

Re: Culture clash

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On Fri, 07 Sep 2007 11:21:46 +1000, Ben Finney wrote:

Or are you suggesting that:

The spoken Japanese language is much easier for a native English speaker to learn after childhood, than it is for a native Japanese speaker to learn the spoken English language after childhood.

Yes.

If the latter, a greater percentage of native Japanese speakers learn English after childhood than native English speakers learn Japanese.

What relevance do you think this has to the ease of learning in each case? How do you remove the factor of enormous economic pressure for adult-NSoJ-learning-English, and very little the other way?

My evidence, on the other hand, is largely anecdotal. NSoE that I speak with who have learned Japanese **outside** Japan to the point of conversational fluency speak highly of how ordered and easily-learned the (spoken) language is. Whereas NSoJ that I speak with struggle for many years with English **immersed** in an English-dominant environment and still frequently make frustrating corner-case errors that significantly impede understanding.

The **perception** of these (anecdotally-selected) people, at least, bears out the hypothesis that adult-NSoE-learning-Japanese has an easier time than a corresponding adult-NSoJ-learning-English.

In the part that you snipped, I did note that my observations were:

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"quantitative assessments and you may be correct that native English speakers have a greater predisposition toward acquiring Japanese than native Japanese speakers have with respect toward acquiring English."

However, I draw different conclusions from your anecdotal information. You refer to "NSoE that I speak with who have learned Japanese *outside* Japan to the point of conversational fluency". You imply, though, that your anecdotal Japanese learners of English are striving for more than mere "conversational fluency."

Therein lies the rub. A determined language learner can acquire spoken conversational fluency in virtually any language in a three month to six month period of intense immersion and study. However, I equate true intermediate proficiency in a language with the ability to read a newspaper, draft business correspondence that might require some editing by a native speaker or more proficient editor, and the ability to discuss business on a non-technical level.

It's hard to establish a level playing field. The average Japanese learns English in high school. The average resident of North America, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand does not learn Japanese at all in school. My anecdotal information tells me that there are a lot of Japanese who can read the New York Times with varying degrees of comprehension but there is a very small percentage of native English speakers who can read the Asahi Shimbun.

Phil Yff

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