

Investigating Fluency and Accuracy of Japanese University EFL Learners' Spoken English Production

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Abstract

Japanese learners of English are often described as having good English grammar but lacking in fluency. However, with the changes to a more communication-focused English curriculum in the last few decades, this is no longer the norm. This paper will first review the reactions to communication-focused English instructions in Japan and other parts of Asia, then discuss the current study which explored the grammatical accuracy and fluency of spoken English production of 45 Japanese university EFL learners who had studied under the communication-focused curriculum in junior and senior high schools. The results of the study showed that, as a group, the participants were neither accurate nor fluent. Although some participants were able to produce sentences accurately using easier grammar structures, their production was very slow, indicating the retrieval of declarative knowledge instead of proceduralized knowledge. Literature review and the results of this current study suggest that the communication-focused curriculum has not been successful in developing fluency among Japanese English learners and that their accuracy has suffered from the decreased amount of grammar instructions. Instead of switching the focus from grammar to communication, balanced grammar instruction and fluency practice are needed.

Keywords:

EFL, Japanese university students, spoken production, accuracy, and fluency

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INTRODUCTION

In today's global society, communicative competence in English is increasingly important, and Japanese secondary English education has undergone a series of curriculum reforms under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to move away from the traditional grammar-translation method and emphasize communication since the late 1980s (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Torikai, 2018). In 2003, MEXT adopted a five-year "Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities" in response to criticisms that Japanese English education had not been effective in producing graduates with the ability to communicate in English in the global economy (Butler & Iino, 2005; MEXT, 2003). Have the reforms been effective? Have Japanese students become more fluent users of the language? This paper will first review literature showing reactions to heavily communication-focused English curriculums in EFL environments, and discuss this current study which investigated the English production accuracy and fluency of Japanese university students who went through secondary education after the reforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reactions to the Communication-Focused Curriculum in Japan

The Japanese government's English education reform efforts faced difficulties. On one hand, many critics reported the new guidelines were not followed and Japanese secondary schools still relied on the grammar-translation method (Falout, et al., 2008; Jones, 2019; Osterman 2014; Underwood & Glasgow, 2019). Some possible reasons for this are that Japanese English teachers receive little training in the communicative method of teaching English, have low communicative English proficiency themselves, must prepare students for university entrance examinations, have large class sizes, and have little time to prepare for classes because of administrative and extracurricular duties (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Underwood & Glasgow, 2019). On the other hand, even though the reforms were based on the almost clichéd belief that Japanese learners of English have high grammatical accuracy but cannot speak it, many disagree that grammar teaching is what prevented the development of communicative fluency of Japanese students (Hasegawa, 2000; Otsu, 2012; Torikai 2018; Tsukawaki, 2014). Many argue that overemphasizing conversation practice in place of explicit instructions and practice on basic grammar would merely lead to memorization of rote phrases, resulting in poor skills not only in conversation but also in reading and writing (Abe, 2017; Inoue, 2016; Narita, 2013; Sugiyama, 2013; Torikai 2018). Saida and Tamaki (2008) analyzed test data from a prefecture-wide English test of listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading, administered to high school students from 1995 to 2002 and found a declining trend in mean scores during the eight years. Ishihara et al. (2010) found declines in English proficiency test scores and both fluency and accuracy in the speed writing test among Japanese university students, especially in the lower proficiency group.

Reactions to the Communication-Focused Curriculum in Other Parts of Asia

Similar educational reforms towards communication-focused English teaching are also

