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English teaching in Japan: the issues of word order and external input

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Abstract

In terms of syntactic patterns, the prescriptive word order in English is Subject, Verb, Object (SVO), while in Japanese it is Subject, Object, Verb (SOV). Moreover, in Japan, the availability of useful English input may be limited outside of school in comparison to western countries. This bachelor dissertation intends to tackle these two issues in relation to English teaching in a Japanese context. Taking into consideration Krashen's theories of second language learning and acquisition, a survey was conducted to 22 students of English in Japan, with questions concerning their exposure to the language in their daily lives and their experience learning English. The overall results show that difficulties on understanding word order may vary across competences and highlight the importance of receiving an adequate external input.

Keywords: English in Japan, Second Language Acquisition, Second Language Learning, Input Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Word Order.

Resumen

En cuanto a estructuras sintácticas se refiere, el orden de palabras prescriptivo en inglés es Sujeto, Verbo, Objeto (SVO), mientras que en japonés es Sujeto, Objeto, Verbo (SOV). Además, en Japón, el acceso a un input útil es más limitado en comparación con países de occidente. Este TFG tiene como objetivo abordar estas dos cuestiones en relación con la enseñanza del inglés en el contexto de Japón. Partiendo de las teorías de adquisición y aprendizaje de segundas lenguas de Krashen, se realizó una encuesta a 22 estudiantes de inglés en Japón, incluyendo preguntas relacionadas con su exposición a la lengua en sus vidas cotidianas y su experiencia aprendiendo inglés. Los resultados muestran que las dificultades para entender el orden de las palabras pueden variar dependiendo de cada destreza, y resaltan la importancia de recibir un input externo adecuado.

Palabras clave: El Inglés en Japón, Adquisición de Segundas Lenguas, Aprendizaje de Segundas Lenguas, Hipótesis del Input, Hipótesis del Monitor, Orden de Palabras.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language teaching occupies an undoubtedly crucial spot in today's society. In a world where cross-cultural interactions are widely prolific, learning how to speak a second language has become a must in most people's lives, both in professional and personal contexts. This is especially true when dealing with English, a language that is now present across multiple fields, concluding in the fact that non-native speakers actually outnumber native speakers. Therefore, educational research has recently focused on how to make English accessible to the widest possible audience, acknowledge that there are different needs that must be met depending on factors such as age or social background. For instance, recent papers have focused on how to adapt English classes to the younger generations through processes of gamification and the inclusion of interactive tools that will increase motivation and improve performance (De La Cruz et al., 2023).

One of the aspects that is worth paying attention to is how a different grammatical system can affect the teaching of English. At a first glance, differences such as word order pose an issue when teaching a foreign language and should be taken into consideration when developing the national curricula. Moreover, the context in which English is taught is also relevant, as well as the possibility to be exposed to the language outside of the regular classes. The aim of this paper is to focus on these two issues in the context of Japan, where the language spoken differs from English in terms of syntactic patterns, and the extramural exposure to English may be more limited. To do so, a questionnaire with 22 participants has been conducted, with the intention of analyzing English student's self-assessment regarding their experience learning the language through their educational stages. This questionnaire contains sections related to both their difficulties when dealing with word order, and their daily exposure to the language.

This dissertation is thus divided into four different sections. The first two serve as a contextualization of the paper, analyzing the existent bibliography on language learning and acquisition; the syntactic patterns in English and Japanese; and, finally, the situation of English within the Japanese society and educational system. The other two consist of a description of the methodology that has been used and the different questions of the questionnaire, followed by a graphical representation and an analysis of the obtained results.

2. JUSTIFICATION

One of the areas that has been studied for this paper is language acquisition, which according to Krashen (1982), refers to the importance that should be given to external input when learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, we have realized that many papers dealing with this phenomenon do not take into consideration how the grammatical aspects of a language can affect this acquisition. What is more, being exposed to a language may be difficult in countries where not enough people speak that language, or where there is a lack of native speakers. Therefore, the intention behind this analysis is to put emphasis on Krashen's acquisition theories and relate them to the specific context of Japan, so as to analyze how the teaching of English should be approached. In addition, this paper aims to provide English students in Japan a way of expressing how they feel about the skills they have acquired, their English grammar, and the ways in which they have been exposed to external input.

This dissertation has been partly possible thanks to the collaboration of Ririko Inada, a student of Spanish and education at Waseda University, in Tokyo. Her contributions made it possible for us to refine the research questions of this paper, and her own personal testimony added evidence to the results that were obtained through the questionnaire. Moreover, we would also like to acknowledge the collaboration of Zhiwen Luo, an exchange student at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, in Madrid, who helped sharing the questionnaire to Japanese students belonging to different universities across Japan.

3. OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this paper is to provide a brief overview on how some countries approach the teaching of English grammar when the L1 has different syntactic patterns. More specifically, this paper intends to analyze, on the one hand, how the English Subject, Verb, Object (SVO) structure is taught in Japan, given that the canonical word order in Japanese tends to be verb-final (SOV); and on the other hand, to analyze through which means Japanese students are exposed to the English language in their daily lives.

The specific objectives that consequently lead to the accomplishment of the former can be divided into three categories:

- Linguistic objectives.

Given that this study deals with the teaching of English grammar, some of the objectives are directly tied to the linguistics field. Firstly, this paper will showcase if a difference in word order hinders the teaching and acquisition of English, and whether studying this phenomenon is an obstacle for Japanese students. Secondly, it is intended to assess whether students who have explicitly learned about word order through their education feel capable of using English patterns in a natural way.

- Pedagogical objectives.

The pedagogical objectives of this paper are mainly related to the description of a usual Japanese English class: the level of usage of the L1, the place of grammar within the lessons, and the typology of activities that are chosen in order to teach about English transitive patterns. Furthermore, this paper will analyze students' own assessment in relation to these activities and the ones that they found more useful.

- Input-analysis objectives.

The third and final category is related to an evaluation of the input received by Japanese students, both inside and outside the classroom, following Krashen's input theory principles. Through this evaluation, it will be possible to assess how their learning environment has complemented their regular English classes.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Language acquisition vs. language learning

Language is one of the most intriguing aspects within human cognitive processes. Throughout history, thanks to this capacity, we have been able to develop complex multilayered systems of communication unique to our own species. Some experts, such as Pinker (2007) describe language as an “instinct”, an innate ability that is wired into our brains and passed on through generations. Others, namely Sampson (2005) are skeptical about the innateness of language and take into account alternative external factors such as motivation or exposure to culture as the triggers that contribute towards the development of language in children’s brains. Regardless of the approach that is adopted, language remains a central research topic in the linguistics and psychology fields, and researchers have drawn their attention to the way this ability allows us not only to speak a specific language through exposure as babies, but also to gain the capacity of using other languages different than our mother tongue.

Furtherly focusing on this last idea, in today’s globalized world, there seems to be a need of speaking as many languages as possible, with a special interest in English given its worldwide status as a lingua franca. Language academies, schools, and universities promote courses dealing with English, introduce bilingual and immersion programs, and overall try to highlight the importance of cross-cultural communication. Most of these courses assure that their teaching methodologies are catered towards effective English learning, and that their ultimate goal is for their students to learn how to express themselves using English. To set an example, the language immersions company Education First describes itself as an organization dealing with “experiential learning programs” that allow customers to “learn a language” and “communicate with the world […]” (Education First, n.d.). The phrase *to learn a language* has been standardized in our everyday lexicon, the same way people learn how to play a sport, learn mathematical equations, or learn how to sing. All these activities involve a study of certain rules that ultimately have the goal of mastering them. Nevertheless, as far as language speaking is concerned, what does it mean to *learn* a language? Is it a process that takes place through a conscious studying of grammar rules? Or, contrarily, does it take place in an unconscious way, similarly to when we start speaking in our mother tongue?

To try to answer these questions, Stephen Krashen proposes the learning-acquisition hypothesis, establishing a difference between two processes that take place when dealing with a second language (L2): language acquisition and language learning. On the one hand, acquisition refers to a process that takes place unconsciously, meaning that individuals are aware of language usage, but do not acknowledge the fact that they have acquired it (i.e., when a language is acquired, grammatical rules are usually ignored and speakers tend to go for feelings of how accurate a structure is rather than a conscious analysis of the rule that is being applied) (Krashen, 1982: 10). On the other hand, learning a language involves a sense of consciousness and explicit learning (i.e., a conscious study of how a language should be spoken) (Patrick, 2019). Overall, the acquisition-learning hypothesis sustains that when approaching an L2 as adults, both processes take place even if the acquisition capacity is usually associated to children (Krashen, 1982: 10). This idea will be furtherly developed in later sections of this dissertation.

4.1.1. First Language Acquisition (FLA) and Learning

As previously mentioned, the idea of an unconscious process that leads to the correct use of a language is typically related to children. Starting at a very young age, infants are capable of acquiring their mother tongue (L1) without any effort and in a considerably rapid way, as opposed to adults trying to acquire an L2, a slower process that is often presented with more difficulties and impediments (O'Grady & Cho, 2001). This acquisition takes place through interaction coming from caregivers or family members, where children are exposed to their L1 thanks to interactive daily routines (e.g., parents changing diapers, feeding the baby, playing games…) through which they are unconsciously being prepared for communication (Clark & Casillas, 2016: 311). To put it differently, for children to attain the utterance of words and sentences, they previously undergo a process of exposure to their L1 in a rather reduced space (i.e., accompanied by their parents or caregivers) that encourages interaction and allows for experimentation in terms of communication.

