

ICTを活用したプロジェクトベース学習  
－日本とタイにおける短期集中国際交流プログラムを通じた、  
共通言語としての英語の役割－

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The roles of English as a lingua franca in a short-term  
ICT task-based Japan-Thailand exchange program

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## 〈研究ノート〉

## The roles of English as a lingua franca in a short-term ICT task-based Japan-Thailand exchange program

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### Abstract

This paper examines the multiple roles that the English language plays in a two-week exchange program between two universities: one in Thailand and one in Japan. The program centers on task-based collaboration between three teams of students from each university: A Web design team, a short film team, and a computer program team. The teams spend a total of two weeks working together—one week in each country—to produce Web pages, short films and computer applications. Throughout the program, English is the common language.

In order to improve the program, the kinds of English encountered and used by participants need to be identified and considered in order to ascertain what kinds of training and support can be provided by instructors, and what level of English can be feasibly achieved in students' work within a two-week timeframe. Primarily the roles of English on the exchange program are: (1) English for general communication (conversation); (2) English for student projects: (a) Web pages, (b) short films, and (c) computer applications; and (3) English for short presentations. Problems inherent in all roles include: (1) the generally low proficiency level of students; (2) the consequent temptation to use machine translation injudiciously; and (3) reading machine-translated script from text-heavy slideshows as a style of presentation. Suggestions for coping with these problems are offered herein.

### ICTを活用したプロジェクトベース学習

—日本とタイにおける短期集中国際交流プログラムを通じた、共通言語としての英語の役割—

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### 要旨

本研究は、日本とタイにおける大学で開催される短期集中プログラムにおける共通言語としての英語の役割を検討するものである。参加学生はウェブデザイン、ショートフィルム、プログラミングに分かれ、日本人2名タイ人2名の1チームを編成し、日本とタイの両国に約1週間滞在し、ワークショップ形式で作品制作する。プログラム期間英語が共通言語である。

プログラムを改善するに当たり、教員によってどのような英語支援が適切か、またわずか2週間でどれぐらいの英語レベルが実現可能か把握するために、参加学生が使用する英語を事前に確認する必要がある。英語は主として：(1) 一般会話、(2) ウェブページ、ショートフィルム、プログラミングの作品、(3) 短いプレゼンテーションで使われる。問題点は、主に、学生による(1) 低い英語運用能力、(2) 翻訳ソフトに任せがちな傾向、(3) 翻訳ソフトに訳されたままのテキストをパワーポイントなどに載せ、そのまま読み上げるプレゼンテーションに集約される。本稿はこの3つの問題点を改善するための対策を提案する。

**Keywords:** short-term exchange program      English as a lingua franca (ELF)

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## 1. Purpose of this Research

This paper has two main purposes:

(1) Identify and explain the ways the English language comes into play on a short-term exchange program between non-native, non-English-major Thai and Japanese students of limited proficiency, and (2) offer suggestions for several issues with regard to how English is used.

Between non-native speakers of limited proficiency, basic communication presents a number of challenges. However, the role of English on the program detailed in this paper goes beyond language for basic oral communication. Students must deal with English text used in Web pages, in dialogue and subtitles for short films, and in words and phrases used in computer applications. While instructors are available for guidance, students are largely responsible for the content, planning and construction of these projects. The specific content of these projects and the English necessary for them are somewhat unpredictable. Further, teams must present their projects in English to an audience of peers and teachers. The English they use depends on how presentations are given—in particular, whether they are scripted or unscripted. Instructors must also deal with a tendency for students to over-rely on machine translation (MT).

While none of these problems can be completely eliminated, a review of how and where they arise and what can be done about them is a step toward improving the program, toward validating its purpose of increasing participants' awareness of how the English language works in a real-world setting.

## 2. English and the HIU-RMUTT Exchange Program

The short-term exchange program at the focus of this paper occurs annually between



**Figure 1. A Thai-Japanese group working on a short film, HIU-RMUTT exchange program, 2015**

Hokkaido Information University (HIU), near Sapporo, Japan, and Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi (RMUTT), near Bangkok, Thailand. English comes into play in three main ways: (1) for general communication; (2) for student project contents, namely: (a) Web pages, (b) short films, and (c) computer applications; and (3) for short presentations by students to peers and instructors. Generally, problems arise as a result of (1) low proficiency levels among students from both universities; (2) a habit of over-relying on machine translation (MT), mostly in the form of online translation sites; and (3) a tendency to read scripted presentations, which scripts are often derived from translation software. Suggestions for coping with these three issues are offered herein.

### 2-1 English for General Communication

Braj Kachru (1985) posited a model of three realms, or circles, that attempt to broadly categorize countries by “the type of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages” (p.12). Both Japan and Thailand are “expanding circle” countries, where English tends to be widely studied but hardly used in society. For language learners whose experience with English in their home countries is limited to classrooms, the concept of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003) likely remains abstract.

