 3) proficiency, 4) affect, and 5) identity.

### **Age**

Attrition studies conducted throughout the world generally suggest that the younger the age, the quicker the loss (e.g. Cohen, 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Hansen-Strain 1990; Yukawa, 1997; Fujita, 2000). Cohen’s (1989) study that examined two Portuguese third language speakers aged 9 and 13 concluded that there was greater attrition for the younger subject after 9 months, producing limited number of words and shorter T-units. Olshtain’s study (1989) examined attrition of L2 English with speakers of Hebrew with two age groups, a younger group aged 5 to 8 and an older group aged 10 to 14. She concluded that for the younger group, lexical loss was evident even after 6 months with earliest signs manifesting as morphological regularization and L1 transfer setting in quickly, while that was not evident for the older group. Hansen-Strain’s study (1990) that examined attrition of Japanese by American children aged 3, 4, 7, and 9 concluded that the older children retained more of the language. Yukawa’s study (1997) that examined L1 Japanese attrition and regaining in three early bilingual children aged 3, 5, and 7 concluded that younger children were quick in both L1 retention and attrition.

One contradictory finding was found in Kuhberg's (1992) longitudinal study which examined L2 attrition in Turkish children aged 7 and 9. Kuhberg concluded that attrition was faster for the older child because there was more pressure to give absolute priority to Turkish and she herself tended more towards giving into that pressure. In the Japanese context, Fujita (2000) concluded that returning at the age of over 9 years old is the biggest factor for maintenance of English, after she examined thirty-six Japanese returnees from ages 6 to 15 who spent two or more years in North America and had recently returned to Japan.

### **Length of incubation**

Gardner (1982) defines an incubation period as a time when there is an absence of specific language training and or direct contact with the language. Various conclusions have been made regarding the length of incubation (Cohen, 1975; Yoshida, 1988; Taura and Taura, 2000). Cohen's (1975) study examined three elementary school students by administering an Oral Language Achievement Measure individually on a test-retest basis in the beginning of June 1973, then in the 20<sup>th</sup> month of language contact, and finally again in September 1973, after the children started second grade. Cohen concluded that a pause in the learning process may actually cause a reduction in certain problem areas. In the Japanese context, Yoshida's (1988) study investigated 44 returnees residing abroad, mainly in the U.S. for more than four years and concluded that returning between 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade may cause deterioration of the L2 within a year of incubation, while returning between 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade makes retention possible for a few years. In another study of Japanese returnees, Taura and Taura (2000) concluded that in spite of an incubation period, significant improvement was seen in oral story-telling and receptive judgment tasks. The researchers claim that this may have been because of a unique school environment where they shared the same school site as Osaka International School where students were able to use English outside of class time if they chose to do so.

### **Achieved proficiency prior to attrition**

Attrition studies conducted thus far suggest that with higher proficiency, it is less likely for language attrition to occur (e.g. Godsall-Myers, 1981; Bahrck, 1984a; Bahrck, 1984b; Robison, 1985; Taura, 2001). Godsall-Myers' (1981) study which examined six BrynMawr College undergraduate students who completed intermediate

German concluded that students with higher grades showed less language attrition. Robison (1985) examined 180 boys and girls enrolled in first-year Spanish courses in grades 7 through 11 in five southern New England junior and senior high schools and concluded that less advanced students suffered significant loss in writing (syntax), while more advanced students did not. Both of Bahrick's studies (1984a and 1984b) tested 733 individuals over a 50 year period for Spanish learned in school and concluded that with higher levels of training, the amount of language forgotten becomes progressively smaller. Within the Japanese context, Taura's (2001) study found that the subjects who have acquired the threshold level of English do not seem to suffer from attrition for at least several years after returning to Japan, after investigating 26 Japanese returnees educated in English-speaking countries for more than 3 years in both elementary or middle school.

