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メタデータ	言語: eng
	出版者:
	公開日: 2007-12-26
	キーワード (Ja):
	キーワード (En):
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URL	https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/613

What kind of English—for Japanese learners of English in the age of English as a Lingua Franca?

Junichi Murata

Introduction

English education in Japan has been criticized for many years with a commonplace remark that even after ten years of study few people are able to communicate in English. A number of reasons for this alleged failure have been offered and one is concerning the quality of English used in the textbooks and in the entrance examinations. Both have been accused of having expressions which are old-fashioned or not used by native speakers, so publishers and examiners have been trying to improve the quality of the English.

However, there is a new trend in the field of applied linguistics, which seems to be going in the opposite direction. More and more scholars have argued recently that the native speaker model should not be goals or models of learners of English as a second or foreign language. English is used many parts of the world as a Lingua Franca and there are many varieties of English and the concepts such as 'Standard English' and 'native speakers' are no longer clearly defined.

In this paper, I am trying to explore what kind of English should be the goal of Japanese learners of English in the age of English as a lingua Franca or English as a global language. We will first overview what kind of English has been the model for Japanese learners of English. Next we will look at the movement of English as a lingua

Franca and its pros and cons. Then we will examine a small-scale survey on how students of English feel about their proficiency and what their attitudes toward the native speaker model are. Finally, on the basis of the results of the survey a few proposals will be given to the English education in Japan in connection with the Lingua Franca Core proposed by Jenkins (2000) and others.

1. Models for Japanese learners of English

There are few people who can use English easily when they graduate from ordinary senior high school in Japan. The inefficiency of English education in Japan is reflected in the results of Japanese examinees of TOEFL. Their average score has been among the lowest group. A number of reasons have been offered and some people blame teaching methods, especially the grammar-translation method, in which English is not normally used in the classroom as a means of communication. Some blame teachers who cannot use English. Still others point out the linguistic distance between English and Japanese. Sometimes a Japanese characteristic of being bad communicators even in their mother tongue is blamed.

Others blame the quality of English in the textbooks and in the entrance examinations. A great number of expressions have been criticized as being too old for contemporary use or being not natural for native speakers. In fact, there have been a number of books published which attack textbooks, dictionaries, or reference books which contain non-native like expressions, like witch hunting. There was a well-known incident in 1980's that a once best selling dictionary was so severely criticized as having non-native-like expressions that it suddenly became less popular. Some say that it even caused the publishing company's serious financial problems.

It is clear from above that the model for Japanese learners of English has been that of native speakers of English. When people in Japan need to express something in English, they try to confirm

whether the expression is correct or natural, that is, in fact, native-like. Many teachers of English in Japan often depend upon native speakers whether expressions they make are acceptable or not.

Watkins, et al (1997) argue that a great number of expressions in entrance examinations are not actually used by native speakers. Murata (2005) examined some of the expressions by using some computer corpora and found that the writers were right. The following were some of the findings:

(1) The structure "intended (hoped) to have p.p." is now old-fashioned and "had intended(hoped) to V" is normally used.
(2) "I am sure of + noun phrase (e.g. his success)" is ambiguous and rarely used in daily communication.
(3) The structure "promise+O+to V" is not standard.

In Question Box of *Eigo Kyoiku* (English Education), a monthly magazine mainly for English teachers in Japan, several questions are asked mostly about grammar. More than a half century have passed, but questions never stop coming. The main issue is whether an expression is correct or not and most judgments are made on the basis of native speakers opinions.

One of those who are in charge of the column, Yagi (2007) pointed out that there are still many expression like (4) and (5) below which are taught in the classroom which are actually not used by native speakers.

(4) Which is taller, Jim or Tom?
(5) She is not what she was ten years ago.

He asked native speakers to judge these sentences and found that both are unnatural. In (4) 'which' should be 'who' and in (5) 'what' should be 'who.'

It is obvious as shown above that the model of English taught in

Japan has been native speakers' English. Most people think there is nothing wrong with this. In the classroom, they think, English expressions used by native speakers should be taught rather than old-fashioned or Japanese-made English expressions, which are often literal translation from Japanese.

