The Japan Association of Language Teaching

全 国 語 学 教 育 学 会

ON CUE

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATORS

National Special Interest Group

大学教育者特別分科会

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University Entrance Exams in Japan

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ON CUE

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ON CUE is edited by Jonathan B. Britten (Editor), David Trokeloshivili (Production Editor) and Thom Simmons (Assistant Editor & Production Coordinator-Interim), and distributed by Stanley Davies (Distribution-Interim) for the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) College and University Educators (*CUE*) National Special Interest Group (N-SIG).

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FROM THE EDITOR

This is the second of four issues scheduled for the 1996 calendar year. David Trokeloshvili has agreed to act as the production editor and technical advisor for the remainder of the year. He brings several decades of professional publishing experience to the task. Moreover, the Membership Chair for ***CUE***, Stanley Davies, has agreed to supervise the distribution. Thanks to both gentlemen for their help.

David Trokeloshvili has also expressed an interest in taking over as editor for the 1997 publishing year, and I will support him if he does in fact run. The position is by election; members cast their votes at the big national JALT meeting in October each year. I do not expect to run again this year.

In thinking about the future direction of ***ON CUE***, I think the newsletter would be more useful if ***CUE*** members take time to clip articles from many sources, get permission to reprint them, and send them along to the editor. The reprint in this issue from ***The Daily Yomiuri***, for example, should be interesting to many of our readers.

There are several major English-language newspapers in Japan, not to mention innumerable other sources of information relevant to college and university educators. No one can read them all, so a digest of the most useful articles would be very useful. I would like to enlist the cooperation of all ***CUE*** members.

As our second feature article makes clear, there is a great deal of lively online discussion about college teaching. ***ON CUE*** would greatly benefit from having a regular columnist to bring us the best of the relevant on-line information. William Lee's letter in this issue suggests that he may be able to take on this task.

The next issues of ***ON CUE*** should be mailed on or about September 15, and December 15. After that, ***ON CUE*** will be appearing under a new editor, who may revise the current policies. Until then, the deadline for submissions is two weeks before the mailing date.

From the Coordinator: Issues past, present and future

• The management of *CUE*

We are quickly coming to the end of another year--it's only four month till the next Annual Business Meeting (ABM) at JALT 96 in Hiroshima and the time goes by very fast. We need more people to get involved with the day to day management of *CUE*, begin work on regional conferences, and produce the newsletter. When all of this falls on the same group, year after year, we burn out our best people and the N-SIG becomes steadily dependent on a few diehards. For those of us who have families, numerous jobs as adjunct lecturers, or are trying to secure better employment, this load becomes very onerous indeed. Many of our participating members are stretched to the limit with their personal affairs, but if the load is spread a little more evenly, we will utilize far greater resources than we are seeing used.

For the remainder of the year, we have appointed David Trokeloshvili to act as Production Editor and Technical Coordinator. David's experience in commercial publications is extensive and he is familiar with the possibilities of desk-top publishing. Stanley Davies, Jon Britten and I will moot his name at the next ABM to be Editor and we feel that his handiwork displayed in the next two issue before the ABM will allow us to show you why he is a good choice for the job.

The surveys that you have seen from time to time in the *On CUE* are one way to illuminate the issues that concern *CUE* N-SIG members. Tim Knowles handled the Data Base, "*In CUE*" for two years and is now doing research on the 1992 Monbusho curriculum guidelines as they are effecting us. His article in the last edition of *ON CUE*, introduced the Survey on Curriculum Innovation. We are republishing this with this issue as well. Tim will be using the information you give him here for the N-SIG paper at JALT 96 in Hiroshima. Tim's paper at JALT 96 will expand on the presentation made by Shiozawa Tadashi at the colloquium "Dealing with Changes in Language Education," (JALT International Conference, Nagoya JAPAN, 11/95, Thom Simmons, Tadashi Shiozawa, Torkil Christensen and Dawn Yonally).

The quantity and quality of submissions to the *ON CUE* are always a concern. There are a few of us who are comfortable writing something every issue but there are many others who also need to be heard. We want to encourage you to do so. As Jon Britten and any other newsletter editor can tell you, the simple act of compiling and formatting the newsletter is time consuming. Adding to that the need to chase down sufficient materials to fill the newsletter is often something that will stretch many to their limits. We have in past issues made numerous calls for opinion pieces and letters to the editor. The *ON CUE* has been published in March and September of 1993, June and December of 1994, June and December of 1995 and March and July of 1996. In the very first *On CUE*, the editor, coordinator and founder of *CUE*, Gillian Kay, asked that *CUE* members submit questions and opinions for discussion. Comments were invited on books, legal issues and school policy, written forms from employers and government agencies that were difficult to understand or needed translation—all were invited. And all, if sought at private agencies, would be time consuming and often expensive. Yet here in *On CUE*, you have the opportunity to take advantage of a tremendous variety of resources and expertise.

Membership in *CUE* is at 362 and has been a little higher. We are steadily growing and are now the largest interest group in JALT. With this large number of members and the recent changes in the Monbusho Guidelines, we are seeing a greater variety of concerns of a rather serious nature. We therefore need people who are willing to bring us all institutional updates in every aspect of the changes they are seeing. In this way we can provide a better balance to the variety of reports we are hearing.

Occasionally we get the membership and the mailing labels mixed up. We became aware of this late last year and have hopefully corrected this problem. There has been a time lag between the current dues paid, memberships recently expired and the printing of the mailing labels. Our apologies. We know that we have been recommended by some of our staunchest supporters to their friends and the distribution problems caused some PR problems. Sincerest apologies. In future, please let us know if you do not get your last issue. We will announce the publication in The Language Teacher in the N-SIG section. Keep an eye out for the *CUE* monthly submission.

• Monbusho guidelines for foreign faculty

While we all are occupied with the processes and problems of classroom teaching, many of us are finding our careers threatened by what is often a hostile or indifferent environment. We are very concerned about addressing these issues here, coherently and in a balanced manner. To that end, in the next issue we will carry the draft of the Ad Hoc Committee on Ageism Letter to the Monbusho that will be presented at the JALT AGM in Hiroshima. We will also carry notes on the debate that was generated over the issue.

The letter to the Monbusho is a direct result of the motion adopted at the 1995 AGM in Nagoya. The Motion reads:

• Motion to Formulate a Policy on Age Discrimination

(November, 4, 1995, JALT 95, Nagoya) Moved that the Executive Board investigate, formulate, and recommend a policy regarding teacher termination at universities and that this policy be brought before the 1996 AGM.

Since the motion stated that we were to have it ready by the 1996 AGM, with this letter, we hope you will have sufficient time to consider the issue and formulate an informed opinion. We have solicited opinions on this matter from members of JALT who are involved in the group (TADD) that went to the Monbusho on the 13th of June and two months earlier to hear the Monbusho's opinion on the guidelines issued in 1992.

Before, things get too mixed up, I should point out that there have been guidelines issued, one on the curriculum--a concern being dealt with by Tim Knowles and then there is the December, 1992 Directive to National Universities Concerning the Employment of Senior Foreign Lecturers which the Ad Hoc Committee on Ageism is dealing with. This issue has generated a tremendous number of rumors and opinions. We have even heard of teachers with wage cuts and salary deferments being told that the Monbusho has made these measures mandatory. Here in On CUE, as this

issue is unfolding, we have addressed related issues to hopefully bring a more factual perspective to what is happening.

In the September 1993 issue of *ON CUE* we carried, The Plight of Foreign Teachers (Steve McCarty), Special advisory Law for the Employment of Foreign Faculty in National and Public Universities (Translation, Mike Fox) which dealt with the opening of positions for foreign nationals, and Education Ministry panel reviews university hiring (reprinted from the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in *The Daily Yomiuri 5/21/93)*.

In the June 1994 issue we printed Facts, figures and recommendations for the U. S.—Japanese student exchange programs (Willetta Wyatt Silva), and in the column Of National Interest , Joshua Dale discussed Steve McCarty's article and the changes in status of foreign teachers in Japan. In that issue we also carried A taxing issue (Joshua Dale) which addressed some of the issues in pension and taxation facing expatriate teachers in Japan.

In the December 1994 issue, in our column Of National Interest (John Freeman), we reprinted the nation wide survey of the employment status of foreign nationals in national universities. This survey of 145 foreign teachers (response rate was 42%) was conducted by Wakakusa Law Office in Nara.

In our June 1995 issue we reprinted Ivan Hall's article Academic Apartheid which first appeared in Japan Policy of Research Institutes' JPRI Working Paper no. 3. In that same issue we printed a follow-up to the National Survey (John Freeman) and included the U. S. Embassy Press release regarding Ambassador Mondale's meeting, April 4, 1995, with Foreign professors to discuss the issue of dismissed foreign lecturers. There was also a short description of the NHK report on the issue.

In the December 1995 issue we carried three more articles: Gene van Troyer's article for the column Of National Interest: Age and race discrimination at Japanese universities: a time for discussion , Professionalism in Japan : Definition and issues in higher education (Thom Simmons) and A proposal for limited term contracts (Translation, Mike Fox). Gene's article contained his working proposals for JALT policies. His article has become the pivot point of the dabates now taking place in JALT. Thom Simmons' article, originally presented at the Omiya chapters' January, 1995 meeting, gave a recap of articles on the foreign faculty issue drawn predominantly from the pages of Science magazine from 1985 to 1993. He included the guidelines for the definition of professionalism from Nagai Michio (*Higher education in Japan: Its take off and crash,* 1971) and the Status of Teachers, Joint commentaries by the ILO and UNESCO. Mike's translation was of two article that appeared in the *Asahi Shinbun*, September 19, and November 27 1995. He added a succinct commentary that elucidated the chain of command for policy in public schools–I feel it is recommended reading. In the column Bits and pieces of that issue we reprinted a short article about the dismissal of a teacher who had engaged in what would normally be considered academic freedom. However, request for further information on this issue went unanswered and we had nothing further to report.

In the March 1996 issue, we published Rube Redfield's article, Yearly salaries for full-time college teachers and Brian McClure's article The new information Department: New and improved corn flakes wherein he provided his insight on the nature of changes of the Monbusho's restructuring of the general studies department.

• In this Issue

In this issue, Brian McClure elucidates some of the realities of teaching. Plans made in the middle of a hectic schedule, changed while the class is in progress and the obvious fact is, competent teachers must be able to adapt to people—their students. Creative solutions come as they do in their own time. On the other hand, pedagoguery, by forcing us into rigid schedules and inflexible goals, limits our ability to adapt to the students on a given day when the truth is teachers are constantly confronted with the need to improvise. This rigidity also seriously limits the time we have to teach and prepare. Improvisation and preparation are best done when we have time to capitalize on our success and mistakes. As we all know, the tasks and the goals that work with one student or one class are often inadequate or too advanced for others. Teachers need to time to plan for contingencies and this places a tremendous load on our need to prepare. Teaching effectively is hardly something done by the unprepared and the uncommitted. Brian's comments on the schedule limitations placed on teachers are useful in illuminating further the burdens teachers must contend with before they even get to the task of teaching.

The Exam Debate taken from several sources concerns one of the most famous (infamous?) aspects of higher education in Japan—the entrance exams. The influence these have on the students' lives and studies prior to tertiary education can not be underestimated. The preparation—or lack of it—that students have for learning to communicate in a foreign language is profoundly effected by the institution of entrance exams.

And last of all we have two short bits on permanent visas and On CUE distribution via alternative technology.

NO TIME THIS TIME: OUR ACADEMIC ANTI-SCHEDULE.

Brian McClure
Shizuoka University

Next year, swear to God, I'm going to have it all planned out ahead, but one Wednesday last month, I spent my morning shower choosing between two class plan possibilities.

How much might I squeeze into the 90-minutes of third year composition class? Having mastered paragraph structures, it was time for the students to move on to the short essay, and I have a lecture and a couple of exercises that work well. However, before plowing ahead, I would have to: return the two paragraphs they'd written in last week's class; explain my handout on editorial marks; pass out copies of exemplary work and common mistakes; and take enough time to answer a few individual questions. No point in pressing ahead if they don't understand how they're screwing up now, but all the busy work alone could easily eat up most of the period.

I knew that 90% of the students would have a good handle on basic three-paragraph essay structure after my short lecture and a simple example. Still, there is that eternal 10% on the losing end (half of which never should have been admitted to the university, and the Lord only knows how they got in, but that's a different article), and although I like to spend about one-third of total class time doing in-class writing, I don't want to go at breakneck speed the whole term

So, should I have them spend the last 40 minutes writing a paragraph, or should we spend the time in review? Mulling over my options during the second lather-rinse cycle that morning, I reached a decision only when I tallied up the remaining classes: by my count, there were nine more classes before summer vacation, barely enough time to work through a basic essay and a short opinion paper from each student. Schedule-wise, I had no choice but to press on to the paragraph-writing exercise.

It was a mistake. Later, with 10 minutes left in the class, it was clear that only the top few students would be able to finish. Most of them were violating our most basic rule (spend plenty of time planning and pre-writing) in their desperation to complete this ungraded assignment. I told them to put their pencils down and put the assignment out of their minds and go home, that we'd pick up from here next week, and I laughed it off. But it peeved me; by pushing forward, or by allowing the schedule to push me forward, I ended up wasting half an hour. Thirty short minutes, yes, but under our schedule that represents a sizable percentage of the term.

The miserable schedule. The perennially insidious and counterproductive schedule. Here's how it works against me, and against my students here at Shizuoka University, again this year.

By my figuring, there are roughly 141 scheduled class days this year: 75 days in the first term, 66 in the second. That's far too few to begin with. In a recent Washington Post article (reprinted in the ***May 17th Daily Yomiuri***), Milton Greenberg bemoans the 155-day academic calendar at American University, a 35-day reduction from the same calendar 30 years ago; but what I wouldn't give for the leeway of his extra two weeks compared to mine.

Think of it, 141 work days; picture that calendar in your head. In terms of the five-day work week, we're talking about a calendar year of less than six months

But even that low number is optimistically misleading. Our schedule at Shizuoka University seems designed to encourage absenteeism and even cancellations on specific days. For starters, there are no afternoon classes on Thursday, ever--ostensibly so that the instructors can attend committee meetings and watch each others' hair grow. What this sometimes leads to is a tendency to lop off Friday classes when previous weekdays are cut or shortened.

Here's a prime example. This school year began the second week of April. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were devoted to the surprisingly information-free guidance periods, so actual classes began on Thursday, April 11th, our weekly half-day. The following Tuesday, April 16th, all afternoon classes for third-year students were canceled so that they could go to the clinic to have their height and weight recorded (a worthless enough exercise, and one they are apparently unable to perform in their own time). This means my first class with the juniors was April 23rd. Classes on the following Monday and Friday are canceled for the insanely staggered Golden Week holidays; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday classes are scheduled, but in reality about 50% of those classes are canceled by the instructors, and classes actually held run at about 75% capacity, in my experience. A sizable chunk of the student body is unwilling to show up for a fraction of their normal weekly work, and I can't blame them at all.