## **Affect**

Affect is known to change over time, and is influenced by the different events one encounters in life. Despite the large number of studies examining affect, the only conclusion that can be made is that affect is likely to influence maintenance or attrition in different ways for different individuals (e.g. Gardner, Lalonde, and MacPherson, 1985; Gardner and Lysynchuk, 1990; Sueda and Wiseman, 1991; Kamijou and Ishiguro, 1991; Nagasawa, 1999; Omori, 2001). Gardner, Lalonde, and MacPherson's (1985) study examined 79 students who had been registered in an intensive six-week course in French in Quebec through mailed questionnaires asking them to rate their perceived second language skills upon completion of the course and 6 months after the course. They concluded that students with less favorable attitudes and motivation perceived themselves as significantly losing their speaking and comprehension skills. Gardner and Lysynchuk's (1990) study examined 128 first-year high school students after nine-month absence of instruction in French as a second language and concluded that anxiety towards using French increased and their perceptions of speaking, writing, and reading skills declined. Nagasawa's (1999) study examined 7 graduate students with formal instruction in Japanese ranging from 9.5 months to almost 5 years and with a length of stay in Japan varying from 9 months to over 3 years. They all just returned from Japan and were continuing language instruction in an L1 environment. The conclusion was that subjects who maintained their proficiency levels kept their motivation high throughout the study period and sought to use the language in the foreign language environment. In the Japanese context, other factors that may influence affect can be

observed. At the elementary school level, Sueda and Wiseman (1991) mention a case where an elementary school child's classmates talked badly of the L2 environment and the teacher yelled at a girl who claimed that she wanted to go back. At the university level, Omori (2001) notes a case in which the *kikokushijo*'s advice to a newly returning student was to be careful not to be labeled a *kikokushijo*. Whether a returnee who encounters such experiences decides to stop or keep working on the L2 largely depends on their identity.

## **Identity**

There are two studies in the Japanese context that illustrate how identity may be linked with proficiency, which may influence language attrition and maintenance. First, Yoshida et al. (2000) used questionnaires from 235 junior high school *kikokushijo* and found that strong identity as a Japanese is formed by how much one can read and write in Japanese, whereas identity as a foreigner is associated with oral communication in L2. A strong Japanese identity could mean that one feels at more ease in using the language and this may promote use and development in Japanese. Second, Kidder (1992) interviewed *kikokushijo* at university concerning how *kikokushijo* perceive themselves. The interviews show that while some Japanese attempt to integrate into society, others simply perceive themselves to be different from typical Japanese people. Perceptions of one's self being different may come from lack of proficiency. In certain social environments, this may promote the urge to work more on developing proficiency. However, if one decides to continue identifying him or herself with a language with more proficiency and comfort, then that language will develop. These studies suggest that L2 identity is linked with proficiency. With these findings in mind, it would be salient to examine if strongly identifying with the L2 helps to maintain the language after returning to the L1 environment.

## **IDENTIFYING THE *KIKOKUSHIJO* FROM THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE**

Gradually, *kikokushijo* have a more favorable social image. However, negative perceptions still exist today. Moreover, societal perceptions of *kikokushijo* may not always coincide with how *kikokushijo* perceive themselves causing friction (which relates to affect) and difficulties in terms of living comfortably in their home country.