However, English teaching in the world outside of Japan seems to be changing in this respect. In the next section we will look at a new trend concerning native speakers and varieties of English.

2. L2 users and English as a Lingua Franca

There is no question that English is used in many parts of the world as an international language or a Lingua Franca and it is also true that there are many varieties of English used as a second language in what Kachru (1986) calls Outer Circle countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Nigeria. Each variety has its own characteristics like accents which are usually not negatively but rather positively considered. In Expanding Circle countries, where English is learned as a foreign language, Jenkins (1998 : 119) argues, what they (=learners) need above all is to be able to communicate successfully with other non-native speakers of English from different L1 backgrounds.

In the same vein but also from linguistic and cognitive points of view, Cook (1999 : 717) asserts that because L2 users differ from monolingual native speakers in their L2s and L1s and in some of their cognitive processes, they should be considered as speakers in their own right, not as approximations to monolingual native speakers. Cook (2007 : 240-241) maintains that L2 users are different kinds of people from monolingual native speakers, and need to be evaluated as people who speak two languages, not as inefficient natives and he lists the following qualities L2 users have:

1. L2 users have different uses of language from monolinguals.

2. L2 users have a different command of the second and first languages.

3. L2 users have different minds from monolinguals.

Both Jenkins and Cook questioned the native speaker model for L2 users or L2 learners. However, there seems to be a difference in their motivation. Cook thinks very positively about L2 users' differences from native speakers and asserts that L2 users should be more confident of themselves. He seems to seek for empowerment of L2 learners. He is not mainly concerned about L2 users' linguistic features to maintain international communication.

On the other hand, what mainly motivated Jenkins to reconsider the native model is how to maintain mutual intelligibility in communication when native speaker accents are not only sociolinguistically inappropriate for communication in which native speakers are rarely involved, but also psycholinguistically and socio-psychologically unachievable for the majority of adolescent and adult learners (Jenkins 2007:36). She found in her research on communications between non-native speakers, however, that while some incorrectly used items caused non-understanding or misunderstanding, other items caused any serious trouble.

Thus, Jenkins (2000) proposes English as an International language or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) with phonological core features, i.e. those found to be essential to mutual intelligibility in ELF across a wide range of L1s. The following is the brief summary (Jenkins, 2006 : 37):

The Lingua Franca Core (LFC)
1. Consonant sounds except for substitutions for 'th' and of dark /l/
2. Aspiration after word-initial /p/, /t/, /k/
3. Avoidance of consonant deletion (as opposed to epenthesis)
4. Vowel length distinctions

5. Nuclear (Tonic) stress production and placement within word groups (tone units)

The features which emerged from the research as not essential to mutual intelligibility in EFL and therefore designated 'non-core' for English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) are as follows:

1. Certain consonants
2. Vowel quality
3. Weak forms
4. Features of connected speech such as elision and assimilation
5. Word stress
6. Pitch movement on the nuclear syllable (tone)
7. Stress-timed rhythm

Grammatical core features have not been formally provided but Seidlhofer (2001) offers "usually unproblematic" grammatical features in ELF as follows:

1. Simple present 3rd person -s omitted: *he look very sad.*
2. Omission of article: *our countries have signed agreement.*
3. Treating *who* and *which* as interchangeable.
4. Substituting bare infinitive for -ing : *I look forward to see you.*
5. Using *'isn't it?'* as a universal tag.

These correspond to non-core features in phonology offered by Jenkis above. Seidlhofer (2004:220) added the following:

1. A heavy reliance on certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do, have, make, put, take.*
2. Extra redundancy such as *discuss about, black color*
3. Pluralisation of nouns which are considered uncountable, such as *informations, staffs, advices.*
4. Use of *that* clause instead of infinitive construction as in *I*

(18)

want that we discuss about my dissertations.