The end result of all this is that by May 7th, one month into the (141-day) school year, most of my third-year students have attended only one class, the first class of the year, which is mostly consumed by logistics.

And Golden Week isn't the only example of such poor planning. Our second term begins on Monday, January 13th. Wednesday, January 15th is a national holiday--no classes.

The following day, Thursday, is the usual half-day. Friday the 15th is the first of three entrance exam days--all classes are canceled. Scratch the first week of the second term.

The situation is even worse for 4th-year students. For five weeks every spring, our English Education majors have student teaching assignments. This is a valuable and necessary exercise; nevertheless, it immediately lowers their year's class total to 115 days. Imagine that--115 days of class. In terms of a five-day work week, we're talking about a five-month calendar year.

But again, the 115-day assumption is beyond reality. Immediately after their student teaching, the seniors begin preparing for yet another in the endless rounds of tests, this one for teacher certification. Again, a necessity, and although they do attend class, they are distracted, and they honestly have little or no time outside class to study for much besides that fateful, or sometimes fatal, test. The tests, in most prefectures, come just a couple of weeks before summer vacation, making it nearly impossible to regain their attention before the holiday.

Immediately after the vacation, the students begin work on their 40-page senior thesis, due in mid-January. Happily for me, this project dovetails neatly into my composition syllabus; unhappily, my colleagues in linguistics, literature and education are again fighting a losing battle for their students' attention. By the time the senior project is handed in, most students already have their teaching credentials and a job lined up for next year. Why go to class? Why go on studying? Why bother? In their shoes, I would have a hard time summoning up any motivation. Many faculty members acquiesce to these constant interruptions, expecting the graduating students to show up for class only a couple of times a week throughout their final year. Perhaps I'll do the same 20 years down the road.

But I hope not, because consider this: the students' first two years are spent in University Requirement and survey courses. The third year is filled with specialized, in-depth coursework. But real instruction in the fourth-year is practically nil, filled as it is with practical, hands-on work and personal projects. In reality, our students get only one good year (141 days) of serious, in-depth, subject-intensive instruction.

All by itself, our buckshot schedule shatters a major Japanese myth, that of the lazy Japanese college student. The schedule itself, in my opinion, actively discourages continuity within courses, much less between courses. In many cases, the schedule even discourages attendance. Who among us has never canceled a class, knowing that attendance would be low and the absent students would have to play catch-up? This year, I let my classes vote whether to cancel the mid-Golden Week classes and add an extra class in July, or to go ahead and follow the sanctioned schedule. The students surprised me, to their credit, by voting overwhelmingly to stick to official schedule, and almost all of them showed up. The problem is not the students.

And don't get me wrong, I'm not arguing for more work. I'm no Iron Horse; personally, I love the class-free time the schedule provides. It allows me to work on not only research, but also short projects like this article. Besides, long vacations are the fringe benefit in what is traditionally a low-wage profession.

But the schedule frustrates me because not only is it too short, and not only does it disrupt the flow of the school year, it is also already so pared-down, with both official and unofficial days off, that it precludes any further absences, for conferences or research trips or even genuine sickness. It mandates my free time, making it difficult for me to use that time productively.

Maybe, in this way, the university schedule, the anti-schedule, performs that most important of all public services in this regimented society: it keeps us in line.

Academic Debate on Language Testing: From Lecture Hall to Newsprint to Cyberspace.

Editor's Note: Academicians in the liberal arts are accustomed to giving and hearing lectures, to submitting their work for vetting, to publishing in edited or refereed journals, newspapers, and magazines, and to sending and reading heated letters-to-the-editors of such publications. These days, however, the rapid growth of electronic media of communications, particularly computer bulletin boards and the Internet, leads to a much more rapid pace of academic debate. CUE Coordinator Thom Simmons has compiled the following sample of various types of academic debate.

The topic here is language testing in Japan. The debate stems from Professor James Dean Brown's plenary speech at the Nagoya International JALT Conference. Professor Brown's lecture prompted a letter-to-the-editor of *The Daily Yomiuri* from Professor Kensaku Yoshida. Our sample begins with this letter.

Professor Yoshida's letter was followed by a variety of replies: a rebuttal from Professor Brown; a counter-rebuttal from Professor Yoshida; a series of letters from Daily Yomiuri readers; and, concurrently with all of this, a lively electronic debate in the cyberspace of Chubu University's JALTCALL bulletin board. That debate ranged from short comments to essays.

Without further ado, then, ON CUE presents the best of this debate about language testing in Japan.

Language testing in Japan: A Cultural Problem?

Professor Kensaku Yoshida
Department of English Language & Studies
Sophia University
(Reprinted from *The Daily Yomiuri*,
Monday, January 15, 1996)

Few people would argue that language testing methods in Japan do not need to be improved. We know from experience that college entrance examinations are not the most reliable or valid means of testing students' proficiency in English, or, for that matter, any subject.

Last November, Dr. J. D. Brown gave a thought-provoking presentation at the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) International Conference in Nagoya. His point was that language testing in Japan is very unscientific and in need of much improvement.

However, certain things must be considered before denouncing the present situation altogether on the basis of what one might call Western values of testing. When we talk about cultural imperialism in the teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom, we sometimes forget that this can also be applied to the testing process. What to an American might seem like a primitive and unscientific method of testing could very well be a reflection of the cultural values inherent in the educational tradition of a given country.

One of the arguments about the unscientific nature of entrance examinations in Japan is that the results could be unreliable because there is virtually no pretesting on the test items.

Pretesting refers to the process of "testing" an examination on a sample of the population that will be taking it to ensure that the test and individual items contained in it are reliable in measuring the abilities of examinees.

For example, if the test was too easy and everyone scored 100, then it failed to determine the skills of those taking it. On the other hand, if it was too difficult, then everyone might score a 0. In both cases, the reliability of the test would be rated .00.

A totally reliable test would get a rating of 1.00. In actuality, however, that is an impossibility. It is assumed that any test rating over .70 has a relatively decent relevance in gauging examinees' skills.

In this way, testers fine-tune an examination to match the abilities of those who will be taking it.

The problem of pretesting, however, must be considered within the context of the Japanese sense of "fairness."

In Japan, "fairness" means fairness for everyone, regardless of physical or intellectual differences. In education, this principle is reflected in the fact that there is virtually no grade skipping. The introduction of a tracking system has also been strongly criticized because it presupposes individual differences in academic ability.

Even though many Japanese children spend several years abroad studying in a foreign language, the percentage who opt to enter a grade below their biological peers when they return to Japan is less than 1 percent. In other words, fairness means being the same as everyone else.

In terms of entrance examinations, this concept is realized in at least the following two ways:

– No pretesting--making sure no one (especially someone belonging to the same population as the examinees) other than those who write the test know the contents beforehand.

– Providing an equal opportunity to prepare for the following year's examination by making the test public as soon as it over.

Many college students prepare at juku (cram schools). It would be disastrous if such students--students from the same population as other examinees were given a pretest and then taught the material at such schools. The concept of fairness is hindered if people other than the test writers are exposed to a test item before the examination. In fact, many prep schools boast that their practice tests contain problems that are also on university entrance examinations. Such publicity attracts potential students.

It is also impossible to pretest items as a part of the actual test--as in the case of the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) because entrance examinations are made public as soon as they are completed. Publishers publish these tests and prep schools use them to prepare their students for the following year's examination. Even if it were legally possible for universities not to release their examinations to the public, it probably would not make good financial sense to do so--the less information high schools and prep schools have about a university's test, the less likely they are to recommend students to take the exam because they cannot prepare them for it.

Furthermore, there is a recent tendency at quite a few colleges to allow students to take the entrance examination

questions home after they finish the test. There is also a growing demand that answers to all questions be made public.

One other point must be mentioned. Brown noted in his talk that the validity of English entrance examinations could be questioned because of the inclusion of translation questions. True, translation has always been treated as a separate skill from the so-called four skills. However, I am not convinced of the invalidity of including it.

One important point to consider when talking about language tests is whether you are talking about "monolingual" proficiency or "bilingual" proficiency. From the monolingual point of view, translation skills are probably not a valid component of language testing because translation is not needed when using a language for monolingual purposes.

However, if we look at research in bilingualism, people like Kenji Hakuta note that translation skill (although not literal translation) is a prominent metalinguistic trait of a balanced bilingual. In other words, balanced bilinguals are capable of saying the same thing in two different languages.

From a more practical point of view, there are English literature departments that specifically want students with the ability to translate.

If the purpose of the English examination were not only to assess the English ability of the examinee, but also to assess the student's degree of bilingualism, then there should be no problem in including translation questions.

I am personally all for trying to make our entrance examinations as scientific as possible. However, I also believe Japanese society places certain conditions on what can actually be done. Also, the validity of a test depends on what test makers define as language proficiency—e.g., monolingualism or bilingualism? Cultural differences affect language testing, too.

J. D. Brown posted his response to be forwarded by C. J. Poel the participants on JALTCALL prior to the publication in *The Yomiuri Daily.*

Forwarded message:
From: brownj@hawaii.edu (J D Brown)
To: C.J.Poel@eworld.com
Date: 96-02-05 00:52:34 PST

Chris,

Thanks for sending along all that JALTCALL stuff [The exam debate which is presented below]. That's interesting reading, and I am archiving it for future ammunition.

I just got word that my rebuttal went to press *Feb. 5th, on page 15 of The Daily Yomiuri.* They never got back to me after I faxed it to them so I had no idea it was coming out so soon. Anyway, as promised, you will find below the text that I sent them. I have no idea if that is what they printed 'cause I haven't seen it yet.
See ya, JD :)

[Coordinator's note: J. D Brown is on the "JALT Journal" Editorial Board, a contributing editor to "TESOL Matters" and an officer on the forming N-SIG, "Testing and Evaluation," being organized by Leo Yoffe. Following is Professor Brown's rebuttal. We have not compared it to the version printed in the DY.]

Japanese entrance exams: A measurement problem?

James Dean Brown
University of Hawaii
[Later published in *The Daily Yomiuri,* February 5, 1996, p. 15]

Professor Kensaku Yoshida's article in *The January 15th The Daily Yomiuri* criticized my plenary speech at the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT) International Conference in Nagoya. To summarize his arguments, he begins by labeling my views "cultural imperialism." Then he says that piloting exam questions is impossible in Japan, so its okay that we don't know how reliable the exams are. Besides, reliability is not as important as "fairness," a concept he claims has some special Japanese meaning. Finally, he excuses the exams for having unknown validity because translation skills and true bilingualism are desirable in Japan. Aside from the fact that Yoshida's arguments defending the status quo are at best incomplete and weak, Yoshida makes a number of statements that are factually incorrect.

First, he chooses to use the inflammatory phrase "cultural imperialism" in referring to my views. Cultural imperialism is the imposition of the values of one culture on another. I did not impose anything on Japan. Who could? I was simply expressing an opinion. Indeed, I have said repeatedly in my many talks on this topic that the current state of the entrance exams is a Japanese problem—one that can only be solved by Japanese people in Japanese ways. However, defending the status quo, as Yoshida does, is no way to solve the problems—problems that he admits exist.

Second, Yoshida labels my views as "Western values of testing." The values of reliability and validity are important in scientific measurement all over the world, especially in Japan. Even in the social sciences in Japan, I have seen considerable concern for reliable and valid measurement. Indeed, some of the finest measurement specialists in the world are in Japan. Why then, aren't these concepts applied to the Japanese entrance exams?

Third, in talking about test reliability, Yoshida states that "any test over .70 has a relatively decent relevance in gauging examinees skills." He seems confused about what test reliability is. Test reliability is about consistency and accuracy, not about "relevance." He is also forgetting that a test which is 70 percent accurate is also 30 percent inaccurate. Consider how happy you would be to learn that the scales at your local post office are 30 percent inaccurate. The government would never allow that to happen. Does Yoshida really believe that, because of some traditional sense of "fairness" in Japan, measurements that affect the futures of young Japanese can be less accurate than measurements for postage?

Fourth, Yoshida says that "the entrance exams are made public as soon as they are completed." The fact is that some of the entrance exams in Japan are published, while others are not. In contrast, all of the entrance exams in the U. S. (for example, TOEFL, ACT, SAT, & GRE) are published within 30 days of being administered. Like in Japan, all students in the U. S. Have equally "fair" opportunities to prepare for those tests using books, software, and cram schools. Nonetheless, test developers in the U.S. miraculously manage to pilot each and every test question.

Fifth, Yoshida nonetheless argues that it is impossible to "pretest" (by which I think he means pilot) questions in

Japan. In my plenary speech, I suggested three ways that such piloting could be done in Japan. Did he stay for the whole speech? Regardless, this "pretesting" argument is a red herring that distracts readers from the central issue: entrance exam questions are seldom analyzed statistically (even after the exams), and such results are never made public. Why is that? Is it because the statistics might indicate major problems with the quality of the test questions, test reliability, and test validity?

Factual errors aside, Yoshida's arguments are just the opinions of one person--one who seems to be serving as an apologist for the existing exam system. Unfortunately, his opinions include sweeping generalizations like "In Japan, fairness means" Does he really think that all Japanese agree with him about what fairness means?

The Japan that I know is a wonderfully varied country with people who are diverse in culture and in opinion. Over the years, I have discussed the entrance exams with literally thousands of people in classes and workshops all over Japan from Kyushu to Hokkaido. Those people have differed considerably in their opinions. Some expressed views similar to Yoshida's. Many others were critical of the entrance exam system, including its fairness, its costs, and its effects on Japanese children. These latter people asked me, indeed begged me, to speak out on this issue.

In studying the entrance exams in a variety of ways, I have found the following to be facts:

1) The entrance exams are not piloted. Thus the questions are of unknown quality, difficulty, and discrimination.

2) The reliability of the entrance exams is generally unknown and is not reported publicly, so a certain unknown amount of inaccuracy is affecting decisions about the futures of Japanese students.

3) The validity of the exams (translation or otherwise) is not studied, or reported publicly, so the test developers are not sure what they are testing (monolingual, bilingual, or otherwise).

4) The exams are expensive (from 10,000 to 40,000 each), and students take many exams.

5) The high schools and universities make a great deal of money from the exams, especially from the 80 to 90 percentage of students who fail. Thus, administrators, teachers, and professors have a vested interest in maintaining the current "traditional" system.

6) The cram schools and publishers make a great deal of money from students preparing for the exams, and from the many ronin who fail, so they too have a vested interest.

7) Many Japanese would like to see the present examination system changed.

8) The entrance procedures in Japan have changed in the past and can be changed in the future.

Let's not waste time making excuses for the existing entrance exam system. Let's instead look squarely at the facts involved and try to find solutions. These exams are dramatically affecting the futures of many young Japanese. Shouldn't they be the best that they can be?

(James Dean Brown is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Hawaii, and often serves as a visiting professor at Temple University Japan.)

