

Global  
CULTURE CLASH IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM IN JAPAN  
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It was October 25, and Brian McMann, English instructor for Delta Language Systems in Japan, was sitting at his desk pondering the events that had transpired over the past two weeks. Brian had graduated in business administration from a university in Canada, and, during the past year and a half that he had been employed at Delta, he had noticed that there were some problems between the foreign, native English-speaking teachers and the Japanese managers. However, two events that had taken place over the past two weeks underscored the extent and seriousness of the problems. He had recently participated in "Veterans' Training," a required development activity for all experienced instructors within the Region. During the training, one session was devoted to discussing the teachers' greatest barriers to job satisfaction

Those damn managers! All they care about are the contracts! I thought I was coming here to teach English, not to be in sales," exclaimed one teacher from Canada.

"The manager at my school won't even talk to us gai-jin (foreign) teachers," sneered another teacher from the UK. "They always send the Japanese teachers to do their dirty work!"

Almost unanimously, the teacher/manager relationship came up as the greatest barrier. About a week later, there was a meeting at Brian's school to discuss the upcoming student renewal campaign. One of the Japanese English teachers at the school had previously been a manager. She had a lot of useful information about how teachers could help managers--not only during the campaign, but also in general.

The Regional Manager would be visiting his school in a few weeks to get input from employees at the school on how the company might improve. As Brian thought about these

events, he wondered what Delta might be able to do in order to eliminate or overcome the challenges presented by the teacher/manager relationship.

### Delta Language Systems

With over 280 schools across the country, Delta was a large chain of schools in the multi-billion dollar English conversation industry in Japan. Delta employed approximately 1,700 people, about 450 of whom were native English speakers. Delta students came from a wide range of ages, backgrounds, occupations, English ability, and interests. Delta had three different lesson formats, each with its own pricing. Private, one-to-one lessons lasted for 50 minutes and cost around Y8000 (US\$80) per lesson. Prep lessons (a group of up to three students) were 45 minutes each and cost Y6000 (US\$60) per lesson. Group lessons (of up to ten students) ran for 60 minutes and cost Y2000 (US\$20) per lesson. Prices varied according to the length of the student's contract and the area of Japan in which the school was located.

### Managers

Depending on its size, a school had one Lead Manager and up to two Sales Managers. The Lead Manager's job was to plan and carry out the marketing plan for the school, as well as to perform any administrative duties. The Lead Manager was responsible for the overall financial performance of the school. The Sales Manager's job was to meet prospective students and sell them on studying at Delta. Sales managers were typically moved to the position of Lead Manager after working for six months to a year, depending on openings and performance.

Before starting to work, managers received three days of training during which the focus was almost entirely on how to speak to prospective students on the telephone and how to sell Delta to them in the informational interview. The remainder, including accounting, marketing,

and class curricula, was to be learned on the job. Additional training took place at the monthly managers' meetings at the regional office or at the head office in Tokyo.

Approximately 95% of the school managers at Delta were women. They were typically between 23 and 35 years old and single. It was not uncommon for school managers to be transferred at intervals of six months to a year. Turnover among managers was quite high. Although the managers were allowed to take up to 48 lessons from one of the teachers at Delta's expense, many of the managers had limited to no English conversation skills and little time to improve them. All school meetings were conducted in Japanese with the Japanese English teachers translating.

#### Teachers--Native Speakers

All of Delta's native English speaking teachers were hired outside of Japan. Delta had hiring offices in Canada and England and made hiring trips to cities throughout the US. Applicants went through a two-and-a-half-day interview process with approximately one in seventy applicants receiving a job offer. Teachers were hired on the following criteria: they had a friendly and outgoing personality, had potential for becoming a good teacher, had good communication and presentation skills, showed potential for working successfully in a Japanese organization, and had a high likelihood of staying in Japan for an extended period of time (initial contracts were two years long and could be renewed annually after that). There was about an even number of men and women selected in this process, most of whom were recent university graduates with no background or preparation in education.

Delta believed that one of the advantages of hiring teachers outside of Japan was that the students would have to speak to the teachers in English because of the teachers' lack of Japanese

skills. Foreign teachers who wished to learn Japanese were offered 24 lessons from Delta before they had to find their own teacher at their own expense, if they chose to do so.

