

# PERSONALITY AND OTHER FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ENGLISH CONVERSATIONAL ABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF SEVEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Jacqueline D. Beebe

## ABSTRACT

This case study of seven students attending Komazawa Gakuen Girl's High School identifies common factors associated with oral fluency and makes recommendations for teachers. The subjects were chosen for their willingness to speak English in class, their fluency, and their accuracy. The subjects were interviewed and their personalities were assessed with the Y G Personality Inventory (Guilford & Yatabe, undated). Common factors arising from the interviews included concrete goals necessitating oral English ability, identification with foreign culture, an orientation more towards communication than towards norms, persistence, self-direction and flexibility (especially in finding native- and non-native speakers of English to speak with), and special learning opportunities or early exposure to English. All seven subjects used their own pedagogical English tapes or listened to radio or television English lessons, and also frequently both enjoyed and studied entertaining English audio and visual media. On the Y G Personality Inventory subjects' scores tended towards the mid-range on the dimension of Neuroticism/Stability, but markedly more towards Extraversion than towards Introversion.

## INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Most Japanese secondary school students have had few or no chances to practice conversing in English and they finish six years of English study still largely lacking in listening and speaking skills. But at the same time, many schools, including Komazawa Gakuen Girl's High School, seem to produce a few students who stand out from their peers in being able to engage in comparatively fluent and accurate conversation. Conversation is herein defined as unplanned face-to-face two-way communication. How or why have these exceptional students attained their skill?

Scholars of individual differences among L2 (second language) learners have found it fruitful to study "good language learners" to see if generalizations may be gleaned from their characteristics and approaches to learning which might guide

the practice of teaching and learning languages. To that end this study presents findings derived from semi-directed interviews of seven outstanding conversationalists attending Komazawa. The individual learning histories of these students were traced retrospectively and their behaviors, attitudes, and goals were explored. Naiman et al. (1978) interviewed thirty-four successful learners and I modeled my interview protocol upon theirs, with the addition of a year-by-year learning history. Naiman et al. identified five major "strategies" which are also evident in my study (it's not surprising that a similar instrument should call forth similar results): active task approach, realization of language as a system, realization of language as a means of communication and interaction, management of affective demands, and monitoring of L2 performance.

While I interviewed the subjects I was struck by their outgoing, confident, and even strong-willed

personalities. Later, becoming acquainted with work on the role of the individual learner difference factor of personality, I decided to follow up the initial study (Beebe, 1993) by testing the personality of the subjects, and this factor is singled out for attention in this current paper. Does personality influence second language learning processes or level attainment? Which aspect of personality and which aspect of attainment? Much research has investigated the trait of extroversion, and Skehan (1989, p. 140) concludes that "there are suggestions that both extroversion and introversion have positive and negative features, and that simple relationships will not be found". Skehan refers to the studies of Rossier (1976) and Pritchard (1952) which found positive relationships between extroversion and oral fluency, and extroversion and fluency, respectively.

Furthermore, a series of studies (Aloiau, Castagnaro, Robson, Tanaka, Ueno, all 1992, Yamazaki, 1993) conducted in 1992 in various academic settings in the Kanto region of Japan have supported the idea that while extroversion is not related to general or academically-oriented measures of proficiency, it does positively correlate with measures more oriented towards proficiency in interpersonal communication. Some of these studies also looked at the factor of neuroticism or trait anxiety, which would seem logically to be connected to the kind of careful persistent study that might lead to academically-oriented and norm-oriented language proficiency, and indeed, several positive correlations were found with such proficiency measures.

Much current research in personality measurement makes reference to the five-factor model of personality; five traits (Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) which are consensually acknowledged although they go by a number of names, and which "cross the boundaries of method and observer, endure across time, and are distinct from measures of cognitive ability" (McCrae,

1989, p. 243). Angleitner reports that "studies starting with personality descriptive adjectives in self- and peer-ratings have now reached consensus about the Big Five factors of personality in different languages such as English, German, and Japanese" (Angleitner, 1991, p. 189). It would have been ideal to have tested all five of these factors, but being unacquainted with an appropriate instrument for Japanese high school students, and wishing to build upon existing SLA (second language acquisition) research, I confined myself to two factors, measuring extroversion and neuroticism using two aggregates, each composed of half of the twelve traits measured on the Yatabe-Guilford Personality Inventory (Guilford & Yatabe, undated).