The following is Sophia University Prof. Kensaku Yoshida's reply to Hawaii University Prof. James Dean Brown's article, "Japanese entrance exams: A measurement problem?" In that article, Brown commented on Yoshida's previously published views on testing in Japan.

Testing the Bounds of Culture

Kensaku Yoshida
Faculty of English Language & Studies
Sophia University
(Reprinted from *The Daily Yomiuri*, February 12, 1996, p. 15)

Testing is an important issue, and I'm glad that people are responding to my article *("Language testing in Japan: A cultural problem?," Jan. 15)*, and I am also very happy that Dr. J. D.. Brown himself has offered a rebuttal.

Of all the criticisms I have received, it seems to me that the main one has to do with my seeming to be a defender of the status quo and nothing more. When I read the article that actually came out, I felt the same way. It was unfortunate that the editors had to change a few words here and there and delete a section of my original article in order to fit it into the limited space they had.

My argument was that in each society there are social and cultural reasons why certain things are the way they are. Therefore, it must be on the basis of a clear recognition of those factors that changes have to be contemplated. However, I am in no way satisfied with the present situation. I am all for change -- but on the condition that there is sufficient understanding of the situation in which the change is being called for.

Dr. Brown mentioned in his article about the use of ACT, SAT, GRE, etc.— all piloted (I thank Dr. Brown for correcting my use of terminology) and scientifically measured-as official tests for entrance purposes, etc. in the United States. That's fine in the United States, but one look at the examinations given in Japan -- from high school entrance examinations, college entrance examinations, graduate school entrance examinations, to national bar examinations, medical examinations, public servants' examinations, etc. -- would show that pilot testing is just not a part of Japan's testing culture. English examinations are just one of the many subjects tested for entrance purposes, and college entrance examinations are just one of the many different examinations administered each year. Testing is a cultural institution.

As Dr. Brown says, there is a lot of good, first-rate scientific research being conducted by Japanese scientists using scientific measurements. But when the same scientists are involved in writing entrance examinations, I don't think they pilot test their items. There is a testing culture that exists independent of scientific research, and why shouldn't there be?

Let me mention a couple of anecdotes. Years ago, there was a serious incident concerning the leakage of college entrance examinations at a major Japanese university. After that incident, even at our university, which had nothing to do with the scandal, full-time teachers were told not to take part-time teaching jobs at prep schools, in order to avoid even the slightest suspicion of leakage. More recently, I recall an incident that became national news when it became know that a professor who was involved in the writing of the national medical examination had used a problem in a course he was

teaching. The problem ultimately appeared on the examination as one of the practice problems.

There were changes in the wording of my article that came out four weeks ago, which distorted the meaning of some things I wanted to say. For example, in the original article I had written: "There are many college students who work in juku and prep schools after entering college..." Unfortunately, this came out in the article as: "Many college students prepare at juku..."

I was referring to those college students who would naturally be potential pilot test takers (being members of the same population as those who would actually be taking the tests) because they have taken on part-time teaching jobs at juku and prep schools -- as often happens.

The situation might not be the same as those I mentioned above, but if these students were exposed to some of the potential items or passages of a potential entrance examination, and if they were able to remember even just a few of them (e.g., the content of reading or listening passages and the kind of questions asked about them—main ideas, topics, etc.), then there would be cause for a lot of concern. (Note: Japanese universities are not testing institutions that might be capable of pilot testing hundreds, or even thousands, of test items each year.)

I am not, however, saying that things are fine the way they are. It was again very unfortunate that although I had mentioned that even without pilot testing, many institutions are seriously trying to make their tests as fair and as reliable as possible, the sections was completely deleted from the article. In that section I had specifically given the reliability coefficient of last year's English entrance examinations given for the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Sophia to show that, even without pilot testing, people can come up with quite reliable tests. We were able to get a .85 reliability for our English examination, which might not be as high as the .95 for the TOEFL, but is as high as the reliability score for, e.g., the TWE. We also calculated the reliability of the World History examination, and got a .90 coefficient of reliability. No piloting was done, but someone must have been doing a fairly good job, and I don't think ours is a "unique" case.

Although Dr. Brown says Japanese test makers should reveal the reliability scores of their tests, I'm not sure I understand why. I only did so (above) to show that with conscientious efforts to make good entrance examinations — even without piloting the items beforehand —reliable results can be attained. We calculated the reliability for our own purposes— to make our tests better. Do people honestly thing that there is no analyzing of examination results just because reliability scores are not made public?

Of course test writers of the National Center of University's Entrance Examinations analyze their results. People use methods ranging from such scientific methods as Item Response Theory to more subjective reviewing of the test items. But they do it in order to make better tests for the future.

Furthermore, most universities in Japan are now at a stage where they must reconsider the content of their entrance examinations. High school graduates studying under the new curriculum guidelines —not only English —will be taking entrance examinations from 1997. As far as the English examination is concerned, few universities will be introducing an oral component in their entrance examinations the first year, but they are now beginning to debate this issue very seriously. Below are some other ideas—related to English examinations —which are also being discussed. Some schools are thinking of simply eliminating English from their entrance examinations. Some are thinking of putting more emphasis on more objective criteria such as TOEFL scores -- especially for returnee examinations. Others are looking at the possibility of considering "special talents"—e.g., first-prize winners of English speech contests, volunteer work with foreign workers in Japan, etc. -- as entrance criteria. Still others are debating the inclusion of oral interviews in their selection process.

Can we expect universities to pilot test all these different ideas? I don't think so. But should they, therefore, be thrown out?

I appreciate Dr. Brown's consideration for the young people of Japan, but the suggestions he gives seem to insinuate that unless the Japanese do things the (Western? or American?) " scientific way," they are not doing their job -- that unless statistical scores are given, something must be wrong. I personally think that's going a little beyond just giving an opinion.

Let me just mention again that I am not condoning the present situation. There is a lot to be done to make it better and to change it. There are a lot of people who are not as serious about entrance examinations as they should be. What I am trying to say, however, is that there is a reality in which we work —the testing culture of Japan—and our job is to do the best we can in it. There are cultural and social restrictions in any society. I do not think that the fact that something works well in one culture will also guarantee its success in another. One of the frustrations some people feel about Japanese entrance examinations come from the fact that they cannot employ the American system.

I hope that through these discussions, we—both Japanese and non-Japanese— can cooperate and come up with better, more practical solutions to the problems we face.

[The following are letters sent to *The Daily Yomiuri* from readers commenting on the Yoshida/ Brown exchange.]

Testing in Japan

Chris Samsell
(Reprinted from *The Daily Yomiuri*,
Monday, January 29, 1996, page 15)

As a former student of Dr. J. D. Brown's course in "Testing" at Temple University Japan and currently the testing coordinator for a Japanese corporation, I'd like to respond to the article (Jan. 15, page 15) by Prof. Kensaku Yoshida of Sophia University, which largely refuted Dr. Brown's research.

Yoshida wrote about Brown's presentation at the recent JALT conference and correctly stated his main point that "language testing in Japan is very unscientific and in need of improvement." That is, it is not fair.

The opening paragraph of Yoshida's article argued that few people would disagree that "college entrance examinations are not the most reliable or valid means of testing students' proficiency in English." He seems to want to concede their need for improvement, but claims the public knows it. Not true. People -- especially teachers, students, and parents -- know the system is terribly stressful but support the necessity of these tests precisely because it is assumed the examination process is fair.

The truth is, professors like Yoshida have gotten away with wielding power and not being held accountable for it. They write the tests, make no effort to analyze the results, then they refuse to reveal the answers. It should be considered

scandalous. Yet, Yoshida wheels out the "culture" excuse which functions, of course, to effectively end debate. Why is it this excuse is often used – predictably -- when something is obviously wrong?

Ultimately, what is the result of Yoshida's commentary? He says he is all for "scientific" testing, yet offers no suggestions or intentions about actually doing it. It seems to be the status quo from him. And we all know what that is: Japan will remain —n regard to its business and other global needs -- a nation with inadequate English language skills.

Defining Fairness

John Haberstroh
(Reprinted from *The Daily Yomiuri*,
Monday, January 29, 1996, page 15)

In "Language testing in Japan: A cultural problem?" (The Daily Yomiuri, Jan. 15) Kensaku Yoshida voices legitimate test security concerns over the pretesting of entrance exams. He also, however, introduces a counterproductive notion: that we may not want to change methods of testing in Japan because they reflect Japan's unique notion of fairness.

Yoshida makes his case by stating that "in Japan, fairness means fairness for everyone, regardless of physical or intellectual differences." Well, fairness means exactly the same thing in the West. Later, he adds that, in Japan, "fairness means being the same as everyone else." It seems to me that evidence is needed for such a special Japanese meaning of the word. For example, we might look in a Japanese dictionary to see if fairness and conformity are synonyms. I don't think they are. Or, we could conduct a word-meaning survey of a fair (in the "Western" sense) representation of Japan's population. I have a feeling that such a survey would show that Japanese people, just like people in the West, have a wide range of sometimes contradictory ideas about what fairness means. "Sameness" is part, but not all of the meaning, for almost everyone, everywhere.

I hope Yoshida's cultural diversion does not de legitimize efforts by both Japanese and foreign experts to improve the quality of English-language testing, and entrance exams in general, in Japan.

Exam success like playing lottery

Hiroko Ohkubo
(Reprinted from *The Daily Yomiuri*, Feb. 12, 1996, p. 15)

I took an entrance examination a few years ago and know how unreliable they are. I learned that taking an entrance examination is the same as playing the lottery. They lucky winners enter a college or company and tackle the next obstacle, which is called TOEFL. (I know this because my major is English.) However, thanks to the TOEFL, I was motivated to study harder.

It is likely that the problem is the multiple-choice tests, which allow people to guess the right answers and do well without studying. I once heard that entrance examinations for universities in France are very different from what we have. An examinee has to be interviewed for hours and hours and hours! Furthermore, there are more than 10 examiners in front of the testee. It's kind of like bullying! This method, however, is much better than what we have.

If Japanese universities were to adopt this method, the application process would be much more fair. Of course I understand that changing our system would be very difficult, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't think about it.

The article "Language testing in Japan" (Jan. 15, p. 15) was a little bit difficult for me. I didn't clearly understand the "examination as scientific" part, for instance. Anyway, these are some honest opinions from one of the foolish (and lucky) winners in our examination "lottery."

Don't hide exam problems.

Christopher Jon Poel
(Reprinted from *The Daily Yomiuri*,
Monday, January 19, 1996)

As a university teacher, I have enjoyed reading the debate on university entrance exams the past few weeks in The Daily Yomiuri. I would like to respond to two points in Kensaku Yoshida's recent article
(Feb. 12, p. 15), namely the issues of publicly revealing exam reliability and the necessity of pilot testing of exam items.

Prof. Yoshida wrote: "Although Dr. Brown says Japanese test makers should reveal the reliability scores of their tests, I'm not sure I understand why." I do! Accountability. Calculating the reliability and effectiveness of individual items is quite simple, especially if a test is computer scored. But once those statistics are calculated, what does the institution do with them? At many universities, the answer seems to be: precious little.

Last year at my university I asked if I could have access to the exam answer sheets in order to analyze them, and my request was met with suspicion and delay. Approval was finally granted under the condition that I do not reveal the results anywhere. The assumption seemed to be that the tests were bad, and that analyzing them would somehow be damaging to the school. When I found low reliability scores, what was the result? A lot of people sucked their teeth and then tried to sweep it under the carpet by suggesting, much as Prof. Yoshida does, that such objective "Western" analyses were unnecessary, and even inappropriate to Japan.

Furthermore, Prof. Yoshida suggests that piloting exam items, something which is fundamental in sound test construction, is unnecessary and impossible to carry out in Japan. An incident reported in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Feb. 7) clearly illustrates the need for piloting. A university in Tokyo discovered after students had taken their physics entrance exam that two out of four items were bad. One item had no possible answer while on the other the exam writers had mistakenly put a minus sign where there should have been a plus sign. Since these two items had to be thrown out, the students were judged by a two-item exam. How reliable is that? (Answer: Not very!) A simple piloting involving several trusted graduate students, or even several teachers who were not actually involved in the writing of the exam, would have caught those mistakes.

Serious problems like the one just mentioned may be unusual, but we don't know for sure because universities won't discuss such matters. It does make us wonder how many less serious, but nevertheless important, mistakes are being hidden. By suggesting that universities do not need to be accountable to the public, Prof. Yoshida is again defending the status quo, as suggested by Dr. Brown and others. Let's not keep this debate hidden, Yoshida-Sensei. Let's work together to reach our common goal— having the best entrance exams that we possibly can.

The Exam Debate

In the following discussion that took place on JALTCALL, the JALT BBS out of Chubu University, there was a vigorous debate of the article written by Yoshida Kensaku criticizing the address that J. D. Brown gave at the JALT 95 Conference n Nagoya. The participants, part of a developing college in cyberspace, employed a number of writing styles as they expressed their opinions and feelings on the issue. Most of the participants have obviously given some thought to the situation and many have first hand experience with the actual construction and administration of these tests here in Japan. Many also evince familiarity with classic precepts in logic because they have illuminated a number of serious flaws in reasoning employed in the first essay by Yoshida.

This is a bit of experimental journalism as we strive to put interactive computer mediated communication on paper. The primary corpus was derived from the BBS and there have been additional comments added by the participants after the fact. While the debates continues, we reprint the results thus far, here for your perusal.
Thomas Simmons, CUE Coordinator

[Editor's Note: The following comments are re-printed here with only minor editing of punctuation and format when necessary for clarity; the occasional, minor errors which remain reflect the reality of the un-mediated, unedited, and ever-flowing conversation of cyberspace.]

Rick Reynolds: Kensaku Yoshida, professor at the Department of English Language and Studies at Sophia University, noted in the Monday, January 15, 1996 *The Daily Yomiuri* here in Japan that Dr. J. D. Brown in a conference in Japan pointed out "that language testing in Japan is very unscientific and in need of much improvement." Yoshida Sensei puts that in the context of cultural imperialism and Western values of testing.

Steve Tripp: It is mentally lazy to use this cultural imperialism argument. JD Brown is just expressing an opinion, not forcing anyone to do anything. Yoshida is defending a system that is well-known to be flawed.

Rick Reynolds: He defends the testing in Japan by explaining that it is based on the principal of fairness which he defines as the cultural value inherent in Japan as "fairness for everyone, regardless of physical or intellectual differences" and "fairness means being the same as everyone else."

M. J. Sheffner: Don't understand this. First, "everyone else" is who? Everyone else are not the same and "the same" in what way?

Steve Tripp: I would guess that there are many Japanese who don't buy Yoshida's definition. Here's another definition of fairness: treating equals equally, treating unequals unequally.

Thom Simmons: I must admit that this is very contradictory. The statement about fairness seems to imply there is no inequality yet the entire exam system is designed to rank people on the basis of their inequality. Why do I say this? Because not every body gets to go to the University of Tokyo. If everybody were in fact the same, then the entire issue– the institution-- of 'gakureiki' or 'credentialism' would be non-existent because a degree from any daigaku would be no different from the prestige daigakus. I agree with Tripp, this whole culturalism business is very lazy, very sloppy.