## **Negative images from the 1970s to the late 1980s**

Toivenen and Imoto (2012) list *kikokushijo* as a notable Japanese issue from the 1970s to the 2000s. They were first identified in the 1970s as children who were said to suffer from various cultural and educational deficiencies after returning to Japan. Kojima (1997) states that the term *kikokushijo* emerged due to the rapid increase in Japanese workers who went abroad and accompanied parents' anxiety for their children's education (p. 41). Pang (2000) supports this negative perception when she observed that the main objective of many studies regarding *kikokushijo* was to search a way to dispel the foul-smell-of butter (*bataakusai*) and to transform these children to behave like Japanese again (*nihonjin-rashiku*). Pang (2000) points out that returnees were seen as non-Japanese who were completely alien in need of foreshortening the cultural distance and ironing out all the differences. She also claims that they were regarded as slightly peculiar or somewhat off (Pang, p. 174). In support of the negative image pervading in society from the 1970s, Goodman (2012) states that the media continued to portray the *kikokushijo* as pitiful well into the mid-1980s by citing newspaper articles published in Japan. For instance, he cites an *Asahi Shinbun* article written December 12th, 1982, which reported a 19 year old boy murdering his uncle and aunt with a baseball bat; and he claims that most of the Japanese media which reported the story concentrated on the fact that he had returned to Japan after 11 years in the United States. He also cites a *Sunday Mainichi* article written March 31st, 1985, which reported a 19 year old boy declaring his mother as a devil, throwing her from the window of their second floor apartment; and he claimed that a considerable emphasis was placed on the fact that he had spent four years in Brazil.

## **Positive images from the late 1980s**

According to Goodman (2012), by the late 1980s, the image of *kikokushijo* as a group to be pitied was "no longer tenable" (p. 38). He argues that this is due to a creation of the *tokubetsu waku* system, a system that creates a special slot for *kikokushijo*, which made entry into universities much easier, and a large number of companies by the late 1980s started to set up special systems to recruit *kikokushijo*. This was significant in that social mobility was believed to be realized by where one graduated from rather than what one learned in school (Hood, 2001). Aspinall (2005) claims, however, that Japanese employers are becoming less interested in how hard a

time a student had in getting into university and more interested in what they learned once they got there. Aspinall's statement highlights the shift in the tendency for the Japanese society to judge societal worth based on where one graduated from.

When Yamamoto (2001) conducted a survey totaling 144 students, social images of *kikokushijo* on the surface seem quite different from the past in that generally, bilingualism was viewed positively. Some words associated with bilingualism were "cool," "intelligent," and "awesome." There were only few negative images including images such as "self-important," "cold," "not proficient in Japanese," and "not proficient in either language" (p. 32). However, it is important to note that a shift does not mean what has happened in the past has been eradicated.

### **The *kikokushijo* experience in society**

Another societal perspective can be seen by examining the actual voices of the *kikokushijo*. Kidder (1992) interviewed 10 *kikokushijo* attending college. One woman, after living in Puerto Rico for 7 years stated that 8 years after her return, she still views herself as marked, and that she thinks differently from a Japanese person, because she is much more direct. This can be linked to the data collected in Yamamoto's (2001) survey in how returnees are seen as self-important and perceived negatively. Since this woman who came back from Puerto Rico compared herself to other Japanese, her comment shows how she thinks she is being perceived by Japanese society. It is interesting to observe that while she neutrally observes her behavior as more direct, to some, that behavior could be interpreted negatively as self-important. Another subject in Kidder's (1992) study who spent a year in California and then attended international English-speaking schools in Tokyo describes his Japanese language skills as deficient. He shows his interest in overcoming challenges in learning how to talk to adults and giving a speech using the appropriate polite words. As the interview data collected by Kidder show, the negative images towards *kikokushijo* are not completely false, and that certain struggles they experience such as the lack of L1 proficiency are a reality.

The negative images of *kikokushijo* may have been formulated through individual encounters with *kikokushijo* in educational settings. For youngsters, it is a major part of their social world which creates room for observation of behavioral differences. Some *kikokushijo* who notice the conflicting values between non-*kikokushijo* and themselves, seem to be careful not to be negatively labeled by staying within the confines of the perceived societal norm. The existence of a prevailing social norm is bolstered by Befu's claim (2005) that there are many Japanese citizens

who think Japan is mono-cultural. It should consist mainly of Japanese people using the Japanese language.

When Yoshida et al. (2002) researched 512 *kikokushijo* between the ages of 5 and 18, it was found that communication with parents, recency of return, and special educational provisions were key to positive outcomes in terms of their reentry experience. With what has been cited and discussed thus far, when one comes from a different background with a different set of cultural values, friction in interpersonal relationships is highly likely. Thus, special educational provisions become necessary.