Having stated that FLA takes place during the early stages of life, there are scholars that claim that the learning of an L1 is also possible. Krashen (1982: 11) states that, defining language learning as the explicit study of language norms and grammar, notions about each individual's L1 are indeed taught in school (e.g., Spanish students learning about

verb tenses in their mother tongue). Nevertheless, this would not be part of the acquisition-learning hypothesis given that knowing about the formal rules of an L1 does not necessarily contribute to language editing nor affects FLA, since learning usually takes place some time after the acquisition has occurred.

4.1.2. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Learning

SLA could be defined as a multidisciplinary field focused on the study of how a language is acquired once an L1 has already been established, covering cases dealing with both children and adults (Gass, 2016). This definition (and the concept of SLA itself) implies that the previously addressed acquisition system, that allows children to speak their L1 by interactional exposure, could also be present in adults. Krashen (1982: 10) expands on this idea by claiming that although adults may be able to acquire an L2 through the same mechanisms that allowed them to acquire their L1, it does not mean that native-like production will always be achieved.

Studies dealing with SLA have historically tackled the acquisition of grammatical knowledge (e.g., phonology, morphology or syntax), interferences coming from the L1, and how performance developed over time, but recent studies have shifted their perspective towards more nuanced aspects of acquisition (e.g., how factors such as motivation, socio-cultural backgrounds and psycholinguistics can affect SLA) (Gass, 2009: 109-10). Overall, SLA is influenced by many more factors than FLA given the time period when it takes place and the cognitive capacities that we develop, added to the fact that a language has already been acquired when dealing with an L2 and our exposure is usually more limited.

Taking Krashen's concepts into consideration, second language learning will thus be the conscious study of the grammatical information of an L2. The learning of a foreign language, contrary to acquisition, does not conclude in the ability to speak in said language, but in the obtention of certain tools to correct errors and self-assess each one's competence (Patrick, 2019). Krashen (1982) establishes a difference among two different types of language learning: studying grammatical rules and theoretical aspects; and the so-called language appreciation, a process that implies learning new information about a language for mere pleasure, curiosity, or research purposes (e.g., linguistic scholars).

4.2. Input hypothesis

Throughout the past three decades, research within the SLA field has focused on the analysis of each learner's linguistic environment, with an emphasis on how the received input can influence the lexical and grammatical knowledge of a language (Gor & Long, 2009). This interest arises from Krashen's formulation of the "input hypothesis", a theory that intends to explain how SLA takes place through the analysis of input. The two main claims of this hypothesis could be summarized by the facts that, firstly, input is directly associated with acquisition, not learning, and secondly, that in order for acquisition to take place in an effective way, the input we receive must provide structures that go a bit beyond our competence (Krashen, 1982: 28). These structures can be described as "i+1 input", where "i" is the current level of the student and "+1" represents going one step further. At a first glance, it could seem irrational to teach students grammatical structures or lexical components that do not correspond to their current level, but Krashen (1982: 28) claims that, when processing the information of a message, other extra-linguistic elements different from competence play an important role in the understanding of said information, namely the context or our general knowledge about the world.

Once established that the input theory claims that we acquire a language through exposure to i+1 input, it is important to assess what further characteristics make input valuable and encourage acquisition. As a starting point, input types can be classified into the following categories:

(1) Pre-modified input: this concept refers to all input that is previously modified for it to be understandable, by either simplifying complex structures, varying the vocabulary or providing extra context or definitions if needed (Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). Some examples of pre-modified input could be grammar worksheets used in language teaching contexts, children's books or texts used to assess reading comprehension.

(2) Interactionally modified input: in this case, the received input is modified gradually through a process of interaction, where the feedback provided by the receiver forces the speaker to add extra information or accommodate their way of speaking to solve comprehension issues (Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). This type of input is common in interactions among native speakers and non-native speakers, where the former usually adapt their language use to facilitate communication.

(3) Non-modified input: contrarily to the two previous types, non-modified input is not simplified nor elaborated, and does not typically have the purpose of language teaching (Le, 2011). An example would be a regular conversation among native speakers, where usually none of them needs to modify their input to allow for comprehension.

Gass & Varonis (1994) conclude that the type of input that a learner receives does influence their performance in the long run. In their study, Native Speakers (NS) were asked to give directions to Non-Native Speaker (NNS), and vice versa. When NS offered non-modified input, NNS provided more detailed and well-constructed directions, whereas when NS modified their input, NNS presented a better level of understanding, but their production was less clear (Gass & Varonis, 1994).

Therefore, it is necessary to establish a common ground between modified and non-modified input that balances understanding and performance. Krashen (1982) thus proposes the term "optimal input":

(4) Optimal input: taking Krashen's recommendations into account, optimal input would be the one that favors acquisition in the most efficient way (i.e., by exposing learners to i+1 structures). These recommendations also include that the input must be comprehensible, interesting to the learner and relevant to their education, not grammatically sequenced (i.e., the selection of input should not be carried out by explicitly searching for i+1 resources), and of a sufficient quantity (Krashen, 1982, 63-72).

After describing the characteristics of an input that favors SLA, the next challenge is to establish the contexts in which learners can be exposed to this optimal input. It is of common assumption that one of the best ways to improve speaking competence in a foreign language is to go abroad and be exposed to the "true variant" of that language, placing yourself in a situation where you will be forced to use the language daily. Krashen (1982: 58) opposes to this idea by claiming that, on the one hand, input exposure when going abroad at an early level could result in more content than the learner can process, and on the other hand, this lack of comprehension may lead to anxiety or a lack of motivation. Alternatively, there are studies that suggest that, under certain contexts, language immersion might be a beneficial source of input. Cheng (2012), carried out an

empirical study where he analyzed three Chinese schools offering language immersion programs to fluent learners of English, concluding that students who participated in those programs improved their production in comparison to the ones who did not join. Furthermore, there is also evidence of immigrant children in the US who were raised in a bilingual context and were able to rapidly learn English thanks to the exposure and input they received at school (Espinosa, 2015). Another useful source of input, especially during the early stages, resides within the language teaching classroom: not only will learners be in an environment where conversation among peers with a similar competence can take place, but they will also be exposed to "teacher talk", a type of both pre-modified and interactionally modified input that ensures comprehension and, ideally, acquisition (Krashen, 1982: 59). In other words, as opposed to the usual role of a classroom that is to teach the different competences of a language, they should be considered as a place where useful input can be obtained. Nevertheless, although classrooms create a space where optimal or semi-optimal input is provided, it is not sufficient for acquisition to take place. An instructor can be effectively trained to use "teacher talk" and can apply the best teaching methodologies, but in order for acquisition to take place, students must also play an active role in their learning (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021).

Contrarily to the importance given to input, this hypothesis gives little attention to output and speech production. According to Krashen (1982: 61) the sole purpose of output is to initiate a scenario where communication will take place and therefore input will be produced:

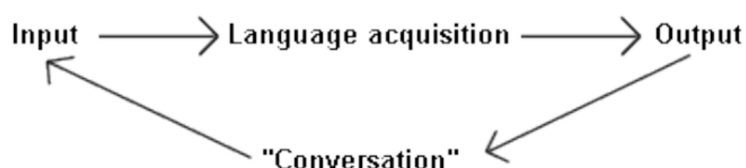


Figure 1. Extracted from Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in Second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.

There is consistent evidence to support the input theory. For instance, the use of "caretaker speech" or "motherese" (i.e., simplified language that is usually employed to communicate with children) as a source of early input, is one of the main tools that parents

unconsciously use and favors FLA (Saint-Georges et al., 2013). This type of input is roughly tuned, which means that caretakers do not modify their speech with the explicit intention of teaching a language (i.e., it is an indirect source of i+1 for the child) (Krashen, 1982: 22). Therefore, it confirms the hypothesis that an effective input should be comprehensible and not grammatically sequenced. Furthermore, the input hypothesis fits within other widely accepted theories of SLA. To set an example, the phenomenon of silent periods and interferences from an L1 when approaching a new language can be explained through the input hypothesis: "speaking ability emerges on its own after enough competence has been developed by listening and understanding" (Krashen, 1982: 27). Thus, not being able to orally produce a sentence, or making use of grammar rules from the learner's L1 does not mean that the L1 itself is impeding the acquisition of the L2, but that the learner is still processing the input received or needs to be exposed to additional input (Krashen, 1982: 27).

Critiques to this theory reside mainly in the protagonism that is given to input throughout the whole theory. As mentioned before, Krashen (1982) focuses on the characteristics of an input that favors acquisition but fails to delve into how interaction and output can contribute to this process. To solve this issue, Long (1981) proposes the Interaction Hypothesis, claiming that the ideal environment where a learner can obtain optimal input is not reduced to the teaching classroom, but also includes interactions with NS where "negotiation of meaning" takes place (e.g., asking for clarifications or rephrasing). Furthermore, considering input as the only way of acquiring a language can hinder language teaching and assessment: how can teachers establish the level of their students? (i.e., their "i") How does a learner move from one level to another? Although Krashen (1981) does not account on these issues directly, and taking into consideration that performance evaluation is still an issue explored nowadays, a possible solution would be reinforcing Krashen's initial idea that acquisition needs to be followed by learning in order to properly speak a language.