Guilford's work over the years both fits into the five-factor model and has been the basis of personality scales currently widely used in Japan. McCrae (1989) reports that a joint factor analysis of the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (GZTS; Guilford, Zimmerman, & Guilford, 1976) and the five NEO-Personality Inventory, (NEO-PI; Costa & McCrae, 1985) demonstrated that "N <Neuroticism> and E <Extraversion> are clearly defined by variables from both instruments" (McCrae, 1989, pp. 241-242).

According to the "*Shin Seikaku Kensaho*" ["New Personality Testing Methods", my translation] (Tsujioka, 1976, pp. 18-19), the thirteen "temperament traits" tested by Guilford (e.g. Guilford & Martin, 1948) became the basis of the Yatabe-Guilford inventory when the Masculinity-Femininity trait was dropped and test questions appropriate for the Japanese were constructed. The administration manual for the Y-G- test, the undated "*Y G Seikaku Kensa Jisshi Tebiki*" states that the YG test has been validated for Japan in a series of studies carried out between 1952 and 1962 (p. 1). And Tsujioka (1976, p. 42) lists reliability coefficients for each of the twelve traits of the YG ranging between .70 and .91 for internal consistency reliability, between .72 and .92 on equiva-

lent forms of the test, and between .56 and .82 for test-retest reliability. Tsujioka maintains that although these figures rarely reach .90, they are higher than those obtained on most personality measures.

The six traits that cluster as a Stability-Neuroticism measure are Depression, Cycloid Tendency (emotional fluctuations), Inferiority Feelings, Nervousness, Objectivity, and Cooperativeness, while the six traits that represent Introversion-Extraversion are Agreeableness, General Activity, Rhathymia (happy-go-lucky), Thinking Introversion-Extraversion, Ascendance-Submission, and Social Extraversion. The RESULTS section of this study presents scores on each of these twelve traits and on the two aggregates.

These students were interviewed several years ago and their names are not included, but to preserve the privacy of the students and their teachers, this current paper does not contain quotes from the students or many details about each particular student. And because Komazawa faculty may read this paper, to further protect the students' privacy, on Table 2, indicating the personality test results, the subjects' identifying initials are listed in a different order than they are on Table 1, which lists the other factors.

## SUBJECTS

The seven subjects were aged seventeen and eighteen and were second and third year high school students at Komazawa. It is my subjective judgement that they all had English conversational skills well above those achieved by most university students in Japan. The students knew that I, the researcher-interviewer, teach part-time at the two-year women's college on the same campus. I am a native-English-speaking European-American female now in my late thirties.

The subjects were recruited by Mr. Cole, the American teacher of an elective English Conver-

sation class at Komazawa. I asked him to choose students who were outstanding English conversationalists. Mr. Cole's reported criteria were, in order of importance; willingness to speak English in his class, fluency (speed and range of expression), and accuracy. Several students he approached declined to volunteer, and two who hesitantly agreed were not included in the results of this study because their English ability was significantly lower than that of the other seven subjects and they often spoke Japanese during their pair interview.

One year after the interviews I attempted to contact the seven subjects by telephone (to ascertain post-graduation addresses through the subjects' families) and letter to ask them to fill out a Y G Personality Inventory and mail it back to me. After writing a second time to some of the subjects I received six out of seven requested Inventories.

## PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTS

Mr. Cole talked to potential subjects individually and gave them an explanation of my request written in English and Japanese. When I first met the subjects they filled out a short questionnaire on their English-learning history while I arranged interview times. Interviews were held in a professor's office at the junior college and were tape-recorded. Among the subjects were two pairs of friends who asked if they could be interviewed together. Individual interviews ranged in length from 80 to 120 minutes and the paired interviews were 160 minutes each. The subjects spoke eagerly and never said that they were tired when I asked them (some interviews extended to two sessions). I roughly followed a bilingual interview protocol, repeating questions in Japanese when necessary. As new themes arose I added new questions into subsequent interviews.

The subjects responded almost entirely in English (my spoken Japanese is of an intermediate level). Both to aid in the subjects' reception of