As to thicken the inextricable strands between education and society in Japan, Miller and Kanazawa (2000) argue that at work, as in school, one is socialized to develop a sense of identity with the organization and a sense of intimacy and dependence on one's group. They illustrate examples of employees who go through initial training sessions together and attend official ceremonies, sports days, and other social events together. Such corporate culture reinforces their sense of identity as in school. Adding to Befu's point on the general yet misinterpreted consensus on monoculturalism, the authors show the existence of groupism and conformity that potentially reinforce this belief, and a strong link from identity to linguistic ability is made. This can also be observed when looking at Sugimoto's (2010) data based on a national census indicating self-definition, citizenship, and language competence as the three main important areas attached to the criteria for determining 'Japaneseness'.

The social perception of 'Japaneseness' can have a strong influence on the behavior of *kikokushijo*. Yeh, et al.'s research (2003) on 8 Japanese immigrant youths about their experiences with respect to their adjustment to life in the United States found that while they managed to maintain bicultural identities, they experienced difficulties with racism and prejudice, language barriers, and conflict regarding their identity and values. This illustrates that the questioning of 'Japaneseness' derived from one's social environment can start from the time they are abroad, which may make some *kikokushijo* very sensitive about their own identity knowing that they can be categorized and perceived differently from others.

## ***KIKOKUSHIJO* FROM THE EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **Special provisions for *kikokushijo***

According to Pang (2000), Sophia University in Tokyo was the first to accept

returnees instead of the usual entrance exams which were initiated in 1971. This was followed by Keio University and Nanzan University which started to offer special entrance exams for returnees. Tsukuba University was the first to set up a special 20 percent quota program for prospective students based on recommendation in 1976. Some schools at different levels have special entrance provisions for returnees so they can gradually reintegrate into the system; and there are also full-time Japanese schools abroad in order to minimize culture shock upon return.

Nagamine (2012) states that schools for *kikokushijo* first began with high schools, followed by elementary and middle schools, and lastly universities. The model high school was Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku Ooizumi Koukou in 1964. International Christian University High School was founded in 1978. Tsukuba University was first to administer entrance exams for returnees in 1978; and by 1984, 26 national universities and 62 undergraduate departments were holding special entrance exams for returnees. Tohoku University was the first to administer exams to those that were still abroad only through recommendation, report card, and paperwork. In this case, the recommendations, report card, and paperwork are the exam. Lastly, International Christian University was the first university to begin fall enrollment instead of the traditional spring enrollment in 1955, which is a special accommodation for returnees. For instance, high schools in the United States finish in May and students typically start university in the fall.

### **Historical development of education in Japan and its impact on *kikokushijo***

In the 1960s and the 1970s, Pang (2000) argued that in order to enroll the brightest out of an increasingly large pool of young applicants, the prewar hierarchical system of ranking schools was reestablished. The general consensus was *nooryoku shugi*, or the ability first principle, where educational background played the most decisive role in terms of one's social status. The alternative to the exam system that still exists is the escalator system, where the selection procedure starts in kindergarten. Education being linked to one's social status, the main function of the teacher is to instruct students how to pass examinations rather than to arouse intellectual curiosity among them.

Yonder (2004) examined data collected through data at two different high schools at different ranks and found that students from a higher class went onto college, obtained the most prestigious jobs and married within their class, thereby securing their

family's continued high status. For instance, 12.5 percent of youths from lower-class households went to college, compared to 86 percent from middle-class households. 11 percent of the lower-class household parents went to college as opposed to 60 percent of the middle-class household parents showing a similar trend for parents and their children as well. Furthermore, a higher percentage of the children going onto college reflects a historical change, as high school graduates who planned to enter college in the 1960s and the 70s was only 17.9 percent (Pang, 2000). Based on the traditional model of graduation from a highly ranked university, returnees may be perceived as an elite class if one's world view reflects the belief that indeed, those at the top of the social hierarchy ladder should be the ones that graduate from prestigious universities. However, with the emergence of *tokubetsu waku*, some may not perceive *kikokushijo* to be in the elite class because they did not enter university through the traditional examination system as having the right to be called elites. Japanese people are likely to categorize them as an unfairly privileged group with an average level of intelligence or below.

