

# Assessing Pragmatic Competence in the Japanese EFL Context



Assessing Pragmatic Competence  
in the Japanese EFL Context:  
Towards the Learning of Listener Responses

By

Pino Cutrone

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Towards the Learning of Listener Responses,  
by Pino Cutrone

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## KEY TO ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Adaptive Control of Thought
ACTFL	American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages
CA	Conversation Analysis
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CANCODE	Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English
CP	Grice's Cooperative Principle
DCT	Discourse Completion Test
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETS	English Testing Service
FFI	Form-Focused Instruction
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
FTA	Face-Threatening Act
IC	Intercultural Communication
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
ID	Individual Learner Difference
IMT	Information Manipulation Theory
JEFL	Japanese Student of English as a Foreign Language
JESL	Japanese Student of English as a Second Language
JFL	Japanese as a Foreign Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language

LCIE	Limerick Corpus of Irish English
MEXT	Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
NES	Native English Speaker
NEO-PI-R	NEO Personality Inventory, Revised
NMMC	Nottingham Multi-Modal Corpus
NS	Native Speaker
NNS	Non-Native Speaker
OC3	Oral Communication III Class
OPI	Oral Proficiency Interview
PPMCC	Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient
Spearman rho	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SS	Simultaneous Speech
SSB	Simultaneous Speech Backchannel
STEP	Standard Test of English Proficiency
TCU	Turn-Constructional Unit
TIPI	Ten Item Personality Inventory
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication
TRP	Transition-Relevance Place
UoN	University of Nagasaki
VOICE	Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English
WTC	Willingness to Communicate

## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS IN RESULTS' TABLES

BC	Backchannel
CB	Clausal boundary
CLAR	Clarification backchannel
CRS	Conversational repair strategy
DC	Discourse context eliciting backchannels
NONU	Situation of non-understanding in which JEFL spoke
NONCLAR	Non-clarification backchannel
NV	Nonverbal
Opps	Opportunities
REPs	Backchannels constituted by repetitions of primary speaker's speech



## PREFACE

“The moment one starts to think of language as discourse, the entire landscape changes, usually, forever.” (McCarthy & Carter 1994: 201)

When I first read the above-mentioned quotation in my early days of graduate school, I did not attach too much importance to it. I suppose, at the time, I rather naively believed that I understood it (at least vaguely) and left it at that. Over the years however, I was quite surprised at how my interpretation of that quote would evolve and actually come to define my experience as a linguist. I realize now that only someone who has dedicated years to the unusual and meticulous task of transcribing conversations in attempts to decipher patterns and give meaning to such features of communication (i.e., discourse) as the length of pauses between syllables, and the precise instances where headnods and clausal boundaries coincide, could possibly understand what McCarthy and Carter meant. Undoubtedly, my years of closely analysing the finer points of conversations in this way have influenced my perspective of everyday communication. While my passion and heightened awareness of such things have served me well academically, I sometimes have to remind myself that most non-linguists are (quite justifiably) not really interested in trying to understand everyday communication in any great depth. Thus, in addition to the heartfelt gratitude I would like to express to my friends and loved ones for their kind and unwavering support over the years, I also feel I should acknowledge how patient and understanding they were of me when I may have behaved somewhat unorthodoxly in my quest to dig deeper into the underpinnings of communication. Tomomi, my better half, thank you for being such a loving and supportive wife and creating the type of happy home where dreams truly do come true. Maya and Sophia, my beautiful little girls, you continue to inspire me every day, and I feel so very blessed and proud that you are my daughters. Thank you mom, dad, Nic, Owen, Teresa, Brian, Victoria, Maria, Chris, Zackery and Isabella for your unconditional love and support. Also, special thanks to the very best friends anyone can ever hope to have, the Thomson and Ortega families, who always believed in me even when I doubted myself.

Since this book is based on the study I conducted to complete my PhD thesis, I would be remiss not to mention the many wonderful people who helped me in a professional capacity to make it to the other side of my

doctoral journey. To start with, I would like to thank the members of Faculty and Staff in the University of Reading's Applied Linguistics Program, who were always willing to lend a helping hand when I needed it. In particular, I would like to thank the three academic advisors I was fortunate to have at various points of my study. First, many thanks to Dr Kristyan Spelman-Miller, who supervised me through the crucial first two years in which I carried out my experiment. Second, I would also like to thank Dr Lisa McEntee-Atalianis, who guided me through the third year of my study and helped shape my writing style in the early stages. Third, I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my final supervisor, Dr Alan Tonkyn, who graciously took me on at a time when he had a multitude of other responsibilities in his many departmental roles. Dr Tonkyn was instrumental in the mentoring of my research, reviewing draft after draft of my work, providing valuable critiques and insights, and ultimately helping to bring my thesis documentation to fruition.

