○ CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE AS A FACTOR IN THE WRITTEN AND ORAL PRODUCTION OF SCHOOL AGE LEARNERS OF JAPANESE IN AUSTRALIA

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The present study investigates to what extent learners' first language (L1) may have an impact on their writing and speaking performances. While Japanese continues to enjoy a large enrolment across levels in Australian schools and universities, the population of learners has become increasingly diverse creating challenges for teachers. One dimension of this diversity is first language background which is the focus of the present study. The data for the present study includes writing and speaking test task performances from learners of different L1s collected for a larger study (see Scarino et al., 2011, and other papers in this volume). The samples were first scored using the scale developed for the larger study and then further analysed qualitatively. The results show that students from Chinese and Korean language backgrounds received higher scores in both writing and speaking, and showed a richness of content and a variety of forms and structures not evident in the performance of those from English and other L1 backgrounds. These findings are discussed in light of learners' level of familiarity with aspects of Japanese culture. The paper presents some suggestions for pedagogy, assessment and further research based on the findings.

KEY WORDS: Language transfer, cross-linguistic influence, cultural familiarity, speaking/writing task

INTRODUCTION

Japanese has been one of the most widely studied foreign languages in Australian secondary schools. Its popularity stems at least partly from Australia's geographical closeness and strong economic ties with Japan. The enrolment of Japanese students significantly increased in the 1990s, reaching a peak in the early 2000s. According to De Kretser and Spence-Brown (2010), unlike Chinese (Orton, 2008 and Scrimgeour, this issue), which is studied by a large number of students of Chinese origin, Japanese is generally taught as a foreign language given that the number of Australians with a family background in Japanese is very small (De Kretser & Spence-Brown, 2010). Nevertheless, Japanese has attracted students from a range of L1 backgrounds, including, increasingly in recent years, students with a background in other Asian languages which are related to Japanese in some respect (e.g., common characters in the case of Chinese and similar grammatical elements in the case of Korean). These learners are often studying side by side with those from English or other language

backgrounds. Meeting the learning needs of students from such diverse L1 backgrounds is a challenge for teachers of Japanese.

With the growth in enrolment of students of Japanese, an increasing volume of research investigating various aspects of learning and teaching Japanese is available (see review in Sakamoto, Koyanagi, Nagatomo, Hatasa, Murakami & Moriyama, 2008). However, most studies have examined learners at tertiary level and limited research investigating the primary and secondary level context is available. The current study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to compare performance on two writing and speaking tasks by secondary school learners from two language background groups (related and unrelated) and examined to what extent Japanese learners' first language had an impact on writing and speaking test performances. In the study we define the term 'related' and 'unrelated' as follows. A related language shares some property with Japanese. For example, Chinese and Japanese share the character system and many Japanese words expressed in kanji[i] originate from Chinese (e.g., 学校 school 健康 health 学生 students 体育 physical education). Korean and Japanese, while they have different scripts, come from the same language family and share many aspects of grammar as well as some vocabulary items. In this study, the only first languages identified as 'related languages' with respect to Japanese were Chinese (irrespective of dialect) and Korean. The remaining learners in the sample were from English or other language backgrounds.

INFLUENCE OF L1 ON L2 DEVELOPMENT

It is widely known that the mother tongue has a strong influence on the way a L2 is learnt and used (Kellerman, 1984; Kellerman & Sharwood Smith, 1986; Ringbom, 1987; Odlin, 1989) as learners use their L1 to learn a L2. The impact of learners' L1 on various aspects of L2 development is known as language transfer or cross-linguistic influence (Odlin, 1989, 2003). How much learners can use their L1 knowledge to learn the L2 largely depends on the distance between L1 and L2 (Kellerman, 1978, 1979; Swan, 1997). In general learners find it easier to learn an L2 that is similar to their L1 because in languages which are typologically or culturally similar many words are shared and learners can use their L1 knowledge to understand the L2 and for this reason it may take longer to reach proficiency in some languages than others. For example, Brown, Hill and Iwashita (2000) compared the performance of English-speaking background learners of four languages (French, Indonesian, Italian and Japanese) at secondary school level in order to examine the length of time needed to learn a language at school and whether some languages are harder to learn than others. The results showed that levels of achievement were typically lower on all skills in Japanese than in the other three languages. This was attributed to the larger language distance between English (the first language of most learners in the sample) and Japanese than between English and the other languages investigated. Chen (2003), reviewing studies on the