The HIU-RMUTT exchange program provides firsthand experience with a real-world need to use English as a common L2. The interaction between the Thai and Japanese participants in this program (Figure 1) is a prime example of an emerging type of English: ELF, or English as a *lingua franca*. This, as Mollin (2006, p.42) observes, involves conversations taking place between speakers who do not share a common L1, regardless of country or location. On this program, that interaction in English takes place in both Thailand and Japan, between Thai and Japanese participants, students and instructors alike.

The program is relatively new. Collaboration between the two universities began formally in 2007 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding. Both universities offer courses in media design, and both hold Web

page design contests for their students. Web design was the first of the three genres of ICT-based project learning, followed by short film-making and computer programming. Collaboration on these projects between the two universities began with the establishment of:

- (a) a unified process for production of work in in-school contests at each university, including lectures and workshops before and during the exchange program;
- (b) criteria for choosing international contest participants, as well as how many participants can be accommodated; and
- (c) a general process by which both universities agree to conduct the program.

A more detailed history of the program is offered in Anada (2015) in Japanese, however, an updated version of the program process is given in the Appendix (adapted from Anada, 2015, p. 22, my translation).

#### 2-1-1 Problem: Low General Proficiency among Students

English is the common language throughout the program. However, although participants from both universities are generally highly motivated and eager to interact with each other, they generally have only rudimentary L2 linguistic means to do so. A formal analysis has not been conducted, however, based on averages of HIU students who have taken the TOEIC test, scores averaging 300 seem likely. I am unaware of RMUTT students' estimated scores, however, during my experience with the program in 2015—which I was privileged to join in its entirety both in Thailand and Japan—I did not note any discernible advantage between Thai students and Japanese students in terms of general communicative ability. A few students reported a similar perception to me, that neither group seemed significantly better than the other, and that they found this comforting. The similarity in Thai and Japanese English ability seems corroborated by data from the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the makers of the TOEFL and TOEIC tests, in its 2014 Report on TOEIC Test Takers Worldwide: Out of a possible 990, Thai takers averaged a total score of 481 and Japan takers averaged 512.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### 2-1-2 Suggestion: Encourage Communication Strategy Use

Most people can remember their first time in a foreign country. It is all at once thrilling and, in some cases, nervewracking. For most HIU students on this program, this is their

first experience travelling outside of Japan. The prospect of having to work closely with other non-Japanese students in a foreign language, with a tenuous and untested grasp of that language, is doubtlessly intimidating. Further, the time between when students are chosen as participants and when the program begins is short, offering little opportunity to brush up whatever skills they might have.

Ultimately, students must make do with what ability they do have. For many students, that ability—what it is and isn't capable of—is unknown to them. Zoltan Dörnyei offers an encouraging observation about successful communication by those with low L2 proficiency: "Some people can communicate effectively in an L2 with only 100 words. How do they do it? They use their hands, they imitate the sound or movement of things, they mix languages, they create new words, they describe or circumlocute something they don't know the word for—in short, they use communication strategies" (1995, p.56). Low TOEIC scores notwithstanding, we can assume that participants have a ready English vocabulary of more than 100 words. Using these devices to compensate for L2 linguistic deficiency may seem like common sense. However, students whose English classroom experience has largely focused on the study and mastery of "correct" English language forms may harbor the sense that it is not OK to use "incorrect" English when trying to communicate. And they may never have been told in the classroom that communication strategies are OK—even desirable—to use.

Research suggests that communication strategy training in the EFL classroom can benefit low-proficiency learners (Dörnyei, 1995; Faucette, 2001; Nakatani, 2010a, 2010b; Rost & Ross, 1991; Willems, 1987). However, pre-program workshop (see Appendix) time is limited and cannot accommodate more than a topical treatment of communication strategies, among other things. One strategy that can be easily highlighted, however, is known as the *appeal for assistance*, or *asking for help*. This strategy involves actively interrupting an interlocutor ("Excuse me") in order to ask for repetition, slower delivery, or explanation of an utterance ("Could you say that again please?" or "What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?") I have used modified and abridged versions of classroom activities outlined in Maybin and Bergschneider (1992) that specifically train learners to use these phrases. I use a laminated "STOP" sign with *ask for help*

phrases on the back (Figure 2). This activity



**Figure 2. STOP sign (obverse and reverse) for communication strategy training**

helps students practice the art of actively asking an interlocutor for help in negotiating a conversation. A fuller description of these activities implemented in university EFL classrooms at HIU is offered in Rian (2016).

Japanese learners in particular tend toward shyness both in and out of the language classroom (Doyon, 2000). Their pre-university English classroom experience typically lacks conversation practice, and is teacher-centered and language-form-focused. It may be reassuring for students to learn that appeals for assistance are not an admission of fault for not having achieved better proficiency after six or more years of compulsory pre-university English study, but rather that they represent an active step toward overcoming communication breakdowns that will inevitably happen between lower-proficiency speakers.

A specific example from the 2015 program occurred when the output of translation devices failed. One of the Japanese students was trying to say to a Thai student that he felt *だるい* [darui], which is a casual expression for feeling tired or worn out. A smartphone translation rendered *だるい* [darui] as *languid*. The Japanese student couldn't pronounce it, and showed her his smartphone. The Thai student responded

with, "What does that mean?" The Japanese student then used body language and a facial expression to indicate tiredness.