I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to the contributions of the following people: my PhD examiners, Dr Jacqueline Laws and Dr Anne O'Keeffe, for the extensive discussion and feedback that made my oral defence such a pleasurable experience, Dr Fred Anderson, who guided me informally in Japan in the stages leading up to and shortly after my admission into the course, Gavin Marinelli for his assistance with the reliability check of the transcribed conversations, Dr Richard Hodson, David Robinson and Joel Hensley for taking the time to proofread various aspects of my work, Dr Chris Bradley for assisting me in developing some of the videotaped materials used in the instructional phase of this study, Dr Brian Spitzberg, Dr Nigel Ward, Dr Terese Thonus, Dr Sam Gosling and Barbara Brozyna for taking the time to discuss various issues related to my research, Dr Atsushi Oshio, Dr Hiroshi Moryasu and Paul Chatfield for the patience they exhibited in assisting me with the statistical procedures used in this study, all the kind and willing participants of my study who made this research project possible, and to my current and former colleagues at Nagasaki University and Nagasaki Prefectural University respectively, who helped to provide the optimum conditions for carrying out this project.

Moreover, I would like to acknowledge how fortunate I have been to be researching a subject area which I have always found fascinating at a time when it is sorely needed. Though I certainly had no inkling of it at the time, I suppose my curiosity of intercultural pragmatics can be traced back to my childhood, which involved being raised by my Italian-immigrant parents in a native-English speaking community in Winnipeg, Canada. I still remember when my Canadian friends would come over to our house

and become quite alarmed when they heard what they believed to be my parents shouting, when, in fact, my parents were simply having lively discussions about food, soccer and other topics they were passionate about. Interestingly, I remember visiting Italy with some friends when I was older and hearing some of my Italian relatives ask my parents why I, and some of my friends, appeared so calm and subdued. Paradoxically, in a similar scenario in Japan several years later, some Japanese students at the university I worked at commented to our staff on how I and the other non-Japanese teachers were especially lively and enthusiastic people. There clearly is a cultural element that influences how human beings perceive the things and behaviours around them, and the differing perspectives that shape our worldly views have always fascinated me.

Thus, when I moved to Japan fifteen years ago, I already had a deep appreciation of how conversational styles and perceptions could potentially differ across cultures. Hence, due to its complexities and multifaceted nature where communication is concerned, Japan provided the perfect platform for one such as myself to develop, but never really satisfy, their curiosity. In my first days in Japan, I noticed and experienced firsthand how listening styles seemed to differ across cultures (both in the L1 and L2), and how these differences sometimes contributed to miscommunication and/or negative perceptions across cultures. Initially, my observations were limited to everyday interactions with shop clerks and the like, in which the communication stakes were low and miscommunication was most often dismissed as fun and humorous. However, once I had started teaching EFL in Japan, the stakes in communicating with my students and the office staff at our school were raised beyond what I had experienced previously. I now had important goals to achieve and time restraints to contend with. Thus, it was here in the professional domain that I first began to understand what a real-world problem this was. For instance, it was extremely difficult to ever know if my students were following what I was saying because many of them would simply continue nodding and saying *uhuh* regardless of whether they understood or not. Throughout the course of a semester – or even a lesson – it would become apparent that a great many students that seemed to be indicating understanding were actually faking it. As a thinking person, I became even more curious about this topic, and I began to consider such questions as: What does this behaviour stem from? Is it an interpersonal communication issue per se, or does it have more to do with the context and a different culture of learning? Are listener responses (called backchannels in the field of linguistics) even addressed in Japanese EFL classes? Thus, fueled by my personal and professional observations

and driven by a deep desire to get to the bottom of these issues, I took my study of this topic to a deeper level and began to tackle these questions academically over the next decade. This involved countless hours, days, and years of reading and writing into this specific topic, as well as conducting various research experiments, such as the one described in this book, in an attempt to uncover the answers that have eluded researchers and practitioners up to this point. Ultimately, the impetus of the study described in this book is to help solve a real-world problem as faced by Japanese L2 English speakers such as Mr Takaya Ishida, the Japanese business man that stood trial in the USA in 1983 in the IBM-Hitachi-Mitsubishi case because, according to his lawyers, he did not understand differing backchannel conventions across cultures, as well as the many foreign EFL teachers in Japan who may have felt confused at one time or another by the seemingly mixed signals coming from their students' listener responses.