4.3. Monitor theory

Starting from the acquisition-learning distinction and the previous idea that both processes need to be taken into account when learning or assessing competence in a foreign language, Krashen proposes the monitor theory. This theory claims that, once acquisition has taken place and allows us to produce utterances in a foreign language,

learned knowledge comes into place as an editor or a monitor (Krashen, 1982: 15). Therefore, the only purpose of language learning would be to modify or improve our production thorough a conscious process:

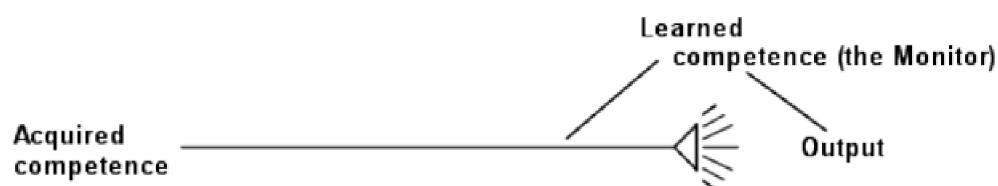


Figure 2. Extracted from Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in Second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.

According to Hassan (2022), there are three requirements that need to be considered for the Monitor ability to be developed:

(1) Sufficient preparation time, so that each learner can get a grasp of the different grammatical rules of a language and which ones will be useful.
(2) Prioritizing form over meaning.
(3) Being fully conscious about the learned rules and language use.

These claims, thus, suggest that grammatical rules can and should be learned. A study carried out by Schleffler & Cinciała (2006) concluded that few grammatical rules are actually acquired implicitly, as opposed to other areas, and that understanding the underlying principles of a language helps students to process input in a smoother way. However, realistically speaking, it is impossible to learn all the rules, given the broad differences between the prescriptive rules and the ones that are actually used by an average native speaker. Facing students with too complex grammar books can lead to an exposure of a greater level than i+1 and to grammar rules that will never be used in day-to-day situations. (Krashen, 1982: 94).

Once the monitoring ability has been developed, Krashen (1982: 19) then distinguishes between three types of monitor users:

(1) Monitor over-users: learners who usually overanalyze their discourse and present hesitations and concerns when speaking, trying to find the perfect grammatical structure.
(2) Monitor under-users: learners who tend to go for simpler structures to play it safe, or simply because they have not learned the correct structure.
(3) Monitor optimal-users: learners whose grammatical knowledge does not interfere with their production.

In an analytical study by Fikroni et al. (2015), it was discovered that language learners tend to overuse their monitor: 71.88% of the participants were classified as over-users, whereas only 21.88% of them presented an optimal use. These results highlight once again the importance of selecting adequate grammar rules when teaching a language and not exposing students with rules they cannot handle or that will impede their correct progression. Going back to Krashen (1982: 94), learning a high number of grammar rules does not result in good performance, but in a greater probability of overusing the monitor.

To furtherly understand why an overuse and underuse of the monitor takes place, it is worth mentioning its close relation to the different processes of learning a language. These processes include production errors such as language transfer, interferences, and overgeneralizations. When a student's L1 differs greatly from the L2 they are learning, there are two errors that can take place: either the learner is unable to process and use the new structures due to their dissimilarities with their mother tongue (interference), or they try to apply the same rules of their L1 (transfer) (Beardmore, 1986). Transfer and interference phenomena can lead to an underuse of the monitor, where due to the inability to recall the correct L2 structures, the student cannot edit their production.

Contrarily, there are errors that can be directly tied to an overuse of the monitor, namely overgeneralizations, a process that consists of a student learning a rule in the L2 and applying it to instances where different rules should be taken into consideration (e.g., using the regular past "-ed" morpheme in every English verb) (Khansir, 2012). It is important that teachers are trained to identify and analyze these errors to avoid not only an incorrect use of the monitor, but also to prevent fossilization: a situation in which transfers or overgeneralizations are completely assimilated by the learner and will be difficult to correct in the long run (Han & Selinker, 2005).

The main source of criticism for the monitor theory does not tackle the principles of the theory as such, but the little importance that Krashen gives it when talking about SLA. While he relegates the monitoring as a mere post-acquisition process, other linguists such as Rabbi (2015) acknowledge the status of monitoring as a "basic learning strategy". Further questioning for this theory revolves around the fact that, when producing an utterance in a foreign language, we do not consciously use our monitor since the fast pace of regular conversations does not allow for enough reflection time, and conscious monitoring would make our speech slower and perhaps less clear (Mitchell et al., 2019: 46). Therefore, there could be two different solutions to this issue: either monitoring is an unconscious ability, related to the acquisition field rather than to language learning, or it takes place in such a rapid way that it does not impede communication. Nevertheless, taking into account that most grammar rules need to be learned (Schleffer & Cinciala, 2006), there is still a connection between monitoring and learning even if its use were to be unconscious. All in all, regardless of the interpretation that is adopted, Krashen's principles (1982) are still valid and only need to be approached from a different perspective.

4.4. English grammar (SVO)

When approaching the study of English as a foreign language, one of the first issues that students are faced with is the linear order in which the constituents of a sentence should be organized, the so called "word order" (Song, 2012: 1). For instance, students whose L1 is Japanese have to deal with the fact that the position of the verb within the sentence differs from what they are used to. The prescriptive pattern of English sentences can be summarized by stating that a subject (S) is followed by a verb (V), and afterwards by the rest of constituents of the sentence, whether it be complements (C), objects (O), adjunts (A), etc. (Yu, 2021). To set an example, the sentence "John likes strawberries" follows the pattern SVO, where John is the subject, likes is the verb, and strawberries is the direct object.

There are certain contexts, however, where this pattern can be altered. For instance, subject ellipsis can take place for numerous reasons (e.g., language economy, coherence, or in spontaneous speech), leading to an (S)VX pattern, where only the verb and the rest of constituents (X) can be explicitly identified (Nariyama, 2006). Other alterations of the usual order include preposing or postposing, and inversions:

(1) The preposition or postposition of constituents within a sentence has the purpose of drawing the recipient's attention to specific information (e.g., "Yesterday, we decided to go to the lake). (Birner & Ward, 1998).
(2) Inversions usually take place in the form of a subject that changes its location and appears in a "postverbal" position (e.g., interrogative constructions with the verb to be: "Are you at school at the moment?"). (Birner, 1995).

As showcased by these examples, changes in word order are mostly situational and have specific functions, namely emphasis or changing the grammatical mood of a sentence, meaning that SVX patterns are usually expected. It is also worth noting that both in the canonical and non-canonical patterns, the verb seems to appear early on, and does not occupy a final position unless the verb does not require complementation (e.g., "She runs") or there is a need for markedness (e.g., "Books, I like").

4.5. Japanese grammar (SOV)

Contrarily to English, Japanese is a "verb-final language", meaning that its basic sentence pattern typically includes the verb at the end (Suzuki, 2000):

(a)	*Jon*	*ga*	*hon*	*o*	*katta.*	(John a book bought)
	S		**O**		**V**	
(b)	*Hon*	*o*	*Jon*	*ga*	*katta.*	(A book John bought)
	O		**S**		**V**	

(Suzuki, 2020)

As evidenced by (a) and (b), sentence patterns in Japanese present a relatively free order, as opposed to English, meaning subjects and objects might be interchanged as long as the verb stays in the final position. Among these two options, SOV is considered as the canonical prescriptive order, but studies have proven that OSV patterns can mostly be seen when objects have a path semantic role (Tanaka, 2020). Although in English the role "path" is usually given to a constituent that indicates the place through which a subject is moving, Tanaka (2020) furtherly explains that in Japanese there could be cases where this location is considered as an object and not an adjunct:

(c) *Jon ga kawa o oyoida.* (John the river swam)
S O V
(d) *Kawa de Jon ga oyoida.* (The river John swam)
O S V

(Suzuki, 2020)

Taking into account the previous ideas, both examples (c) and (d) would be grammatical, but the latter would be more frequent given that “in the river” is considered as an object with a path semantic role. Other variations in word order include changes in the nominative and accusative elements of transitive sentences. They maintain the semantic meaning regardless of the constituents’ position, and take place depending on the context or the emphasis that needs to be given to each participant (Kondo & Yamashita, 2011):

(e) *Jon ga Mary o mita* (John Mary saw)
S O V
(f) *Mary wo Jon ga mita* (Mary John saw)
O S V

(Suzuki, 2020)

These changes receive the name of “sentence scrambling”, and as seen previously, they can occur due to various reasons, such as emphasis, semantic meaning, or even differences between formal and informal contexts. There are some exceptional contexts where sentence elements or particles can appear after the verb, but they are rare and are not relevant for the present study, meaning that we can generalize that the norm is for the verb to always appear as the last constituent in Japanese sentences (Kondo & Yamashita, 2011).

5. CONTEXTUALIZATION

5.1. English in the Japanese society

Having stated some of the syntactical differences between English and Japanese, it is important to establish the situation of English as a language in the Japanese society. This idea can be approached following two different perspectives: firstly, according to the

status and importance that is given to English, and secondly, analyzing people's overall opinion on the language.

