

CULTURAL IMAGE COMPARISON BETWEEN AUSTRALIANS AND JAPANESE CITIZENS RESIDING IN AUSTRALIA-IMPACT ON LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION-

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I. Introduction

As the 21st century approaches, we are increasingly becoming a borderless world. Financial and merchandise commerce activities are globalizing. Human mobility, in terms of both tourism and transnational work forces, is expanding. Success in both business and cultural relations, therefore, will be increasingly based on understanding of the ways citizens of different countries view themselves.

Such perceptions are particularly relevant to language teaching since language is how we communicate and interact. Language communicates concepts beyond words. Appreciating the context of how words are used, therefore, is critical. Human learning, expression, and motivations are deeply rooted with a country's self image - comprised of cultural norms, beliefs, world views, interaction with geography, political history, and societal goals.

II. The object of the study

Given the size and emerging importance of Australia, as well as the expanding business and social interactions between Australia and Japan, this study examined the perceptions of Australia by Australians themselves and a population of Japanese students residing in Australia.

In view of the large cultural difference between Australia and Japan, this study began with the hypothesis that there must be a large perception gap between Australians and Japanese living in Australia. Alternatively, if only little difference was found in perceptions about Australia, then support for the success of 'active' education, in contrast to passive, traditional classroom education, would be achieved.

III. The research sample and method

191 Australian citizens were interviewed. Their demographics are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. These were mainly University students, language teachers and office staffs from Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, and Sidney.

Number of Australian Participants.

Table 1

N (191)

Male : 45 (23.6%)	Female : 140 (73.3%)	No answer : 6 (3.1%)
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Number of Australian Citizens by Region

Table 2

N (191)

N.S.W. : 100 (52.3%)	W.A. : 40 (20.9%)	V.I.C. : 20 (10.5%)
S.A. : 19 (9.9%)	A.C.T. : 12 (6.3%)	Q.L.D. : 0

N.S.W.=New South Wales W.A.=Western Australia V.I.C.=Victoria
S.A.=South Australia A.C.T.=Australian Capital Territory
Q.L.D.=Queensland

Age Distribution of Australian Citizens

Table 3

N (191)

Age	Number of People	(%)	Age	Number of People	(%)
16~20	58	(30.4%)	21~25	40	(20.9%)
26~30	14	(7.3%)	31~35	11	(5.8%)
36~40	19	(9.9%)	41~45	19	(9.9%)
46~50	9	(4.7%)	51~55	6	(3.1%)
Over 56	3	(1.6%)	No answer	12	(6.3%)

Japanese studentst in ELICOS and others

Table 4

N(151)

Male : 61	40.4%	Female : 86	57.0%	No answer : 4	2.6%
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Age Distribution of Japanese Students

Table 5

N(151)

Age	Number of People	(%)	Age	Number of People	(%)
16~17	13	(8.6)	18~19	50	(33.1)
20~22	51	(33.8)	23~25	19	(12.6)
26~30	9	(6.0)	Over 31	6	(4.0)
No answer	3	(2.0)			

151 Japanese citizens residing in Australia were interviewed. 75 were university students, 13 were high school students, and 63 were students in individual study. 144 of the 151 Japanese respondents were enrolled in the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) program. Their demographics are presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Number of Japanese Students in Regions

Table 6

N(151)

N.S.W. : 25	(16.5%)	V.I.C. : 63	(41.7%)	S.A. : 32	(21.1%)
W.A. : 25	(16.5%)	A.C.T. : 6	(3.9%)		

Type of housing while stay

Table 7

N(151)

Multiple responses

Homestay	71.5%	Dormitory	20.5%	Apartment	8.6%
Guest house	0.7%	Hotel	0.7%	others	6.6%

Nearly 80% of the respondents were in Australia for the first time. About 68% of them like English language. About 72% of respondents stayed with Australian families, about 20% resided in school dormitories, about 9% lived in their own apartments or other type of housing. See Table 7.

The Australian and Japanese respondents were interviewed by questionnaires distributed to classrooms, student halls, cafeteria, or offices for teaching/administrative staffs. The survey was conducted August to October 1995. The rate of response was 95.5%.

The questionnaire consisted of requesting the respondents to list words they felt described Australia.