In addition to the issues discussed above, this book offers readers a window into the following six topics:

- (1) Descriptive and explanatory knowledge about conversational behaviour: From the perspective of Japanese EFL/ESL speakers, this book provides readers with an opportunity to learn about how conversational and listening styles differ, and why miscommunication and negative perceptions occur across cultures.
- (2) More specifically, since the end of WWII, there has been great interest in (mis)communication between Japanese and Americans, and this book is sure to inform readers who are specifically interested in this aspect of the topic.
- (3) Knowledge pertaining to sound research design: This book offers young researchers a chance to learn about some of the methodological considerations and issues involved in conducting a longitudinal study involving cross-cultural communication in the field of Applied Linguistics.
- (4) The state of English education in Japan: This book provides a synopsis of English teaching in Japan, explaining its failures and discussing potential areas for reform in the future.
- (5) Practical applications: The findings of this study are directly relative to what happens in the foreign language classroom. The study described in this book shows that pragmatic targets such as listener responses can and should be taught in EFL/ESL classes and also provides language practitioners with detailed information on how to go about doing this.

- (6) Theoretical applications: In a much broader context, this book sheds light on current theoretical issues in SLA and Pragmatics, such as the role of consciousness in language teaching (Krashen's Input Hypothesis vs. Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis), the interpretation of Grice's maxims across cultures, and the degree to which Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and specifically the aspect that deals with face theory, can be applied to Asian contexts.

I sincerely hope readers find this book useful in some capacity and are able to relate its contents to their studies and/or experiences as I did. On a final personal note as I reflect on my life and the journey I have travelled to get to this point, I feel extremely fortunate to have crossed paths with so many wonderful people along the way, and I remain forever in debt to my family and friends in Japan and abroad for their encouragement and support through the years in times both good and bad to keep me focused on my goals. Earning my doctorate is the culmination of a life-long dream, and the consequent publishing of this book truly provides the proverbial icing on the cake. In closing, I would like to express my deep and enduring gratitude to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for, first, noticing my PhD thesis and, subsequently, for guiding me through its transition into the book you are now reading. It goes without saying that none of this would have been possible without you.



# CHAPTER ONE

## THE BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

With the increasing prominence of globalisation, intercultural communication is becoming increasingly common around the world. As English is generally regarded as the international language for communication used in such fields as international politics, academia, business and science, more people around the world are studying EFL/ESL every day. Perhaps no country has expended greater resources encouraging its citizens to study English than Japan, yet the results to date have been largely unsatisfactory, particularly concerning oral skills. An important part of effective oral communication is being able to give effective feedback to one's interlocutor (O'Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter 2007), and this is a specific area in which the writer contends that Japanese EFL learners (JEFLs hereafter) have experienced problems (Cutrone 2005). It is becoming increasingly clear that what constitutes effective feedback seems open to interpretation, and there is potential for cross-cultural pragmatic failure and misunderstanding when listening styles differ. In an attempt to inform language pedagogy in the JEFL context, the general aims of this book are to gain a better understanding of how and why JEFLs produce L2 backchannels the way they do and, subsequently, to determine how to improve this aspect of JEFLs' English.

Before issues concerning listening behaviour are presented in Chapter 2, it is necessary to first set the background for the study described in this book. To this end, Chapter 1 provides an examination of Japanese learners of L2 English. The first part of this chapter, Section 1.2, focuses on the JEFL context in which this study takes place. To help explain how the current situation came to be, this section consists of a historical overview of English education in Japan. The final part of this section explores the status of language learning in Japan compared to other Asian settings. The next section, 1.3, provides a description of JEFL speakers, while Section 1.4 considers the L1-L2 language transfer that Japanese learners experience. Section 1.5 examines some of the affective factors that

influence JEFL learners' oral output, which include language anxiety and willingness to communicate. Section 1.6 examines how the term culture is used in this study, while Section 1.7 looks at aspects of Japanese culture thought to influence the communication style of individuals in this group. Addressing issues involved in communication across cultures, Section 1.8 includes subsections which define Intercultural Communication (IC) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Section 1.9 examines the four maxims included in Grice's (1975) cooperative principle as a framework to identify sources of miscommunication across cultures, and, lastly, Section 1.10 concludes the chapter by providing an overview of its contents.