It is undeniable that English has reached a global status and is used as a complementary language in many countries despite not being the official one. Kachru (1992) proposes the three concentric model to try to explain the importance English plays or has played in a certain country, which would be designated as follows:

(1) Inner circle: it includes the UK and countries affected by the first English diaspora (e.g., USA, Canada or New Zealand…). They are characterized by having English as their main official language.
(2) Outer circle: this circle makes reference to the second diaspora of the English language: African and Asian countries that were under the influence of British imperialism and had to inevitably incorporate English into their societies (e.g., India, Kenya or Singapore).
(3) Expanding circle: it refers to countries where English has a certain level of importance, but not in an official way and because for reasons not tied to colonialism (e.g., China, Korea or Norway).

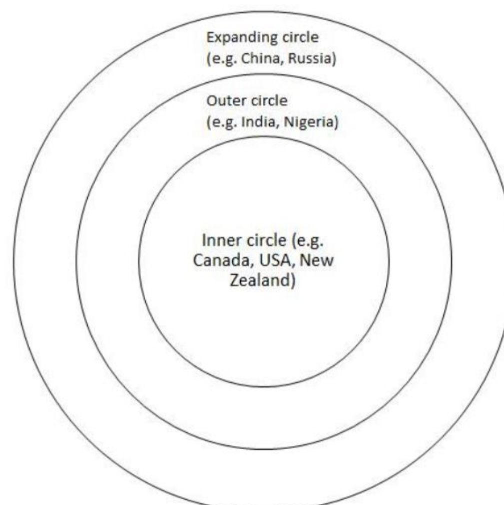


Figure 3. Extracted from Al-Mutairi, M.A. (2019). Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model of English Language: An Overview of Criticism & the Place of Kuwait in it. *English Language Teaching, 13*, 85-88.

Jenkins (2014: 15) adds on to this model by suggesting that the inner circle countries are the ones that have created and imposed language rules across history (norm-providing); the outer circle has adapted English to their own way of living due to it being imposed (norm-developing); and the expanding circle has had little to no influence in the evolution of the language (norm-depending). Thus, following this criterion, Japan would be part of the expanding circle: English is not an official language, nor it has been established due to a colonialist or imperialist past.

Taking into account that Japan belongs to the expanding circle, English is rarely used in their everyday society. Its use is usually limited to international meetings, overseas relationships, and a small number of internal fields such as media, the government or education (D'Angelo, 2017). Furthermore, as Japan has never been colonized by an English-speaking country, the language is perceived by the national institutions as a means of communication with other countries rather than an imposition or a cultural component (Smith, 2015). In other words, English in Japan has an international connotation: it is used as a lingua franca and its objective is for international relations to be smoother. Furthermore, this phenomenon has resulted in Japanese popular elements (e.g., manga comics, J-pop or TV shows) being influenced by Western culture and include references to the English language, going as far as to imitating British pop culture in their tourism promotion slogans (in 2010, the Japanese slogan "Cool Japan" was inspired by "Cool Britannia", used in Great Britain to attract tourists) (Seaton & Yamamura, 2015).

Nevertheless, there are still opposite views regarding the current use of the language. Many people, biased by traditionalist ideas, see English as a threat to their culture and the preservation of the Japanese language, while others consider these changes as stylistic and defend the use of English as a way of enriching their media or making oneself look smart (i.e., speaking English is equivalent to a higher status and education), rather than as an internationalization tool (Toh, 2014). The mere existence of this debate evidences that, even if the ambits where English is used are limited, it is still an up-to-date topic in the Japanese society.

5.2. English in the Japanese education system

As mentioned in previous sections of this paper, English and Japanese differ widely in terms of grammar, but even basic elements such as the writing system or verb conjugation

are also completely different. Therefore, it is necessary to follow different teaching approaches than those used in Western countries with romance languages such as Spanish or French. The first accounts of English teaching in Japan date back to the 19th century, when a need for speaking new languages appeared, and educational programs focused on teaching English in a way that could be easily quantified and graded: by following grammar-translation methods where the main language used in the classroom was Japanese (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). In the early 20th century, Harold E. Palmer, an English linguist, became the official advisor of the education ministry in Japan, suggesting innovative teaching methodologies that focused on oral skills through the exclusive use of English in the lessons, but most of his ideas were discarded due to the lack of training among teachers (Iino, 2002). Eventually, after the second world war, learning English started to become popular among Japanese people, but it was not until the 1970s that a significant shift took place: for the first time, English was not regarded as foreign element but as a tool for communication, a first step that would later lead to the pluralist views mentioned in the previous section (Sasaki, 2008).

Moving on to the situation of English education in Japan during recent years, although there has been a clear development, there are still issues that have emerged. English classes for elementary schools, which were first established in 2008, tend to focus only on memorizing and learning the English alphabet, while Junior and Senior high school lessons do not usually follow a single approach: either teachers opt for drilling or translation strategies, or overuse roleplays and games (Ikegashira et al., 2009). Therefore, students do not receive useful input and teachers may become exhausted due to the methodology variations across levels. A possible solution for this lack of English exposure was the introduction of bilingual and immersive programs in education: language classes fully conducted in English and the use of the L2 in subjects such as mathematics or sciences (Sakamoto, 2012).

Added to these changes, one of the most relevant shifts in English education took place when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), issued in 2014 an education reform plan as a response to globalization. Their intention was to improve English proficiency in Japan due to the Olympics that were set to be held in 2020. The main points that MEXT (2014) proposed in their reform could be summarized as follows:

(1) Enriching English education in the lower levels (i.e., elementary school), focusing on establishing a foundation based on the development of communicative skills.
(2) Implementing classes fully conducted in English for higher levels (i.e., lower secondary school and upper secondary school), and encouraging activities such as debates or presentations.
(3) Improving the training of English teachers, offering them teaching materials, courses to enhance their skills, and giving them the opportunity to work with language assistants.
(4) Testing the students' progress regularly through external exams such as TOEFL.

The latest updates of the English national curriculum standard shows that some of these measures have actually been put into practice. For instance, by taking a closer look at the 2020 Elementary School curriculum, the overall objective for students in terms of foreign languages is for them "to develop […] competences that form the base of communication as follows through language activities such as listening, reading, speaking and writing in foreign languages […]" (MEXT, 2020). Furthermore, in relation to English education beyond secondary school, a basic level of English is now required by a lot of Japanese universities, leading to multiple cases where native teachers are hired to teach "Oral Communication" as a complementation to the regular English classes that students receive (Jones, 2019). In a way, it can be stated that as years have passed by, Japan has tried to shift from a more grammar-focused approach to a communicative setting where oral production is favored.

Despite the institutional and scholarly efforts to improve English education, there are still issues that need to be faced. Firstly, according to Giri & Fo (2014), in the midst of the 2010s, there was still an unawareness of the paradigm changes that were taking place, mostly due to traditionalist and conformist ideas. Furthermore, the most common way of teaching English in schools has historically been related to the "Standard American Speaker Model", a model where American English is taught and seen as the goal that needs to be attained in order to speak "good English" (e.g., the closer your accent is to the American one, the better your English will be) (Honna & Takeshita, 2014). This has led to a diminishment of world Englishes and the flourishing of the "native speaker syndrome", which pressures students to achieve a native-like level (Giri & Fo, 2014). Honna & Takeshita (2014) suggest that a possible solution for these problems would be

the implementation of the "Japanese English Speaker Model", where the role of American English is reduced as a source of input that favors acquisition, and there is a focus on intelligibility and multicultural communication rather than imitating American patterns and longing for a perfect proficiency. Overall, the implementation of changes and the modification of national curricula takes a long time. In addition, societal changes of beliefs and structures that have been historically followed take even greater efforts to overcome.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. Participants

To carry out this study, 22 participants have voluntarily agreed to answer a questionnaire regarding both their English learning background and their exposure to the language outside of the classroom. They are all Japanese students belonging to either a university or postgraduate level, with ages ranging from 18 to 24 years old. Most of the participants study in Tokyo or neighboring towns such as Yokohama, but some others attend universities in other major Japanese cities (Osaka and Kobe).

The selection of participants was based on two common factors: firstly, their mother tongue had to be Japanese, and secondly, it was necessary that they had studied English at some point in their lives. While all of them have studied English during Senior high school (grades 10-12), not all of them started their English education at the same time: 5 started in pre-school, 7 in elementary school, 6 in Junior high school, and 3 in Senior high school. Out of the 22, 13 are still studying English nowadays. Furthermore, 17 participants have an intermediate (B1-B2) English level, while 4 have an advanced (C1-C2) English level.

The following charts summarize the participants' profiles:

- Ages:

16-18	**19-21**	**22-24**
1	5	16

- English level:

Intermediate (B1-B2)	Advanced (C1-C2)
17	4

- Period when they started learning English:

Pre-School	Elementary school (grades 1-6)	Junior high school (grades 7-9)	Senior high school (grades 10-12)
5	7	6	3

(One of the participants already had English as a mother tongue since it was her mother's L1, but was brought up in Japan, and another one had Chinese as his L1)

6.2. Quantitative analysis: survey

All the 22 participants answered a survey consisting of four different sections:

- First section (personal information): it includes questions to assess the eligibility of the participants, such as their age or mother tongue; and classification questions such as their English level or whether they have any English certificates.
- Second section (English learning): this section deepens into their educational background in terms of English. The first part focuses on the teaching of grammar and, specifically, of the SVO pattern, with questions related to the period when they started learning English, or whether they have been taught about the differences in word order. The second part consists of self-assessment statements where each participant has to indicate whether or not they agree with them. These statements are related to the level of difficulty that learning grammar and the SVO pattern has supposed to them, to the role of grammar and the L1 in their English classes, and their own oral production fluency.
- Third section (English exposure): the purpose of this section is to evaluate the input received by the participants outside their English classes. It focuses on whether they use English in their daily lives, the different English media that they consume, and the specific instances where they are exposed to English.