met with reluctance by teachers in other parts of Asia. In Taiwan, Huang and Yang (2018) conducted a survey of 75 English teachers and found that, while 100% believed the development of students' English communication skills is important, only 49% felt communication-focused language teaching policy was applicable in their classrooms. The teachers listed similar reasons to those in Japan; lack of teacher training and appropriate material, tests being more important for students than communication, and large class sizes. In Korea, Whitehead (2017) found that many teachers felt that CLT did not fit their classes because it did not match with Korean test-based objectives, activities took too long to prepare, large and mixed-level classes did not suit CLT, homogeneous L1 classes led to a lack of motivation to use English, and CLT conflicted with their traditional teaching beliefs. In China, Kraut and Poole (2017) surveyed 65 in-service English teachers after a month-long CLT teacher training course and found similar responses. In India, Samantray (2014) asked 16 post-graduate students training to become English teachers to reflect on how they had been taught English, and plan how they would teach their students to develop communicative English skills. The majority had experienced explicit grammar instructions and form-focused practice that were "more to remember rules than to be used for communication (p.9)." However, they believed the grammar knowledge helped develop their fluency because the confidence from the knowledge reduced anxiety in communication situations. Thus, the participants intended to use grammar instructions with form-focused activities and increased listening and reading input to help develop their future students' communicative English skills.

The necessity of Teaching Grammar in EFL

Unlike one's native language, where the grammar is mastered unconsciously, learning a foreign language is "conscious and deliberate from the start" and "spontaneous speech with a quick and sure command of grammatical structures comes to him only as of the crowning achievement of long, arduous study" (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 194 - 195). Second and foreign language acquisitions are believed to involve first acquiring declarative knowledge about the target language, then using the knowledge repeatedly to develop procedural knowledge, which then will become fluent and without error through extensive practice (Anderson et al. 1997; DeKeyser, 1997, 2007a, 2007b, 2015; De Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Muranoi, 2007; N. Ellis, 2011). In a foreign language learning environment, where the overall amount of exposure to the target language is not enough for implicit acquisition (DeKeyser, 2007b; Otsu, 2012), correct declarative knowledge through explicit learning is especially necessary (Criado, 2016; Inoue, 2016; Otsu, 2012; Sugiyama, 2013).

Oyama (2017) compared the effects of different types of instructions on the use of the past counterfactual conditional among 84 Japanese university students. He found that learners who received focus-on-form treatment with explicit grammar explanation and practice outperformed learners who received focus-on-form treatment without explicit grammar instruction and those who received focus-on-meaning treatment. Oyama argued that focus-on-form with explicit explanation and grammar-focused practice

facilitates cognitive comparison, where learners compare their existing knowledge of the target language with the input they receive.

Muranoi (2016) tested second-year English major students on 36 grammar structures that are covered in the junior and senior high school curriculum in a written and spoken tests. No statistically significant difference was found between the results of the written and spoken formats of the tests, and the difficulty ranking of grammar structures was similar. Perfect tenses, conditionals, embedded questions, relative clauses, and tag questions were some of the most difficult structures in both tests, while the present progressive, simple present, simple past, and comparatives were among the easiest. However, he found differences in difficulty in the present progressive depending on the lexical aspect of the verb. While a present progressive with an activity verb (*study*) had the most correct responses among the 36 grammar structures in both written and spoken tests, another with an achievement verb (*fall*) had a significantly lower number of correct responses.

The researcher of this paper previously tested 345 Japanese university students on their English grammar knowledge and usage using a multiple-choice grammar rule test, a grammaticality judgment test, and a Japanese to English sentence translation task. Relative clauses, embedded questions, tag questions, and indefinite articles were difficult for the participants throughout the battery of the tests, suggesting a lack of declarative knowledge for these structures. In the sentence translation task, the present progressive unexpectedly had the highest difficulty, but unlike Muranoi (2016), all verbs were activity verbs (*ride, read and cry*). Although regular past, third person *-s*, comparative's *-er* and *than* were among the easiest, difficulty was higher for the production task, indicating that these easier structures could use more production practice.

To better understand the English proficiency of current Japanese university students who had studied English under the communication-focused English curriculum, the current study investigated the following questions: 1. What grammar structures can Japanese university EFL learners use in their spoken English production? 2. How fluent are Japanese university EFL learners in their spoken English production in a picture description task?