Table 1  
Factors Common to Many of the Subjects

Factor	Strength of the Factor					
	Subject					
	A - B	C - D	E	F	G	
Plans to study at a North American college	1	2	1	2	2	1
Wants to work abroad or marry an American	0	2	0	0	1	1
Talks or studies about foreign cultures	0	0	2	2	2	1
Attended school's English club	0	2	1	0	2	1
Grammar and test-oriented after-school lessons	2	1	2	2	2	1
After-school lessons with convers. practice during secondary years	0	2	1	0	1	1
Traveled or had a homestay abroad	0	2	0	1	2	1
Informally talks to foreigners in Japan	1	1	0	0	2	0
Has corresponded with a foreigner	0	1	1	1	0	1
Buys own grammar exercise & reference books, asks teacher questions	2	0	2	2	1	1
Pleasure reading of English children's books and magazines	1	1	1	0	1	0
Instructional tapes or radio/TV courses	1	1	2	2	2	2
Active listening to entertaining audio/visuals	2	2	2	1	2	1
Exposure to English during elementary years	1	2	1	1	2	1
Persistence in the face of boredom/discouragement	1	0	2	1	2	2
Pursues goals, uses English against resistance	1	1	0	0	2	0
Speaks English with Japanese outside of classrooms	1	1	0	0	2	2

Note. 2 = strongly true 1 = somewhat true 0 = untrue or not mentioned by the subject  
Subjects' initials joined with a hyphen indicate a pair interview.

English and to stimulate answers, I made ample use of examples and often paraphrased and expanded upon their answers. The subjects seemed quick to correct me when I had not correctly interpreted their imperfect English or jumped to a wrong conclusion. Rather than transcribing the tapes verbatim I merely took extensive notes on the entirety of the tapes, only occasionally writing down noteworthy portions word-for-word.

The letters contacting the subjects concerning the personality inventory were written in English, but the responding subjects filled out the Japanese language version for high school students of the Y G Personality Inventory. These inventories, which contain 120 questions and take very roughly fifteen minutes to fill out, were presumably filled

out by the subjects on their own, and were mailed back to me. I had them hand-scored by the *Nihon Shinri Tesuto Kenkyujo*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Goals: A Concrete Need for English Ability

One striking finding that arose from the interviews was that all seven subjects had clear future plans to put their conversational skills to use in English-speaking countries (see Table 1). They all either planned to spend a year abroad in their college years, attend a U.S. university in Japan, study in the U.S.A. for two years after graduating from a Japanese junior college, or enter North American colleges immediately after high school. Four subjects mentioned wanting to work abroad, and these subjects love to study and talk about

foreign cultures, especially America (see Table 1).

I do not contend that the future need for English has *caused* the high attainment of these subjects, since it could be that their own assessment of their high abilities has inspired their plans. In fact, I suppose that the influence goes in both directions, but I think the connection is striking enough to suggest that educationalists should not only increase opportunities for Japanese students to learn conversation at school, but should also increase opportunities for students to experience a communicational *need* for conversational ability. One way would be by supporting homestay abroad programs. Although Komazawa does not send self-selected groups of students abroad during vacations, as some schools do, it could nonetheless put up posters and offer information on reputable outside programs and recognize high school credits earned abroad. Komazawa could also invite foreign visitors and encourage its students' families to host young foreigners.

#### English as a Communicative Tool

All seven subjects exhibited what Naiman et al. (1978) call a realization of language as a means of communication and interaction. To these subjects, *real* English is that used for face-to-face communication, and the most valuable language learning is that which directly contributes to conversational skills. In the interviews I found it difficult to get them to talk about their form-focused lock-step classroom learning activities, which they generally found boring and irrelevant to their primary interest in communicative English. It may be difficult for Komazawa teachers *not* to bore their students at times since my subjects reported that most students had already learned the content of their English lessons at after-school cram schools. Their school English lessons seldom included any speaking or listening activities. Five of these subjects had at some point joined their junior or senior high English club, perhaps seeking conversational opportunities (see

Table 1). One subject said that she was frustrated by the out-of-date English taught in school textbooks, which she has found useless for communication.

Most subjects mentioned wanting to improve their listening and speaking or vocabulary; only one mentioned wanting to improve her grammar. The subjects all appreciated those Japanese English teachers they had had who were particularly skillful at explaining English grammar in Japanese, but they saw these teachers as a means to the ends of interacting with native speakers. One subject said that she wanted to express herself in English and to try out her pronunciation on native speakers. This is an example of Naiman et al.'s (1978) strategy of monitoring of L2 performance: these subjects craved the chance to test their listening and speaking abilities by monitoring the comprehension of both speakers during conversations with native speakers.

All of these students had formal group or private lessons outside of regular school, and according to two of the subjects, this was the norm among their classmates. But I believe that these seven students had had more than the usual share of outside classes which provide conversational opportunities and not just test practice (see Table 1), so perhaps more than most Komazawa students, they were able to compare their school lessons with orally-oriented lessons.