Teachers received their initial training in their country of origin. They were first asked to read a notebook called, "An Introduction to TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)." Before leaving for Japan, teachers were required to receive training and orientation for two days in the hiring office. This training included teaching methods, company policy, and a brief introduction to Japan.

After teaching for three or four months in Japan, foreign teachers received Advanced Training at their regional office in Japan. This training included motivation theory, lesson planning, student-care ideas, techniques for interviewing new students, and company policy.

Finally, after working for Delta for approximately a year and a half, teachers received Veterans' Training in which the focus was on methods and theories of teaching English as a Foreign Language.

These teachers were fairly well paid. During their first year, depending on the exchange rate (at the time of this case, the exchange rate was approximately US\$1=¥100), they are paid approximately \$25,000. During the second year, with favorable evaluations and promotions, the pay increased by about \$5,000, and a round-trip plane ticket and four extra paid holidays were provided for a trip home. With incentives and bonuses, it was possible to add an additional \$10-15,000 per year. Company-rented apartments (Japanese style) were available to teachers at about \$500 per month rent, and a bicycle or bus/train pass was provided for transportation. In addition, 100% health coverage was provided. If the teacher stayed for the two years, round-trip airfare home was provided, in addition to an end-of-the-contract bonus of up to \$4,600. Further, these teachers paid no US or Canadian taxes, and their tax rate in Japan was only 10%. Because

of a bill passed by the Japanese Diet to stimulate consumer spending, approximately 15% of paid income taxes had been rebated at the end of the past two years.

### Teachers--Japanese Native Speakers Teaching English

As with the managers, most of the Japanese native speaking English teachers were women, again, usually single and young. These teachers were often graduates of English Literature programs in Japanese universities. The majority of these teachers had experience studying, if for a limited time, in a country where English was the native language.

All training and orientation sessions were offered to these teachers separate from the native English speakers. While their responsibilities were similar to the native English-speaking teachers, they were used exclusively for teaching the basic language classes for adults.

Occasionally, the English skill level of the Japanese teachers was quite minimal, and some could not carry on conversations with the native English-speaking teachers. Japanese teachers received a one-hour lesson from one of the native teachers once a week.

The majority of Japanese teachers were part-time employees, meaning that they were paid only when they were actually teaching. They were not paid for activities such as preparing lessons and doing paperwork. Japanese teachers were often expected to help the manager around the office and stay late or come in early to interview prospective students. Teachers were paid ¥1000 only if the student signed a contract. Regardless of the number of students in a class, the time of day, or whether the hours are overtime, the pay was ¥2000 an hour. A part-time teacher could typically expect to make between ¥160,000 - ¥200,000 a month, although it was possible to make as much as ¥250,000 a month. Japanese teachers enjoyed the same tax rebate as the native teachers. No apartments were provided, and there were no round-trip plane tickets. There was no insurance coverage or maternity leave. While bonuses and incentives were available, they

usually went to the native English-speaking teachers, because students would rather study with them than with the English-speaking Japanese teachers.

Turnover was very frequent. As the teachers married, they left the school. This pattern was the norm in Japan for female employees and was not exclusive to Delta. However, because Delta had such a high proportion of female employees, the impact was greater than the norm.

#### Brian's School

The school at which Brian taught was located in a town of approximately 60,000 people located in Fukuoka Prefecture on the island of Kyushu. At any one time, the school had one manager, two full-time native English-speaking teachers, and three part-time Japanese English teachers, and served between 150-200 students. During the two years of Brian's contract, the school had four different managers and seven different Japanese teachers. The number of students was relatively stable, and the school was one of the smaller schools in the company.

#### Brian's Experience

While thinking about the situation, Brian began to reflect on his year and a half with Delta, and some relevant experiences came to mind. On one occasion, Brian recalled when he received a phone call late one night from his former manager, Akiko Yamamoto, with whom he had had a good relationship and had maintained contact. She had transferred earlier that year to open a school in another part of Japan.

"She hates me, and I'm going to quit!" was how Brian remembered the conversation starting. The new foreign teacher at her school, Joanne, was from England, and Yamamoto-san thought that Joanne hated her because she came off as being cold, and she rarely spoke to Yamamoto-san. After listening to Yamamoto-san, Brian suggested taking the teacher out for dinner so that they could talk on neutral ground and maybe break the ice. At dinner, Yamamoto-

san realized that Joanne was experiencing a great deal of culture shock and was depressed, the reason for her cool disposition. Their working relationship was improving significantly, and they continued to meet often outside of work as friends.