## **1.2 The Japanese EFL context**

### **1.2.1 A Brief History of English Education in Japan**

The first Japanese contact with English likely occurred in 1600 when an Englishman, William Adams, was swept ashore on the southern island of Kyushu (Ike 1995; Hughes 1999). Japan's relationship with English has traversed numerous peaks and valleys since this time. Regarding the latter, there were periods in Japanese history when the study of English and contact with foreigners were forbidden, such as when Japan adopted a strict isolationist policy from 1638 to 1853 and at the time of political upheaval leading up to and during World War II. In terms of peaks, the study of English in Japan reached new heights during the Meiji Restoration in the mid to late 1800s and again after the Allied Forces defeated Japan to end WWII in 1945. However, even when English was being studied in earnest in Japan, there was not often much emphasis on mastering communicative abilities. While the study of English in Japan was initially seen as a gateway to communicating with the outside world during the Meiji Era, it soon became just one of the many non-communicative subjects of study in Japan and was mainly learnt in order to be able to read written texts in such areas as technology, science, architecture and medicine (Kitao & Kitao 1982).

While there have been various debates and discussions regarding the direction of English education in the Japanese school system over the past fifty years, little has changed in terms of classroom practice as the entrance examination system continues to define English education in Japan to this day. This is a prototypical example of the phenomenon known in education as the 'washback effect' in which testing methods have a major influence on teaching and learning in the classroom (Gates



1995: 101). Since mandatory education is completed in Japan upon graduating from junior high school, all senior high schools and most universities, both public and private, have entrance examinations, which include an English component. The English section of the examinations demands knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, which are taught in Japanese. Due to the make-up of the entrance examinations, the nature of the curriculum and instruction during these years has for the most part not been communicative. Rather, it has generally focused on the rote learning of grammatical rules, translation, some listening skills and the ability to develop reading skills.

### **1.2.2 EFL in Japan Compared to Other Asian Settings**

Recently, in the age of globalisation in which we now live, the reasons for Japanese citizens to learn and be able to function in English have expanded greatly as English has grown in modern times to become the international language for communication used in such fields as international politics, academics, business and science (Ammon 2003; Yano 2001; Yashima 2002). Further, English proficiency has become a common requirement for jobs in Japan and is considered to be important in building a successful career (Kitao & Kitao 1995; Nikolova 2008). This is evidenced by the fact that many companies in Japan offer their employees incentives for achieving designated scores on various English proficiency tests such as the Standard Test of English Proficiency (STEP), Test of English for Intercultural Communication (TOEIC) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Although the Japanese seem to have many good reasons to study English, and despite the fact that English education in Japan has had a relatively long history, the learning outcome has been markedly inadequate, particularly where speaking skills are concerned. While Japan has expended vast resources as a nation on the study of English, Japanese citizens continue to rank near the bottom among Asian countries in English language proficiency tests (Clark 2000; Nikolova 2008) such as TOEFL (Kwahn 2002; Takahashi 2005) and TOEIC (ETS 2000, 2006). While the general failure of English language education in Japan has been highly documented in the literature and continues to generate a lot of discussion, most analysts agree that oral skills are what JEFLs have the greatest trouble with (Ellis 1991; Farooq 2005; Helgesen 1987; Hughes 1999; Okushi 1990; Matsumoto 1994; Yano 2001; Reesor 2002; Roger 2008; Takanashi 2004). For instance, Ellis (1991: 123) and Okushi (1990: 65) have noted that the regular Japanese high school and/or university

graduate is seriously incompetent as an English speaker, particularly where sociolinguistic competence is concerned. Farooq (2005: 27) describes JEFLs as having ‘extreme difficulties in interacting with native speakers in real-life situations even at a survival level’. The term false beginner is often used to describe JEFLs in current course books and/or teacher instructional manuals designed for university classes (Helgesen, Brown & Mandeville 2007; Martin 2003). According to Peaty (1987: 4), who describes the JEFL university student as the ‘prototype false beginner’, false beginners have a background in English based on their study of grammar and translation in junior and senior high school, but have very little, if any, communicative abilities. Recent scores on the newly adopted TOEFL iBT, which was made to include a speaking section for the first time, also suggest that JEFL/ESLs have difficulty with the oral tasks therein (ETS 2007, 2008, 2009).