Another example I observed was when a Japanese student described the arduousness of the program schedule using the Japanese word *辛い*, which has two meanings and can be read two ways: [karai], and [tsurai]. The first means *spicy* while the second means *hard* or *difficult*. The smartphone translator had only brought back the first meaning, *spicy*. The Thai student asked, "Spicy? What do you mean?" The Japanese student then restated it: *ハード* [ha-do], the Japanese transliteration of 'hard'. The Thai student still didn't understand, so I interjected and offered another word: *busy*. The Japanese student liked this alternative, smiled, and said emphatically, "Yes yes, very very busy!"

In another instance, a Japanese student was trying to convey to his two Thai teammates that the other Japanese team member was not present because she had been called away to a *交流パーティー* [kouryuu paatii], or an informal social get-together, by some other Thai students. The word *交流* [kouryuu] has a variety of meanings, including *social get-together*, *interchange*, *transaction*, and *alternating current*. The Thai students were bewildered when the Japanese student held up his smartphone. The screen read, *alternating current party*. I suggested to him that he simply rephrase the entire statement to: "She is busy, she will be back soon." I mentioned that this act of restatement was a communication strategy, which was advice that no translation device anywhere could provide.

While communication strategies cannot completely compensate for an acute lack of vocabulary and basic grammar, an awareness of them can at least offer the potential for recovery in some misunderstandings. What degree to raise students' awareness of communication strategies as compensatory devices must ultimately be left to the discretion of individual English instructors, whose availability for participation in the program may vary by year. However, the implication of communication strategies, and the philosophy of "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972) on which they are founded, seem clear: in any conversation, if an English utterance makes sense to a listener, then that English is good enough. And if it doesn't make sense, then seeking clarification is acceptable, and encourageable, until meaning is successfully negotiated.

2-2 *English for Projects: Web Pages, Short Films, and Computer Applications*

Types of English and the range of vocabulary needed for projects that students produce on the program vary. Students need language necessary to put together Web page text, short film subtitles, and computer application content. Following are accounts of several language problems that were apparent in the 2015 program.

2-2-1 *Problem: Tendency to Defer to Translation Software*

For low English proficiency students whose major is ICT-related, the allure of machine translation (MT) may be irresistible. The ubiquity of smartphones and a multitude of convenient online translators seem to offer convenient fixes for L2 deficiency. However, while MT has made considerable advances as technology constantly develops, it still has significant limits. For example, most online translators can provide grammatically correct renditions of simple sentences like “I went to school yesterday.” But they would have trouble with: “I would have considered going to school yesterday, if it weren’t for the fact that I had a high fever and two feet of snow had fallen.” Some simple examples of the limits of MT are offered by Harris (2010, p. 27). These were converted from English (A) into Japanese (B) and then back-translated to English (C) through a popular online translation site, Yahoo! BabelFish:

- A. Bob loves Clara, who loves Bill.
- B. ボブはビルを愛するクララを愛する。
- C. The hob loves [kurara] which loves the building.

- A. Sam broke down and cried.
- B. サムは破壊し、叫んだ。
- C. It destroyed sum, shouted.

Harris states, “Simply put, MT does not work well unless there is sufficient world knowledge (knowledge of the relationship between things) and controlled language (p. 26). He cites Melby (1995, p. 4), who observes, “computers are very likely to produce atrocious results [unless the text treats] a very narrow topic in a rather dry and monotonous style.” In the case of language used by students in their projects, they are often unaware of how complex it is, and how limited MT is in terms of rendering it accurately from one language to another. Text is a necessary part of Web page design. Without at least some longer text passages, a Web page might appear as a repository of images and pictures with short captions.

For the 2015 program, a Web page contest entry by an HIU team featured a comparison of various deities. Each deity featured a hand-drawn illustration in *manga* style accompanied by a brief “profile” summary in Japanese (Figure 3). In order to be submitted for the International Contest, the Web page had to be converted to English. The translation provided to me for editing was obviously straight from an online translator. It read as follows.

**Profile**

**Birthplace:** Greece

Greek myth is appearance “Intelligence” “Art” “Crafts” strategy to govern a Goddess.

World heritage in the Parthenon is her should Enshrined was and Current



Figure 3. Excerpt from an in-school Web Design Contest (WDC) entry

of the Greece Capital to name said to from the her name. Also her the hide of a goat and monster Medusa the neck made aegis hold a shield against a person Rejected this shield.

This shield name current Warship is mounted 「Aegis System」 has been passed down. This modern society at first name learn God.

*「Because I am defeated by nobody...」*

I edited this to the following, changing some of the content in the process:

### **Profile**

#### **From:** Greece

Goddess of arts, crafts, intelligence and strategy.

Said to live in the Parthenon in Athens, the capital of Greece, which borrows her name. She wears an ‘aegis’, made from goat hide, and has a shield made the neck of a monster called Medusa. With these she defeats enemies.