M. J. Sheffner: I heartily second Steve Tripp's comments.

Peter Lutes: This cultural value inherent in Japan strikes me as being very similar to the uniqueness of Japanese snow, or sprinkler systems, to give prominent, past examples of this line of rationale. Unfortunately, Japanese cultural values/uniqueness are often used as a way of avoiding debate. To defend a testing methodology on the basis of cultural imperialism vs. a inherent cultural value seems to be counter productive (especially when dealing with a foreign language)

Rick Reynolds: I'm no test expert but I do recognize a dogfight when I hear barking. And, you won't catch me picking bones when the big dogs fight. In one of the marvels of timing, I graded a Japanese designed language test that asked the student to put words in sentence order. The words were "drive, if, want, you, yourself, get, a, good, to, map." How many sentences could you make with those words? More than one? And, if more than one, how would you evaluate the L2 abilities reflected by the different answers?

M. J. Sheffner: In Yoshida Sensei's view, test items are "to ensure that the test and individual items contained in it are reliable in measuring the abilities of examinees." Dr. Brown and others have attacked the unscientific nature of entrance examinations in Japan because there is virtually no pretesting on the test items. Fairness, in the view of Yoshida Sensei, is met when no one other than those who write the test know the contents.

In Yoshida Sensei's view, test items are "to ensure that the test and individual items contained in it are reliable in measuring the abilities of examinees." Dr. Brown and others have attacked the unscientific nature of entrance examinations in Japan because there is virtually no pretesting on the test items. Fairness, in the view of Yoshida Sensei, is met when no one other than those who write the test know the contents.

Thom Simmons: If "to ensure that the test and individual items contained in it are reliable in measuring the abilities of examinees," is Yoshida's objective then he is using Brown's rope with which to hang himself because he spends a lot time affirming Brown's assertions.

Peter Lutes: In Japan, the biggest factors influencing a student's future—employment possibilities, social contacts, and even marriage partners--can be/are all affected by the "rank" of one's university . Is it fair to test someone in an entrance exam that does not necessarily test what it is supposed to test? Given a test that with unknown contents of unproven test validity seems to be more random than fair. Is it fair in

any sense of the word when students attend juku (the price of some jukus especially in rural areas is exorbitant) and have to study patterns that are of little practical use in order to pass these 'fair' exams?

Rick Reynolds: Yoshida Sensei makes thoughtful points in the newspaper about translation questions and the bilingual or monolingual abilities of students. He produces culturally revealing arguments for Japanese sensibilities of fairness. And, I applaud his support for making Japanese entrance examinations as scientific as possible.

Thom Simmons: I did not get that from the article at all. I don't think he argued for any point concerning the bilingual or monolingual abilities of the students. And I am totally in the dark about what he is calling 'cultural' so I can't see that they are culturally revealing. Culture is usually regarded as shared if it is to be considered culture and I have no idea what he is sharing with anyone. I have been backward and forward over the article and he is not elucidating his definitions.

He pointedly avoids the issue regarding support for making them scientific. Lip service and rhetoric aside, he is actively supporting a non-scientific approach to exams.

Rick Reynolds: In my case, though, I would like to get some answers about the validity of testing and if not answers then some issues we should consider. In another forum, I am enrolled in an online class called Fluency First. One proposal was that no current test predicted whole language ability accurately so one should be designed. Who can argue with that? I would be surprised to find a test that could predict preposition use accurately (or anything we could agree on—if you don't mind me bringing that up).

Is testing to see who has acquired a certain body of knowledge? To see who will have eventual success in language? To give students grades? Motivation? Is a lack of testing a failure to take learning seriously? A disregard for failure altogether? Is there a way to verify the validity of testing?

M. J. Sheffner: Some excellent points made by Rick Reynolds, and excellent questions, too. In the example he gave, it seems that fairness, in Yoshida's view, is met "when no-one other than those who write the test know the ANSWERS."

As I have been on exam-making teams for several years (university entrance-exams, that is), I can add that whenever I have pointed out that a particular question has more than one "correct" answer, especially when the choices offered include more than one correct answer, I have always been taken seriously and the question and/or answers have been changed until I and another "gaijin" are satisfied.

Thom Simmons: I think Sheffner's experience elucidates the claim that the entire process is as varied as the institutions using these exams. We have people here who will testify that the exams are a sham and others who say they are constructed to reflect a real language. With this in mind, I perceive this as yet another shortcoming inherent in Yoshida's essay to delineate the exam process and their environment because he may not speak for all of these institutions. We seem to be left with the original premise of Brown's speech--the exams are not reliable since the exams themselves are not examined nor constructed for reliability. Yoshida confirms this conclusion. He does not say it is not true. He says that in Japan reliability is not necessary because of cultural differences. But he neither evinces an understanding of reliability nor is he articulating what he means by culture in his essay.

But let's get to the biggee--what precisely do we know that the university entrance exams actually do? We can ask for a correlation with something--how about the ability of the exam to predict students' performance in school--no, bad idea. The SAT is far superior psychometrically and it does not predict performance after the first year (source: H. Gardner). How about job placement-what kind of job do they get relative to their entrance exam score? Nah--gakureki (credentialism) renders this approach a complete shambles--the reputation of the daigaku awarding the degree is the most important thing (source: Ikuo Amano and a great many others). Well, gee, what then? I know—ZIPPOLA! They are meaningless. They have no empirically or scientifically ascertainable function.

But this is not surprising--according to Amano Ikuo, they were imported from China via the medieval Jesuit universities in Europe and their primary use to choose members of the bureaucracy was modeled on the early 19th century Prussian State and their continued use is an overt expression of the long-term love affair the Monbusho (and others) have with the intellectually specious, morally bankrupt, tradition of the reification of the unitary concept of the quasi-Binet perspective on predicting failure in French Schools--about 90 years ago!

According to Professor Horio Teruhisa (personal communication and an article in "Comparative Education" in 1986), the rationale for these exams in Japan is the same as the racialist eugenicists in the United States and Britain who promote such specious hypothesis as the racial inferiority of minorities on the basis of their I. Q. test results.

Steve McGuire: Am I misremembering, or has anyone neglected to mention that students pay 30,000 yen for each entrance exam they take. I'm sorry, is that cynical of me?

How do I say this? Uh, at a 'friend's' school they have three departments, and students take an entrance exam with two parts: Japanese and English—neither of which have anything directly to do with their major. They also have to do a project based on their major. If a student fails the Japanese or the English part of the test, they don't get in. Wait, that's not right: if there are 30 places (to pick a number from a hat) only the highest 30 get in.

However, it seems really strange that applicants can get rejected on only one part of the test. How does getting a low score on an English or a Japanese test relate to future performance?

I've often asked my friend that, and he schizophrenically replies he doesn't know.

Nelson Einwaechter: I've been following the thread on entrance exams with great interest. Here, where I teach, we also are limited on what we can ask the prospective students during the oral interview.

Even though I ask very simple questions in English, the interviewees are very nervous. I want to tell them to relax because this part of the test really doesn't count for much. Some pairs of professors do not include native English speakers, so many of the students are not asked anything in English (despite the fact that these are students who want to major in English and most of these professors teach English).

99.9% of the interviewees are given a "B" based on how they answer questions in Japanese such as "Why did

you decide to come to this school?" A few are given "A" or "C".

Are the jukus misinformed about the importance (or lack thereof) of these oral interviews or is my school one of a few that handles this component of the entrance exam in this manner?

John Shillaw: Thanks to Kevin Ryan, I've now had the chance to read the original article by Yoshida about testing and JD Brown's Nagoya address. It strikes me that most of what Yoshida says is reasonable within the context of Japanese entrance exams. I wasn't at Nagoya and so don't know exactly what Brown said about exams and pre-testing. If he spoke about the general desirability of trialing items, then OK: if he specifically mentioned the need to pre-test items on the entrance exams, then this is pretty naive.

What irked me, and others who have responded, is the old 'culture' hobby-horse. The format of the traditional exams here has nothing directly related to culture; it is an 'educational' choice (accepting that education is part of culture). I could take issue at length about the question of mono/bilingual assessment, but see it essentially as a red herring in terms of the kind of assessment that should be going on in the exams.

Yoshida gamely tries, in my opinion, to defend the indefensible. The exams are not as effective as they could be and are a perpetuation of a Grand Tradition that refuses to lie down and die. Until the test construction is less controlled by the linguistic/lit groups and more people gain some background in testing and SLA, the tests are only going to evolve slowly at best. Japanese teachers also need to have greater confidence in their own English ability.

Thom Simmons: Yoshida throws a wrench in the works here that is arguably an attempt to distract or 'poison the well':

"However, certain things must be considered before denouncing the present situation altogether on the basis of what one might call Western values of testing." (Yoshida, 1996)

These tests are in fact attributed to western values--by Japanese scholars--from the inception of their use in the Meiji era. An example of this scholarship that I mentioned earlier is that of Amano Ikuo *(Education and Examination in Modern Japan*, 1990, University of Tokyo Press*)*. He argues that these tests are specifically an attempt at mimicking western institutions. To divorce them from their historical foundations, as Yoshida is doing at this late stage, is to close the barn door after the horses are already out.

The issue of 'Cultural Imperialism' had not been addressed, established as an issue by nor was the concept defined. It was introduced, without argument by Yoshida:

"When we talk about cultural imperialism in the teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom, we sometimes forget that this can also be applied to the testing process." (1996)

This is often referred to as 'poisoning the well'. By placing an odious label on the issue or casting doubt on those who bring up the issue or defend it, the use of this tactic is intended to put an opposing viewpoint and those who hold them in a bad light. It is not an argument, it is abuse.

Furthermore, Yoshida has difficulty focusing on the issue:

"What to an American might seem like a primitive and unscientific method of testing could very well be a reflection of the cultural values inherent in the educational tradition of a given country." (1996)

The reference here to 'an American' is Argumentum ad Hominem (against the speaker) and as such its use is of dubious value. Rather than addressing the topic, Yoshida is avoiding the issue and going after Brown personally.

The methods of testing Yoshida is referring to are not a product of any tradition here in Japan. How could they possibly reflect values inherent in tradition? In the 'tradition' of Japan, the use of these tests is barely over 100 years old, in Europe it is much older and the closest they come in China is about a millennium. Japan is a late comer in the realm of testing and according to Amano Ikuo (1990), the testing stratagem here was imported from Prussia specifically to control the entrance into the state bureaucracies.

Yoshida also misuses the term 'reliability':

"One of the arguments about the unscientific nature of entrance examinations in Japan is that the results could be unreliable because there is virtually no pretesting on the test items.

"Pretesting refers to the process of "testing" an examination on a sample of the population that will be taking it to ensure that the test and individual items contained in it are reliable in measuring the abilities of examinees.

"For example, if the test was too easy and everyone scored 100, then it failed to determine the skills of those taking it." (1996)

First we must consider the motive of the protest: If scientific reliability is undesirable then why go to all the trouble to compare exam scores with International Studies in Educational Achievement, produced by the Internatio[illegible]ssociation for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The international exam competition is frequently cited to demonstrate that Japan's schools are some of the best in the world Lack of reliability renders these exam competitions totally meaningless.

Next, the association of high scores with the issue of reliability is irrelevant. If scores are all in a certain range then they are reliable regardless of whether they are high of low. Reliability is consistency, to put it simply.

John Shillaw: Whilst pre-testing is not feasible, changes in format are. Translation is a notoriously difficult method of assessment, as Rick Reynold simply demonstrated in his original posting. I've had to grade the damn J->E questions for the past 4 years at Tsukuba, and I wouldn't trust my judgment after the first couple of hours of work, and I rate myself as pretty experienced at subjective item grading. So, while pre-testing is definitely dame [not feasible], changes to increase reliability (and validity!) are easy to implement. We have to wait for a climate in the colleges that sees a need for change.

Daniel T. Kirk: Having had experience with both English and Japanese oral interviews, I can only imagine that schools of any kind, jukus or otherwise, must be totally in the dark about how these components of the entrance exam are handled . Much of the decision-making was conducted post facto, based on a host of considerations. I am reluctant to discuss this topic in detail on a public forum, but even if I did, I am sceptical that it would be of any help to interviewees next year. They could not rely on this year's events being repeated or improved.

Might as well give them dice. At least they would know that before the test.

Rick Reynolds: I agree with Thom [Simmons] that the issue about university entrance testing is that they are not referenced to any known result.

It appears to me that we have an opportunity for lots of minor research that will get ink and with the right observations build a presence in shaping testing ideas. I would like to see something worthwhile before "researchers" run contradictory and specious articles. We might want to divide up the work and publish results on a system-wide scale.

How about this example of entrance tests: I know one man who failed all the exams one year, entered a year of study and failed all the exams the second year except one. That one he passed was Tokyo University. He's happy. His parents are happy. I'm even happy for him.

Maybe we could enlarge the system and get beyond the "How are you? I'm fine and you" stage of language proficiency. If fact, is there a real world of language proficiency or just one created in the EFL/ESL classroom? Are there any standards or just practical applications?

Kevin Ryan: Now that everybody has read Yoshida's article, I'd like to make a few comments. Let's forget that Yoshida defines reliability as difficulty, and get on to the two arguments he sets up. It looks like he is arguing against J. D.. Brown, but upon close reading, he is actually setting up a straw man and knocking him down. J. D. Brown was mentioned twice in the article:
"His point was that language testing in Japan is very unscientific and in need of much improvement." (Yoshida, 1996)
"However, certain things must be considered before denouncing the present situation altogether on the basis of what one might call Western values of testing" (Yoshida, 1996)
How did he get from "in need of much improvement" to "denouncing the present situation altogether?"

Notice that J. D.. is not mentioned except in the second paragraph. Yoshida then goes on to create this straw man that denounces things, insists on pre-testing even at the cost of culture, is unfair or uncaring, then gives his criticism--not against J. D., but against his perceptions of western testing.

He even confuses himself by insisting that it would be disastrous if pre-testing were used, because many tests are made public, then goes on to say, "In fact, many prep schools boast that their practice tests contain problems that are also on university entrance examinations. Such publicity attracts potential students." ..... What?
"It is also impossible to pretest items as a part of the actual test--as in the case of the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) because entrance examinations are made public as soon as they are completed." (Yoshida, 1996)
TOEFL publishes their tests, don't they?
"There is also a growing demand that answers to all questions be made public." (Yoshida, 1996)
Let's just hope the public starts insisting on reliability and validity stats.

The only other time he mentions Brown is in connection to translation, and says that Hakuta, when studying bilingualism, lists translation as a skill. Has anybody read any Hakuta?

I think this idea of translation is spurious, a red herring. A true bilingual should have native-speaker proficiency in two languages. If translation is part of the process, it cannot be native level. We are talking about two parallel processes (speaking two languages) and he is talking about a bridge between. Apples and oranges.