#### Seeking Communication with Native Speakers

Politzer and McGroarty (1985) used a questionnaire to look at classroom study, individual study, and social interaction outside the classroom and found that only social interaction strategies significantly correlated with communicative ability. I believe that the individual study activities of these seven subjects, particularly those involving listening practice, had also substantially contributed to their conversational abilities, but the subjects themselves valued nothing as highly as interaction with native speakers of English.

While in high school, three of the subjects had spent one or two months on English-speaking homestays and others had found foreign English teachers at commercial conversation schools or had met foreigners elsewhere in Japan (see Table 1). It seems that the subjects were learning conversation both because they *wanted* to speak to foreigners--it was a goal, and because they *were* speaking to foreigners--it was a means. These students had found creative and independent but innocent ways to informally meet foreigners in Japan. Four subjects had also corresponded in English with foreign friends, so schools might do well to encourage students to write to foreign penpals (see Table 1).

#### Also Focus on Accuracy

As much as these subjects valued communication of ideas, as Naiman et al. said, (1978), good language learners realize that language is a system, and thus none of the subjects was developing only fluency with no real regard for accuracy. They would fairly often correct their speech in mid-utterance, changing a verb tense, for example. Several of the students had joined the small voluntary after-school grammar class offered at Komazawa and they said that this special class had been quite useful. All of the subjects except for one, who did not like English or study seriously until high school, reported that on written tests of English they were probably always on an average or superior level compared to their classmates.

Three subjects had chosen and bought their own grammar texts to study. L2 reading experts advocate letting students choose books for pleasure reading at their preferred readability levels, and it would be wise to let students grapple with a grammar point when their interlanguage has reached a level allowing them to handle it most fruitfully. The subjects I interviewed seemed especially willing to put effort into self-chosen materials and would probably have welcomed a class-

room library of self-access resources for self-instruction. Such a library at Komazawa could include form-focused reference and exercise books, entertaining magazines and books, and even cassette and video tapes made for both instructional and entertainment purposes (see Table 1). It would be especially useful if students received hints on creative ways in which other students have employed listening materials (see the discussion on listening activities below). With such resources, *school* could be an arena where students could develop the active approach to the language learning task, a strategy identified by Naiman et al. (1978), which my subjects exhibited *outside* of the classroom.

#### Active Listening With Self-Chosen Materials

Excepting Mr. Cole's class, only four of the subjects had used cassette tapes in a secondary classroom, and then only for pronunciation practice, (listening and repeating while looking at the book) not "hearing" comprehension practice (where they must catch the information with their ears only). But these students independently had come to highly value both types of listening practice; *all* of them had used instructional cassette tapes and/or radio or television English lessons (see Table 1). (The subjects liked Mr. Cole's use of videos, music, and games, but wished they had more speaking chances, and two had joined the school English club which he led.)

These students all also actively engaged themselves with non-instructional English-speaking films, television shows and popular music from an early age (see Table 1). By late elementary school two students would catch a few words from the chorus of a song and sing along without knowing what the words meant, and by junior high several subjects were actively studying the words of songs; memorizing them, singing along, and thinking about what they meant. In junior high one subject mimicked English-speaking disc jockeys, even writing out scripts to practice.

These subjects monitored and stretched their English abilities while being entertained, allocating some of their attention to language learning. Two subjects looked up unknown words they heard on the radio or in movies. One subject used a bilingual option on her family's television set to watch movies in English, reportedly understanding 50% of what she heard. As more Japanese families acquire these televisions, students should be coached on how they can use them, especially since many units allow the dubbing of videotapes off of the broadcast in either English or Japanese: two subjects watched movies twice; once to read the Japanese subtitles and once to listen to the English soundtrack. Two subjects had watched the same videos many times, one sometimes tried not reading the subtitles of movies, and another bought three unsubtitled videos abroad.

#### Will Publicly Speak English in the Right Setting

These subjects did not speak up in their Komazawa English classes beyond just reading sentences from the textbook, or giving the briefest answers, and not because they could not speak or had nothing to say, but because no one else did (including the teacher!) Not counting Mr. Cole's class, all of the subjects had either within or outside school at some time had a communicatively-oriented teacher. Three subjects had a junior high class in which students spoke English (not just reading aloud from the textbook) in teacher-fronted work; in one class it was required, another teacher gave points to volunteers who raised their hands to answer, and another created a fun atmosphere that encouraged volunteers. Two subjects spoke positively of native-English speaking junior high teachers (once a week) who had the students ask and answer communicative questions with the teacher. Other subject had attended group classes after school in which they volunteered because other students also did so. But in their second and third year English classes at Komazawa none of these subjects any longer

volunteered because they felt too inhibited. If a Komazawa teacher wants his or her students to start speaking English then the teacher must require unplanned speaking or the expression of ideas so that this behavior is no longer deviant in that setting.