- Fourth section (Final reflections): this final section intends to allow the participants to select the strategies that were more useful to them in order to improve their English proficiency.

A more detailed description of this questionnaire, including all the questions that were asked, can be found in the results section.

6.3. Qualitative analysis: personal experiences

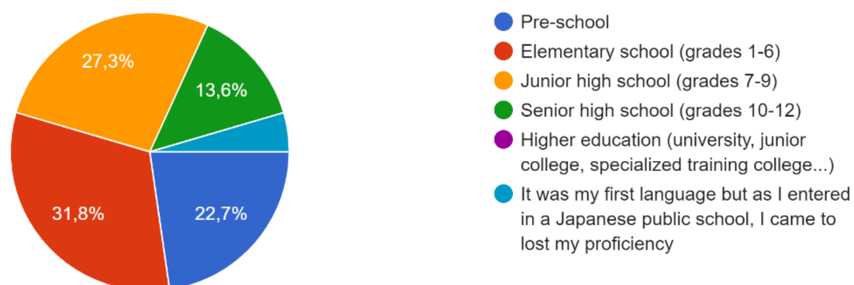
After the fourth section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to voluntarily give a brief overview of their experience while learning English, focusing on how they viewed grammar and word order. Out of the 22 participants, 16 decided to participate in this part of the study, providing a deeper insight on their struggles with English grammar and the aspects that shaped their English learning experience, both in positive and negative ways. These personal experiences have been used to furtherly support the conclusions extracted from the questionnaire. All these answers have been included in the annex without any modifications.

7. RESULTS

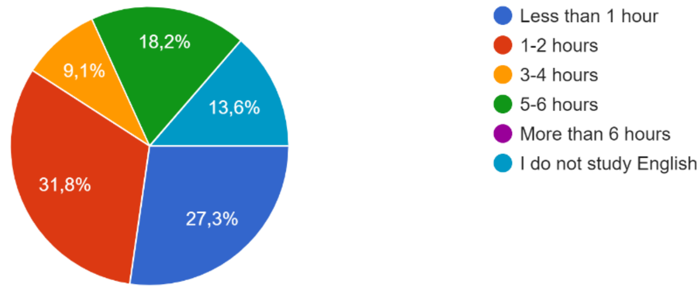
After conducting the previously mentioned questionnaire, the following results were obtained. It is worth mentioning that the answers in section 1 of the survey were only used to identify the profile of each participant, therefore they have not been included in this section.

- Questions in section 2 (English learning background): the participants were asked to choose only one answer in these questions.

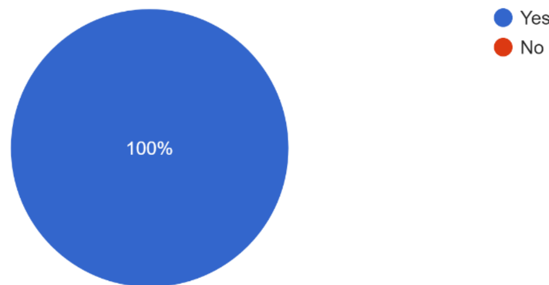
1. When did you start studying English?



2. How many hours do you study English a week?



3. Have you ever studied English grammar in your classes?

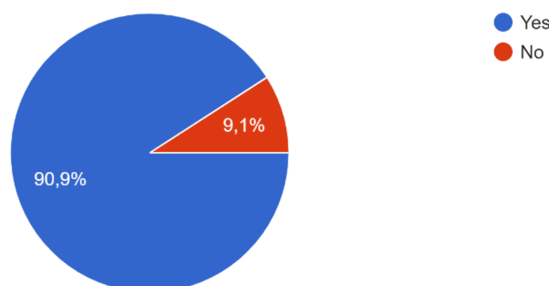


4. As you may know, English and Japanese have a different word order:

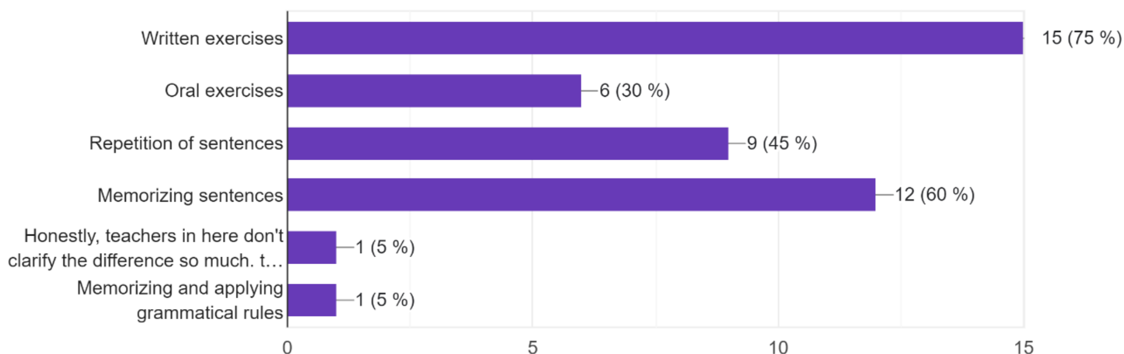
- In English, the regular order is usually Subject, Verb, Object (SVO), for example, "Mary likes apples".

- In Japanese, the verb tends to be at the end (SOV), for example, "メアリーはリンゴが好き".

Have you ever been taught about this difference?



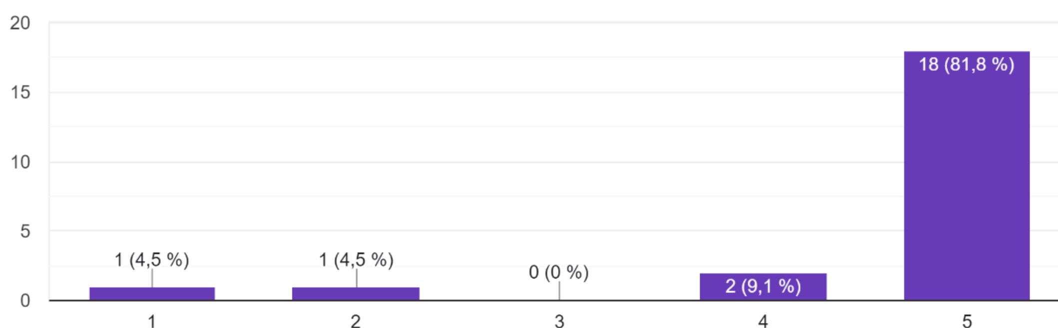
In the following question, the participants who had learned about word order in their English classes were asked to select the activities and tasks that were used in order to do so. These were the most common answers:



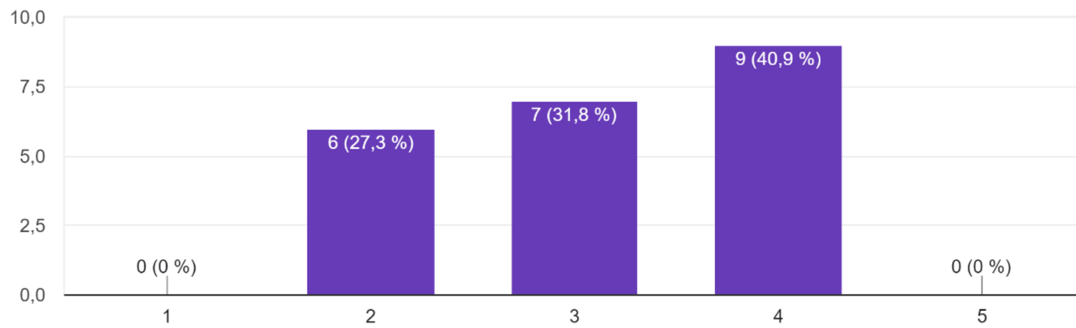
Although most of the participants indicated that they had been taught about this aspect, one of them stated that "Honestly, teachers in [Japan] don't clarify the difference so much. They are just like "English and Japanese are totally different, this is how English is". But […] I was studying English grammar from repetition or shadowing".

For the last part of section 2, the participants were presented with six statements in relation to their English learning experience. Their task was to indicate whether or not they agreed with those statements, following a scale of 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The results were as follows:

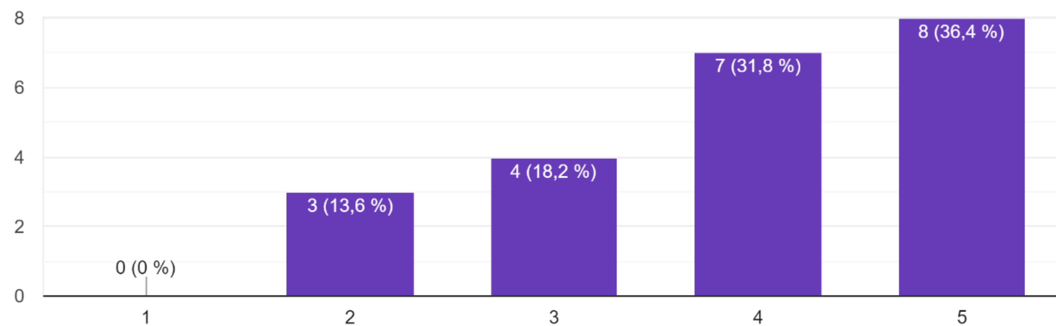
1. My teachers used or have used Japanese in order to teach grammar.