METHOD

Participants

The researcher and a colleague recruited volunteers to participate in the research from our classes, and students who agreed to participate signed a consent form. The volunteer participants were 45 first and second-year Japanese students of various majors taking mandatory English classes at a private Japanese 4-year university. All participants' L1 was Japanese, and they all went to Japanese junior and senior high schools. According to the database of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (2019), the participants had studied under the educational guidelines for junior high schools implemented in 2002, and ones for high school implemented in 2009. Both guidelines stated that grammar must be taught in relation to communicative activities, and instruction should not focus on explanations of forms and usage. Not all students had scores or grades

of English proficiency tests, but 17 had EIKEN Grades 3 - 5 (CEFR A1), 13 had EIKEN Pre-2 or TOEIC 450 - 500 (CEFR A2) and five had EIKEN 2 or TOEIC 600 (CEFR B1). As mentioned earlier, only around 40% of Japanese high school graduates reach the CEFR A2 level, so the participants' English proficiency levels are not atypical of Japanese university students.

Test Batteries and Procedures

The tests were conducted individually, by either the researcher or the colleague, in a meeting room at a time of each volunteer participants' convenience. They were compensated with 1,000-yen gift certificates for their time (equivalent to approximately US\$10). Participants' utterances were audio-recorded, with their permission, then transcribed for analysis.

Spoken Japanese to English Sentence Translation Task

The spoken Japanese to English translation task was conducted to observe participants' accuracy in their spoken English production. The task used 13 sentences covering 23 target grammar structures. As the same structures appeared in different sentences, 36 items in the 13 sentences were checked. The 23 grammar structures were chosen based on grammatical judgment tests used in Ellis (2005) and Shimada (2010). The selected target structures were; third person *-s*, adverb placement, definite article, indefinite article, comparative *-er*, *so/because*, embedded questions, *go + ing*, negative, perfect tense, clear plural *-s*, unclear plural *-s*, possessive pronoun, possessive *-s*, preposition, progressive, regular past, relative clause, *since/for*, tag questions, *there is*, enjoy + *-ing*, and *yes/no* questions. Here, clear plural *-s* refers to situations where the plurality of the noun is clear by a preceding number, such as "Ken has two sisters." Unclear plural *-s*, on the other hand, refers to the usage in such a sentence as "Do you like dogs?" *Go + ing* refers to errors of adding *to* before gerunds. Japanese students often add *to* after *go* regardless of what follows *go*, creating such an erroneous sentence as "*Did you go to shopping yesterday?" An example of the *so/because* structure item is "*I'm going home so I'm tired." All the structures are covered in either junior or senior high school educational guidelines by MEXT, thus should not be new to the participants of this study.

The participants were shown cards with a single Japanese sentence and key English words in alphabetical order and were asked to translate each sentence into English as quickly as possible. Students were instructed to use the keywords but change the forms when necessary. An example item from the spoken translation task, *Ken often goes fishing*, including adverb placement, *go + ing*, and the third person *-s* is shown below:

Kenはよく魚釣りに行く。 fishing, go, often

The test was recorded, transcribed, then scored for 36 grammar structure items. Each target grammar structure within each sentence was independently scored dichotomously. For example, "Ken often goes to fishing," would be scored one for the adverb placement, one for the third person *-s*, and zero for *go + ing*. For tag questions, an informal form "right?" was used by a few participants, and those responses were scored as correct. For relative pronouns, when the omitted sentences were formed correctly as in

“The woman sitting under the tree,” instead of “The woman who is sitting under the tree,” they were also marked as correct. Analysis was conducted for the 23 target grammar structures and for whole sentences.

Spoken Picture Description Task

The picture description task was conducted to observe participants' fluency in spoken production. This task used a card (Figure 1) showing six pictures connected with arrows in sequence, created for the purpose of using free-to-use illustrations online. The storyline aimed to be simple but relatable to students learning English. Content words were written beneath each picture as an aid, but participants were not required to use those words if they did not need them or preferred other words. The participants were given one minute to look at the card and think about the story, then asked to describe what was happening in the pictures. Participants were asked to say “finish” when they were finished, but there was no time limit on how long they spoke.