Japanese warships use a missile defense system called the “Aegis System.” So, Greek Mythology is alive, even in Japan.

*“Second to None...”*

In cases like these, students generate complex sentences and paragraphs in their L1, run them through an online translator, and then copy and paste the result into the English version of their Web page. While teachers may perceive this action as lazy, it may simply reflect an inability by students to appreciate the shortcomings of the translation engines. The output looks like English to them, and in their mind that is good enough. The problem lies in the fact that they do not have—or they *think* they do not have—sufficient language ability to question it. Ultimately, however, it is what Dougill (1987, 2008) aptly termed “decorative English.” To the untrained, it looks good, but in the eyes anyone of higher proficiency, it cheapens the product it adorns.

#### *2-2-2 Suggestion: Show Students How to Use Translation Software Judiciously, and Why*

Students need to understand the limits of online translator output, and that their input is needed in order to give their text substance. Total deference to translation software is a means of escape, an attempt to avoid responsibility. To guard against this, instructors can tell students directly about the pitfalls of MT. Better, they can show them

by pointing out examples of effective and ineffective MT use, in real time.

Some instructors try to sweep the MT issue under the rug. They would rather ban the use of translation devices altogether. But for all their shortcomings, online translators need not be denigrated, nor should they be prohibited outright. Rather, they should be shown for what they are, and demonstrated for how they can contribute to student learning. In the specific setting of the HIU-RMUTT exchange program, which revolves around computers and technology, banning MT is virtually unfeasible. In fact, it would deprive students of the opportunity to experiment with and learn about how MT works, as well as how it doesn’t work.

Regarding the MT issue, Niño (2009) offers some balanced advice:

In the language class students, especially those with a low proficiency of the target language, can be shown instances of what free online MT can and cannot translate so that they are made aware of the uncertainty of relying on these systems as the only online resource for their foreign language written production. At the same time students can be shown good examples of writing and translation into the target language and can be presented with more reliable online resources to check the correctness of their work. This can send them the message that free online MT output is often of a worse linguistic quality than what they are capable of doing. All in all, students should also be educated in the belief that only by getting fully involved intellectually and by adding some creativity to their tasks will they learn properly how to communicate themselves in the target language. (p. 246)

One solution to the MT issue, then, is to explicitly and concretely show students the reality and limits of translation software, and where possible, to point out alternatives. A variety of online translation resources is available, and each has merits and demerits. The ones at issue are those that attempt to handle chunks of text, like long sentences or entire paragraphs. Others, such as online dictionaries, deal with words and phrases only. With these resources, students can research the meanings of individual words and phrases, and then string them together using their own knowledge of basic grammar. For Japanese learners of English and English learners of Japanese, [www.alc.co.jp](http://www.alc.co.jp) brings up a list of example sentences in addition to simple definitions of words and phrases. It is an excellent resource for understanding how words and phrases are used in context.

Inevitably, some students will copy and paste online translator gibberish, thinking or hoping that it is a faithful translation from an L1. Here are two ways of providing feedback:

(1) Ask students to read the translation aloud. If it appears that they stumble to pronounce unknown words or language forms, they can be told that if *they themselves* appear not to understand the text, their audience is unlikely to understand it either.

(2) Indicate the complexity of the source L1 text. Provide a simplified rendition in L2, and suggest simplifying the L1. Alternatively they can be told to back-translate the simplified version of the English into their L1. This act can demonstrate the effectiveness of starting off with concise, clear language.

Simplifying the source language may seem limiting to students. As young adults, students have achieved a level of proficiency in their L1 that often vastly outstrips what they can do in an L2. They are often unaware how vast that gap may be. They may have never considered their own L1 proficiency, or the ways they construct text in their own language. They may discover unexpected complexity in their own L1, or that there are more direct ways of expressing complex ideas. Ideally, they will become aware of their audience. On this program it is mostly non-native English speakers, just like them, who appreciate it when the other person keeps things simple for them.

Additionally, students may think that translating from an L1 to an L2 is just the same as translating from an L2 to an L1. In fact, L2 to L1 is much easier because of stronger lexical association (Fujii, 2007): the amount of L1 words and language forms at the translator's disposal is usually far greater than their L2. This is why professional translation agencies often employ translators to translate from an L2 to their L1, rather than vice versa.

On the other hand, translating from an L1 to an L2 can be a useful tool for learning vocabulary and language forms (Fernandez-Guerra, 2014), especially for students of higher-level proficiency (Stern, 1992). However, this can occur only when sufficient teacher guidance is provided. Depending on the volume and nature of the text, and considering the lower proficiency level of the students, adequate guidance may not always be available. This is doubly true in the case of some projects. For example, short film teams often travel on short notice

to various locations in order to shoot scenes. They may create or adjust dialogue on on-site. A proficient English speaker is not likely to be available to accompany and advise every short film team on-site.