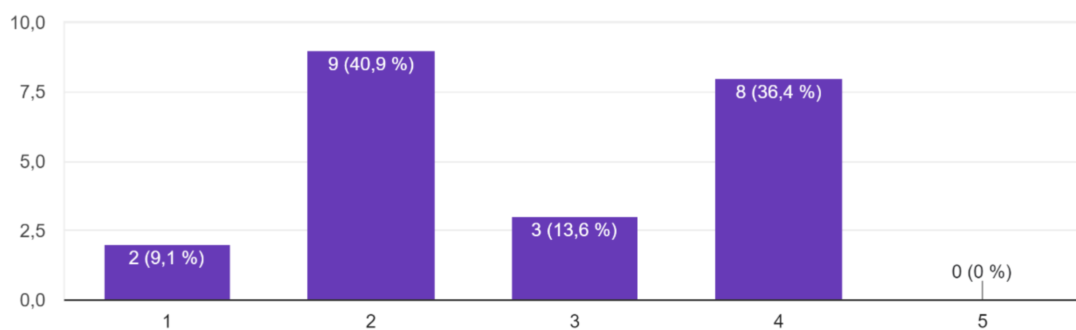
2. English grammar is easy to learn.



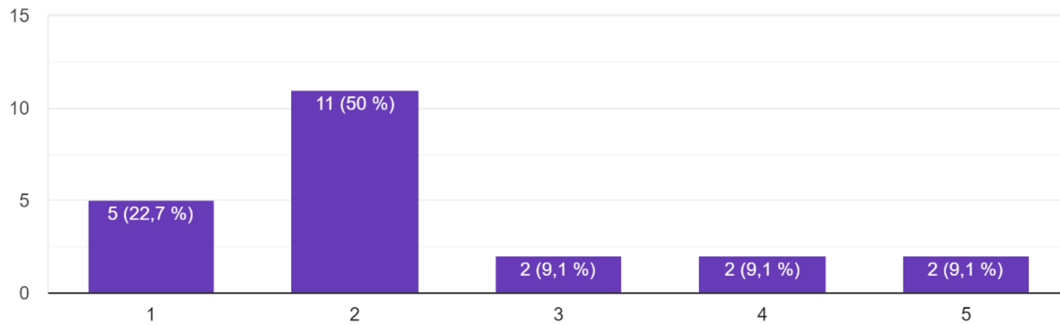
3. My English classes focus mainly on grammar.



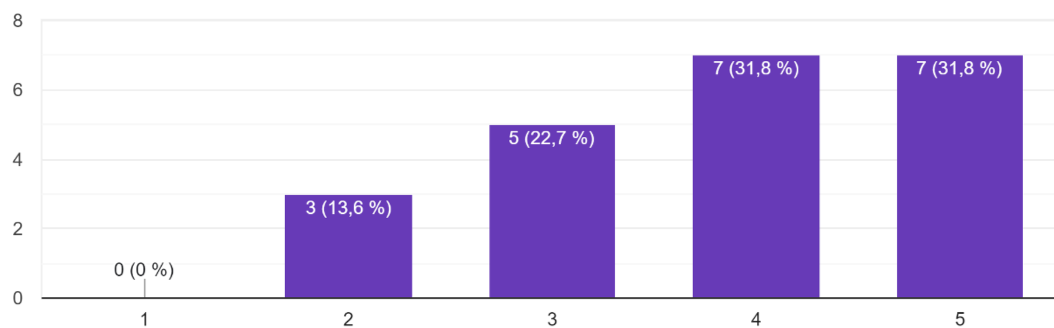
4. Learning the English word order was hard for me.



5. Learning the English word order was the most difficult part of English grammar.



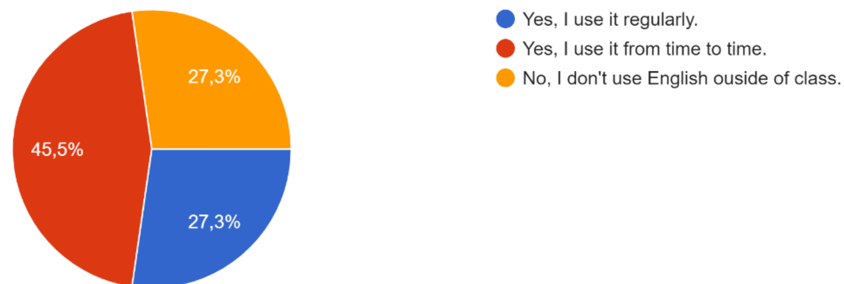
6. When I speak English, I do not think about the order of words, they come out automatically.



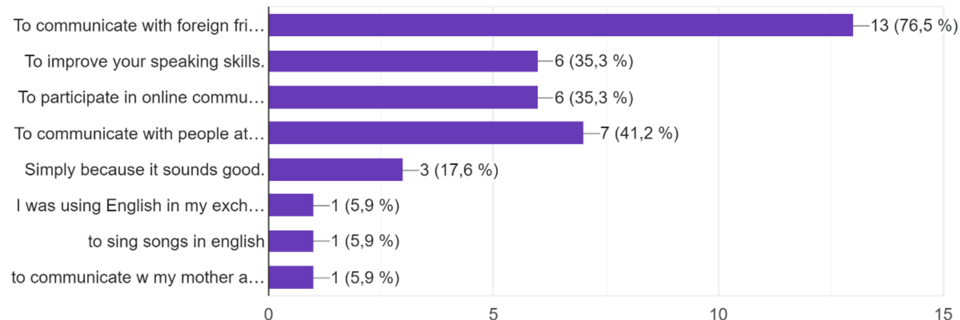
- Questions in section 3 (English exposure):

The first part of this section intended to identify whether the participants used English outside their classes and the purpose of doing so.

1. Do you use English outside your English classes?

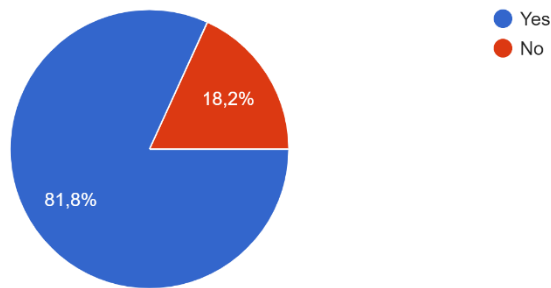


2. If your answer was "yes", why do you use English outside your classes? (select all that apply).

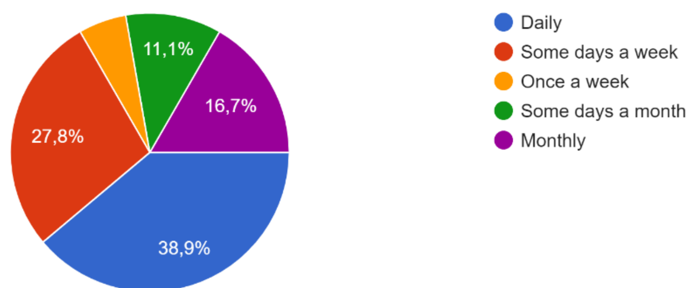


The last part of section 3 allowed the participants to discuss their exposure to English through the consumption of English media, as well as through other methods not mentioned in the questionnaire.

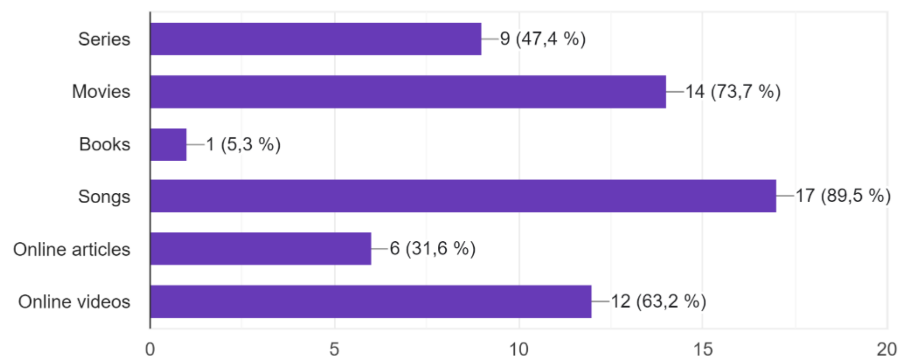
1. Do you consume English media? (for example, English books, TV series…)



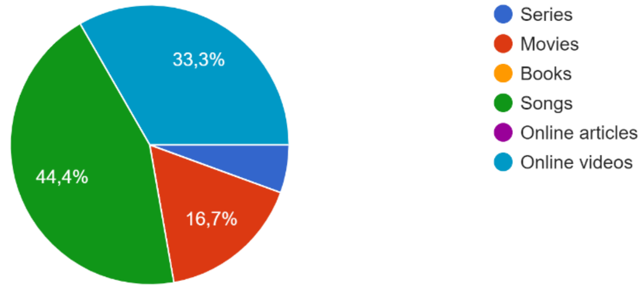
2. If your answer was "yes", how often do you watch, listen or read English media?