IV. Findings

Table 8 presents the words listed by Australian citizens to describe themselves and their country. The five most frequent responses were (in descending order) : multicultural/multiethnic, beaches, wide open space, friendly, and kangaroos. Australians are proud of their diversity based on their most frequent response. The second and third ranked responses related to Australian geography. Often, various adjectives were added for example beautiful, long, white, and not crowded. The fourth most frequent response related to the Australian people's nature, and was often complemented with words such as ' mateship ' - representing a code of conduct among individuals stressing equality and fellowship. The fifth rank response related to the unique Australian fauna, the kangaroo.

Many of the other responses simply described the top five choices in slightly different ways. Examining the entire list, certain themes are apparent, such as social freedom, a country of opportunity and large size, food, entertainment, good standard of living, and stable government. These themes appear common among the developed, immigrant-based countries, including the United States and Canada. Although we got the impression of easy-going Australia, it must be a competitive society due to the fact of unemployment rate⁽¹⁾.

The main picture presented by Australians about themselves is that they are friendly, outgoing, relaxed, casual, helpful, and open minded. They enjoy their environment very much, and are outdoor oriented with adventurous sports. They seem to spend more time with their families than working in offices.

In the top 22 responses, 14 related to nature, such as the land, the beach, weather, and natural habitat. The size of the country is also a

High Frequent Word or Words of AUSTRALIAN IMAGES (By Australian Citizens)

Table 8

N(191)

※ multiple responses

Ranking	Word/Words	No. of People	Percentage ※
1	Multicultural/Multiethnic	77	40.3%
2	Beaches(long, beautiful)	74	38.7
3	Wide/Open Space	73	38.2
4	Friendly	61	31.9
5	Kangaroos	45	23.5
6	Koalas	43	22.5
7	Various Landscapes/Scenery	36	18.8
8	Good Weather	35	18.3
9	Relaxed	32	16.7
10	Unique Fauna	30	15.7
11	Nature, Environment	29	15.1
12	B.B.Q. (barbecue)	25	13.0
12	The sun	25	13.0
13	Easy-going	24	12.5
14	Ayers Rock	19	9.9
15	Casual/Informality	18	9.4
15	Opera House	18	9.4
16	Outdoor-sports lover	16	8.3
17	Nation of the sports	15	7.8
17	Desert	15	7.8
18	Freedom	14	7.3
19	Big variety of food	13	6.8
20	Big, open, blue sky	12	6.2
20	Hot	12	6.2
20	Wild life	12	6.2
21	Surfing	11	5.7
21	Aborigine	11	5.7
21	outdoor lovers	11	5.7
21	unique flora	11	5.7
22	acceptability/generous	10	5.2
22	quiet country/place	10	5.2
22	various climate	10	5.2

THE AUSTRALIAN IMAGES By Japanese Students

Table 9 N(151) Multiple responses

1	wide/huge	90	59.6%
2	rich/beauty of nature	55	36.4%
3	easygoing	31	20.5%
4	unique fauna (koala) (kangaroo)	25	16.5%
5	kind	23	15.2%
6	broad-minded	17	11.2%
6	friendly	17	11.2%
6	beautiful/pretty	17	11.2%
7	safety	14	9.2%
7	prices of commodities are low	14	9.2%
8	lazy	13	8.6%
9	multinational country	12	7.9%
10	freedom	9	5.9%
10	rustic/rough/random	9	5.9%
11	warm	8	5.2%

recurring theme. (Australia has about the same size as the United States excluding Alaska, and is about 20⁽²⁾ times the size of Japan.) Australia's population is about 18 million, whereas Japan's population is about 125 million.

Table 9 presents the most frequent words used by Japanese students residing in Australia to describe Australia. Notably, the words used to describe Australia's image by Japanese are similar to those use by Australians themselves. About 60% of the Japanese respondents listed the large size of Australia. The second ranked choice related to Australia's natural beauty and richness. The third and fifth ranked choices related to the Australian people, describing them as easygoing and kind. The remaining word choices complement the top 5, and present recurring themes of openness, freedom, and multinational.