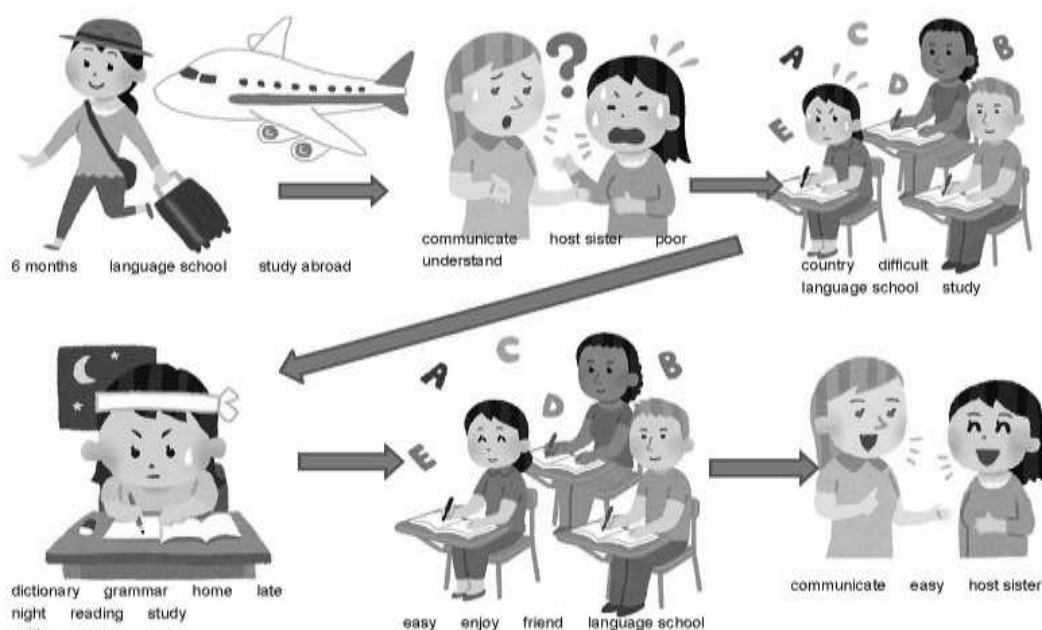


Figure 1. Picture card used for the picture description tasks

For the analysis of this task, Praat software (Boersma & Weenink, 2018) was used to record the length of the description, as well as the total length of silences. To measure fluency, total length, total pause length, phonation time ratio, words per minute, and syllables per minute were recorded. Total length is the time in seconds from when the participants started speaking until they indicated that they were finished. Total pause is the sum of pauses longer than 0.5 seconds, and phonation time ratio is the ratio of speaking time to total time. Syllable counts were based on transcribed words, not actual pronunciation since Japanese learners of English frequently mispronounce or insert vowels when pronouncing English. The phonation time ratio has been used to measure

fluency in different studies (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Tavakoli, et al., 2015; Towell et al., 1996) along with other measures, and Kormos and Dénes (2004), analyzing picture description tasks of 16 Hungarian learners of English, found that syllables per minute and phonation time ratio correlated strongly with perceived fluency by native and non-native teachers.

FINDINGS

Spoken Japanese to English Sentence Translation Task

Table 1

Results of Spoken Translation Task (23 Grammar Structures) in Order of Difficulty