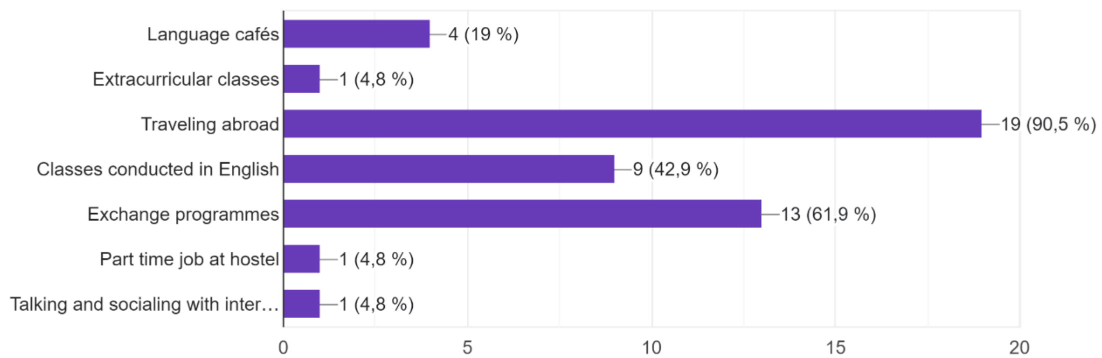
3. What types of English media do you usually consume?



4. If you selected more than one, which one would you say is the most frequent one?

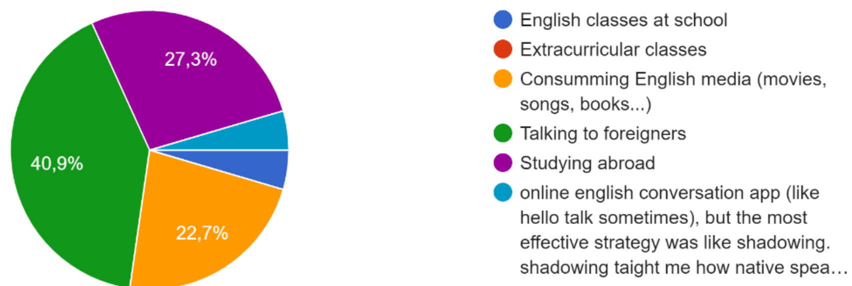


5. Are you exposed to English in any other way? (select all that apply).



- Section 4 (final reflections): for this final section, the participants were asked to choose among different options in relation to the one that resulted the most useful for them.

1. Which of the following was the most useful for you in order to learn English?



8. RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

8.1. English learning in school

Although the participants of this study have attended different schools, and in some cases even come from different areas of Japan, there are still common aspects that can be seen by analyzing both the results and the additional comments provided in the last section of the questionnaire. Most of the 22 participants started being exposed to English at an early stage of their lives: more than half of them (54.5%) received English classes for the first time before Junior high school, and 22.7% had already been in contact with English during pre-school. Attending language classes at such a young age could be seen as a positive decision, but some of the students claim that the lessons did not focus on developing oral competences: "I started to learn English when I was around 6 years old. And I kept studying in schools, but we always [took writing and reading] exams, which means not speaking and listening even though we practiced in classes" (Student H). This idea is reinforced by question 3 in section 2 of the questionnaire, where 68.2% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that their English classes were focused mainly on grammatical aspects. Thus, it can be stated that by the time Japanese students have completed their mandatory educational period (primary and secondary school), their writing and reading competences, as well as their grammar analysis capabilities will be the most developed ones, as shared by two of the participants: "To be honest, I think many Japanese [students] are better at writing and reading than at listening and speaking […]" (Student D), "From my experience, the most difficult part is how [to] apply grammar knowledge to English conversation or speaking […]" (Student C). Moreover, by conducting grammar-focused lessons as a norm, there is a risk of monitor overuse, with students overanalyzing their production and syntactic structures. As mentioned previously in this paper, this was actually one of the issues acknowledged by Japan's MEXT in their 2014 reform plan, where they intended to balance the contents of English lessons in lower levels to include both grammar aspects and activities that encourage communication among students.

Despite this, there are still participants (13.6%) that stated they did not receive exclusively grammar-focused classes, and two of them even answered "disagree" when asked if their teachers used Japanese during the lessons. This can be explained by the existence of international schools in Japan. International schools can be defined as elementary, junior

and senior high schools where most students come from foreign countries, therefore the language used to conduct classes is usually English (although there are also specialized international schools, namely Korean schools where the language used is Korean) (Gillis-Furataka, 2007). The students that attended international schools claimed that even the language teaching curriculum is different, and that grammar was taught implicitly through readings and student interaction: "We did not have the curriculum which teaches word order in [my] international school. I naturally [learned] it by reading books and talking [to] my friends in English" (Student A). Another student added that attending an international school brought him the opportunity to use English on a daily basis: "This long-term learning process also enabled me to start using English daily after entering an international high school" (Student F).

8.2. English grammar and word order

As far as grammar is concerned, all the participants have received grammar lessons during their English learning stages. Moreover, 90.9% of them were aware of the differences among word order in English and Japanese, and stated they had been taught about it. This is once again tied to the fact that grammar is usually the focus of a regular English lesson in Japanese schools. Nevertheless, when asked about the difficulties while facing a different word order, most of the participants were either neutral (12.5%), disagreed (41.7%), or strongly disagreed (8.3%) with the fact that learning the English word order was hard for them. What is more, only a 16.6% agreed or strongly agreed that learning the English word order was the most difficult part of English grammar.

A possible explanation is the way through which this difference is taught. Written exercises and the memorization of sentences were the two most widely used activities, followed by the repetition of sentences. Thus, it can be easy for students to master these types of exercises by practicing, memorizing and getting accustomed to them. However, this does not imply that they always use the English word order in a correct way: some participants acknowledged that "[they] do not care about the word order in English if [they] can see the sentences, but it is a bit harder when listening and speaking […]" (Student H), or that in some cases they felt the need to construct "all of the sentences in [their] minds before [they] say [them] to someone" (Student B). Overall, it can be stated that the type of input received can affect specific competences rather than language proficiency as a whole (i.e., being exposed to written exercises and memorizing English

sentences may result in a mastering of the word order in reading comprehension or writing).

8.3. Extracurricular input

While all the participants have experience with English grammar, English classes, and word order, the results were different when asked about their extramural English exposure. 27.3% of them do not use English at all outside their classes, and 45.5% answered they only use it occasionally. Therefore, the number of students who are exposed regularly to English is already limited. This could be explained by either a personal preference, or by the lack of opportunities to do so, as explained by one of the students: "The difficulties I faced mainly concentrated in the lack of a native language environment in east Asian countries" (Student L).

Out of the 16 participants that use English in a non-educational environment, the most common reason behind it is to communicate with foreign people, namely friends or work colleagues. Following Krashen's optimal input model, communicating with foreigners can be a useful source of non-grammatically sequenced input that allows for interaction. Moreover, in the case of friend-to-friend conversations, there is a safe environment where committing errors or taking longer to process a sentence will not be an issue. What is more, 40.9% of the participants claimed that talking to foreigners was the most practical way of improving their English level, even above English classes at school. It is also worth noting that most of the participants do not see this as a way of improving their English proficiency, given that only 6 of them stated that they use English outside school to improve their speaking skills. Once more, this fact gives more value to the input since the initial purpose is not to learn English, therefore, it does not directly aim for i+1 content.

On a different note, most of the participants (81.8%) receive passive input through the consumption of English media, especially songs, movies and TV series. In addition, the majority of them are exposed to this input at least once a week, with a 38.9% of participants stating that they watch, listen to or read English media on a daily basis. While these sources of input do not allow for interaction or output production, they are still valuable considering they follow the characteristics of optimal input, especially in the fact that consuming media is, in most cases, voluntary and will allow the learner to choose

based on their level of comprehension and their interests. As an example, one of the participants claimed that watching Disney Channel in English during his childhood "made it quite unproblematic for [him] to start reading, writing, and learning grammar in English" (Student F). Additionally, media consumption can even be a contribution towards the motivation to learn English, as shared by one student: "I started to learn English because I was really interested in the western culture. I love songs and movies in English" (Student L).

Other common ways of English exposure include traveling abroad and exchange programs. One of the participants even mentioned that studying in a foreign country became a decisive step in her English learning process and allowed her to process grammar in an easier way: "After [being] exposed to [an] environment [where] English is needed, for example, studying abroad, […], the grammar usually comes to my mind automatically" (Student B). Thus, the fact that 90.5% of the participants have traveled abroad and 61.9% have participated in exchange programs may explain why most of them consider that they do not need to think about word order when speaking English.

8.4. Other difficulties faced

Having stated that in certain contexts and under specific circumstances (i.e., after studying abroad or communicating with foreigners) some of the participants did not find word order as the most difficult part when studying English, other areas where they needed an additional effort were mentioned. One of the most common issues, derived directly from a lack of optimal input in the early stages of their school years, would be the lack of confidence while speaking. The participants claimed that "it is difficult to speak English with confidence" (Student E), or even that "[Japanese people] do not have the opportunity to speak English, so they do not have confidence […]" (Student M).