acquisition of kanji words in the Japanese language by native speakers of a Chinese language, explains that because Japanese and Chinese share some characters and kanji words, native speakers of a Chinese language have a certain advantage in acquiring kanji words in Japanese. Similarly, Odlin (1989) reports that native speakers of European languages (Spanish and Swedish) learned English vocabulary faster and more successfully than native speakers of non-European languages (Finish and Arabic speakers). Ringbom (1987) also showed that Swedish speaking Finns develop English proficiency faster than Finish speaking Finns because of the typological similarity between English and Swedish.

While the studies above show the advantage that learning a language closer to L1 can bring to the level and rate of L2 development, it seems that cultural distance between L1 and L2 can also play a significant role. Swan (1997) referring to cultural distance and the conceptual dimension of words, explains that it is easier for learners to acquire words in a language whose culture is similar to their L1 because the concept behind the words is familiar to them. For example, in Japanese the word 先生 '*teacher*' carries the underlying connotation that teachers are respected, which also applies in the case of Chinese. Given this cultural similarity it may be easier for native speakers of Chinese to use the word 先生 teacher in a contextually appropriate manner. Likewise both Japanese and Korean show similarities in the sense that, depending on a speaker's relationship with the listener, different words/endings are used to show respect. It is therefore often the case in both languages that people in the older generation are addressed with honorifics. Thus using honorifics to show respect for elders is not a foreign concept for Korean learners of Japanese and this can make their mastery of honorifics in Japanese relatively easy.

In addition to an easier access to the conceptual dimension of words, benefits of learning a language which is culturally similar to the L1 can be argued in the context of language learning motivation (e.g., Matsumoto, 2009; Svanes, 1997). It is assumed that motivated learners have a positive attitude towards the target culture, and this intrinsic motivation is facilitative of learning. Matsumoto (2009), for example, has shown that Australian university students' cultural/linguistic backgrounds have a significant impact on sustaining motivation and on their performance in learning the language and this is linked to an interest in aspects of Japanese culture. Similarly Svanes (1987) investigated the relationship between attitudes, second language proficiency and cultural distance and university students from different backgrounds studying Norwegian. The European and American groups scored significantly higher than the African and Asian groups and these results were attributed by the author to different degrees of cultural distance between learners' L1 and the target language. Interestingly, however, although these different groups displayed different types of motivation, there was no obvious link between level of motivation and proficiency.

While both language and cultural distance can have an impact on the amount of transfer and subsequent L2 development, this does not always make the task of learning easier for

learners attempting to acquire a language which is closely related to their L1. As reported in criticisms of the contrastive analysis hypothesis, the difference between L1 and L2 is not the same as difficulty (e.g., Dulay & Burt, 1974). Also the cause of errors does not always originate from the dissimilarity of the target language to learners' L1 (e.g., Schachter, 1974). Similarly Chen (2003) points out that the kanji words used in the two languages do not always share the same meaning, and therefore that negative transfer from Chinese language can occur based on the false assumption of similarity between some words (e.g., 新聞 for newspaper in Japanese and news in Chinese).

According to Kellerman (1977), distance could be considered as either a linguistic phenomenon or as an individual perception which is referred as *psychotypology* (Kellerman, 1977). Kellerman (1979) investigated to what extent Dutch learners of English can translate Dutch sentences containing the verb *breken* into English using the verb break. The results show clear differences in the 17 sentences according to the percentage of students who are prepared to translate into English using *break*. Interpreting the results, Kellerman proposed three factors affecting transfer: prototypicality (i.e., the extent to which learners perceive the feature to be transferrable), the learner's perception of L1-L2 distance and the learner's actual knowledge of L2. Building on the Kellerman (1979) study, Kato (2005) used both lexical judgement and oral production tests to investigate the acquisition of Japanese vocabulary by Chinese native speakers. His focus was on the transferability of Chinese polysemy 開 and 看[ii] to the corresponding Japanese words both in receptive and productive language use. While the results of the lexical judgment test were not consistent with the Kellerman's (1978, 1979) studies, the results of the oral production test were similar. Participants in both studies were university students, and it is not clear whether the findings would apply to the secondary school students investigated in the current study, given that the words learned in this context are generally simple and younger learners may not be prone to reflect on whether words in their first language repertoire are transferrable to Japanese. Nevertheless it is worth considering what words learners with a Chinese language background transfer and why some words are transferred and others are not.