On the same note, expecting students to come up with their own English without using any resources would invite frustration. When students ask for help with English phrasing for conversation, for projects or for presentations, instructors can offer their own input on how it *could* be rendered. They might put it to students like this: “Well, *I* might say it this way, but now how do *you* want to say it?”

Ultimately, a balanced attitude among both instructors and students toward the use of MT will likely prove the most useful. The key is fostering among students a sense of ownership of the English texts they create. If asked, can students explain in their own best English why they said what they said and how they said it? It is an achievement if they can. If they have difficulty, then the text can be rephrased and simplified until they can. And while examples of rephrasings should be offered, it is important to show them the validity of their own English voice, however imperfect; of not allowing others, especially machines, free license to put words in their mouths, on their Web pages or in their subtitles.

### 2-2-3 Problem: Culture-Specific Humor

Currently there are no limits on what students can submit for contest entry. For the HIU in-school contest, many students submit entries whose contents are entirely in Japanese. Perhaps they expect to convert them to English only if they are accepted to the international program. And perhaps they are unaware of how complicated that conversion to English may be.

An example from the 2015 program was a short film entry titled “Assassin from Future” [sic]. It included a personification of the days of the week. The film director cleverly personified the five weekdays as members of a *dantaisen*—a term for a team of competitors of three to five people commonly used in the Japanese martial arts of *kendo*, *judo* and *sumo*. Several terms refer to each competitor's rank or ability within the team. These are 先鋒 [senpou], 次鋒 [jihou], 中堅 [chuuken], 副将 [fukushou], and 大将 [taishou], respectively.

In Japanese, each day of the week is represented by a certain Japanese character. The weekdays are, 月曜日 [getsuyoubi],



Monday; 火曜日 [kayoubi], Tuesday; 水曜日 [suiyoubi], Wednesday; 木曜日 [mokuyoubi], Thursday, and 金曜日, [kinyoubi], Friday. The first character in each set of three is an astronomical reference. These are some similarities in English. “Mon” in English, or 月 in Japanese, refers to the moon. Hence Monday is literally “moon day” in both English and Japanese. On the other hand, Wednesday derives its name in English from the Norse god Odin, also spelled Woden or Weden. Hence, Weden’s Day, or spelled with the Old English possessive, *Wedenes Daeg*. The Japanese reference follows the Latin reference to the Roman god Mercury, hence *Mercurii Dies* in Latin, or *Mercredi* in French. In Japanese, the planet Mercury is represented as 水星 [suisei]. The character 水 [sui] also means simply *water*. The producer of the film touched on this double meaning in his short film (Figure 4), where Wednesday could be interpreted as “water day.”

While the references are clever, they are lost on an audience without Japanese proficiency. Without considerable background explanation, a direct rendering of the Japanese could be awkward or confusing. This is particularly true in the case of subtitles, where time and screen space are very limited. As an example of direct translation, consider the script for the scene in Figure 4:

Original Japanese:

次に！まだ半分という絶望！激流の中堅、水曜日！

(My) direct translation:

Next, the middleweight champion of half-way hopelessness, Wednesday!

(My) revised translation:

Then there’s Wednesday, also known as “hump day”—a virtual mountain to get over!



**Figure 4. Still capture from a Web Design Contest (In-School) short film entry: Wednesday as “water day.”**

While both of these translations are plausible, the reference to the Japanese 中堅 [chuuken], or middleweight team member, and to water for Wednesday (水曜日 [suiyoubi]) are lost on an international audience. A contemporaneous subtitle explanation would require too much text.

Arguably, in this case what is lost in translation might not necessarily detract from the finished product. However, it is an example of unanticipated challenges in communicating content from one language and one culture to another. While putting together ideas for their projects in their L1, contest entrants may not have their mind on how the L1 will render into L2. In this particular case, the entrant had done his homework: He had provided a partial English translation for his subtitles, using his own words as much as possible, when he submitted it to me for review. He explicitly admitted that he ran into trouble with the scenes about the days of the week.

#### *2-2-4 Suggestion: Encourage L1 Clarity in Order to Foster L2 Clarity*

The same rule of thumb applies to short film subtitles and to computer applications as it does to Web page text: the clearer it is in L1, the easier it can be rendered into L2. It is not necessary to limit the content of student projects merely for the sake of easy translation, but it is helpful to bear in mind the question, “How would I explain this in English?” while producing L1 content, for two reasons. First, it will be necessary to do this when co-producing material with foreign counterparts, whose proficiency is roughly the same. Second, the finished product will need to be explained in English in a final presentation at the end of the program, to an audience of peers and staff. And while some staff may be more proficient than their students, they will no doubt appreciate simplicity and clarity just the same.

### **2-3 English for Short Presentations**

Of all program tasks, the “simple is best” rule of thumb applies most aptly to short presentations. Of all tasks on the program, presentations may be the most challenging. Speaking at the front of classrooms may be second nature to veteran instructors, who may have forgotten how terrifying the act may feel to their students. According to de

Becker (1997), a deathly fear of public speaking may literally be well founded:

Surveys have shown that ranking very close to the fear of death is the fear of public speaking. Why would someone feel profound fear, deep in his or her stomach, about public speaking, which is so far from death? Because it isn't so far from death when we link it. Those who fear public speaking actually fear the loss of identity that attaches to performing badly, and that is firmly rooted in our survival needs. (p. 297).