	Number of items	Number of correct productions	Ratio correct	CEFR	Appearance in textbooks
progressive embedded	1	13	.29	A1-A2	J1
question	2	33	.37	B2	J3, 1S
relative clause	1	17	.38	B2	J3
tag question	2	34	.38	B1	J3
indefinite article	1	18	.40	A1	J1
unclear plural -s	1	19	.42	A1	J1
third-person -s	3	62	.46	A1	J1
clear plural -s	1	31	.69	A1	J1
perfect	1	32	.71	A1-A2	J3, S1
possessive -s	1	34	.76	A1-A2	-
regular past	2	69	.77	A1-A3	J1
definite article	3	104	.77	A1	J1
<i>there is</i>	1	37	.82	A1	J2
<i>go + ing</i>	2	75	.83	A1-A2	J2
preposition	2	76	.84	A1	J1
<i>enjoy + -ing</i>	1	40	.89	A1-A2	J2
<i>because</i>	1	41	.91	A1	J2
<i>since/for</i>	1	41	.91	A1-A2	J3, S1
possessive pronoun	3	124	.92	A1	J1
adverb placement	2	83	.92	A1-A2	J1
comparative -er	1	42	.93	A1-B1	J2
negative	1	42	.93	A1	J1
<i>yes/no</i> question	2	85	.94	A1-A2	J1

Note. J = junior high school, S = senior high school

Table 1 shows the grammar structures in the spoken translation task in order of the ratio of correct usage, from lowest to highest. CEFR column shows the levels of the target structures on the CEFR level sequence by British Council/EAQUALS (2015), and the last column shows the earliest year in junior or senior high school the structure appears frequently in government authorized textbooks (CEFR-J, 2020; Muranoi, 2016).

J stands for junior high school and S stands for senior high school, and J1 indicates that students are exposed to the structure in the first year of junior high school. Although educational guidelines by MEXT list grammar structures to be covered in three years of junior high school and three years of senior high school, there are no official guidelines for which year or in which order grammar structures should be covered. The most difficult grammar structure was the progressive, with only 13 out of 45 participants being able to use it correctly. The second and third most difficult structures were embedded questions and relative clauses. The easiest grammar structure with the highest ratio of correct usage was *yes/no* questions, followed by negatives, comparative *-er*, and adverb placement.

Table 2 lists the sentences of the spoken translation task in order of difficulty with the number of target structures included in each sentence. The most difficult sentence to produce in the task was “Ken has two sisters, doesn’t he?” which required a third person *-s*, a clear plural *-s*, and a tag question. Only eight out of 45 participants produced this sentence without errors. The second hardest sentence was an embedded question, “Yumi asked Ken where he lived,” requiring a regular past and an embedded question. Thirty participants produced the sentence “This is not my friend’s bicycle,” requiring negative, possessive pronoun and possessive *-s* correctly, making this the easiest sentence among the 13. The difficulty of sentences depended on whether the sentence included target structures of high difficulty and/or the number of target structures.

Table 2
Results of Spoken Translation Task (13 Sentences) in Order of Difficulty

	Number of correct sentences (<i>N</i> = 45)	Number of target structures	Ratio correct
Ken has two sisters, doesn't he?	8	3	.18
Yumi asked Ken where he lived.	10	2	.22
Yumi sometimes goes shopping in Tenjin.	11	4	.24
I must go home because my mother is waiting.	11	3	.24
The woman who is sitting under the tree is Ken's sister.	13	4	.29
Ken often goes fishing.	14	3	.31
There is a hospital near her house.	16	3	.36
Ken enjoyed watching the movie.	17	3	.38
Do you like dogs?	19	2	.42
Do you know who he is?	19	2	.42
Fukuoka is warmer than Tokyo, isn't it?	22	2	.49
I have lived in Fukuoka since 2010.	23	2	.51
This is not my friend's bicycle.	30	3	.67

Spoken Picture Description Task

Table 3 lists the variables from the recordings of the spoken picture description task by the 45 participants and two native speakers of English (NSE) for comparison. The means are shown in four different groups, the whole group ($N = 45$), a relatively high fluency group ($n = 15$), a moderate group ($n = 15$), and a low fluency group ($n = 15$) divided by their individual phonation time ratio. The native English speakers were both North American, teaching English in Japan. The mean speaking speed among the 45 participants was 37.6 words per minute (WPM) and 54.4 syllables per minute (SPM), while the teachers averaged 119.9 WPM and 164.4 SPM.