3.　Criticisms against the LFC

Several scholars are not supportive of the LFC. For example, Rani Rubdy and Mario Saraceni (2006) point out the possibility that the Lingua Franca Core could be another standard, saying, "Once the core features are established, are these likely to assume the character and force of a new dogma, particularly if the findings they are based on bear the stamp of visibly high-tech undertakings of international standing as represented by the ICE and VOICE corpora? (p.10)"

Jenkins (2006) denies her intention of imposing a monolithic (or standard) pronunciation model of LFC. To the contrary, she argues, "it (=the LFC) respects both ELF learners' right to choose whether or not they adopt it and the diversity of their accents" (p.36). This seems to be a valid argument because the core features are only part of the whole phonological system and each L2 user can have their own accents in the non-core features, although some of the core features may be modified according to L1 as will be pointed out in the later section.

Another question was given by Prodromou (2006, 2007), that is, "in terms of student aspirations and teacher competence, motivation and self-esteem, the bar for the common grammatical core can be set much higher than is suggested by the examples of acceptable items listed by Seidlhofer." This argument is plausible because the items on Seidhofer's list, especially 1 and 3 seem to be too lax or lenient especially for teachers and advanced students. However, we have to consider whether the rules are applied to speaking or writing. If applied to speaking, this bar may not be so low.

Another critical argument against LFC added by Prodromou (2007) is about the definition of ELF by Jenkins, that is, "English used in international contexts which does not involve 'native-speakers /L1 users' of English". He asserts that "while we can agree that

neither the 'native-speaker' nor 'nativeness' (if such an essence exists) are appropriate norms for EIL, it is more difficult to argue that native-speakers as users of English as an International language are 'irrelevant' to the way international Englishes are shaped. (p.49)... Denigrating core standard English grammar only serves to strengthen the power of those who already 'have' standard English grammar (P.52)." This is a strong argument and it will be discussed later in this paper.

One more critic of the ELF is Kuo (2006 : 217), who addresses issues and problems of ELF and concludes that a native-speaker model could serve as a complete and convenient starting point and it is up to the TESOL professionals and the learners in each context to decide to what extent they want to approximate to that model. She also questions the validity of computerized corpus data.

We have seen some criticisms and questions about LFC. In the next section, taking these debatable points into consideration we will discuss the main theme of this paper, that is, how we deal with the trend of LFC or EIL in the English teaching situation in Japan.

4. English Education in Japan and The Lingua Franca Core

The faith in native speaker's English is so strong that it may be quite difficult to adopt the Lingua Franca Core in the English teaching in Japan. However, it is also true that more and more people are aware of 'international English', which is a very close term to the LF and a more popular concept. For example, Former UN Under-Secretary-General Akashi Yasushi says:

> Each country has more or less created its own version of English to use as an international language. The Japanese should not feel embarrassed about their pronunciation when they try to speak but should rather regard English as the present-day Esperanto and use it confidently to express their own thoughts and logic.

One of the symptoms of this trend is also found in the Course of Study published by the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) which says, "it should be taken into consideration that a variety of English have been used internationally as a means of communication."

Under these circumstances how can we adopt or adapt the LFC? First of all, let us see the model of English stipulated by MEXT. The Course of Study for Junior high school English says as for pronunciation, the following five items should be emphasized properly: 1. Current standard sounds, 2. Sound changes in connected words, 3. Basic stress in words, phrases and sentences, 4. Basic intonations, 5. Basic pauses in sentences. It does not say anything about varieties but just say "current, standard sounds" but it is a tacit understanding that standard English of British English or American English should be taught. As for the other three items are all among non-core features in the LFC, except "stress in sentences".

With regards to grammar, MEXT's Course of Study says nothing about what variety of English should be taught but it is also clear that standard English should be the model.

In addition, the so-called 'ultra-course of study', English in entrance examinations should be taken into account. In the Center Examination, which is the most influential test in Japan, questions have been given asking about vowel quality and word stress. In grammar, although fewer and fewer questions on grammar are given in the center test, many private universities still give nit-picky questions on grammar, usage and vocabulary. Thus, in senior high school English classes, many hours are spent preparing the students for these questions.

In a word, if the lingua Franca Core is adopted in Japan, great changes should be made because it is fundamentally different from the present course of study and the so-called "ultra-course of study."