#### Early Exposure

All seven subjects had positive experiences with English media or English speakers in their elementary school days (see Table 1). Three subjects had studied English after school for two or three years of elementary school; two of the girls with a native speaker of English. They had learned some grammar, formulaic sentences, and vocabulary, and if they did not really converse in English, they played games in English and were exposed to picture books, songs, and even videos. Before junior high school other subjects had had enjoyable experiences with English books, songs, or Sesame Street programs or had heard people around them speak English.

One is reminded of studies of L1 literacy acquisition which have suggested that children who are exposed to books in the home before they begin to read learn to read more successfully when they enter school. These subjects may have benefitted in a similar way from their early exposure to English. Japanese elementary schools might do well to stock their libraries with some attractive English picture books to allow for an affective opening towards English, and point out the books to the students when they are taught the Roman alphabet. Actually, several subjects had for years been reading English children's books for pleasure, and my university English students also enjoy reading them, so I would encourage the school libraries at Komazawa's junior and senior high schools to also buy English children's books.

With this early exposure to English, the subjects may have come to their first junior high English class equipped with a greater ability and confidence in handling the grammar or sound

system of English. A few initial weeks or months of feeling successful may have had an invaluable effect on their self-images. Only one subject had not had any particular interest in English in first year junior high and five subjects described their first year junior high school English classes positively. (By second and third grade, interesting discourse, and the few chances for listening and speaking practice were being sacrificed to practice for high school entrance exams.)

#### Resurgence of Interest on Entering High School

Berwick and Ross (1989) found that partway through their first year at college or university a sizeable portion of Japanese students they surveyed experienced an awakening or reawakening of their interest in studying English. The authors suggested that after recovering from the pressures of their entrance exam studies these students had a chance to reevaluate the possible future value of English proficiency and develop new goals involving English ability. This happened to some of my subjects during their first year of high school. When students were asked if they had ever felt discouraged or frustrated about their English studies it was usually to their junior high period of test-driven study both in and out of the regular schools to which they referred. Four students reported studying English more seriously or with more enjoyment during their first year of high school, so this is an area that Komazawa high school has had some success in.

#### Interest in Foreign Countries

Several students had by late elementary school already decided that they wanted to either travel to or live in other countries someday, usually America, and several mentioned the inspiring effect of knowing schoolmates who had lived abroad. Subjects expressed a special interest in sixteen different countries, however only one mentioned that English would enable her to communicate with people throughout the world. Kom-

azawa teachers might do well to emphasize the usefulness of English as a common world language to help sustain the interest of students who are interested in non-Anglophonic countries. From the elementary years, visits to the classroom by either foreigners or Japanese with experiences abroad, or encouraging students who have traveled to share their experiences in class, could be especially powerful motivational tools.

#### Persistence

These subjects had managed to keep their love for English uncontaminated by negative English learning experiences and they were willing to work hard, or as Naiman et al. (1978) say, they manage affective demands. Motivated intrinsically, they wanted to learn to fluently communicate with native speakers of English, but they are extrinsically aware of both the gates through which they must pass to meet foreigners (by entering upper level classes at commercial conversation schools or schools abroad) and of the effort it will take to pass through those gates.

The language-learning motivation and positive attitudes towards English of my subjects seemed to be more constant than attitude toward any particular teacher. They were encouraged by especially good English teachers but not too discouraged by their less favorite teachers. And it seems that teachers do not have to excel at everything, since my subjects distinguished between skillful and likeable teachers and between teachers who were skillful in the L2 and skillful at teaching.

These subjects may have put the minimum into their school work, but they were working hard in their self-chosen English pursuits, without depending on the constant stimulation of something new, demonstrating intrinsic motivation in repeatedly saying that particular activities were fun because they could understand the English. The pressure of entrance exams had led only one student to give up on studying for some time (in third year



junior high); the other students had simply persevered when frustrated (see Table 1).

#### Autonomy Through Flexibility

Current wisdom holds that learning is best done autonomously, but these students were not adults; they had parents and teachers who expected them to tailor their studies to upcoming entrance exams and they had attended junior and senior high schools and cram schools with fixed curricula and many demoralized students. The subjects had had to be flexible and seize whatever opportunities came their way, as in using any available materials and changing their goals and plans as reality (parents, teachers, financial considerations) dictated. Many of these seven subjects had wanted to attend North American universities for four years and only finally accepted various educational compromises demanded by their parents. The autonomy of these subjects also included ignoring or even fighting with family and friends who ridiculed or ignored their interest in English (see Table 1).