### ***Kikokushijo's experiences in the current educational system***

Much of the research concerning *kikokushijo* suggests that educational institutions generally do not perceive *kikokushijo* as intelligent. At a private junior high school in Mie prefecture where many *kikokushijo* study, categorization stratification of *kikokusei* and *ippansei* are seen. Data from the survey show that while *kikokusei* or *kikokushijo* regard *ippansei*, those that have essentially been educated in Japan as “intelligent people (*atama no ii hito tachi*),” *kikokusei* are regarded as “showing off their English (*eigo wo tsukatte misebirakashite iru*)” and are also labeled by some as “stupid and noisy” (Shibuya, 2001, p. 123).

Furthermore, some parents of *kikokushijo*, perhaps understanding the importance of acquiring intelligence in a genuine sense rather than through a superficial label, stress the importance of entering the system the hard way. A parent of a returnee attending junior high school expressed concern that not having the child experience *juken* or the entrance examination process may be detrimental to the child, implying that by studying for and taking the entrance exam, a child becomes more mentally fit. A reflection from a *kikokushijo* who was a senior in junior high school at the time, supports this perception. While at first, it was difficult to understand the purpose behind taking the entrance exam, the student indicated that the child was able to overcome an obstacle (*hitotsu no kabe wo norikoeru kotoga dekita*) by studying with friends and

cheering their success of passing the exam (Inoue, 1989). Not everyone can pass the exams to get into a prestigious high school, which may increase the chances of being admitted into a prestigious university. In addition, not everyone is fortunate enough to be surrounded by friends who cheer and encourage each other to study.

Along with this point, one cannot underestimate the time and energy that could have been used to build on the experiences that *kikokushijo* already have. In addition to regular schooling, for instance, 75 percent of children at Ooizumi High School, a school known to enroll many returnees, went to cram school in their senior year for anywhere between one to six days (Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku Kyouikugakubu Fuzoku Koutougakkou Ooizumi Kousha, 1996). On the contrary, Ebuchi (1989) emphasizes that educational experiences which build on the *kikokushijo*'s previous ones should be utilized in positive ways. Since returnees and their parents have a choice to take the traditional route, use the *tokubetsu waku*, or go to schools with many returnees, it may be that there are enough choices at its current state to claim responsibility.

Cunningham (1988) supports a high level of parental involvement of *kikokushijo* particularly when their children are abroad in English as a Second Language programs. She cites worried parents who call schools when their children get Cs and when they hear other schools doing something they like that seem to fit their children's needs. As for the reactions of ESL teachers, the parents are overly concerned about grades and they need parents to understand that each school and each teacher conducts classes differently. While this is not likely a phenomenon only pertaining to Japanese parents of children who are planning to go back to their home countries, these behaviors may be influenced by the differences between programs in Japan and abroad.

Shimahara (2002) compared educational objectives in Japan and the United States and noted several major differences. Japan takes a more holistic approach while the U.S. takes a more cognitive and instrumental approach. Objectives at the elementary school level in Japan include fostering robust and healthy children, children who think deeply and are creative, empathetic and cheerful with a sensitive heart, whereas objectives in elementary schools in the U.S. include providing a strong foundation in math, reading, and language arts, helping children to explore and investigate the world through science and social studies, and helping each child communicate in the most effective ways possible through oral and written languages (Shimahara, 2002). It may be argued that since education tends to be holistic in Japan, some parents may perceive the education process as a cooperative process, where they feel they need to intervene because of how much they think they know about their own children and how that information can help improve teaching.

Even beyond elementary school, the effort at holistic development of children is observed, as the following quote from a ninth grade teacher in Japan shows.