Table 10 directly compares the 5 top words used to describe Australia by Australians and Japanese students residing in Australia. Clearly, there was not a large perception gap about Australian images between the two

The Contrast of the Australian Images by Australian and Japanese
Table 10

Rank	Australian	Rank	Japanese
Image Factors			
1	Multicultural/Multiethnic	1	Wide/Huge
2	Beaches	2	Richness/Beauty of Nature
3	Wide/Open Space	3	Easygoing
4	Friendly	4	Unique Fauna (Koala/Kangaroo)
5	Kangaroos	5	Kind

groups, even though the cultures and history of the two groups are very different. While the rank order differed somewhat, the pattern of the overall Australian image was similar.

Notably, both groups held positive images of Australia. That 'safety' was an observation by the Japanese respondents may explain why students are increasingly going to Australia rather than the United States to study the English language.

V. Conclusion

The initial hypothesis of this study - that there might be a large perception gap about Australia's image between Australians and Japanese students residing in Australia appears disproved. The words used to describe Australia by the two different groups are virtually identical.

This interpretation is particularly remarkable when considering that the Japanese citizen respondents resided in Australia for relatively short periods of time.

The explanation for the similarity of image between the two culturally - and language - distinct groups is most likely first-hand experience, something not feasible in a classroom far removed from the subject. Indeed, there is much more to language and cultural image than simply the words that can be learned in the language classroom. Patterns of observation and experience require deeper experiences, and certainly more than traditional receptive learning.

Jean Piaget⁽³⁾'s theoretical analysis provides an excellent explanation. The profession of teaching, or pedagogy, must be 'active' to be successful. Traditional language methods, relying on a teacher in the front of a room full of presumably receptive and quiet students, is simply insufficient. Such passive education does not capture the full experience of the subject, or the language.

In contrast to students learning English in a Japanese classroom, students immersed within an English-speaking culture, Australia for example, are participating with word concepts on many levels 'actively' and simultaneously. More intellectual effort is required to communicate in a meaningful and productive way. Since thriving in the real world, in this example in Australia, requires more thorough language understanding and physical/intellectual effort, the meaning of words is more complete. With better language understanding comes an awareness of a different culture very similar to those native with that culture. As found in this study, Japanese respondents living in Australia even for a short time have an image of Australia very similar to Australian natives.

Interestingly in view of our modern reliance on visual media, Piaget would predict that language training by watching films, videos, or television would be inadequate. Piaget writes, "...knowledge is not at all the same thing as making a figurative copy of reality for oneself, but that it invariably consists in operative processes leading to a transformation of reality, either in actions or in thought, in order to grasp the mechanisms of those transformations and thus assimilate the events and the objects into systems of operations ...intelligence cannot be reduced to the images of a film..."

Applying these conclusions to the present study, students successfully acquired language and cultural understanding because of first-hand experience within the cultural capsule of Australia. Effective language learning is simply an application of Piaget's 'active method'.

A common saying is 'Seeing is believing'. We do not understand deeply enough without real experience. First-hand experience with a cultural image creates new ideas and motivations. Just as we apply the 'active method' to other fields (for example, sports, medicine, and

psychology), we will achieve better language training through first-hand experience.

Barriers to the 'active method' and first-hand experience are, however, significant. Transporting students to Australia, or to any other selected country culture, would be expensive. Also problematical, more duties are placed and more skills are required from on the language teacher. However, another common saying addressed these hurdles imposed by such costs, 'You get what you pay for'.

Nevertheless, there may be an effective intermediate solution. We could consider integrating the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) of English language training. For example, we could more widely teach English through actions such as a speech contest, an English - speaking play, or using inter-net. In that way, we could offer students opportunities to engage their English abilities more actively or use their abilities in real life situations at school.

All English courses should be goal-oriented, and optimized with active language experiences.

Just as many speakers and writers state that 'knowledge is power', this study indicates that improved language instruction might also consider that 'image has power'.

Notes

(1) U. S. Civilian unemployment rate in 1995 was 5.6%, Japan, 3.2% and Australia, 8.9%. "Economic Report of the President" Transmitted to the Congress February 1997

"Year Book Australia 1997" Australian Bureau of Statistics P.117

(2) Australia comprises a land area of about 7,682,300 km² and Japan including Northern Territories is about 377,737 km².

(3) Piaget, *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child*, Orion Press, New York 1970 pp.68-75

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