One joke which was popular among managers went like this, "What does a dog say when you tell it to do something? Won-Won (the sound a dog makes in Japanese)." "What does a foreigner say when you tell him or her to do something? Why? Why?" Japanese managers believed that employees shouldn't question them when told to do something. On the other hand, the foreign teachers wanted to know why they had to do something.

#### Pia's Experience

Brian's foreign co-worker at the school was Pia Lopez. Pia, 23, was born in the Philippines but moved to Canada when she was two. She arrived at the school on the same day as Mariya Nonaka, Brian's second manager. The relationship between Nonaka-san and Pia had been the source of a lot of frustration in the school.

"She thinks I'm a bad teacher. What's worse is that every time she talks to me, it seems like she's talking down to me. And she's so moody, I don't understand her. One time she told me, 'Don't smile when I'm talking to you!' What does she expect? She speaks to me in Japanese, and I don't understand a word. I just nod and smile to be polite. I know she's moody with all of the teachers, but at least she listens to the other teachers. I'm definitely asking for a transfer as soon as possible!"

Armed with a dictionary and the Japanese he had picked up over the past year and a half, Brian went to speak to Nonaka-san about the problem. "I don't think Pia's a bad teacher, but I just want her to become better, faster. I don't think she takes her job seriously; she's always laughing and joking around. I want her to respect me." When Brian suggested that Pia's laughing and

joking was partly cultural and that respect is shown in different ways in North America, Nonaka-san replied, "I understand that, but this is Japan, and Delta is a Japanese company, and I have higher status than she!"

Brian experienced Nonaka-san a little differently. Because he was older, 25 years old to Nonaka-san's 24, and had worked at Delta longer than her, a year and a half to her year, Nonaka-san showed more respect for him than for Pia. Brian thought another factor was that Brian was able to communicate with Nonaka-san in Japanese most of the time, whereas Pia always had to speak through a translator.

### Kaori's Experience

Kaori Tanaka, 24 years old, was one of the part-time Japanese teachers at the school. Kaori had studied archeology in University and spent one year studying in England. After graduating, she had difficulty finding a job in her field, and her interest in English and other cultures drew her to Delta. She had been teaching at Delta now for a year.

"When I first came to Delta, I was excited to teach English and practice my own English on a daily basis. I came here expecting this to be just a temporary job while I decided what to do next. My excitement waned quickly as I learned what this job was really about...business. The majority of my time is spent on trying to get new students to sign contracts, trying to get existing students to sign new contracts, and doing an enormous amount of paperwork. I still enjoy socializing with the native English-speaking teachers after work, but I'm wondering if it's worth it. I only get paid when I'm teaching, yet I only spend about half my time at work teaching. The other half is spent preparing lessons, calling students, conducting interviews with prospective new students and doing favors for the manager. I do all of this without complaint because it is



my duty. I wish the native English-speaking teachers had the same attitude. They do only what is minimally necessary and yet feel entitled to their higher pay and perks.”

Kaori’s experience and sentiments were fairly representative of other part-time Japanese teachers at Delta.

### Seiko's Thoughts

On Wednesday, October 25, the teachers had their weekly teachers' meeting. This week the major item on the agenda was the November and December student renewal campaigns for students whose contracts were to expire between January and April, 1996. Renewal campaigns were very important at Delta--to keep current students and to provide cash in the months of the year when typically very few new students signed up. During the meeting, Seiko Suzuki, formerly a teacher, then a manager, and then a teacher again, related her experience as a manager and what the teachers could do to help managers during campaign periods.

"Managers are under a lot of stress during renewal campaigns. Head office might call as often as once an hour during the day to ask how much money the manager had made that day. If a manager is not meeting her goal, head office will berate her, telling her how stupid she is and how bad a manager she is. Managers are expected to agree and say that they understand.

"Teachers can help by keeping the lines of communication open. Think about each student and try to predict if it will be difficult to get that student to sign up again. Let the manager know and coordinate strategy with her. It is our job as teachers to convince the students that it's important to study English, and the manager's job is to talk about the money, but if you cooperate, you can reinforce what each other says."

This wasn't too difficult at a small school, but Brian recalled what some of the foreign teachers had said at training. "At some schools, the manager and the teachers rarely, if ever, speak."