The subjects allied themselves with key peers for moral support and to create their own opportunities for English use. In first year high school one subject started liking English again because three of her friends liked English. Many subjects offered examples from their junior or senior high days of having friends who liked English, spoke English together (sometimes in empty classrooms or on the telephone), or spoke about English-speaking countries and film stars. One subject said that she always chose the same skilled partner for pairwork in Mr. Cole's conversation class and they pretended that they were Americans and talked a lot. Many Japanese students resist speaking English with other Japanese, feeling it to be too unnatural, but five of these subjects had the flexibility to use Japanese speaking partners when foreigners were not available (see Table 1). And six subjects mentioned talking to an English teacher before or after class or at conversation

school parties.

#### The Subjects Explain Their Own Success

When specifically asked about various forms of language aptitude, four subjects affirmed that they might have special talents, usually claiming "a good ear" but a weak memory. Three students explained their conversational abilities by referring to a special learning opportunity, while the other four students explained their conversational ability in terms of goals, effort, and liking English.

Of the three subjects who were asked to advise a hypothetical junior high student on how to learn conversation, two recommended exposure to English-language movies and music as the best means to speak interest in English, which will lead to motivation to study. (Even Japanese English teachers with little confidence in their own speaking abilities may use entertaining music and videos in the classroom.) One subject recommended talking with native speakers of English.

#### The Role of Personality

While I of course cannot employ any inferential statistics to determine if the results of the Y G scores could have resulted from chance alone since I only have results from six subjects, I believe that "eye-balling" the results nonetheless reveals a striking tendency for these subjects to score highly on measures of extraversion. Because the raw test scores for each of the twelve traits convert slightly differently to percentile scores, I will employ the system used by the *Shinri Tesuto Kenkyujo* of converting the raw interval scores into a five-point ordinal scale. Tsujioka (1976, p. 17) explains that a score of 1 indicates a score in the lowest 6.7% of respondents, 2, in the next 24.2%, 3, the middle 38.3%, 4, the next 24.2%, and 5, the upper 6.7% of respondents. However these percentages add up to 100.1%, so perhaps the middle group is actually 38.2%.

As Table 2 indicates, Subject "a" had extreme scores on both measures of Stability/Neuroticism

Table 2  
Personality Inventory Results of Six Individual Subjects

Trait	Strength of the Trait					
	Subject					
	a	b	c	d	e	f
Depression	1	4	3	2	2	2
Cycloid Disposition (emotional fluctuations)	1	4	4	4	2	3
Inferiority Feelings	1	3	2	3	1	2
Nervousness	1	4	3	4	2	3
Objectivity	2	5	4	5	3	3
Cooperativeness	1	4	3	3	3	1
<b>Stability/Neuroticism</b> (mean of above 6)	1.2	4.0	3.2	3.5	2.2	2.3
Agreeableness	5	4	5	5	4	4
General Activity	5	2	3	3	3	4
Rhathymia (happy-go-lucky)	4	4	5	4	3	5
Thinking Introversion/Extraversion	4	3	4	1	2	4
Ascendance-Submission	5	4	4	4	4	5
Social Introversion/Extraversion	5	5	4	5	5	5
<b>Introversion/Extraversion</b> (mean of above 6)	4.7	3.7	4.2	3.7	3.5	4.5

Note. Ordinal scores were derived from raw test scores, 1 being in the lowest of 5 percentile bands: 6.7%, 24.2%, 38.3% (sic), 24.2%, 6.7%.

Subjects' initials on Table 2 do not correspond to those on Table 1.

(a mean of 1.2 on the six relevant traits) and Introversion/Extraversion (a mean of 4.7) Her Y G scores indicate that she has a very stable and very extraverted personality. I therefore did not calculate any means for the six responding subjects, but subject "a" was not the only one who scored strongly towards extraversion: for the other five subjects, nine out of 30 scores on the Introversion/Extraversion traits were 5s and thirteen out of the same 30 scores were 4s, whereas these five subjects only had one 1, two 2s, and five 3s. Compare this to the scores of the other five subjects on the Stability/Neuroticism traits, which were definitely more normally (centrally) distributed: two 1s, seven 2s, eleven 3s, eight 4s and two 5s.