Research on transfer/cross-linguistic influence in language learning has centred on the examination of particular aspects of language and also on the factors which affect transfer. Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008), reviewing more recent developments in language transfer research focusing on the psycholinguistic aspects of transfer observed in adult second language learners, report that more recent transfer research covers wide areas and skills and shows many factors affecting transfer are intertwined, which makes transfer a very complex phenomenon.

A number of studies focussing specifically on the acquisition of Japanese as a second language have systematically investigated how learners' first language background may have an impact on various aspects of the Japanese language learning (e.g., vocabulary and word

knowledge in Hasuike, 2007; Kato, 2005; writing in Iwashita & Sekiguchi, 2008; syntax in Sawazaki, 2009). Again, however, most have investigated learners at tertiary level and to date little is known about how similarities between learners' first language and Japanese impact on learning at primary and secondary levels. Furthermore, as noted above, studies in this area have mainly focused on investigating a specific language feature or skill rather than taking a more holistic approach as is the case with the current study. The data examined here is drawn from the larger SAALE study (see Scarino, this issue and Elder, Kim & Knoch, this issue). It was geared to profiling the performance of learners from different L1 backgrounds in order to better understand the nature and extent of variation in school achievement so that teachers are better able to respond to the needs of L2 students from a broad range of language backgrounds who may be learning alongside one another in Australian classrooms. It addresses the following research question:

> To what extent does Japanese learners' first language have an impact on L2 writing and speaking test performances?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the research question above, we undertook both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the written and speech samples collected for the large study (see Elder et al., this issue, for further details of this process).

DATA AND PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND

Data analysed in the current study are 109 written scripts and 19 speech samples by Year 10 students across Australian schools (three from South Australia, two from Victoria, one from Tasmania, three from New South Wales, and one from Queensland for oral data only). Further information about the frequency, intensity, and overall time devoted to instruction within each school is presented in the project report (Scarino et al., 2011)

The written scripts were drawn from two writing tasks. Task 1 required students to write a self-introduction as a part of a scholarship application for an exchange program in Japan. In Task 2, students responded to the blog sent by a Japanese student in Tokyo. In response, students answered the questions asked in the blog including some personal information.

Out of the total of 109 writing scripts analysed in the present study, a substantial portion (*N*=39, 36.4%) of the learner population are from first language backgrounds deemed to be related to Japanese. These included learners from Korean (*N* =11) and Chinese (*N* =28) language backgrounds. Many of these learners reported using Korean or Chinese exclusively (*N* =27) or in combination with English (*N* =9) before starting school. Although three of the Chinese background learners reported English as their first language, one of them was born

and educated in a country where Chinese was widely spoken, and two of them reported having parents born in a Chinese-speaking country.

The speech samples were taken from two oral interaction tasks where students answered the interviewer's questions (Task 1) and participated in a discussion with an interviewer using the prompts given (Task 2). Detailed information of the tasks and the sample tasks are available at http://www.saale.unisa.edu.au/project.html. Out of the total of 19 participants, six students are from Chinese background, and the remaining 13 have first languages unrelated to Japanese (e.g., English). The six students in the related language background group are all native speakers of Chinese and use Chinese regularly at home.

Writing and speaking data were scored subjectively using a set of categories or assessment criteria that were developed for the larger project. The details of the assessment categories and rating procedures are reported in Elder et al. (this issue) and information about the reliability of ratings is summarised in the project report (Scarino et al., 2011).