Many reasons for the Japanese failure to learn English have been put forward. First, the independent and/or insular attitudes that may have evolved from Japan’s self-imposed isolation (1638-1853), and the fact that Japan remains an island country, are among the most commonly cited reasons to explain the struggles of the Japanese to learn to communicate in English (Hughes 1999; Reischauer 1988). Several scholars have gone so far as to say that Japanese society and culture, which favours reticent and passive students, is as much to blame for this failure as anything else (Anderson 1993; Matsumoto 1994; McVeigh 2002). The role that Japanese culture plays in English communication will be explored in Section 1.7. Hidasi (2004: 3) provides the following list of potential factors that may contribute to the low efficiency in varying degrees:

1. Large class-sizes
2. Lecture-type class arrangements
3. Not-sufficient English language skills of the Japanese native teachers
4. Overall ageing of the teachers’ population
5. The lingua-typological difference of Japanese from English
6. Fluctuation of native English language teachers
7. Not-sufficient number of English native teachers (sic)
8. Rigidity of the curriculum
9. Non-stimulating textbooks
10. Writing-reading oriented teaching methods
11. Exam-oriented content of the teaching
12. Lack of students’ motivation
13. Lack of exposure to real-life intercultural communication
14. No real need to know a foreign language within Japan

15. Relatively old age of students when first exposed to foreign language learning
16. Difference in mental programming that manifests itself in communication behaviour

Most of the reasons listed above are related to inadequate classroom methods and instruction. As noted previously, EFL instruction in Japanese schools has not been very communicative and has employed primarily approaches which rely heavily upon reading, memorising grammatical rules and translation.

### **1.3 A Brief Description of JEFL Speakers**

There exists a strong stereotypical view of JEFL learners and speakers as reticent, hyper polite, and compliant to the group's needs over their own, which is supported by general observation and/or anecdotal evidence. While there may be some truth to some of these depictions, great care must be exercised in arriving at generalisations because they do not take account of the variation in communicative behaviour that results from contextual factors and individual personalities (Scollon & Scollon 2001). Also, it should be noted that many of the studies assessing JEFLs' oral abilities involve elicited data rather than naturally occurring data, and, thus, it cannot be said with any certainty that the linguistic behaviour observed in such activities as Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs)<sup>1</sup> and/or role-plays corresponds to behaviour in authentic communicative situations. With this in mind, this section seeks to provide a general description of JEFL speakers and to show how their communication styles may sometimes differ from Native English Speakers (NESs) in various respects; however, due to reasons stated above, the picture which seems to emerge from the literature must be treated with circumspection.

In an article in which he discusses Japanese learners' failure to acquire sociolinguistic competence in English, Ellis (1991) provides us with a starting point. By drawing on considerable research (Barnlund 1974; Beebe & Takahashi 1989; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz 1990; Clancy 1990; Fukushima & Iwata 1985; Graham 1990; Hill 1990; LoCastro 1987; Loveday 1982; Takahashi & Beebe 1987; Tanaka 1988; Wolfson 1983, 1989), Ellis (1991: 116) offers the following generalisations of the Japanese communication style as compared to NESs (Australian and

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<sup>1</sup> This is a technique often used in interlanguage pragmatics research, which asks learners to write responses according to hypothetical situations.

American):

1. Japanese are less verbal, more inclined to use silence in intercultural interactions.
2. Japanese are inclined to use more backchannelling devices.<sup>2</sup>
3. Japanese can be more direct in some situations, in particular those where a lower-status person is being addressed, and less direct in others.
4. Japanese may lack the politeness strategies needed to successfully perform face-threatening speech acts such as invitations and requests.
5. Japanese are less explicit in giving reasons for their verbal behaviour.
6. Japanese tend to be more formal.
7. Japanese tend to give recognition to status relationships between speakers rather than to level of familiarity.

Much of the research centres on particular speech acts and is cross-sectional in design. Barnlund (1974), who administered questionnaires to elicit the Japanese perspective regarding interpersonal relationships, reports that the Japanese participants in his study emphasised the need to keep conversations pleasant by behaving smoothly and avoiding disagreement. While this may be a common human trait, there is mounting evidence to suggest that it may exist to a higher degree in Japanese culture (Loveday 1982; Kenna & Lacy 1994; Matsumoto & Boyè Lafayette 2000). Loveday (1982) describes the Japanese conversational style as markedly different from the western style, in that the latter seems to involve a type of logical game with continuous positive and negative judgements. Loveday (1982) also claims that NESs often perceive JEFL speakers to be distant and cool because of their reluctance to talk about their personal feelings. While it is impossible to generalise the communicative behaviour of any group in this way, it is interesting to see that a great deal of cross-cultural literature is littered with such conjecture.