In our work, there is neither beginning nor end because it just continues. So I am extremely busy. It would be the best to complete everything at school, but it is impossible. I have to bring my work home and spend one or two hours on it every day. And on top of that I also use weekends to work on it. To be frank, I spend 50 percent of my time on paperwork and the remaining time on instruction at school and even after school. As a result, I have to bring it home. I often wonder if we can do it more efficiently. But, I feel we cannot make education more efficient (Shimahara, 2002, p. 32).

The teacher is creating his or her own reality by pointing at the fact that there is no beginning nor end. This belief, however, may stem from the objective to nurture the students holistically and personal sacrifices for some teachers in the Japanese cultural context may seem inevitable. Observing the differences in the educational systems abroad and in Japan help understand problems when friction arises. By examining the educational perspective, several factors become clearer in how they affect *kikokushijo*'s L2 maintenance and development. Depending on educational environment, they could experience a variety of events that they will subjectively identify as problems in terms of maintaining or developing their L2.

## **MAINTENANCE AND ATTRITION OF *KIKOKUSIJO*'S SECOND LANGUAGE**

### **Issues from the psycholinguistic perspective**

Research from the psycholinguistic perspective shows that generally the older and more proficient one is, the less likelihood they are to experience language attrition; and affect, identity, and length of incubation can have various effects on attrition. The main problem in terms of psycholinguistics is that there is no one identifiable solution to combating attrition. Specifically, age, proficiency level, affect, identity and length of incubation are important factors. However, all components are integral parts of each returnee, making each profile different. Researchers in psycholinguistics present varying pedagogical implications, but all seem to share the same foundation, which is to

provide cognitively challenging tasks that effectively promote linguistic development. The concentration on acquisition instead of attrition makes sense, because of the very reason that there is no one identifiable solution to combating attrition.

Yoshitomi (1994) observed in her research that despite taking language maintenance classes, there were minimal opportunities for returnees to practice their L2 knowledge to the fullest and coordinate linguistic sub-skills spontaneously. Further, she points out the problem that the most common class activities at maintenance classes consisted of spelling tests, memorization games, and simple listening or reading comprehension exercises. “Few activities seem to consist of interactive production exercises which involve communication gaps and the use of global language skills” (p. 229). Reetz-Kurashige (1999) argues that “providing L2 input at the appropriate level is essential” (p. 42). Although the older and the more proficient do not suffer as much from attrition, thoughtful classroom activities to promote appropriate L2 input is important.

### **Issues from the social perspective**

A major issue from the social perspective in terms of language maintenance and attrition is that the discomfort that results from living back in Japan may either promote language maintenance or attrition depending on how the *kikokushijo* interprets his or her experiences. The *kikokushijo* in college who was frustrated not stating her feelings in Japan because she claims that others will call her bossy and get angry at her is a fitting example (French, H. W., 2000, May 3). She might decide to integrate into an L2 environment more often to alleviate stress, which may lead to the development of L2. However, she might also try hard to conform to these perceived social expectations, which may lead to attrition. A *kikokushijo* in college in Kidder’s (1992) study who describes his Japanese language skills as deficient is another example. He shows his interest in learning how to talk to adults and how to give a speech using polite words. The decision is derived in part from what he perceived society expects from him, which is clearly taking away opportunities to maintain his L2.

Another major issue is the prestige of the English language. There are Japanese returnees from various countries. In fact around 40 percent come from North America and 20 percent come from Asia (Kaigaishijo Kyouiku Shinkou Zaidan, 1991). However, the prestige of L2 as English, as illustrated by the majority of attrition studies that examine English as an L2 creates a social environment that promotes the development of English as their L2 and no other language. Therefore, prestige is not a problem for

returnees with English as their L2 but a potential problem in terms of maintenance and attrition for returnees with other languages as their L2. Naturally, if returnees perceive that their L2 is not a language that they are likely to use in the future at work, they may stop investing their time and effort to develop their L2. In a survey of 60 Japanese business people between the ages 18 to 65 by Ipsos (2012, p. 19), the question was asked: “Thinking about your interactions with people who live in other countries, what language do you use most often when you communicate with them?” 59 percent answered English, 20 percent answered Japanese, 8 percent answered Mandarin, and 2 percent each answered German, Italian, Russian, Indonesian, Turkish, Korean and other languages. Based on this survey, English is clearly a language that is worth the investment, and other languages may not be worth the investment at the national level.