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer the research question, the data were first divided into two groups according to students' first language background: related and unrelated as in the larger study (Scarino et al., 2011). The mean scores on the writing and speaking tasks were then compared across the two groups. In order to validate the quantitative results and characterize the nature of each group's performance, a close qualitative examination of selected written and oral production data from the two language groupings was undertaken. The selection of scripts was based on available language background data and on test scores (see Elder et al., this issue for further information)

RESULTS

WRITING

Quantitative analysis

Scores for each criterion across Tasks 1 and 2 were combined and mean scores are shown in Table 1 below. A t-test analysis showed that the difference between learners in the related and unrelated language groups was statistically highly significant on all criteria as well as on the combined score with large effect sizes in each case: Content ($t_{(104.8)}$=6.355, p<.01, d=1.19), Vocabulary ($t_{(104.4)}$=5.885, p<.01, d=1.10), Forms & Structures ($t_{(99.4)}$=4.418, p<.01, d=.84), Discourse ($t_{(103.1)}$=7.013, p<.01, d=1.25), Use of scripts ($t_{(100.1)}$=2.954, p<.01, d=.84) and combined score ($t_{(92.3)}$=4.640, p<.01, d=.89).

Table 1. Mean writing scores in each criterion by first language background for Tasks 1 and 2 (Related *N* =39; Unrelated *N* =70)

Criteria	Group	Max. possible	*M*	*SD*	Min.	Max.
Content	Related	8	6.97	1.33	4	8
	Unrelated	8	4.90	2.07	1	8
Vocabulary	Related	8	6.90	1.25	4	8
	Unrelated	8	5.10	1.93	1	8
Forms and Structure	Related	8	6.31	1.42	3	8
	Unrelated	8	4.87	1.95	1	8
Discourse	Related	8	6.45	1.27	3	8
	Unrelated	8	4.43	1.89	1	8
Use of scripts	Related	8	6.41	1.29	4	8
	Unrelated	8	5.53	1.80	1	8
Combined	Related	40	32.33	7.64	0	40
	Unrelated	40	24.83	8.98	6	40

Qualitative analysis

In order to validate the above findings, we conducted qualitative analyses by identifying salient features observed in the students' written samples which might separate the two language groups in each category. The results are illustrated with a few samples taken from both related/unrelated language groups (Examples 1 and 4 – native speakers of a Chinese language, Example 2 – a native speaker of English, Example 3 – a native speaker of Korean). Learners with similar scores were selected to ensure potential differences are due to the L1 difference not proficiency. All examples are given in the Appendix.

Content and form and structure

Students in the related language group provide rich content using a wider variety of forms and complex sentences than students in the unrelated language group. The information provided in the texts by students in the related language group show evidence of a personal interest in Japanese popular culture and exposure outside the classroom, particularly to anime and manga (comics).

Example 1, written by a Chinese learner, shows the writer's familiarity with Japanese comics and Japanese entertainment (Karaoke, drama on TV). For example, sentences contain more than one verb or adjective thus providing detailed information about past-time activities (e.g., 休みの時に、友達といっしょに町によく行って、買い物をしたり、えいがを見たり

、ときどきカラオケをしたりします。During holidays, I often go to the city together with my friends, do shopping, watch a movie and sometimes do karaoke, among other activities.) A few simple sentences are also linked with connectives (i.e., から　　because　　けど　　but)　to　form　more　complex　sentences　(e.g., こくさいおんがくが大好きで、わたしのiPodにあまり英語のおんがくがありません けど、たくさん日本語のおんがくや中国語のおんがくやかんこく語のおんがくがあ ります。I like international music, and I don't have English songs in my iPod, but I have many Japanese songs, Chinese songs and Korean songs.) A comparative form is used　to　express　the　writer's　preference　regarding　leisure　activities (スポーツよりしずかなことの方が好きです。I　like　quiet　activities　better　than sports.) The writer uses adverbs effectively to express the degree of frequency of the activities she is engaged in (e.g., よくまんがを書きます。I often draw comics. あまりスポーツが好きじゃないです。I don't like sports very much.)

In contrast, Example 2, written by a native speaker of English (i.e. in the unrelated language group), shows less familiarity with/exposure to the Japanese culture as fewer references are made to Japanese culture in explaining hobbies and leisure time activities. Although the student does make a good attempt at providing details of the computer game he enjoys playing by using the connective form of a verb/adjective to link with another verb/adjective (i.e., 今、ドミニトンズ３がして、大女で[iii]、とてもおもしろくてむずかしいです。Now, I play 'Dominions 3' and like it very much and it's very interesting and difficult.), compared with Example 1 above, his statements are less grammatically complex and their meaning is not entirely clear. Unlike Example 1, this example contains no connectives or conjunctions (e.g., けど、が、ので) and generally shorter and simpler sentences.