However, should we really change our course of study or the super course of study in the worldwide trend of ELF? Before we consider

this question we should first find out about actual use of English by Japanese people. Do Japanese people in general use English more with non-native speakers of English than with native speakers? The ELF or LFC advocates have taken it for granted that English is used more between non-native speakers than between native and non-native speakers. Is the situation the same for Japanese people in Japan or working outside Japan? Before this question is answered we cannot say what variety of English we should learn, and as far as I know, there is no data on this issue.

However, we can make use of the LFC whatever the real use of English for Japanese is. Dalton and Seilhofer (1994) argue for the need to distinguish between norms and models, contending that rather than approaching the teaching of a native speaker accent as the norm, it should be approached as a model that learners can use as a point of reference, preventing speakers of English from moving too far apart in their pronunciation. This means that the LFC is a minimum of learning or teaching items. This is a realistic way of using the LFC.

But there seem to be some items in the LFC which should be deleted for Japanese learners of English. For example, some consonants besides /θ/, /ð/ are so hard for Japanese, that the distinctions between /r/ and /l/, /b/ and /v/, /dʒ/ and /ʒ/ or /j/ and /i/ could be among non-core items for Japanese. As for grammatical non-core, plural -s could be among the non-core list.

The items selected above are among those commonly referred to as difficult items for Japanese learners of English. However, it would be more reasonable to argue about them on the basis of some data. In the next section we will look at a small-scale survey conducted for this purpose.

5. Survey

It is meaningful to find out what students themselves think about their learning of English in order to discuss whether or how LFC

should be adopted in English language teaching in Japan. A questionnaire was administered in connection with EIL in the following procedure:

Aims:There are several aims of this questionnaire. The major aims are to find out about the following questions:
1. How strongly the students want their English to approximate native speaker.
2. How correctly they think they can pronounce or distinguish some sounds.
3. How correctly they think they can use some grammatical items.
4. Whether there is any correlation between their proficiency in English scored by TOEIC and their pronunciation skills or grammatical correctness.

Method: A total of 134 university English major students participated in this survey. They were asked to select one of five answers to 24 questions shown below. The five answers to each question are on the scale of 1 to 5: with 5 to strongly agree, 4 to agree, 3 to neither agree nor disagree, 2 to disagree and 1 to strongly disagree, although some answers do not exactly follow this formula but practically the same in content. The students were also asked about their scores of TOEIC or TOEFL or STEP degrees to see whether there is any correlation between their proficiency in English and their pronunciation skills or grammatical correctness.

Questions:
1) Do you think your pronunciation is close to that of native speakers?
2) Do you want to make your pronunciation close to that of native speakers?
3) Have you had trouble making yourself understood in English because of your poor pronunciation?

4) Do you think that you had enough pronunciation instruction in junior and senior high school?

5) Do you think that students should have enough pronunciation instruction in junior and senior high school?

6) Do you (Can you) pronounce /r/ and /l/ sounds accurately?

7) How much effort have you made in order to learn to pronounce the sounds?

8) Can you distinguish /r/ and /l/ sounds correctly?

9) How much effort have you made in order to learn to distinguish the sounds?

10) Do you (Can you) pronounce /b/ and /v/ sounds accurately?

11) How much effort have you made in order to learn to distinguish the sounds?

12) Can you distinguish /b/ and /v/ sounds correctly?

13) How much effort have you made in order to learn to distinguish the sounds?

14) Do you (Can you) pronounce /θ/ and /ð/ sounds accurately?

15) How much effort have you made in order to learn to distinguish the sounds?

16) Can you distinguish/s/ and /θ/ and /z/ and/ð/ sounds correctly?

17) How much effort have you made in order to learn to distinguish the sounds?

18) Can you (automatically) use articles correctly?

19) Can you (automatically) use plural noun -s?

20) Can you (automatically) use third person singular present -s?

21) Can you (automatically) use tenses correctly?

22) Can you (automatically) use prepositions correctly?

23) Do you think that Japanese people should speak English with Japanese accents?

24) If you have taken TOEFL, TOEIC or STEP, please write the score or the degree.