Table 3
Analysis of Fluency in the Spoken Picture Description Task

	Total length	Total pause length	Phonation time ratio	Words per minute	Syllables per minute
Mean ($N = 45$)	134.70	85.48	.41	37.60	54.42
High group mean ($n = 15$)	89.25	38.61	.57	51.62	73.36
Middle group mean ($n = 15$)	132.62	81.16	.39	36.78	52.68
Low group mean ($n = 15$)	182.21	136.67	.27	24.40	37.21
Minimum	56.78	22.80	.15	11.68	17.98
Maximum	355.48	291.46	.66	85.72	124.17
NSE Mean ($N = 2$)	79.00	20.02	.74	119.89	164.40

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to clarify the relationships between the participants' abilities in translation tasks measuring grammatical accuracy and their fluency in picture description tasks. Table 4 shows the results of this calculation, where no significant correlation was found between accuracy and fluency.

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients among Measures of Accuracy and Fluency

Measure	1	2	3	4
1. Accuracy (Item)	-			
2. Accuracy (Sentence)	.87**	-		
3. Fluency (Phonation Time Ratio)	.09	.09	-	
4. Fluency (Syllables Per Minute)	.05	.10	.81**	-

Note. ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question, the Japanese to English sentence translation task was used to measure which of the 23 target grammar structures were used correctly by

the participants. Producing the present progressive was the most difficult for the participants. The present progressive was targeted in one sentence, “I must go home because my mother is waiting.” Only 13 of the 45 participants produced the present progressive correctly, and the most common error was “my mother wait” ($n = 18$) followed by “my mother waiting” ($n = 9$). More errors resulted from participants not attempting to use the present progressive, instead of making present progressive sentences incorrectly. In morpheme acquisition studies focusing on a hypothesized natural order of acquisition (Krashen, 1982, for example), the progressive form is believed to be one of the first acquired, and it is covered in the first year of junior high school in Japan (Muranoi, 2016). The results seem to suggest that the usage of the progressive, especially when it is to be used, is not clearly understood by many of the participants.

Using embedded questions, relative clauses, tag questions, articles, plurals, and third-person *-s* followed the present progressive in difficulty. Embedded questions, indefinite articles, and relative clauses were reported to be not well understood by Japanese EFL learners (Muranoi, 2016). The reason may be that they are higher on the CEFR scale (British Council/EAQUALS, 2015), and Japanese English learners are exposed to them later than other target structures (CEFR-J, 2020).

DeKeyser (2005) listed three factors affecting the difficulty of second language grammar; complexity of form, complexity of meaning, and complexity of the form-meaning relationship. Larsen-Freeman (2003) listed three similar categories of challenges English learners face; form, meaning, and use. English articles and third-person *-s* for L1 Japanese learners cause problems of meaning, as Japanese lacks these. Word order and morphemes cause difficulty of form for learners, and many grammar structures in this study, embedded questions, tag questions, negatives, regular past, third person *-s*, etc., probably fit this category. Larsen-Freeman (2003) stated that frequency is the key in tackling the challenge of form, and learners need frequent opportunities to use the target forms through meaningful activities that require the use of those forms. Unclear plural-*s* and present progressive presented form-meaning relationship difficulty. The participants had problems figuring out when those forms were required, rather than making the forms. To address this problem, Larsen-Freeman (2003) argued that practicing choosing appropriate forms given contextual constraints, such as fill-in-the-blank exercises, is more beneficial than frequent use.

The easiest grammar structures to use in translation tasks were *yes/no* questions, negatives, comparative *-er*, adverb placement, and possessive pronouns. The low difficulty of possessive pronouns and relative ease of the possessive *-s* follow the findings of Luk and Shirai (2009), who found Japanese L1 learners of English acquired possessives much earlier than the hypothesized natural order, attributed to the Japanese possessive particle *-no* functioning in a very similar manner to the English possessives. Thus, it is clear to Japanese EFL learners when possessives are required, unlike the unclear plural *-s*.