So what we have here are straw men and red herrings. Nothing of real substance, even though it might sound like it, and make some people feel good.

James Swan: Although I agree with a lot of what you say, I think you might find some of these two paragraphs [in Ryan's post above] a bit of a hard sell to the members of the Bilingualism N-SIG. As is true of almost any specialized field of study, the closer you look at things, the more complex they become. People really into the psycho- and socio- linguistics of bilingualism would probably say, "well, yeah, but . . . ."

Steve McGuire: I don't think Kevin was saying there aren't complexities involved in defining bilingualism. I think the discussion was whether translation questions alone are a measure of bilingualism. And yes, I know Kevin can speak for himself. <g>

Kevin Ryan: I WAS oversimplifying (space restraints). I agree with Jim's assessment of my comment, especially the part: into the psycho- and socio- linguistics of bilingualism would probably say, "well, yeah, but . . . ."

Steve McGuire: I said I probably wouldn't be able to resist commenting on Prof. Yoshida's article, and I was right. What I'd mainly like to do is comment on some of the many unquestioned beliefs in the article.

First, a petty one. Students returning to Japan want to be placed with their fellow students and not behind. (Herein lies an) assumption : "Returnees would never qualify 'ahead' of their fellow students." Is this valid? I dunno.

Next, the article seems to beg the question of why students have to attend jukus at all. I guess if the exams test the ability to regurgitate vast amounts of information the process is doing what it's meant to do. This is an old question so 'nuff said.

Thom Simmons: I would point out that much of the culturalism defense also employs the tactic of 'begging the question,' since most of the premises are reiterations of the conclusions/assertions. Strange, this form of fallacy is not invalid since the conclusion categorically follows from the premise (they are the same) but there is no test for truth and thus they can not be tested for soundness.

Steve McGuire: Another question: is it really legally required to publish the questions? If there is a law, does it state how soon afterwards the test questions must be published? And, if there is a law, why couldn't it be changed if it's getting in the way of making tests fair? If universities let students take home exams right after the test isn't that a practice they've chosen that can be changed? I know, it'd be difficult and it's a naive question, but "that's the law" and "that's the way it's always been done" have often been used as excuses for not changing the system.

Is Yoshida implying that measuring translation ability shows the applicants' level of bilingualism? Yes, the ability to say the same thing in two languages may show how bilingual a person is, but I don't think translation questions 'by themselves' are necessarily the best measure. That's not to say they don't measure 'anything'. Doesn't the ability to translate a passage they've never seen before reflect students' preparation and/or ability at all?

Also, if there are English literature departments that specifically want students with the ability to translate I'd ask why? We're discussing testing here and not what the departments teach but I'd question this, too. Oh, because literature has always been taught that way.
"However, I also believe Japanese society places certain conditions on what

can actually be done. Also, the validity of a test depends on what test makers define as language proficiency—e.g., monolingualism or bilingualism? Cultural differences affect language testing, too." (Yoshida 1996)

Ignoring the implication that Japanese society is special in some way ('all' societies place certain conditions on what can be done!) and ignoring the question of whether the tests actually measure the bilingualism of the test takers, if the tests 'do' do what the universities really want (whatever it is they 'claim' to want), who are we to argue?

Um, that last sentence would lead to a long discourse on what gives us the right to argue (such as having to teach the students who pass these language tests) but I'm going to resist the temptation. I'm up to 47 lines as it is.

Bryan Jenner: [Regarding Yoshida's statement]

"Pretesting refers to the process of "testing" an examination on a sample of the population that will be taking it to ensure that the test and individual items contained in it are reliable in measuring the abilities of examinees." (Yoshida, 1996)

Yes, and if it doesn't it's not fair.

I think BTW [sic: by the way] that there is some confused thinking going on about pre-testing. Any testing organization (TOEFL, UCLES, etc) has an enormous bank of items and formats which have been pre-tested on a sample population over a period of years. The process of pre-testing shows: a) that these items test what they are supposed to test (i.e. have validity) and, b) that they do it with similar results on repeated occasions and irrespective of who takes the test (i.e. are reliable).

An actual test is then composed by taking a sample of these pre-tested items, but the chances that any student would be given items which they have already encountered are minimal. And since they would not know what the "right" answer is, it wouldn't matter anyway.

Since nobody in power appears to know what Japanese tests are supposed to test, it is difficult to see how tests of validity could proceed. And until there is an agreed national testing system, with proper data banks and "test-re-test" checks on reliability, there is little chance of an improvement there either.

Steve McGuire: This goes back to something I said before. I don't see universities giving up their cash cows--entrance exams. One national test for all universities? Heavens!

I sure seem to have gotten cynical all of a sudden. Must be my cold.

Bryan Jenner: If high schools and universities (not to mention Monbusho) could agree on some national objectives at various levels, we might be able to make a start on proper test construction, since that would give us some idea of what we wanted to measure.

Until then, Japanese students will go drinking from the "poisoned well".

John Shillaw: I think that a few practical points need to be considered concerning pre-testing in any context, but particularly with university entrance exams.

1. ETS can pre-test many new items a year because it can insert trial items into the tests. Remember that TOEFL is administered monthly and in different forms. To the best of my knowledge, the trial items are not reproduced again in the published versions of the tests, only the items that count. The trial items might not be used for some years in the future. Colleges here would need years to establish an item bank.
2. ETS uses probably the most sophisticated methods anywhere for equating new items to the existing item banks. They employ some of the foremost experts in item writing and stats analysis. How many English teachers here have even rudimentary stats knowledge or training in item writing?
3. The pre-testing and equating of subjectively graded items (essays, translation exercises, etc.) is extremely difficult and involves the use of partial credit model analysis. In my limited experience, most items don't work very well unless heavily modified - sometimes several times. Students will know these items backwards by the time they are used 'live'.

Now, bearing in mind the current exam styles/methods, is it really feasible to use pre-testing for entrance exams? IMHO [in my humble opinion], I think not.

I maintain the point I made a few days ago, that changes in format (i.e. less translation) will go a long way to improving the situation. Pre-testing is a long way down the road.

Brett Reynolds: There have been a number of criticisms of the article here. Personally I tend to agree with most of them and I expect others do as well, which brings up the question, aren't we preaching to the converted?

Shouldn't somebody with a lot of letters behind their name (I'm just a lowly eikaiwa teacher with no credentials to speak of) be attacking this article in the newspaper where it was printed?

Paul Arenson: Regarding the Yoshida article, didn't he also have a plenary session [sic: at the JALT 95 conference in Nagoya]?

I didn't see it, but I recall that the title was mildly grating--something about 'preserving culture'--as if language learning posed a threat to it (I understand that some people FEAR that they will 'unbecome' who they are if they adopt a different language persona, but...).

Then again, I am only speculating based on what, to me, was an unusual title....

Scott Jarrett: This is in response to a couple of threads, the one on tenure and the one on the university entrance exams (i.e. Yoshida's *Yomiuri* article). First, a disclaimer; I do not work at a Japanese university, nor do I have the desire to do so. My knowledge of the tenure problem and the testing problem is all second hand. That being said, it seems to me that if people were serious about righting the wrongs they see in the Japanese educational system, they would go about it in a way that might succeed in Japan. To my knowledge (and I might be wrong about this), the power within both Mombusho and the universities themselves is vested in the 60-70 year-olds. These guys are not interested in changing the system and in fact usually reject any idea of change, but they <will> die or retire one of these days. Why not then forge alliances with those younger professors (or people in the ministry), many of whom are probably sympathetic to the ideas that have been batted about on this list and some of whom will be in positions of power one of these days? Although this is a long term solution, isn't that the way things work in Japan? I've only been here 6 years, so I'm still a novice, but from what I've seen, change here comes about only after the foundation has been firmly laid.

Chris Poel: Good idea! The problem I've had, though, is that these younger professors, while being enthusiastic about change at the beginning, soon start to worry about their promotions, and then become overly worried about

rocking the boat. By the time they are in positions of power, all of the spirit in them has either died or has been suppressed for so long that it might as well be dead. In my case, the threat of not being promoted has done little to suppress my enthusiasm -- although I must admit that at times I am extremely depressed at the long range prospects of any change -- and I am widely known as the guy who'll say whatever is necessary to get a point across. In other words, I'm a pain in the ass at meetings. But, despite this, I've recently been promoted, the fastest ever in my university (for a non-major teacher). So, I don't necessarily agree that being the squeaky wheel is a problem here, as long as you do it carefully and consistently.

Daniel T. Kirk: I've been following the Yoshida thread closely, and agree that it would be interesting to have J. D. Brown or someone to comment on the article in question. My problem with all of this is that Dr. Brown's work is published, and open to all who want to read it. Anyone who wants to find out what Dr. Brown thinks about testing just has to read a book and find out. The material is available. The testing experts have spoken. The individual person on the street thinks it's terrible that children are forced into this system.

In a recent discussion with a colleague, C. W., on this issue, she suggested that we look beyond what the product of the test is (though the product is important, too) and try to find why the powers that be perpetuate a system that is so obviously flawed. What are they protecting?

Yoshida, in his article, is spouting a party line. Minoru Wada spouted a similar party line at a conference that I attended in Miyazaki. Sure there's a lot of money in if for private universities. My question is why the national government, if Wada is any example, should be defending the system? If Mombusho said tomorrow that these tests were hindering real language development in this country, then they could use the strong-arm tactics they have always used to end the practice. Are they protecting private universities? Then why?

My first reaction was money. Several people have mentioned the amount of money expended on the system. Ms. C. W.'s opinion was that it wasn't enough money for government agencies to be interested. The political powers that be deal with larger sums of money than what testing generates.

James Swan: The government agencies are not protecting the system as much as the private universities are. Those entrance exam fees form a large percentage of their annual operating incomes.

Daniel T. Kirk: My second answer [sic: to the question of why these tests are continued] was guns. Use the education system to create a citizenry that is uncritical and inactive in order to condemn war and violence with one hand and build a war machine with the other.

Thom Simmons: D. Kirk's second answer may seem off the wall to some but whether or not it is, it is pertinent to point out that when other governments get involved in these issues (e.g. the no-tenure for foreign nationals at public institutions issue) these governments may feel justified in looking for a security threat inherent in these policies.

In his correspondence to the monthly magazine "Nature," Ivan Hall pointed out the national security perspective that the U. S. American Ambassador brought to the no-tenure for foreign nationals issue. The editor of "Nature" referred to that as 'rattling sabers,' i. e. empty threats. Yet to continue what was an ad hominem analogy, I would point out that to rattle a saber, so to speak, implies that there is one at hand. In short, "When the issue is out of the hands of the professionals, the politicians will use it for their own ends," no matter how irrelevant they may seem to us.

James Swan: This current year (NEN-DOH, ending this coming March 31st) I've had the dubious pleasure of being my neighborhood block representative to the JICHI-KAI ("Tribal Council," roughly translated). While it has been an unwanted distraction in my life, getting involved has been instructive, and I highly recommend it to anyone who still manages to believe that the Japanese people are uncritical and monolithic. You've got quite a surprise in store. The problem here is that you--we--think that if a rationale can't be formally explicated then it doesn't exist. Or, put another way, if people haven't been taught critical thinking in their schools, they can't think critically. Well, that's baloney.

Daniel T. Kirk: The average folk know that the system is not working. I realize that there are socially aware people everywhere. My point was that, like in the US, the government decries war and aggression while amassing weapons for global destruction. Therefore, the government does not support the testing system for the soul purpose of desensitizing the people. For what other purposes does the government support the system?

The problem with that is that the U.S. does that without this kind of testing system.

James Swan: What really ticks me off is when somebody spouts the line comparing the difficulty of getting into colleges in Japan and the US: "In the States it's easy to get in but hard to graduate . . . ." I once told a Doshisha student of mine that he was crazy if he believed that anyone could just waltz into Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Berkeley, Chicago, etc. Daniel, step back a minute and look at what you wrote: How narrowly do you want to define "this kind"? I'm sure you don't really think there aren't lots of hoops that an American kid has to jump through to get ahead in the American school system.

Daniel T. Kirk: I'm curious what y'all think. I can see someone attracting top-notch intellectuals to explain the problems with the existing testing system, and have the people in the system say, in effect, "So"?

What is it the system is protecting with the tests? Control? For what?

James Swan: I share your sympathy with the poor students, whose very futures are determined by what now amounts to nothing more than a roll of the dice, but I believe the Japanese entrance exam situation is a matter of inertia rather than a conspiracy. You've got to remember that heavy duty stats in LT [language testing] is still very new everywhere. Many of the English teachers in Japan come from literature backgrounds -- they're "fuzzies," not "techies" -- and they distrust this so-called "scientific" testing. How many of us aren't in somewhat the same position, really -- in your heart of hearts, haven't you often felt that you can tell the same thing with a glance at some writing samples that will require a mainframe computer and 600 man-hours of inputting multiple-choice answers? I know I sure have! Not to mention that it means I have to go off somewhere and study statistics (Oh, God!) just in order to understand what the results mean. And not to mention that the experts

themselves can't agree what they mean, either! My basic take on all this is: Hey, I didn't become an English teacher to spend my life doing statistics!

Daniel T. Kirk: Sure, but I feel that I should be held accountable to my students, to the prefecture and myself to do the best job possible. Possible also means financially feasible. These tests generate lots of cash . Brown mentioned it in his address in Nagoya.

Chris Poel: Sorry, I can't agree [with J. Swan]. You may have an idea of how bad something is by glancing at it, but until you seriously investigate it, you can't really tell what the truth is. And, it doesn't take 600 man-hours or the use of heavy duty statistics. I input and analyzed more than 2000 exams last year, and it took me less than 20 hours to do everything. If I'd had a little help and cooperation from other teachers, it would have taken considerably less. The stats I ran took less than an hour total. The information, however, was invaluable, and has led to an attempt at improving the exam. If I'd just gone in an told my boss that I think that the tests need improving because I thought that's what the data looked like, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere —in fact, that's what happened the two years before. Last year, the numbers convinced him that something had to be done.

James Swan: I imagine the Japanese literature professors are just holding on, hoping to reach the high ground of retirement age before the floodwaters of pseudo-science start flowing over the dam.

Daniel T. Kirk: They certainly are that.

James Swan: Going beyond all this, how many of you people out there even think that foreign language ability is a suitable requirement for entrance into a university? If my tertiary education had depended on my ability to do a foreign language, I'd be a bag-boy at Safeway today, instead of the highly revered (worshipped even!) ERAI SENSEI that I am. But in Japan you have to be able to translate both to and from a foreign language (in an utterly different language family, no less) in order to get into a school to study basket weaving. I think that if the Japanese people ever came to their senses, English would be drastically downgraded in its perceived importance and most of us would be out of jobs.

Does Safeway still have bag-boys? Or are they all bag-persons now? Container Attendants maybe? There but for fortune . . . .

Chris Poel: This is a completely different question, and one I'd have to agree with. Lately I've been hearing that "English ability is an indicator of overall academic ability," but I think that's a load of crap.