Table 3 combines the scores of all six respondents as well as the scores on the lower and upper percentile bands. Scores which are particularly skewed are indicated in bold type. This table

indicates that the subjects scored highly on the trait of Depression, which, according to The Guilford-Martin Temperament Profile Chart, indicates "freedom from depression, a cheerful, optimistic disposition," whereas a low score indicates "a chronically depressed mood including feelings of unworthiness and guilt" (Guilford & Martin, 1948). This quantitatively measured lack of depression supports the subjects' own verbal reports that they have steadily studied English over the years, seldom feeling or giving in to discouragement. The subjects' high scores on Inferiority Feelings indicate "self-confidence and a lack of inferiority feelings" (Guilford & Martin, 1948), and one can imagine that students burdened by feelings of inferiority would be less inclined than my subjects were to expose themselves and their L2 abilities to the immediate scrutiny of others, as happens in a conversation. As the other traits were evenly distributed, the six subjects

Table 3  
Number of Subjects Scoring in the Lower, Middle, and Upper Bands on Each Personality Trait

Trait	Score of		
	1 or 2	3	4 or 5
Depression	4	1	1
Cycloid Disposition (emotional fluctuations)	2	1	3
Inferiority Feelings	4	2	0
Nervousness	2	2	2
Objectivity	1	2	3
Cooperativeness	2	3	1
<b>Stability/Neuroticism</b> (total of above 6)	15	11	10
Agreeableness	0	0	6
General Activity	1	3	2
Rhathymia (happy-go-lucky)	0	1	5
Thinking Introversion/Extraversion	2	1	3
Ascendance-Submission	0	0	6
Social Introversion/Extraversion	0	0	6
<b>Introversion/Extraversion</b> (total of above 6)	3	5	28

Note. Ordinal scores were derived from raw test scores, 1 being in the lowest of 5 percentile bands: 6.7%, 24.2%, 38.3% (sic), 24.2%, 6.7%.

A score of 1 or 2 is in the lowest 30.9%, 4 or 5 in the highest 30.9%.

have a total of 15 scores indicating Stability, 11 in the mid-range, and 10 on the end towards Neuroticism.

Table 3 indicates more dramatic results for the six traits associated with Introversion/Extraversion. All six subjects scored a four or a five on three traits: Agreeableness, Ascendance-Submission, and Social Introversion-Extraversion. A high score on Agreeableness indicates "an agreeable lack of quarrelsomeness and a lack domineering qualities," on Ascendance-Submission, "social leadership," and on Social Introversion-Extraversion, "sociability, a tendency to seek social contacts and to enjoy the company of others" (Guilford & Martin, 1948). The indication that these subjects do not feel a need to dominate might be related to their willingness to engage in English conversation with native speakers of English, in which they may be at a disadvantage in directing the conversation,

and again related to their flexibility in negotiating compromises with their parents related to English study. The subjects' high scores on social leadership and sociability bring to mind their abilities and propensities to actively seek out or organize both informal and formal opportunities for English conversation. Five out of six subjects scored on the higher percentile bands on Rhathymia, indicating "a happy-go-lucky or carefree disposition, liveliness, and impulsiveness" (Guilford & Martin, 1948), which may be related to their willingness to strike up English conversations with strangers, go on homestays abroad, and to engage in L2 conversation, which does not allow for the careful editing of mistakes possible in written production. In all, a striking twenty-eight Introversion/Extraversion trait scores were in the upper range, five scores were in the middle range, and only three scores were in the lower range.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Researcher Explains the Subjects' Success

In interviewing these seven subjects I of course asked the questions that *I* was interested in, (but that is also true of large-scale questionnaires) and I chose to discuss the results that *I* found most striking. But I believe that the subjects had a sufficient chance to openly share their own realities with me and that enough commonalities have emerged to show us something significant about the success of these particular students. How far can we generalize from this case study? The subjects were all females, they had all attended Mr. Cole's *elective* Conversation class, and they attracted his attention through their volubility. Even if the reader trusts the subjective assessments of these of learners' abilities made by Mr. Cole and I, there may well have been other skilled conversationalists in the school who either did not take, or refused to speak up in, his classes, and some prospective subjects declined to be interviewed. This *caveat* is especially important in interpreting the extroverted personality scores of the six self-selected responding subjects. Furthermore, five of the seven subjects I employed *have* been abroad, and three of these five have had significant learning opportunities outside Japan, which is certainly not typical of all Japanese high school students, but we can see that the *subject's own interest* in English or in life abroad motivated them to make conversational opportunities for themselves both inside and outside of Japan. Therefore, rather than dismissing these learners as exceptions to the rule, we can learn from them as outstanding examples of what is possible in a foreign language learning setting.