This fear of identity loss may be high in Japan, whose society traditionally puts great importance on saving face. Typically Japanese excel at working in groups, but are terrified of standing out of one. Perhaps this fear is even more acute among college-age young adults with little or no experience giving effective and lively presentations in front of peers and teachers. Low proficiency in English—the prospect of fumbling with unfamiliar words in an unfamiliar L2—lifts the hurdle of fear even higher, raising the stakes for messing things up in front of everyone, for all to see and judge, to astronomical levels. What happens as a result, and what can be done about it, is offered below.

#### *2-3-1 Problem: Students Give Dull, Lackluster Oral Presentations*

It is common for students who are not familiar with giving a presentation to fall into the trap of writing it out on paper and simply reading aloud to their audience. When accompanied by a slideshow like PowerPoint, some presenters insert blocks of text on any number of slides and then recite verbatim what is clearly in front of the eyes of the audience. Sometimes they face the projector screen or look down at the computer screen while they do this. Worse, sometimes they read in a soft, mumbly voice, in an effort to mask their poor pronunciation, or the fact that they cannot understand what they are reading. This is the presentation equivalent of “decorative English” mentioned before. It fulfills the form of talking in front of people, and not much more. Perhaps this is why some presenters end quickly and rush back to the safety of their seat, eager to escape the shame of burdening their audience with what they know is a boring presentation.

These actions are like surrendering to the whims of translation software: some students think they can do no better, bound fast by a low-English-proficiency straitjacket that clasps them into unrelenting mediocrity, restricting them from saying what they might

otherwise want to say.

Mumbling and terror aside, it is safe to say that reciting from script, memorized or not, is not an uncommon method of giving a presentation. In Japan, some students may be trained to do it this way, or, they may pick the habit up from witnessing some of their teachers. Unfortunately, the act of reading slides can be frequently observed in university classrooms. Reading polished language is not necessarily a bad thing. Some presenters can be engaging this way. In the case of low-proficiency presenters, however, polishing language is challenging, and reading it in a lively, confident and engaging manner is even more challenging.

A hypothetical worst-case scenario: in a final program presentation of a group's collaborative hard work, a student presenter gets up in front of an audience of classmates, teachers, and high-level university staff. He and his teammates are armed with a PowerPoint but have no sense of the main goal of a presentation: to engage the audience by being informative, persuasive and dynamic. One teammate reads the slides verbatim, while the others stand off to the side. He reads in a low, monotone voice, eyes cast down, body bent toward the computer, one arm on the lectern and the other on the computer mouse to advance the slides. The text is the product of rambling, needlessly prosaic Japanese text, thrown into and regurgitated by an online translator, whose output was copied and pasted directly into the slides.

If the program can be intended to improve presentation skills, participants who are allowed to present like this are being ill-served. They are denied an opportunity to garner recognition for the fruit of their hard work during the program. At worst, they are robbed of a chance to triumph over a fear of death.

#### *2-3-2 Suggestion: Provide Practice with Unscripted Presentation, and Focus on Eye Contact, Body Language and Voice Volume*

Disallowing the recitation of text during a presentation may seem cruel and unusual punishment for lower-proficiency students. It is something I did unabashedly during the 2015 program, and with good results. Because students are operating in an unfamiliar L2, it may seem like they need to polish what they will say in a written version. *Writing out* a presentation is fine, even helpful, so long as they do not *read* it. Unless students are unusually adept at preparing, memorizing and reciting a

well-polished text, they wind up becoming attached to the printed word, whether on slides or on paper. As a result, students come to feel that they cannot present without such a crutch. The result is an uttered text, which unless delivered by a skilled orator is typically cringe-worthy to any audience.

A viable alternative is to encourage written preparation of what *kinds of things to say*—an outline—but to disallow recitation from a complete, polished text. In other words, no holding or reading a paper of any kind, and allow only a small number of words on each slide. Sparsely worded slides are in line with best practices for effective oral presentation visuals (Sloboda, 2003), including the use of color, font size, and simple images, among other things. For students of Web design in particular, these elements should be familiar.

According to Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan (2010), currently there is limited literature on oral presentations in EFL classrooms. The existing literature deals with EFL oral presentation assessment (see e.g. Otschi & Heffernan, 2008). Commonly among the criteria for assessment are the use of non-verbal elements, such as eye contact, voice volume, and body language and movement. For program participants, encouraging and practicing the use of these skills is a step toward compensating for limited oral proficiency. The philosophy: an imperfect but dynamic talk is more engaging than a polished, uttered text.