Bryan Jenner: Agreed. Maybe the ability to do clever grammar questions is an indicator of something, but that's got little to do with the ability to speak or write English. On the other hand, in internationally committed places like Holland, Denmark or Singapore, a great many shop assistants, petrol station attendants and workers in other professions for which no university course is available can function effectively in one or more foreign languages. There is still this peculiar belief that foreign language ability depends on intelligence (whatever that is). What is more important is a national commitment and a perception of need. In Japan the perception of need is there (at an individual level) but the national commitment is not (yet).

Thom Simmons: I can't agree with Jim. If they "ever came to their senses" they would know that it is imperative that many categories of education require English language ability. I went through the last 10 years of the "Japan Journal of Education Psychology" (which deals with many of the issues here) and I can tell you that 40 to 60% of the articles referenced were written in English—if you can't read English your research and thus your practice in education will be impaired by isolation. This is even more true in such areas as health care. 70 to 75% of the world's research in oncology is reported in English. The list of such examples is endless.

Chris Poel: It all comes down to the issue that many have mentioned: money. I just talked to the boss at one university here in Chiba, and he was very pleased that this year they have over 10,300 applicants for the entrance exam – at 33,000 yen a pop. With this kind of money being thrown around, how is anyone going to convince them that exams are an evil thing? And, who am I to complain since I get a chunk of that change in March as my "entrance exam overtime bonus"?

Thom Simmons: 339,900,000 yen?! Are you saying they are pulling down more than three million, three hundred ninety-nine thousand dollars? This could be a billion dollar industry if it is repeated on this scale at all of the daigaku. Any idea what their costs are?

James Swan: Now we're getting down to it. The single most important reason why any significant change will take a long, long time to come about: Money talks. The cost of living in Japan is probably at least double that of the US, but college tuitions in Japan are about half of what American schools charge. Not to mention that American schools get lots of endowments from their rich old graduates, which Japanese college don't get. Where does the shortfall come from? Simple: the entrance exam lottery, wherein the next generation of losers subsidizes the educations of the winners.

Thom Simmons: Actually, in-state tuition at public universities is still fairly low compared to public institutions here. But this funding issue is a primary problem. In 1994, the Monbusho had only about 75 million dollars to distribute for research in higher education. Massachusetts Institute of Technology had about 600 million in 1993 and Harvard University had 70 million just for student aid. Comparatively, financial support in Japan has some major shortfalls when compared with other heavily industrialized countries

James Swan: In my previous posting, I started out just responding to something Daniel Kirk said, then I thought I'd try to put a little perspective on the issue, but I got carried away playing Devil's Advocate, and I ended up saying some things that even I couldn't defend. I don't dispute the value of statistical analysis, exactly.

I've had full-timer or quasi-full-timer positions at three different schools, and I think I can justifiably extrapolate from that to say that college full-time teachers are heavily overworked already and not receptive to any new-fangled ways of doing things. When young hotshots from abroad come into a Japanese university and start telling all the teachers that their methods are entirely inappropriate, wrongheaded,

biased, unfair, and outright deceitful, that's Strike One. When they say that proper testing at So-And-So, 2000-student college should involve years of statistically-analyzing pre-tested multiple-choice items for item-banking and later reuse, like ETS—with its limitless resources—does for millions of students worldwide, well, that's Strike Two. And when people start saying that the colleges should give up these pointless entrance exams altogether and forego jillions of yen in annual income, well, that's another one right in the old Strike Zone (pants' rear pocket, for most people).

Elin Melchior: As I read all of these messages about the entrance exams, I keep waiting to see the ideas of my Japanese bilingualism teacher repeated. However if they were, I missed them. She (a Japanese national) told my class that the purpose of the English portion of the university entrance exam in Japan was not to test English language ability, but to test the ability of students to do an incredible amount of work and memorization for no justifiable reason.

Tadashi Shiozawa: Have you ever seen recent college entrance exams? They are pretty much like the TOEIC or TOEFL structure and reading sections. This trend is getting stronger. I just don't think they can get high scores just by memorizing words and phrases. (I do admit some question items have nothing to do with the test-takers' English proficiency). Some schools are even giving listening sections. I just wish they gave interview tests, though, which they could if they really wanted.

Kazunori Nozawa: I agree! Although my school does not ask freshmen candidates to take an English exam, their score in the common qualification exams by the University Entrance Exams Center is added to the university exam (only mathematics) and the interview test. For junior transfer entrance exams, we have given fairly basic exams on three skills (vocabulary/reading, grammar/writing, and listening). We always eliminated obscure English or difficult words or idioms to be suitable for those educational levels. These are the biggest ones for my university because we accept the majority of the students from junior technical colleges for the undergraduate programs.

Elin Melchior: [my Japanese bilingualism teacher said that] A student who is willing to do the incredible amount of work necessary to learn this type of obscure English is the type of person who will make a good company employee - someone who will work amazingly hard without understanding the reason or needing a purpose. As this is the ideal company employee, this is the type of student that universities want.

I am of course paraphrasing after all this time, but I thought people might be interested in one Japanese expatriate point of view.

Her views seemed rather extreme to me, and I would like to hear how others, more knowledgeable than myself, react to this point of view.

Kazunori Nozawa: Her idea on the entrance exams is quite old-fashioned and I really doubt the truth of what she said.

Steve Tripp: Name a company that wants people like this.

Tadashi Shiozawa: Never heard of that. I don't think successful companies are that stupid to recruit that kind of future employees. And we don't want any students like that at our school.

Kazunori Nozawa: Neither did I. I agree with Shiozawa-san's idea.

Martin Pauly: Remember the Recruit Scandal several years back? It was said that the Recruit Company hired Physical Education graduates (especially those from strict bukatsudo areas, e.g., judo, kendo, karate). As far as I know, Recruit had nothing to do with P.E. and martial arts but they wanted employees who were literate and would work long hours and not ask questions.

Steve Tripp: You're saying phys. ed. majors do best on the English entrance exams?

Kazunori Nozawa: I know that some security companies have been hiring those who had majored in P.E. or had belonged to sports clubs or cheering leaders. However, I never heard of the case of Recruit Company.

Tadashi Shiozawa: They didn't hire those with sports background because they did not ask questions, but they and we know that those athletes will be far better businessmen than reticent and apathetic regular college students who spent their college days playing pachinko.

Kobayashi Etsuo: I hope we will not generalize that regular college students are all apathetic. Many of ordinary students like to develop themselves by studying. If they do not, something is wrong with the college and the teachers.

Kazunori Nozawa: I certainly agree with Kobayashi-san. My students majoring in engineering seem to be more motivated to learn and I find there is only a small number of apathetic students. Overgeneralization is always dangerous, isn't it?

Tadashi Shiozawa: My fault. I agree with Kobayashi-san and Nozawa-san. Most of my students do respond to my challenges with amazing hard work, which makes me really happy. I should have said 'some' apathetic college students.....playing pachinko. I was recently visited by a couple of students begging me for a passing grade without coming to class. Those are the students I had in mind. Will I pass them? Why not... .. not this year, but next year if they still want to take my class... and work. ;-)

Charles Adamson: It has been my experience that most of the students want to learn and are willing to study during their first year, but by their second year they know what college classes are like and give up the idea. The few that don't have continuous problems with some, but not all thank goodness, of the professors.

Kobayashi Etsuo: Do the few that don't [study] still expect that they can learn something from some of the professors? Is that the main problem they have?

Charles Adamson: No, they have given up expecting to learn much in class and are working on their own in their own way. This independence seems to fly in the face of some professors (who seem to be determined to stamp it out at all costs, included withholding employment recommendations). These professors make their disapproval and dislike of the students extremely obvious.

Regarding the lengthy discussion on exams in Japan: There was an interesting article at the bottom of page 2 of today's *The Daily Yomiuri* [Fri, 2 Feb 96]. It may shed some light on the

Japanese idea of fairness that has been repeatedly mentioned in these discussion.

I do not have the article with me so I will have to summarize from memory. The article was about complaints by people from Kobe that the central government was not giving them (sufficient?) extra funds this year to help them recover from the earthquake. The complainer stated that the government's reason was that it would be unfair, since it would treat Kobe differently from the other city and towns in Japan. You are banging your heads against a cultural value that is much stronger than many of you think.

James Swan: I read a similar article in the Japan Times and was tempted to post my reaction, just as Charlie has done. Appearing in the news right after Sharon Vaipae's posting the day before, it was very eye-catching indeed.

Charles Adamson: In my experience the way to get a change is to first bring it up with the reasons then drop it for a while. Do some more research and get more facts. After a year or so, bring it up again presenting both the old and new info. Repeat this cycle for a few years. At some point some Japanese authority will bring it up on their own at which point we say, "What a wonderful idea! We should do that! How do you think that we can implement the idea?" From that point on, the idea will quickly be turned into practice. The first few times that it happens you will get no credit at all, but finally a point will be reached where that powers that be will start asking you for advice.

I know a lot of you won't like this idea, but it works.

James Swan: Charlie knows how to swing level and keep his eye on the ball.

Steve McGuire: [Charles Adamson's idea] isn't unique to Japan, of course. I wonder how many of us have been in the position where we realize that the only way to get something done is to have a PTB (a Power That Be) think it's his/her idea. Used to have to do that when I was a lowly peon in a university office.

The trouble is that many [non-Japanese] teachers in Japan won't be here long enough to carry this out, either because they're not planning on staying for 5-10 years or more likely because they're on short-term, nonrenewable contracts.

Personally, I've been keeping a low profile at my school while I figure out how far I can go in making suggestions. I'm coming up on my third year and I'm almost ready to make a small suggestion (I dunno, maybe something major like "shall I turn the heat down?" You know, work up to things). This seems to be an approach that will work, but it's frustrating keeping my mouth shut.

Thom Simmons: One of the problems we have with exams is their correlation with anything. A consistent approach to this is--do they actually test for language ability? Elizabeth Isenstead has this to say about exams and rote learning:

"Rote learning. I don't have substantial research to back up what I am about to write on this subject. I do have about six years of experience teaching students who learned English in their native countries by rote learning, however. The overwhelming problem has been that a goodly number of these students cannot comprehend what they read in English (though they may understand the vocabulary), cannot write well at all, cannot understand spoken English in everyday settings in the U.S. and above all cannot communicate or be understood. And so they end up, after 6-8 years of grammar intensive study in their own countries, back in Communicative - Based ESL classes in universities, colleges and private ESL schools here in the U.S. These students often do fairly well on the TOEFL and on cloze-type tests; they do not do well outside such structured, predictable, controlled settings." ("TESL-L: Teachers of English as a Second Language List," Tue, 30 Jan. 1996)

I thought this was germane considering what Elizabeth has to say about the students ability to use English and their TOEFL scores. As I remember the TOEFL is considerably better designed and implemented than entrance exams in Japan but there would seem to be little or no correlation with communicative skills and tests scores in her experience. What was it we said about validity?

Bryan Jenner: If this is true, it is tantamount to saying that TOEFL is no better than the Japanese entrance exams in that it only tests knowledge. It may be more relevant knowledge, but it does not test the ability to perform or produce. In that sense a low score on TOEFL only tells us what a student does NOT know.

Charles Adamson: This is why many American universities reject the TOEFL altogether or ask Asian students to score 50 or 100 points higher than students from other countries. I met with a group of about 10 administrators from American universities in 1989 (Fulbrights) and they were extremely concerned about this problem, but said that the TOEFL was better than nothing.

John Shillaw: If TOEFL only measures knowledge and Japanese students are good at this form of testing, why is the average score for Japanese candidates the lowest in Asia, with the exception of N. Korea? I'm no great fan of TOEFL, but I think it's overstating the case to say that it only focuses on knowledge . ETS's [Educational Testing Service, Cambridge MA] research papers on the relationship between TOEFL and more communicative, productive tests, show pretty good correlations.

Bryan Jenner: I am surprised that no-one has mentioned any other test formats in this discussion, such as the various Cambridge exams, or the British Council IELTS (for UK university entrance), which do give candidates the opportunity to write freely, speak spontaneously and display aural and reading comprehension. The speaking tests are often conducted interactively. AND, by a blend of multiple grading, sampling and training of examiners etc., they have built up an acceptable measure of objectivity over many years. They would provide a much more helpful model for exam reform in the Japanese context where there seems to be such confusion about discrete item testing.

John Shillaw: I would certainly second Bryan Jenner's point . . . about the UCLES tests being a better model of communicative competence. The KET, PET and FCE exams are tied to clear performance goals: the first two are linked to the Council of Europe's Waystage and Threshold level goals respectively. These tests are not tests of academic skills, however, which TOEFL purports to be. 'You pays your money and you takes your choice.'

Bryan Jenner: Agreed, but the higher grade Cambridge exams (Advanced and Proficiency) certainly require students to do things which are relevant to academic

performance in an Anglophone study environment. And the IELTS scheme (originally British Council) is precisely that: it covers both general academic skills and also offers subject-specific supplements, as well as requiring students to demonstrate normal (or social) interactive ability. You can't do those things with a paper only test.

There are plenty of communicative exams around. We're just not looking in that direction.

Larry Cisar: This question about entrance exams has led to another question in my mind: "Are students currently being misplaced by these exams?"

Some students, no matter what system is used, will either do better or worse than they should have. But overall, is the system working or not? And I don't have an answer to that question.

Christ Poel: As a university teacher, I have enjoyed reading the debate on university entrance exams the past few weeks in The Daily Yomiuri. I would like to respond to two points in Kensaku Yoshida's recent article (Feb. 12, p. 15), namely the issues of publicly revealing exam reliability and the necessity of pilot testing of exam items.

Prof. Yoshida wrote: "Although Dr. Brown says Japanese test makers should reveal the reliability scores of their tests, I'm not sure I understand why." I do! Accountability.

Michael Guest: I was under the impression that English exams for entrance into national (and perhaps other) universities were subject to public review in the press. Doesn't this count in any way toward accountability, say as a reasonable alternative to revealing statistical data that one has analyzed oneself? Is there a similar procedure in the United States?

Chris Poel: First of all, the phrase "subject to public review" is pretty vague. Some exams, like you said from the famous national universities, are printed in newspapers to "challenge" the readers. They serve a similar function to the "which celebrity are you most compatible with" type surveys in the popular press – it may be an interesting way to pass an hour or so, but is it valuable? And even if it's valuable, what does it mean? And even more to the point, how can such an exercise be used to improve future tests?

As to whether or not it "counts" toward accountability, I guess that would depend on what you mean by "count." It's an important first step, nothing more. But the point I made in my letter is still not answered— how do we 'know' that the test is a reliable or valid measure of English??? Just relying on intuition, experience, gut feeling, or whatever is a 50-50 proposition. That's not good enough. Statistics may not be perfect, but they at least give us some information that can be used to make better entrance decisions, and provide us with information that can be used to improve the next year's tests.