Moreover, some students also stated that they had problems with English pronunciation: "It was not difficult for me to learn about the [word] order in English. I [faced] difficulties in pronunciations" (Student K). As explained previously, the Japanese language teaching system is affected by the "native speaker syndrome", where students feel pressured to sound native-like in their oral production. Added to the lack of opportunities to interact in English environments, and the grammar-focused classes in school, pronunciation may

not be taught in a proper way, affecting once more the speakers' confidence and motivation.

Finally, another issue that was mentioned is the difficulty behind improving one's proficiency once a certain level has already been achieved. Most of the participants (81%) have an intermediate (B1-B2) English level, and one of them expressed his struggles when trying to aim for a more advance level, taking into account the formation of more complex sentences and the comprehension of a wider variety of vocabulary: "A thing that [I have] noticed is that when I gradually reached an intermediate level of the language, I started to feel like somehow it is difficult for me to reach a higher level. Though I could talk freely in English now, I would not be able to use or understand more advanced or academic vocabularies as I do in my mother tongue" (Student L).

9. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the theoretical framework of this paper has showcased the current views on language acquisition and language learning, evidencing the importance of establishing a difference between these two concepts in the language teaching area. Moreover, understanding the basic syntactic pattern differences in English (SVO), and Japanese (SOV), has helped setting the foundation to answer the questions of this study. Along with this syntactic analysis, the scanning of official Japanese documents from the MEXT has contributed to a contextualization of the role English has both in Japanese schools and in their society, more specifically regarding the curricula reforms plans that have taken place. These reforms have put emphasis on changing the paradigm of English teaching in Japan, aiming to adapt the current lesson plans so that more competences such as speaking or listening are included in lower levels, and to offer a wider variety of tools (e.g., teaching assistants) in higher levels. Finally, Kachru's (1992) three-circle model has allowed for an understanding of the position of Japan in terms of English speaking compared to other countries.

Moving on, the analysis of the results obtained from the two parts of the questionnaire (i.e., the multiple-choice sections, and the optional final question), has provided a possible answer to the aims of this paper. Firstly, as far as the linguistic objectives are concerned, the students' claims have concluded that grammar and word order have not posed a special difficulty for them thanks to the lessons received on the topic. However, they have

also stated that reading and writing-focused activities have resulted in a lack of ease when dealing with these aspects when communicating with other people. Moreover, other areas that did hinder their English skills development have been mentioned, namely the lack of English speakers, not having enough confidence, or pronouncing the words in a correct way.

Secondly, dealing with the pedagogical objectives, the results in section 2 of the questionnaire put into perspective the structure of a typical English lesson in Japan: grammar is usually the main focus, Japanese is used to explain grammatical concepts, and word order is taught mainly through written exercises and the memorization of sentences. Contrarily, two of the testimonies extracted from the last part of the questionnaire, evidence that there are international schools in Japan that do not present these characteristics and approach the teaching of English in a more immersive and inductive way.

Finally, in relation to the input-analysis objectives, it can be said that the external exposure that the participants of the questionnaire have received during their English learning stages fulfills the recommendations formulated by Krashen. Most of the participants consume English media weekly and use the language to communicate with other people and to travel abroad, indirectly receiving optimal input.

Further research in this area could add on to this previous study by analyzing in a more extensive level the ways in which Japanese teachers of English could implement current SLA theories, establishing a parallelism between the specific goals and difficulties of the teaching environment in Japan and the methodologies that would be more suitable. Furthermore, it would be valuable to conduct similar surveys focusing on specific schools in Japan, as a way of obtaining a wider range of results and allowing for comparisons and contrasts.

Overall, this dissertation can serve as a way of highlighting the importance of understanding the specific context of a country when approaching the teaching of English, in terms of linguistic differences, resources available, and the societal view of English as a whole. More specifically, focusing on the Japanese context has allowed to understand how students in Japan feel about these issues, and their experiences provide insight to how English teaching should evolve.

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11. ANNEX

STUDENT A

I used to study English in International school(at the age 9-12) so the learning system was entirely different from the one in Japanese junior high school (age 12-15) . we didn't have the curriculum which teaches word order in international school. I naturally learn it by reading books and talking with my friends in English. I think I had felt much more difficult to learn it if I wasn't able to study in International school.

STUDENT B

I started to study English by my self outside pf school, too because I simply liked the pronunciation of it. It was difficult for me to make English sentences especially when I speak. I used to make all the sentences in my mind before I say it to someone. After I used to exposed to the environment which English is needed, for example, studying abroad, taking university classes held in English, and talking to foreign friends, the grammar usually comes to my mind automatically.

STUDENT C

【motivation】

My part of motivation for studying English is just to overcome what my friends can do

In our education style(in general) is like competing with classmates and getting higher score.

【difficulty】

From my experience, the most difficult part is like how I can apply grammar knowledge to English conversation or speaking.

About learning grammar, it's of course really difficult since English grammar is different from my language. But, i am kind of good at learning grammer even if grammar is super difficult to me. I am studying grammar like from repetation/ memorizartion of sentence either way. And our education system, they simply focus on educationg students' grammar knowledge and spend too much hours just for teaching it. So that's why I didnt have less problem acquiring English grammar .

Because of that system, I just focused on learning grammar so much that I didnt speak any English when i was freshman of Uni.(you know? i just had fondation of speaking English but I had no idea how to apply them for being able to speak English).

STUDENT D

When I try to speak English, I always think about word order. Maybe because Japanese and English are too different, school education focuses too much on English input and not enough on communication.... To be honest, I think many native Japanese speakers are better at writing and reading than at listening and speaking English.

STUDENT E

I started learning English because I wanted to mingle with a lot of ppl around the world! But I think it's difficult to speak English with confidence, as I'm worried too much about the accuracy of grammar.

STUDENT F

I grew up watching Disney Channel, which made it quite unproblematic for me to start reading, writing, and learning grammar in english starting in middle school. I believe my sense of word order naturally developed in these processes, as I was able to tell when there were grammatical errors in the sentences. This long-term learning process also enabled me to start using english daily after entering an international high school, although I struggled with speaking which I didn't have much experience in. I suppose I finally reached to a certain practical level of English when I spent a year abroad for an exchange program in university.

STUDENT G

I read same sentences again and again. It led to memorize the order of English.

STUDENT H

I started to learn English when I was around 6 years old. And I kept studying in schools but we always take exams of writing and reading, which means not speaking and listening even though we practiced in classes. That's why we don't care the word order in English if we can see the sentences. But it's a bit harder to do this when listening and speaking

out. And also in Japanese, we can alter our opinions by changing the end of the sentences, for instance "〜だと思います" or "〜だと思いません". But in English we should say "I think" or "I don't think" firstly, that is also different point and I need to think about sometimes.

STUDENT I

It made me easy to use English after I learn and understand five sentence structures.

STUDENT J

I was exposed to English in international school for a year in middle school, but after I came back to Japan and studied grammar at cram school for high school entrance exam, my English improved noticeably. So I think studying grammar has important role in my English learning. Some says communication is the best way to learn but studying grammar is also something necessary.

STUDENT K

I start learning English becauge I wanted to talk with my friend in foreign countries.

It was not difficult for me to learn about the order in English. I face difficulties in pronounciations.

STUDENT L

I started to learn English because I was really interested in the western culture. I love songs and movies in English, so it really is a lot of fun learning this language. As well, my enlightening English teacher in middle school was a truly responsible and devocated educator. She always encouraged me and contributed a lot to my English learning. What's more, since I was young I've always been interested in intercultural communications, and English without doubt is a powerful linguistic tool when it comes to international conversations.

The difficulties I faced mainly concentrated in the lack of a native language environment in east asian countries. Meanwhile, the huge gap in grammer structure could also be a problem, even though for me myself grammer acquisition wasn't my main focus when I started to learn this language. East Asian languages are significantly distinct to English

which belongs to Indo-European language family, so there is nothing to lean on in our mother tongue when it comes to pick up English as a East Asian learner. Nevertheless, speaking about current challenges for me to improve my English, a thing that I've noticed is that when I gradually reached a intermediate level of the language, I started to feel like somehow it's difficult for me to reach a higher level. Though I could talk freely in English now, I wouldn't be able to use or understand more advanced or academic vocabularies as I do in my mother tongue, and it's also tough for me to organize more complex and advanced sentence structure when it comes to academic writing.

STUDENT M

When I started learning English, I was little kid. But mainly l learned speaking. That why my grammar was really bad. After junior high we started learning grammar, my English grammar was better. I think most japanese people grammar and word order is good. But they don't have opportunity to speak English.

So they don't have confidence to speak English or conversation.

STUDENT N

When I do translation, I feel it difficult

STUDENT O

I was interested in American culture so I started studying English. I’ve never had difficulty with word order in English but I did have with pronunciation.

STUDENT P

As you know English word order is completely different with Japanese one. So even now, I need to thinking time before starting talking in English. Actually the moment is a little bit stressful for me because I feel like I do not speak freely. My words do not come from feeling but they come from my brain. so to use English in conversation is need a lot of energy for me. I think these stress would be less, If I learn English at elementary school with native English. (the way of learning English at school was completely Japanese with Japanese tether and focus on writing grammar strongly)

Thank you for sharing my learning English experience:))