The conditions of the program are the same for oral presentations as they are for general oral communication: there is not enough time to significantly improve students' L2 linguistic ability. So, the same advice for students to use the best English they can muster in a conversation can be applied to the art of presenting: a lively presentation in simple, even broken English is more engaging—in particular to a non-native audience of similar proficiency levels—than a recitation of polished script. Again, an opportunity to point out to students the usefulness of communication strategies presents itself: paraphrase, circumlocution and mime (including facial expressions, body language and gestures) are as handy in presentations as they are in conversation to offset the numbing silence that can result from not being able to find the “right” words.

It should be noted that some instructors prefer polished, scripted presentations, and may not be comfortable with advocating this presentation style, fearing that it may provide too great a temptation for some students to

do slipshod preparation. A worst-case scenario would be a student who presents with a poor slideshow and one-word utterances before quickly retreating to his seat, and excuses his performance with the claim that “English is difficult.” This temptation can, however, be identified and stemmed before it becomes a problem.

From what I observed, no problems occurred with presentations during the 2015 program. On the contrary, university staff commented positively on them, compared to previous years. This success is, I believe, in part due to presentation practice sessions held once during pre-program mini-workshops, once at the beginning of Workshop 1 (see Appendix), and at the two presentation rehearsals just before the final presentations at the end of Workshop 2: one on the day before, in the classroom, and one on the day of, on the actual stage. During these practice sessions, participating instructors gave direct and specific feedback and suggestions to students, who then took the advice. Continuation and, if feasible, expansion of this presentation training—underscoring to students the connection between good preparation and good presentation—would seem to bode well for continued success. Just as a poor presentation seems to risk a desperate loss of face in front of others, a successful, engaging one may stand as a significant psychological achievement, a large boost to self-confidence, for any student to take away from the program.

### 3. English, the HIU-RMUTT Exchange Program, and “Global Human Resources”

The HIU-RMUTT program bills itself as an answer to a call by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology (MEXT) to develop “global human resources.” This term sounds good, but it deserves some background and clarification.

In 2012 the Central Council for Education, one of a number of bodies that advise MEXT, advocated the development of *global human resources*, citing a trend among Japanese towards insularism and introversion (sometimes referred to as *uchimuki*) in addition to the generally accepted view that Japanese have comparatively poor abilities with foreign language. The Central Council's final recommendations to MEXT appear in Japanese only<sup>(2)</sup>, but are detailed in, and

based largely on, an interim report by another related entity, the Council on Promotion of Human Resource [sic] for Globalization Development<sup>(3)</sup>, for which an English translation is available<sup>(4)</sup>. The interim report coins the term *global human resources*, stating that:

In order for Japan to reemerge as a country with a growing economy ... while it continues to face the issues of decreasing population and drastically aging society, it is an urgent issue to cultivate members of the young generation who possess creativity and vitality. As globalization gathers speed for the international economy of the 21st century, it is of great necessity to continuously develop “global human resources” who possess rich linguistic and communication skills and intercultural experiences, and thrive internationally. (p.3)

The interim report continues:

The concept of “global human resources,” which Japan must develop and utilize as it goes forth in this globalized economy and society, can be, generally speaking, consisted [sic] of the following factors:

Factor I: Linguistic and communication skills

Factor II: Self-direction and positiveness, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission

Factor III: Understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as a Japanese.

In addition to the above, qualities that are commonly required not only of “global human resources” but also of core individuals for future Japanese society include: broad and well cultivated mind and profound expertise, willingness to find and solve problems, team-work and leadership skills (to bring together persons of various backgrounds), public-mindedness, moral sensibilities, and media-literacy. (p.7)

It is notable that the report lists the first factor necessary for global human resources as *linguistic and communication skills*. It explains:

Considering the wide-range of factors included in the concept of “global human resources,” the required qualities and skills cannot be measured with a single yardstick.

However, if the qualification standards were to be presented in levels (from primary to advanced) based mainly on Factor I (linguistic and communication skills as “tools”), which are relatively easy to measure (expecting that other factors will entail in line with such skills), the following may be one example:

- (1) Communication skills for travels abroad.
- (2) Communication skills for daily life abroad interactions.
- (3) Communication skills for business conversation and paperworks. [sic]
- (4) Linguistic skills for bilateral negotiations.

(5) Linguistic skills for multilateral negotiations.

Of the above, it can be said in Japan that there has been a steady increase in “global human resources” who are at the (1),(2), and (3) levels in Japan. From now on, we must go further to develop those who are in (4) and (5) levels (p.7-8)

It is unclear what is meant by bilateral and multilateral negotiations, however, the word *negotiations* seems to evoke an image of high-level English proficiency.

Immediately following, the report cites low Japanese TOEFL scores compared to those of other countries. It is intriguing to note that this claim was called into question in 1993 by J.D. Brown, an expert in testing, who, as Davidson (1998) informs us,

pointed out that Japan’s average TOEFL score proved nothing about the English abilities of Japanese people as compared with other Asian nations. This is because Japan also has by far the highest number of people taking the TOEFL test. In many nations, only a very small number take the TOEFL test. Usually they are proficient English language users definitely planning to study or do research abroad. In Japan, many without such definite plans take the test as a measure of their English language achievement. So naturally a lower national average results. (p. 46).