Here ends this portion of the discussion. We hope to present the discussion on Dr. Brown's answer and Professor Yoshida's response in *The Yomiuri Daily* at a later date. Some of this discussion and further articles will be considered in the upcoming newsletters of both the Testing N-SIG that is currently forming and the PALE N-SIG newsletter

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Essays on Exams

The following short essays were part of the examination debate that has taken place on the JALTCALL. They indicate a developing discourse community in cyberspace among the participants as do the short exchanges. The JALTCALL participants are in the process of developing a college that brings current issues in education and sociology to a forum where they are discussed at length with a hybrid of speaking and writing styles, formal and, usually, informal. This college provides an immediately accessible venue of debate that a growing core of members use consistently. The vigor with which the members approached this topic is a strong indication of the concern they have for this issue.
Thom Simmons, CUE Coordinator

Testing item content, Fairness, etc.

Gene van Troyer
President, JALT

It seems to me that there may be an understanding gap here between what JD Brown means when he talks about pretesting item content and what Professor Yoshida may have thought he meant.

In running a pretest, one is–as I understand it--seeking to acquire data that validates the reliability of a test as measured against some kind of accepted standard. Based on the results of that pretest, an actual test is then created. In short, the pretest is not given to discover results based upon CONTENT, but upon test item TYPE.

ETS does this sort of thing all the time with the TOEFL. What they do not do (at least not immediately) is then turn around and administer the same test (meaning the same item-content) to people paying to take the test. No testing agency in its right mind would ever do that--it would fatally corrupt test security and invalidate all test scores.

However and in fact, what most universities seem to wind up doing is using the results of each previous entrance exam as a baseline (or norm) to guide them in the creation of the next test. After all, they sell their retired exams so that cram schools and high schools can begin to prepare their college-bound students for up-coming entrance exams, which means that the exams the students will eventually take have to resemble previous tests in terms of item type.

The question is whether such tests are valid in terms of reflecting a testee's actual language skills. No, they aren't, because they are not referenced against any recognized standard of what constitutes proficiency. This is what, if I understand him correctly, JD Brown is getting at. The further question is whether this is what the universities are really interested in. Well, if they really are, my guess is that they probably write reliable tests whose results reflect student abilities within the context of ELT as it is practiced in Japan. This is what Kensaku Yoshida seems to be getting at.

The context in Japan is that most universities have their own standards, with affiliated juku and high schools serving as "feeders" for potential entrants--in other words, college-bound students at those schools basically prepare to take entrance exams for a handful of specified universities. Teachers at the juku and secondary level are fully aware of this and struggle to prepare their students accordingly, which means acquiring the retired entrance exams from the applicable universities and incorporating them into their instructional regime. To do anything less would be a disservice to their students.

Is this right or even fair? is, for research and philosophical purposes, an appropriate question to address, but this is the operating question: Is it realistic? This question can be answered: Yes. The rightness and fairness; the validity and reliability of the tests themselves are and will remain an unfortunate side issue until the Japanese education system is thoroughly revamped to place emphasis especially upon the reliability issue.

As for the issue of "fairness," I did not get the feeling that Yoshida was falling back on the assertion of Japanese "uniqueness" but again simply stating what is a perceived social reality in Japan, to be fair to everyone. I have seen this carried to ridiculous extremes, and here's an anecdote: A close friend of mind conducted research on learning styles employed by her JSL students and worked with a colleague of hers. When all of the results were in and my friend wrote the paper, she got into a tremendous fight with her co-researcher over disclosing certain of the results that could be taken to imply that language learners from one cultural background might be considered superior to learners from a different cultural background. This, her colleague argued, was a matter of discrimination and would be unfair to the students (totally disregarding the fact that the point of the project was to find out what could be done to make the JSL curriculum as accommodating as possible to the broadest spectrum of students). The information stayed in the article, which will be published later this year; the unfortunate fallout being that my friend will never again work with this colleague on research projects.

Admittedly this is an extreme example, but the flashpoint was the issue of "fairness", however misperceived. Another example that is perhaps more to the point arises every year where I work. When we

conduct oral interviews with examinees we are given strict guidelines regarding what we can or cannot ask them, and we are strictly forbidden to ask them anything about their personal backgrounds because such questions can be taken as an attempt to disqualify an examinee on the basis of social or ethnic origin--which is frequently associated with, say, the occupations of parents or relatives (i.e., burakumin, Korean, Chinese, Okinawan, whether dad's a farmer, taxi driver, pachinko parlor operator or corporation executive, etc.). The question again is one of fairness.

To close this already lengthy post, I did not get the impression that Yoshida was in anyway dismissing Brown's arguments about the entrance exam situation, but was pointing out that the exams themselves had a different function that did not involve language proficiency. He basically accepted the premise that they are unscientific and unreliable, discussed why this was so, and concluded that he personally would like to see more scientific and reliable tests written.

Testing English - what for?

Jim Buell
Kansai Gaidai

Yoshida-sensei's arguments are somewhat disingenuous, I think. He's taken on one side of J. D.. Brown's criticism - by saying that it's very difficult to try out items for future tests - but ignored another, equally important one. Sure, the examination questions and answers are published each time it is administered. BUT, there's apparently no public disclosure of how the population of examinees scores on the test overall, let alone how they do on individual test items and sections. This makes it impossible for outside experts or other interested parties to judge whether the national university English examinations are reliable - that is, whether the test that Hiroshi passes with flying colors one year is at all related to the one his sister flunks a year later.

After all, the whole point of norm-referenced tests (love 'em or hate 'em) is to create and administer banks of items that are both of equivalent difficulty, and independent of one another. ETS regularly publishes bulletins that show how examinees overall, and subcategories such as males/females and people from different language and ethnic groups, score on TOEFL and other tests. They also present their reliability findings regularly at international conferences like LTRC and TESOL. Moreover, for a proficiency test such as TOEFL, the whole point of moving from "raw" scores (it's a 150-item test) to "scaled" scores (ranging from 267-687 or thereabouts) is to ensure that different versions of the test yield roughly comparable scores. It's this variety of public disclosure that's most glaringly absent from the university examinations.

It's not correct to say that ETS doesn't pre-test individual test items, as someone wrote on JALTCALL. In TOEFL, each test contains several items that are not scored, and the most successful of these (i.e., the ones whose patterns of answers most closely match those of the "mature," scored items) will be incorporated into future tests. This is also the practice with other ETS tests; each Graduate Record Examination, for instance, has seven sections, although only six are scored (two verbal, two analytic, two quantitative); the seventh section contains questions that are slated for future versions.

Naturally, the two points are related. If the makers of the national examinations were to publish the score information for the test each year, it's highly doubtful that such figures would indicate much reliability. After all, they redesign the test from scratch each time; it's a classic case of having, not thirty years' experience, but one year's experience thirty times. I can't help thinking that the reason the statistics aren't made public is that they would show that the emperor has no clothes. And that would be very likely to spark many more calls for a change in the system.

It's a given in testing that, to be valid, an examination must first be reliable. This means that questions of what the national English examinations are supposed to test are meaningless, until we can ascertain that the scores at least have some stable meaning. In that sense, questions of whether to include listening, writing, interviews, etc. don't mean much, unless score patterns are examined and supported in statistically valid ways. It's interesting to note that the criticisms of TOEFL, and there are many, all revolve around its validity (particularly content validity) rather than its statistical reliability, which is unassailable.

I think it's safe to say that the incompleteness of Yoshida-sensei's arguments is distressing. On the other hand, it's quite good that he felt called upon to make them months after Brown's talk. I get the feeling that the cages have been rattled, and that this issue may continue to gather momentum.

In Yoshida's defense

Rick Reynolds

In my original posting about Yoshida's article, I was thinking about a reply to him and wanted to gauge the response of other readers to his points. I reacted to points about imperialism, pre-testing, validity and reliability, and the cultural purpose of language programs. I also wanted to see if anyone quoted Brown since I wasn't at the JALT conference.

I considered writing a point by point response to Yoshida but trench warfare is not my main interest. I want to parachute behind the lines to understand how he thinks. Besides a reply would need extensive quoting from the original article (as well as being a personal attack). I wanted to dialogue on his turf. Why would Yoshida open himself to criticism by trying to unexplain the explainable? What are the Japanese reasons for some students in a class to finish before others if all are equal? What is fair about students having to wait for others to finish the year's work when they could be going on in a model of continuous education (a concept I advocate over on the eltasia-l list where I hang out).

There may be some felt response to a perceived imperialism. For all I know there is a list somewhere where Japanese professors discuss eastern thought in education. Yoshida may be an apologist for a secular academic religion where the sacred cows are fairness, equality, and an established financial market that ensures randomness in testing. Or he may have written in English because no one of importance would read it. And, why drag Professor Brown into it?

In light of more recent articles such as *Yomiuri* staff writer Yanagisawa's piece on a listening scale to assess language ability and the editorial in both the Japanese and English newspapers about the need for high schools to diversify, it may be we are experiencing *The Yomiuri's* editorial position more than we are having a dialogue.

If in fact language teaching in Japan is an island unto itself with its own rules, then the only valid thought is Japanese. But if language teaching and the use of English is cross cultural then we need a responsive article addressing issues on both sides. Yoshida provided that opening with his points about the purpose of entrance tests to assess the English ability of the examinee made toward the end of his article. Interference with assessment (or agreement as to what is acceptable English usage) should include a recognition of problems in testing as well as other problems peculiar to Japan such as phoneme practice, the shyness fear of mistakes, and the model of education in Japan. Why not also address concepts of fairness? An article that discusses the problems of non-success in language learning in Japan should prove interesting and readable especially if we can come up with some workable solutions to improve the situation in such a way that both sides are comfortable or at least more knowledgeable. It seems to me more Japanese are calling for communicative approaches to English and putting less emphasis on the entrance exam approach although the point at which they will cross is a long way off.

Cultural knowledge testing suggestion

Greg Matheson

Although I agree with J. D.. Brown that Japanese English education needs a swift quick up the pants, I don't know if testing is the boot to use when we start putting the boot in. Testing of course makes teachers accountable as much as it does students. But the knowledge that distinguishes the profession is also put on the line.

We need to be able to specify what communicative competence is if we are to justify decisions that this student has less than that student. This however we can only imperfectly do. With TOEFL a test of usage rather than use and IELTS a test of English for Academic Purposes rather than communicative competence (native speaker performance on it correlates with educational level), we have not been able to define what it is to know language. This is not just ESL teachers' fault, and not even applied linguistics,' but it does make it difficult for us to claim to have the answers and that other people don't.

What I'm reporting here as an alternative to Japanese entrance exams is a suggestion. Michael Byram, Carol Morgan and colleagues ("Teaching and learning language and culture" (1994). Clevedon, Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters) talk about A level exams in French in England where there are "cultural learning" syllabus alternatives to the exclusive study of literature. The aims of these various syllabuses include fostering a sympathetic understanding of the culture and civilization of francophone countries, developing awareness of self and of other individuals and societies, encouraging first-hand contact with francophone people through aural and written correspondence and travel and residence, furthering appreciation of French by understanding both French and British culture from the view-point of the respective peoples and fostering interest in the views of French people on current issues.

Social issues include the sociology of leisure: sport, mass media, holidays, the French way of life, and contemporary problems: drugs, criminality, racism, unemployment. Examination essay questions either require a catalog of facts or a discussion of an issue where students can compare differences with English culture. Linguistic skills are awarded the majority of marks. Content in the culture paper is only worth 10-25 % of the overall grade. The rest goes to language skills in essay writing. Byram, Morgan & colleagues suggest cultural knowledge, empathy and behavior should be tested more. Knowledge includes knowledge of phenomena, explanations from the foreign perspective, knowledge of how the phenomena are portrayed in the culture, and explanation of their significance to the culture. Empathy is the degree to which students can explain factual knowledge and its significance from the foreign perspective and the degree to which they recognize the relativity of different perspectives. Behavior is the description and analysis of the foreign norms of social interaction and the performance of social interaction following these norms. What about this instead of the present exams?

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR PERMANENT JAPANESE VISAS?

Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted **with permission of The Daily Yomiuri.** It appeared in the Saturday, May 25 issue in the weekly "You Asked for It" column, which selects questions from calls received by the JAPAN HOTLINE, an English-language counseling service.

It would be interesting to find out how many ON CUE readers have attempted to obtain a permanent visa, and how many have succeeded. Perhaps we can add a block for visa status to the CUE Information and Networking Database Questionnaire. The question could also be the basis of an interesting article. Anyone?

Q: How can I obtain a permanent visa?

A: The criteria for permanent residence are strict in Japan. Permanent residence is permitted only if a foreigner has established a permanent base of livelihood here and his or her permanent residence is determined to be in accord with Japan's interests.

Permanent residence is permitted only if a foreigner fulfills the following conditions:

—The person has sufficient assets or ability to make a living. This is not required for spouses or children of Japanese nationals or foreigners with permanent visas, or for those recognized as refugees.

—The person is of good conduct

There is no rule on how long a person must live in Japan before becoming eligible for permanent residency. It is, however, necessary for an applicant to be in the country long enough to demonstrate that his or her livelihood is rooted in Japanese society. Spouses and children of Japanese nationals or foreigners who have permanent visas usually must live in Japan at least five years to obtain the visa. Others must have resided in Japan at least 20 years.

The following documents are needed to apply for the permanent visa:

— Materials showing that the applicant's conduct has been good. Documents showing proper payment of income tax, fixed property tax and resident tax for the past three years are required, as is a "commendation certificate" if the applicant has ever contributed to the community. Other documents may also be required.

—Materials showing that the applicant has sufficient income to make an independent living. In come tax records and an employment certificate from the past three years, certificates of fixed property and bank deposit should be sufficient. If the applicant runs a business in Japan, company registration certificate, profit and loss statement and other documents are needed.

—Health examination certificate that shows if the applicant has an infectious disease or drug addiction that could harm public sanitation.

—Certificate outlining the applicant's immediate family.

—Certificate of guarantor (a Japanese or foreigner who holds permanent visa).

Because other documents may be required, applicants should consult with the Regional Immigration Bureau.

For more information, call the Immigration Information Center Tokyo at (03) 3313-8523 through 8527, or the Yokohama Immigration Information Center at (045) 651-2851 or 2852.

JAPAN HOTLINE'S English-speaking telephone counselors are on duty Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The hot line is operated free of charge by Dial Service Co. (03) 3586-0110.

Bits and Pieces

A New Columnist?

William E. Lee sent **ON CUE** an informative e-mail message on January 23, part of which is reprinted here:

Hi Jonathan,

Although my JALT and N-SIG memberships were held up three months until January, once they came through they were backdated to September, so I guess I'm overdue to say hello.

Thom Simmons was kind enough to e-mail me a June issue of ON CUE, in which you ask about subscribers willing to get On Cue as e-mail and forego the paper version. I'd be happy to. Ditto CUE IN.

. . . I have apparently unlimited use of e-mail and Internet on SINE NET (SINET?) a Japanese academic network), and I'd like to put it to work for **CUE** in some way. Everything is done for me

through the LAN, so I don't know much about how it works--or ANYTHING about BBSs--but it seems like a plush system and I'd like to do some good with it. If **CUE** has any projects that call for lots of network . . . let me know.