At the international level, a global summary of 24 countries around the world asked the same question to 3879 business people. The answers were 67 percent answered English, 5 percent Spanish, 4 percent Mandarin Chinese, 3 percent French and the rest of the languages were less than 3 percent (Ipsos, 2012). Based on a possibility that returnees may live in another country in the future for business, investing in the languages listed above may be useful. Mandarin Chinese is 8 percent at the national level and 4 percent at the global level, and so, in looking at the research by Ipsos (2012), this language might be worth further investment for returnees returning to Japan. Nevertheless, there is an enormous gap in the percentage of people who answered English over other languages, which shows that English is definitely worth the investment, while other languages are not.

## **Issues from the educational perspective**

A major issue from the educational perspective in terms of L2 maintenance and attrition is that there are different interpretations of possible events encountered by *kikokushijo*. A second issue in terms of language maintenance is that taking entrance exams is time-consuming. However, studying for entrance exams is often a choice that the *kikokushijo* and his or her parents make. This is related to the finding in Shibuya’s study (2001) that those that have essentially been educated in Japan are perceived as “intelligent people (*atama no ii hito tachi*).” However, *kikokusei* are regarded as “showing off their English (*eigo wo tsukatte misebirakashite iru*)” and are also labeled by some as “stupid and noisy.” They may experience attrition because there is pressure to conform and stop using English. However, it is up to the individual returnee to decide to stop using English in class. Further, even if the returnee is labeled as such and

refrains from using English in class, he or she may be propelled to use more English outside of class as a result of this event. The returnee in senior high school who decided to take a regular entrance exam instead of using the *tokubetsu waku* mentioned in Inoue's (1989) study has decided to devote his time to studying for the entrance exam. By choice, 75 percent of children at Ooizumi High School, a school known to enroll many returnees, were going to cram school in their senior year regularly after school (Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku Kyouikugakubu Fuzoku Koutougakkou Ooizumi Kousha, 1996). The decision to take the entrance exam takes time away from L2 maintenance and may promote attrition, since the subjects covered in cram school are not limited to English. Shimahara's (2002) study points out a potential problem with teachers providing holistic education in Japan compared to a more cognitive and instrumental approach in the U.S., citing a teacher who claims that there is too much time necessary for paperwork because of the educational culture. A claim could be made such that teachers will not have the energy to instruct students.

## CONCLUSION

The main issue boils down to the complexity of knowing and serving Japanese returnees. Japanese returnees are diverse in terms of their psycholinguistic profile, making it difficult to come up with generalizable solutions that work for most returnees. As with the social perspective, the degree of dissonance felt by the returnees differs case by case. Any given event can create discomfort for a returnee making them strive towards maintenance or improvement and another returnee to act in ways that may cause attrition. Social prestige of one's L2 is a major factor that can be detrimental to maintenance and improvement particularly for those who have L2 backgrounds in a non-English language. However, certain individuals may become even more motivated to maintain their non-English L2 for that very reason. The experiences at educational institutions vary as well for each returnee, and taking the entrance exam, may lead to a loss in the investment of time for maintaining or improving their L2. This is often a choice because there are special educational provisions offered for returnees now available. Provided this complex situation, the only possible solution to maintenance and attrition is for each returnee to think long term. They need to focus on what they want to be able to do with their L2 in the future, and identify the actions that need to be taken to fill the gap between the abilities they have now and the abilities they hope to gain in the future.

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