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<sup>2</sup> While this definition will be expanded upon in Chapter 2, backchannelling devices can be defined for the time being as the responses and/or reactions that a listener gives to the primary speaker when the primary speaker is speaking (Yngve 1970).

## 1.4 Language Transfer in the JEFL Context

Relative to the scope of this study, this section considers the degree of pragmatic transfer experienced by JEFL learners. Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990: 56) define pragmatic transfer as the ‘transfer of L1 sociocultural communicative competence in performing L2 speech acts or any other function of language, where the speaker is trying to achieve a particular function of language’. Pragmatic transfer is most likely to occur in speech acts that require delicate interpersonal negotiation as learners seek to alleviate or avoid face-threatening behaviour in ways they understand best. There are numerous studies demonstrating varying degrees of L1 Japanese to L2 English pragmatic transfer involving the speech acts of refusals (Takahashi & Beebe 1987; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz 1990; Robinson 1992), requests (Takahashi 1996) and apologies (Maeshiba et al. 1996).

Nonetheless, it is difficult to come to any concrete conclusions regarding the variables impacting on the development of pragmatic competence due to the somewhat conflicting findings, as well as some of the methods used to collect data. Particularly, the relationship between linguistic proficiency and pragmatic transfer remains unclear. Whereas some studies found evidence of greater L1 pragmatic interference in more proficient learners (Takahashi & Beebe 1987; Maeshiba et al. 1996), other studies found less (Schmidt 1983; Takahashi 1996). Some researchers have suggested that development may follow a bell-shaped pattern, in which learners first show increased pragmatic transfer as they acquire the linguistic competence to encode native-like patterns and later less as they develop pragmatic competence in the target language (Ellis 1991; Takahashi & Beebe 1987). In other words, pragmatic interference would not be expected to simply disappear as a result of linguistic development; rather, in the case of some learners, it may temporarily increase at times. According to Ellis (1991: 119), ‘linguistic competence is not sufficient to guarantee the development of pragmatic knowledge, but it is probably necessary’.

Furthermore, as Takahashi (1996) asserts, learners’ level of sociolinguistic competence in the L2 may be a more crucial factor than their linguistic proficiency in the L2 in determining the extent of pragmatic transfer they might experience. Another factor that may cause researchers to be cautious in arriving at any conclusions is that most of the aforementioned studies described in this section used some type of DCT. There have been concerns regarding the reliability and validity of the data DCTs produce (Gass & Neu 1996). That is, as responses are elicited on the

DCT and learners generally have time to weigh their options, many argue that this type of data is unnatural as the responses produced may bear little resemblance to the spontaneous responses produced in natural settings, as evidenced by Beebe and Takahashi (1989).

## **1.5 Individual Differences: A Focus on Affective Variables**

As Individual Learner Differences (IDs) have been shown to influence learning outcomes on various levels (Ellis 2008), the study of IDs continues to be an area of SLA inspiring a great deal of research attention and scholarly discussion (Fewell 2010). IDs generally include, among others, factors classified under the following three areas: learning styles, learning strategies and affective variables (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford 2003). Relative to the study described in this book, IDs thought to have particularly strong influences on the oral abilities of JEFLs include the interrelated affective variables known as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC). The latter, as Section 1.5.2 discusses, is a particularly useful construct for researchers in that it has been shown to encompass various other affective IDs, such as FLA, self-confidence, motivation, intergroup dynamics, social context, communicative competence and personality.

While the following subsections describe FLA and WTC in greater depth, it is useful to briefly touch upon two other variables of relevance to this study: the extraversion/intraversion dimension of personality (see Section 3.3) and language proficiency. Extraversion is of particular importance as it has traditionally been thought to be at the centre of Personality models (Eysenck 1992), and, similar to the WTC construct, it has been shown to influence L2 use (Dewaele & Furnham 2000). Regarding language proficiency, various researchers have attempted to use IDs to create profiles of successful JEFLs (Heffernan & Jones 2005). Concerning pragmalinguistic features of language, it is not yet clear how L2 proficiency affects the learning of such targets (see Section 2.9.2.4). Thus, in attempting to piece together profiles of performance associated with listening behaviour, the influences of L2 proficiency, extraversion, and/or WTC require examination.

### **1.5.1 Foreign Language Anxiety**

Several researchers have commented on the Japanese learner's disposition towards reticent behaviour (Anderson 1993; Ellis 1991; Greer