I feel that the success of these seven learners stems less from the formal learning opportunities which were available to them in the classroom than from their autonomous direction of their own learning. They have positive attitudes towards English and English-speakers, and both

general and specific goals requiring English listening and speaking skills. For them, English is a symbol of a wider world, and English ability is a means to enter that wider world. Furthermore, their stable, extraverted personalities may have given them the confidence to venture into that unknown wider world. Perhaps these subjects turned to English as a means to express their expansive, extraverted personalities and desires. And perhaps also in contemplating different cultures they were inspired to question the apparent limits of their own culture. Thus inspired, they worked hard: their successful learning stems from persistent and flexible effort, especially in finding conversational partners and using self-chosen listening materials.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Hideki Sasaki, who translated my interview protocol and loaned his room for the interviews, and all the Komazawa Gakuen high school teachers who assisted me in contacting students, especially Mr. Kenneth Cole. I also thank Dr. Rod Ellis, who commented on an earlier version of this paper, and of course I thank the nine students who shared so freely of their time, ideas, and experiences.

## REFERENCES

- Aloia, E. K. W. (1992). An exploratory study of the individual differences between more and less successful learners in the advanced division of the IELP. Unpublished manuscript.
- Angleitner, A. (1991). Personality psychology: Trends and developments. European Journal of Personality, 5, 185-197.
- Beebe, J. D. (1993, October). "To speak English with my voice": A study of seven successful English conversationalists. Paper presented at the International Conference of the Japan Association of Language Teachers, Omiya, Japan.
- Berwick, R. & Ross, S. (1989). Motivation after matriculation: Are Japanese learners of English

- still alive after examination hell? JALT Journal, 11, 193-210.
- Castagnaro, P. J. (1992). Introduction of physiological measures in locating aversive stimulation related to foreign language learning among Japanese university students. Unpublished manuscript.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1985). The NEO Personality Inventory manual. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Guilford, J. P. & Martin, H. G. (1948). The Guilford-Martin Temperament Profile Chart. Beverly Hills, CA: Sheridan Supply Company.
- Guilford, J. S. & Yatabe, T. (undated). Y G Seikaku Kensa [Yatabe-Guilford Personality Inventory] . Osaka: *Nihon Shinri Tesuto Kenkyujo* [Institute for Psychological Testing] .
- Guilford, J. S., Zimmerman, W. S. & Guilford, J. P. (1976). The Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey Handbook. Twenty-five Years of Research and Application. San Diego, CA: Edits Publishers.
- McCrae, R. R. (1989). Why I advocate the five-factor model: Joint factor analyses of the NEO-PI with other instruments. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), Personality Psychology: Recent Trends and Emerging Directions (pp. 237-245). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Naiman, N., Frohlich, M., Stern, H. H., & Todesco, A. (1978). The good language learner. Research in Education Series, 7. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Nihon Shinri Tesuto Kenkyujo* [Institute for Psychological Testing]. (undated). Y G Seikaku Kensa Jisshi Tebiki [Y G Personality Inventory Administration Manual] . Osaka: *Nihon Shinri Tesuto Kenkyujo* [Institute for Psychological Testing].
- Politzer, R. L. & McGroarty, M. (1985). An exploratory study of learning behaviors and their relationship to gains in linguistic and communicative competence. TESOL Quarterly, 19, 103-123.
- Pritchard, D. (1952). An investigation of the relationship of personality traits and ability in modern languages. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 22, 147-148.
- Robson, G. (1992). Individual differences and classroom participation: A pilot study. Unpublished manuscript.
- Rossier, R. (1976). Extroversion-introversion as a significant variable in the learning of oral English as a second language. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California.
- Skehan, P. (1989). Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning. London: Edward Arnold.
- Tanaka, Y. (1992). Classroom participation and individual differences---An exploratory study. Unpublished manuscript.
- Tsujioka, M. (1976). *Shin Seikaku Kensaho* [New Personality Testing Methods] . Osaka: *Nihon Shinri Test Kenkyujo* [Institute for Psychological Testing].
- Ueno, N. (1992). Personality traits, factors, types, oral skills, and overall English proficiency of Japanese junior college students. Unpublished manuscript.
- Yamazaki, A. (1992). Introversion-extraversion and the English proficiency of Japanese high school students. Otsuka Forum, 10, 68-76.