Table 1 : The percentages of response to each question

grade / question	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
1	38.1	41.2	17.2	3.0	0.7	1.87
2	0.0	0.7	2.2	32.1	64.9	4.61
3	0.8	15.9	54.5	25.0	3.8	3.10
4	55.2	32.1	9.7	3.0	0.0	1.60
5	0.0	3.7	17.9	50.7	27.6	4.02
6	7.5	26.9	22.4	34.3	9.0	3.10
7	11.3	22.6	42.9	19.5	3.8	2.80
8	6.7	32.1	20.1	36.6	4.5	3.00
9	7.5	31.6	39.8	15.0	6.0	2.78
10	6.0	21.8	203	38.3	13.5	3.29
11	11.2	31.3	42.5	11.9	3.0	2.64
12	4.5	26.1	26.1	38.8	4.5	3.13
13	6.7	40.3	41.0	9.7	2.2	2.60
14	5.2	29.1	9.7	42.5	13.4	3.30
15	10.5	37.6	37.6	11.3	3.0	2.57
16	6.0	27.6	20.1	37.3	9.0	3.16
17	9.7	41.0	38.1	10.4	0.7	2.51
18	4.5	49.3	32.8	12.7	0.7	2.56
19	0.7	9.7	24.6	50.0	14.9	3.69
20	0.0	7.5	17.9	56.0	18.7	3.86
21	0.0	24.6	29.1	41.0	5.2	3.27
22	3.0	49.3	28.4	17.2	2.2	2.66
23	16.4	44.0	28.4	10.4	0.7	2.35

Results and Discussion:

From Table 1 we might be able to say a number of things. First of all, almost 80% of the students do not think that their pronunciation is close to native speakers and more than 98 % of all the students want to make their pronunciation close to native speakers despite the fact that less then 30% often had trouble with their pronunciation. Accordingly, almost 90% say they did not have enough pronunciation instruction in junior or senior high school and about the same number say students should have.

The results of question 6 to 13, which are about specific pronunciations, shows that while about 40% or more say that they can correctly pronounce or distinguish these sounds, about 30% or more say

they cannot. It is noticeable that the number of those who can pronounce the sounds correctly is more than that of those who can distinguish them.

In question 18 to 22, which is about grammar, we can say that less than 20% of the students say that they can use articles and prepositions correctly while plural -s and third person -s can be used by about two thirds or more students.

There were 44 students who had taken TOEIC and the average score was 685. The highest was 905 and the lowest was 450. As for the correlations between students' proficiency in English scored by TOEIC and their pronunciation skills or grammatical correctness, out of 11 items there were only two items which have significant correlations, that is, the distinctions between /b/ and /v/ (.342*) and between /s/ and /θ/ and /z/ and /ð/ (.425**). It is possible that this result derived from the fact that the number of students was too small to have more correlations or the fact that most of the students were on the too high level to have more correlations. Despite these possibilities, we might say this survey seems to suggest that some English sounds and grammatical items are too difficult to acquire even for high level students. These items may be unachievable for most Japanese learners of English.

We should also note from the result of question 23 that only about 10% of the students agree with speaking English with Japanese accents. This may imply that the movement for ELF is not known to or supported by the students.

6. Proposals and suggestions

On the basis of what has been argued in this paper concerning the English education in Japan and the Lingua Franca Core proposed by Jenkins and Seidlhofer plus the small scale survey, I will try to answer the question "What kind of English should be learned by Japanese learners of English."

First of all, as we see in the first section, it is still necessary to revise English taught in school by disposing of expressions which appear in textbooks or examination questions but are actually not commonly used in 'current English.' 'Current English' means in this case "English used not only by native speakers but by non-native speakers internationally". However, it is very difficult to decide whether an expression is commonly used in current English or not. This issue needs further research.

Second, the Lingua Franca Core proposed by Jenkins might be adopted as a minimum for communicative intelligibility in spoken English. However, some adaptations are desirable for Japanese speakers of English. For example, as shown in the survey, some consonants like /r/, /l/, might be excluded from the core just as /θ/ and /ð/ are by Jenkins. Seidlhofer's non-core candidates for grammar might also be modified, by excluding such as "Treating *who* and *which* as interchangeable."