. . . Since starting to collate and disseminate chapter information in all kinds of media, I've become perplexed about the discrepancy between JALT print and electronic communications, and especially the two-tier system of electronic haves and have-nots that seems to be evolving. I'd very much like to hear your views if you have the time, since it seems to be on your mind too . . .

ON CUE looks like a publication I can get a lot from and I hope I can give some of it back.

Your colleague,

Bill Lee

Employment Problems?

Foreign teachers at Japanese universities have organized in informal group of foreign teachers at Japanese universities to explore means of dealing with problems of contract renewals, and especially invite those who face dismissals they consider to be discriminatory to send inquires and/or particulars of their circumstances in writing to our secretariat. Strict confidentiality is assured. Group membership is informal and free, and anyone is welcome to join.

Ivan Hall, Chairman
Foreign University Teachers Action Group Against Discriminatory Dismissals (TADD)
Secretariat:
Minato International Law Offices
Chojiya Building 6th Floor
1-19-5 Toronomon
Minato-ku Tokyo 105
FAX: 03-3503-8850

ON CUE readers should also be aware of the PALE N-SIG and its related publication, which may provide a closer focus on employment issues than the **CUE** N-SIG's stated goals permit.

Internet TESL Journal

The Internet TESL Journal <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/-iteslj/> is calling for submissions. Submissions should be of immediate practical use to ESL/EFL teachers. Purely theoretical papers will not be published. Suggested submissions include lesson plans, classroom handouts, articles, or research papers. You may e-mail submissions as a text file of formatted as HTML to: <iteslj@aitech.ac.jp> or send a text file with floppy to The Internet TESL Journal PO 94 Higashi-ku, Nagoya, Japan 461. For more information please contact the Internet TESL Journal directly.

Journal Publications Database

Thom Simmons writes: "We are also well on our way to getting a database for publications in relative areas of concern that are not published in JALT publication. This will supplement Larry Cisar's gargantuan efforts in compiling a JALT publications' database. Dale Griffee is set up to begin compiling a database and a depository for the publications of JALT members who did not publish in TLT or the JALT Journal. He needs the following:

1. Copy of the paper (published or unpublished manuscripts)
2. Citation of the publication in English
3. A maximum of 15 words to describe the paper
4. Name and mailing address of the author(s)
5. Telephone number

In return he will send you a copy of the database and a separate list of the authors and their mailing addresses. All further communication about the specific paper will then be directed to the authors. Any and all correspondence must be accompanied by a SASE since he is doing this project without university or CUE funding. We'll take it from there and see what other things we can do with this but we now have the basic requirements of a database and library reserve.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Our work as college and university teachers includes a variety of tasks. Members are invited to contribute articles or information on topics that will help other teachers in any aspect of their work. Possible areas might be:

1. Theory and practice of teaching language at college level.
2. Abstracts of your own or other authors published work.
3. Teaching ideas useful for college level classes.
4. News about presentations, conferences, and meetings in your area.
5. Offers or requests for cooperation with research, giving presentations, writing articles or sharing of teaching materials.
6. Reviews of relevant books, videos, teaching materials, presentations.
7. Relevant newspaper or magazine articles, reproduced as they are, or with commentary.
8. Information about he administrative structure of Japanese colleges.
9. Information about contracts, salary, retirement and separation pay, insurance and pensions.
10. Information about holidays and leave-taking policies.
11. Information about research grants and allowances.

Please send contributions or abstracts to the 1996 Editor of *ON CUE*, Jonathan Britten or the 1996 Coordinator, Thomas Simmons.

The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the *CUE* Officers. Because *ON CUE* is published by volunteers who have full-time teaching responsibilities, contributors must carefully ensure the accuracy of their submissions. The best way to submit material is to send, simultaneously, a printout and a 3.5" floppy disc of the material. Discs should be compatible with (or readable by) Macintosh computers using Microsoft Word.

Please be sure to write your name, university affiliation, and the title of your submission on the disc. Submissions in Japanese should be sent camera-ready. If you require the return of your disc and/or printout, please include an appropriately sized stamped self-addressed envelope.

Back issues are available beginning with the December 1995 issue. All requests must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped (¥190) B-5 envelope (SASE). Back issues are also available on disc. Send a disc and a SASE with ¥90 postage

ABOUT THE CUE N-SIG

Statement of Purpose (Created 1992)

Through discussion with other foreign language instructors, we have come to recognize the need for a professional network linking instructors of foreign languages employed at colleges and universities in Japan, to help them understand and meet the goals of Japanese higher education.

Needs

The College and University Educators N-SIG proposes to address the specific needs of foreign language teachers in Japanese colleges and universities. To do this, we plan to:

1. Offer a base for mutual support, networking, and professional development among the group's members.

2. Disseminate information about current research relating to language teaching at Japanese colleges.

3. Help members understand Japanese language information related to teaching at Japanese colleges and universities.

4. Provide a forum for the exchange of information and opinion between educators.

Goals

1. Create a database of members' research interests, and circulate these to members.

2. Produce a newsletter to report on research projects and current practices, and print articles written by members.

3. Provide a translation resource in English of forms and notices commonly circulated in Japanese colleges.

4. Organize regional meetings, mini-conferences, and *CUE* N-SIG activities at national JALT conferences.

We believe that working toward these goals will not only benefit the College and University Educators N-SIG members, but also their students and institutions. *CUE* has the same basic goals as JALT, but with a specific focus on college and university language education. The group aims to help members develop and share their teaching and research interests in this area.

We are committed to helping our members communicate with each other; through submissions to our newsletter, presentations at conferences, and by contacting people with similar concerns listed on our information and networking database.

As JALT is a pedagogical and academic organization, the major focus of *CUE* on teaching and research. We also respond to members' needs for information relating to employment issues, although *CUE* has no labor union affiliations, and cannot advocate on their behalf. CUE aims to facilitate exchange of information and opinion between members to help them develop professionally, and through this to improve college and university language education in Japan.

Publications

ON CUE is a newsletter, published at least three times a year.

CUE IN is an information and networking database, distributed periodically.

The Networking Database

If you wish to add your name to the database, or change details of your existing file, please send a completed questionnaire to Lorraine Koch-Yao, our membership database secretary.

E-mail Networking

Thomas Robb ('Sharing Information through Electronic Mail,' *ON CUE* Sept.'93) set up an initial forum on his university's computer for the use of the *CUE* membership, but reports that there was not sufficient response to establish an on-line discussion list for *CUE*. However, a list called JALTCALL has been established for communication on any aspect of language teaching, and *CUE* members are welcome to use this. If in the future, the number of CUE-related messages achieves a high enough volume, a separate list can be started then.

To join JALTCALL, send a message to : majordomo@clc.hyper.chubu.ac.jp saying subscribe jaltcall. Don't write anything more or less or the message will be automatically rejected and you won't get on-line.

To send messages to the subscribers, address them to : jaltcall@clc.hyper.chubu.ac.jp

Translators

CUE members Michael Fox and Steve McCarty have kindly offered to translate from Japanese into English work-related documents sent in by members. Please write to Mike Fox at: Hyogo Women's College, 2301 Shinzaike, Hiraoka-cho, Kakogawa, Hyogo 675-01. Work fax (0794) 26-2365, Home tel. (078) 928-0308, or to Steve McCarty at: Kokubunji Nii 3717-33, Kagawa 769-10.

CUE's Constitution

Members present at the Nagoya meeting in November 1995 voted to allow CUE officers to make changes and ratify the constitution sometime during 1996, without further approval of the members. We will publish the complete approved constitution when the officers have approved it.

Of National Interest

Readers are welcome to submit any questions or topics for future issues. Here are some suggestions: Information on curriculum, administration, contracts, salary and research budgets, research grants, tenure, accommodation, home leave, part-time teaching in other universities, committee work and administration, translations of Mombusho regulations and official notices or forms related to our situations, as well as your thoughts and comments on these.

The columnists hope eventually to produce a booklet of this information and make it available to all foreign national university teachers in CUE. Also, they are thinking about beginning an E-mail network for CUE members to share information, and ask advice from others who have solved similar problems in the past. Let them know if you're interested. Send submissions to one of the following :

Items relating to regular faculty, sennin, kyoshi, jokyoju, etc: Joshua Dale, Department of English, Tokyo University of Liberal Arts, 4-1-1 Nukui Kitamachi, Koganei-shi, Tokyo 814

Items relating to gaikokujin kyoshi: Gillian Kay, Toyama Medical and Pharmaceutical University, 2630 Sugitani, Toyama City 930-01.

Research Corner

Simultaneously scoring oral performance for numerous categories--"grammar," vocabulary," "fluency," "intonation," etc.– can be subjective, taxing, and unreliable. To develop a simpler measure by analyzing the underlying factors of such test scores, I would be grateful for data from all kinds of oral tests, including speech contests: the score of each speaker for each linguistic category (as judged by each examiner).

Bill Lee, Gifu University 1-1 Yanagido, Gifu 501-11. Phone: 058-293-3091. E-mail: billee@cc.gifu-u.ac.jp.

Coming to *ON CUE* Soon

In the next issue, Professor Joshua Dale will publish an article describing an innovative lesson plan, which focuses on the theme of workplace sabotage. The lesson plan combines reading, writing, and debate. We will carry an another article on scheduling by Wayne Johnson with his recommendations.

CUE Hiroshima presentation: The New Guidelines and university innovations: Another appeal for contributions.

In the last 'On Cue', you may remember that there was a questionnaire upon which members were invited to describe their experiences with any recent curriculum innovation in Japan's universities and colleges. This was all towards the CUE presentation at Hiroshima, entitled, very unimaginatively: "The New Guidelines: Are there any real changes?" I have had a number of very interesting responses, but would very much like to hear from more people. Whether you have a vast experience of such innovation, or a very limited experience, and whether you feel very positive towards what you see, or very negative, your response is still very valuable. All innovations: not just those said to be related to the 'New Guidelines', are of interest, and I am just as interested to know if there has been no innovation at all.

As explained below, the questionnaire format seems to be somewhat limiting, so I have decided this time to simply ask members to contact me in any way you like to tell me about innovations, or lack of innovations in your college or university. Please tell me your name and the name and type of your establishment, and your position (in particular, do you yourself have any say in curriculum decisions?). I would very much like to know whether these 'New Guidelines have been brought up for discussion at your establishment, and whether recent innovations are said to be in response to those Guidelines. Do these innovations affect you personally, and most important of all: *in your opinion*, what real effect do they have on students' education? I stress once again that *I am just as interested to know of a lack of innovation.* So, please:

either: a) write to me at:
Tim Knowles,
Ippangaikokugo, Sophia University,
Kioi-cho 7-1,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.
or: b) fax me at: 03-3238-3087
or: c) e-mail me at: t-knowle@hoffman.cc.sophia.ac.jp

Many thanks to those of you who have already responded to my plea for information. I have had 15 replies from CUE: obviously only a small proportion of total membership, but more or less what I expected. What I didn't expect, and am very grateful for, is the detail with which you answered, most of you having filled the whole questionnaire, the margins, and then covering the back too. Obviously, the questionnaire format was cramping your styles, which is why I've decided to abandon it in favour of a more open format.

Understandably, most of the respondents said that they had experience of innovations, and went on to describe them, for better or worse. However, one or two did write to say that they knew of no innovation happening at all. Most said that they had very little control over what was going on, and the widespread conclusion was that it remains to be seen whether the innovations are for the good or not.

Clearly, the paper is not going to be an exhaustive study and evaluation of innovation in Japanese universities. However, it is clear from the respondents that there are many people who are very enthusiastic for a dissemination of curriculum change evaluation, which otherwise would remain constrained between the walls of each university. So that is really what the paper will become: a kind of 'Home Page' for our experiences and evaluations. of changes in university curriculums, with a view to perhaps having some influence on subsequent changes.

HOW TO JOIN CUE/RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

First, please be sure that you are a current member of JALT. Then please pay 1,000 yen to join/rejoin CUE at your chapter meeting, at a conference N-SIG Hospitality Desk, or by using the postal transfer (furikae) form at the back of The Language Teacher.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE THE CUE N-SIG TO DO FOR YOU? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO FOR THE CUE N-SIG?

NAME : _____

CONTACT ADDRESS : _____

_____

_____

CONTACT TEL. : _____ FAX : _____

I would like to see CUE N-SIG promote the following activities :

_____

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Comments on the Statement of Purpose :

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I am interested in : (please tick)

Serving on the CUE N-SIG Committee _____
Writing for ON CUE _____
Presenting for CUE at conferences and chapter meetings _____
Manning the CUE hospitality desk at conferences _____

Please mail or fax this form to Thom Simmons.

CUE Information and Networking Database Questionnaire

(Please return to Lorraine Koch-Yao, CUE Database Coordinator, address on page 1)

The information derived from answers from this questionnaire will be used to form a database of members' work interests and activities. It will be assumed that anybody who completes this questionnaire will be willing to have information about himself/herself included on the database, and for others in CUE to have access to it. If you do not wish for others to have access to any specific information simply do not answer the relevant questions. In the case of phone numbers and contact addresses, which are necessary for administration, please state at the end if you do not want them listed. Your wishes will be respected (*MEANS CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE)

- How would you prefer to receive your Newsletter (check one) :
  PRINTED ☐ DISC (*DOS or Mac format—please send your disc to editor) ☐ E-MAIL ☐
- Underline in red any information which should not be available to others
- Check in red ( ) any information not to be used anonymously for research

- Name _____ Date: d ____ m _____ y _____
- Home Address: _____

_____

- Phone (*w/h) _____ Fax (*w/h) _____
- E-mail: _____
- Nationality: _____ • Years in Japan _____

1. Place of work (main) _____
- Faculty/department: _____
- Work Address: _____

_____

- Type *Private/Public/National; 2yr/4yr. Other _____
- Areas of Institutional Emphasis: _____
- Position Title: **Kyoju* / Professor; *sennin koshi* /Assistant professor; *Jyokyoju* /Associate Professor; *Gaikokujinkyoshi* /Foreign Instructor; Other _____
- Position: Permanent/Renewable/Limited Term/Part time/Other _____
- Subjects you teach: _____
- What language(s) do you use: _____

2. Place of work (secondary) _____
- Faculty/department: _____
- Work Address: _____

_____

- Type *Private/Public/National; 2yr/4yr. Other _____
- Areas of Institutional Emphasis: _____
- Position Title: _____
- Position: Permanent/Renewable/Limited Term/Part time/Other _____
- Subjects you teach: _____
- What language(s) do you use: _____

Other places of work and positions: _____

_____

- Chapter (position): _____
- Other JALT N-SIGs (and positions): _____
- Highest degree and awarding university: _____
- Main teaching/research interests (MAIN INTEREST in UPPER CASE):

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- Member of which other organisations:

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- Professional Journals subscribed to:

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- Comments for other members:

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- Suggestions for Database questionnaire:

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