TOEFL arguments aside, it is clear is that the report reflects a commonly accepted understanding that Japanese are generally poor at English, and that it argues for measures to be taken to raise English ability among Japanese. It would seem, then, that MEXT’s ideal “global human resource” is one with high-level English proficiency.

Unfortunately, a two-week exchange program has negligible value in measurably boosting the English level—specifically the linguistic competence—of its participants. However, the program makes an invaluable contribution to its participants: most come away from the program with a sense of achievement and a modicum of confidence toward the *idea* of communicating with foreign people in English. Thus, while the program cannot afford participants significant improvements in linguistic competency, it provides the quintessential element, in particular for low-proficiency learners, for language learning to begin. Participants get a sense of achievement from the experience of having collaborated and communicated in English with real foreign people on real projects, and hopefully, a resulting positive attitude toward language learning.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

A number of faculty members from HIU and RMUTT participate in this program every year, and there is general agreement to the basic framework. However, while the English language plays such a crucial role in participant success, very little has been discussed in terms of how to best bring out and utilize the English that students already know. This is important because, as mentioned before, a two-week timeframe is simply not enough to raise general linguistic ability. In other words, students need to tap into the ability they already have, and learn to make do with that. At minimum, students will experience what a genuine need for L2 competence means. They may realize through participation on the program the limitations of what they can express and understand in an L2 versus their L1. Hopefully, however, they will realize not what they *cannot* do but what they *can* do in an L2; that at very least it is enough to function; and that their years of compulsory study have yielded them something more than preparation to take tests.

A brief set of principles, or guidelines, for handy reference regarding the use of English in each of the roles treated in this paper—general communication, collaborative projects, and short presentations—might be helpful for current and future participating staff. While some staff are more proficient in English than their students, they likely share some of the same apprehensions when it comes to using English for actual communication. This is a good thing, because it means they can empathize with the struggles of the learners.

A set of guidelines as to how to approach English use would be helpful so that students and staff embarking on the program at both universities abide by a similar philosophy—in specific, that imperfect English is not necessarily bad English. The three main issues to work into these guidelines are:

- (1) Best practices for judicious use of translation software;
- (2) Best practices for effective short presentations; and
- (3) Tolerance and acknowledgement of imperfect English as *interlanguage*; that is, embracing the idea that any English that makes sense to the other person is good English, or at very least, good enough.

I would caution, however, that any guidelines established should remain just that—guidelines. They should not become

prescriptions or proscriptions. For example, some English teachers may feel uncomfortable encouraging ‘broken’ English or unscripted presentations. If instructors can make students feel at ease through mastering language forms and by using written scripts to produce engaging presentations, then they should unquestioningly be allowed to do so.

Finally, although English plays a crucial role in the program, it is barely accounted for in evaluation. The program is referred to as “international,” but the term refers to the interaction and collaboration by teams of students and instructors from two countries on projects using the best English they can. In the end projects are evaluated locally by teachers who are mostly non-native speakers. “English quality” is one criterion on the evaluation rubric, but counts for a tiny number of points. Presentations, too, are evaluated not by any language proficiency criteria but by their overall impact on an audience of mostly non-native speakers. The thought occurs that, if the term “international” is to refer to a true global audience, then the linguistic element of English language content should somehow be better supported in the project production process, and should carry greater weight in evaluation outcomes.

The improvement of English ability is one of MEXT’s ideals. However, it should be pointed out that while reports by the aforementioned councils strongly advocate a need to improve English linguistic competence in what they envision to be “global human resources,” the very first sentence of the final recommendation to MEXT by the Central Council for Education, set off by a bordered text box, states:

グローバル人材の育成については、これまでも政府内で様々な検討がなされてきた。その中で、「グローバル人材」に求められる要素として、語学力のみならず、相互理解や価値創造力、社会貢献意識など、様々な要素が想定されている。<sup>(2)</sup> [Up to this point, there has been much discussion in government with regard to the development of global human resources. Amid this discussion, it is envisioned that the essential elements for “global human resources” include not only those of linguistic ability, but also the capacity to mutually understand, to add value, and to be conscious of making positive contributions to society.] (p.1)

Mutual understanding, collaboration, and making social contributions can all be achieved with limited fluency in English. The value of the HIU-RMUTT program as a promoter of global human resources rests not in how well it can improve participants’ L2

linguistic performance, but in how well it can raise their awareness of how English works, what English ability they already have, and how well that ability can serve them despite its imperfectness. If the program can foster a positive attitude toward interacting with international partners using English, it has already attained a praiseworthy goal. This positive attitude is, perhaps, the essence of what the promotion of global human resources genuinely seeks to achieve.

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- (2) MEXT Website: グローバル人材の育成について [Development of global human resources]. Retrieved from [http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/047/siryō/\\_icsFiles/fieldfile/2012/02/14/1316067\\_01.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/047/siryō/_icsFiles/fieldfile/2012/02/14/1316067_01.pdf)
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**Appendix: HIU-RMUTT Exchange Program Process (adapted and translated from Anada, 2015)**