To answer the second research question, the picture description task was conducted to measure the fluency of the participants' spoken production. Even though the 119.89 WPM mean of two native English speaker teachers was slow by Pimsleur et al.'s

(1977) criteria, they were still vastly faster than the 37.60 WPM mean of the 45 participants. In the study by Kormos and Dénes (2004) previously mentioned, the advanced and lower intermediate groups had speech rates of 181.19 and 115.87 SPM respectively, and the phonation time ratios of .69 and .52. The speech rate in this study, 54.42 SPM, was much lower than Kormos and Dénes (2004) low intermediate participants, as was the phonation time ratio of .41. These numbers indicate that the participants of this study, on average, are far from fluent, indicating that they mostly rely on retrieving their declarative knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

Our most fluent participant's speech rate was 124.17 SPM with a phonation time ratio of .66. This particular participant had completed a two-week internship in Vietnam and a three-week study abroad in the United States. Although he was the most fluent among the group, he ranked 43rd out of the 45 participants in accuracy in the translation task, producing only 17 of the 36 items correctly. The second and third most fluent participants were high in accuracy, ranking in the 15th and 12th respectively. While the least fluent participant also had low accuracy, ranking in 42nd, the second and third least fluent participants ranked 22nd and 9th in accuracy respectively. The top two participants in accuracy ranked 7th and 11th in fluency, proving to be both accurate and relatively fluent among the group. These results, along with correlation coefficients in Table 4, are evidence of different profiles of accuracy versus fluency among the participants. Although Japanese learners of English are often described as having higher grammatical accuracy rather than fluency, these results suggest a more complex relationship.

Fluency development requires proceduralization and automatization of declarative knowledge through extensive practice, and proceduralization is difficult without declarative knowledge (Criado, 2016; Inoue, 2016; DeKeyser, 2007b; Otsu, 2012; Sugiyama, 2013). Participants of this study were not fluent in using grammar structures that were covered in the first year of junior high school, calling for more production practice. Grammar structures that had low accuracy by the participants in this study were also found to be difficult in production tasks in Muranoi (2016), suggesting the lack of declarative knowledge. Japanese EFL learners may benefit from explicit grammar instruction for these structures.

CONCLUSION

Participants in this study had different levels of proficiency in using English grammar structures in their spoken production. As a group, they were neither accurate nor fluent, and some structures would benefit from further instruction before practice, while others need more practice-oriented towards fluency. Although the excessive focus on grammatical accuracy would be unrealistic and demotivating, having declarative knowledge of form and usage would help them decode input and produce output. Assuming that learners can acquire grammar through practice alone is problematic when the majority of Japanese students have little necessity to use English outside classrooms. To help learners become equipped with enough knowledge to take advantage of real-life

practice when opportunities or necessities arise, understanding learners' current knowledge and providing appropriate instruction or activities is essential.

This study looked at fluency in its narrow sense, as the flow and smoothness of delivery which may be differentiated into cognitive fluency and performance fluency (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011). In this view, performance fluency requires cognitive fluency built on the speaker's "linguistic knowledge as well as the use of that knowledge, the speed of access, and control over the available linguistic forms and syntactic devices" (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011, p.534). As the picture description task had a simple, relatable theme, and was conducted by Japanese teachers that the participants knew, participants' knowledge and control of the language itself are considered to have had the most effect on the fluency of their utterances. To look at fluency in its wider sense, psycholinguistic issue of pauses and hesitations arising from the complexity of context, and sociolinguistic issue of socioeconomic and power status among interlocutors, and discourse analysis issues of turn-taking and holding the floor must also be considered.

Although this research showed the need for balanced instruction and practice, the most effective amount of explicit instruction and balance of learning and practice would depend on learners' English education background, current proficiency, motivation, etc., and it is outside of the scope of the present study, as there is certainly no one best way. However, researching more learners with a greater range of proficiency would provide a better understanding of English learners in general and may help improve English education. Also, the effect of explicit instructions or increased exposure to structures that showed difficulties of form-meaning relationship difficulty, such as the present progressive and plural -s calls for future research.

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