Third, since the Lingua Franca Core should be considered a minimum for communicative intelligibility, it depends upon individual students how close they want to make their English to the native speaker model. Teachers should not or could not deny their preferences or efforts to approximate the native speaker model.

Finally, or this should be probably the first in priority, we need to keep in mind a few conditions before we discuss the appropriateness of the LFC. It is necessary to find out how Japanese people use English at work or in other situations. Whether we should think more seriously about the LFC depends on whether the communication with non-native speakers is really more frequent than that with native speakers. Another crucial thing is whether the data of the LFC is really reliable or sufficient for intelligibility for communication. The data by Jenkins (2000) seem to be still limited and more research is needed.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I explore what kind of English should be the goal of

Japanese learners of English in the age of English as a Lingua Franca or English as a global language. I suggest that the Lingua Franca Core, with some modifications, could be used as a minimum level for Japanese learners of English when they speak it for international communication. In addition, I would like to strongly emphasize the need to find out about actual use of English by Japanese people in Japan and abroad. This will clarify not only the issue of the LFC but also what language policy Japan should take in the future.

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APPENDIX

The original questionnaire in Japanese

＜英語を話す能力に関するアンケート＞

		5	4	3	2	1
1	自分の英語の発音はネイティブに近いと思いますか？	非常に思う	そう思う	どちらとも言えない	そう思わない	全く思わない
	ネイティブの発音に近づけたいと思いますか。	非常に思う	そう思う	どちらとも言えない	そう思わない	全く思わない
	自分の英語の発音が通じずに困った経験はありますか	非常によくある	よくある	ときどきある	めったにない	まったくない
2	中学高校で発音の指導が十分されたと思いますか。	非常に思う	そう思う	どちらとも言えない	そう思わない	全く思わない
	中学高校で発音の指導を十分すべきだと思いますか。	非常に思う	そう思う	どちらとも言えない	そう思わない	全く思わない
3	/r/と/l/を正しく発音できますか（してますか)。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	上記の発音ができるようにどれほど努力しましたか。	非常に努力した	かなり努力した	やや努力した	それほど努力しなかった	まったく努力しなかった
	/r/と/l/を正しく聞き分けることができますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	上記の音が区別できるようにどれほど努力しましたか。	非常に努力した	かなり努力した	やや努力した	それほど努力しなかった	まったく努力しなかった

4	/b/と/v/を正しく発音できますか（してますか）。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	上記の発音ができるようにどれほど努力しましたか。	非常に努力した	かなり努力した	やや努力した	それほど努力しなかった	ほとんど努力しなかった
	/b/と/v/を正しく聞き分けることができますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	上記の音が区別できるようにどれほど努力しましたか。	非常に努力した	かなり努力した	やや努力した	それほど努力しなかった	まったく努力しなかった
5	/θ/と/ð/を正しく発音できますか（してますか）。Thin, This,	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	上記の発音ができるようにどれほど努力しましたか。	非常に努力した	かなり努力した	やや努力した	それほど努力しなかった	ほとんど努力しなかった
	/s/と/θ/[sin, thin], /z/と/ð/[zen,then]を正しく聞き分けることができますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	上記の音が区別できるようにどれほど努力しましたか。	非常に努力した	かなり努力した	やや努力した	それほど努力しなかった	まったく努力しなかった
6	冠詞を（自動的に）正しく使えますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	名詞が複数の場合 -s を（自動的に）つけることができますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	三人称単数現在の -s を（自動的に）つけることができますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	時制の区別は（自動的に）できますか	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
	前置詞を（自動的に）正しく使えますか。	ほぼ完全にできる	大体できる	どちらとも言えない	あまりできない	全くできない
7	日本人は日本人としての特徴のある英語を話すべきだと思いますか。	非常に思う	そう思う	どちらとも言えない	そう思わない	全く思わない
	英検、TOEIC, TOEFL を受験経験のある方は級または得点を書いて下さい。	英検（　　　　）級　　TOIEC（　　　　）点　　TOEFL（　　　　）点				