It should be noted that while Chinese and Japanese share some common features, this does not apply to the grammatical system. That means that the wider range of grammatical forms and more complex forms observed in the sample by the related-language group learner (Example 1) is not a function of linguistic similarity, but more likely a result of the writer's familiarity with Japanese comics and Japanese entertainment (Karaoke, drama on TV). Thus the learner appears to have had more to say and as a result was able to use a variety of complex forms. On the other hand the non-related background sample (Example 2) is characterized by a high degree of grammatical problems compared to those in the related background sample. These problems however, tend to be of a minor nature, and for the most part do not interfere with intelligibility. In fact the text reveals substantial evidence of acquisition of basic structures in terms of word order, sentence structures.

Vocabulary

Students with a Chinese background use words derived from Chinese vocabulary as can be seen in Example 4, where the student used 課 to refer to class (クラス、授業) and 昼飯 for lunch (お昼ご飯、お昼、ランチ、弁当).

The same example shows this student's tendency to use more kanji in her writing including 食堂 cafeteria, 趣味 hobby, 授業 class, 起きる get up, 苦手 not good at, but also some characters borrowed from Chinese (i.e., 数学 for 数学 mathematics, 毎日 for 毎日 everyday, 勉彊 for 勉強 study, 経済 for 経済 economics). However it is not clear whether the learner knows the Japanese word, but not the associated characters, or whether the student is merely using a Chinese word to fill a lexical gap in his knowledge of Japanese.

On the other hand in Example 2, the student from the non-related language group tends to use English words transcribed in Katakana (ドクトレートfor doctorate, リプライ for reply アザー for other) to compensate for gaps in lexical knowledge.

Discourse

In Example 3, written by a Korean native speaker, there is no reference to Japanese culture in the explanation of hobbies as was the case with the Chinese learner in Example 1, but the writer's effective use of adverbs makes the tone of her statements appear more natural (e.g., 日本の冬は<u>すごく</u>さむいから As winter in Japan is <u>very</u> cold, 私の好きなかもくは<u>やっぱり</u>日本語ですけど My favourite subject is Japanese <u>as you might expect</u>, but..). This could be the result of either positive transfer from Korean (which has the same adverb & VP word order) or of substantial exposure to authentic Japanese materials.

Use of scripts

Handwriting is another feature that distinguishes the two groups. That is, handwriting by learners in the 'related language' group is natural and demonstrates control. Often character construction is more balanced as shown in Examples 1, 3 and 4 (see Appendix). However, there are also examples of negative L1 transfer such as spelling mistakes influenced by pronunciation difficulties which have their origins in Chinese and Korean (i.e. voiced/non-voiced sounds are often confused) (e.g., かそく ka<u>s</u>oku for かぞく ka<u>z</u>oku family, やっばりya<u>bb</u>ari for やっぱりya<u>pp</u>ari as expected, ごんにちは <u>g</u>onnichiwa for こんにちは <u>k</u>onnichiwa hello, さむくなにます samuku na<u>ni</u>masu for さむくなります samukuna<u>ri</u>masu gets cold, サントイッチ san<u>t</u>oittchi for サンドイッチsan<u>d</u>oittchi sandwiches, シャケト shaketo for ジャケット jaketto jacket).

On the other hand, handwriting and scripts written by students in the unrelated language group show less control over character construction, balance and stroke as shown in Example

2 (see Appendix). Spelling errors observed in the written scripts by the group of learners whose L1s are unrelated to Japanese are often observed in words written in katakana script (e.g., スポートfor スポーツ sport,ウウッドワークfor ウッドワーク woodwork). These errors may be largely caused by learners' uncertainty as to how to pronounce loan words, but this only remains as speculation.

SPEAKING

Quantitative analysis

As shown in Table 2 below, the mean scores of the related L1 group were higher than those of unrelated L1 group. A t-test analysis showed that the difference was statistically significant with a large effect size on all criteria as well for the combined score: Content 1 ($t_{(17)}$=2.271, p<.05, d=1.24), Content 2 ($t_{(17)}$=2.470, p<.05, d=1.31), Forms & Structure ($t_{(17)}$=2.323, p<.05, d=1.03), Comprehension ($t_{(17)}$=2.207, p<.05, d=1.62), and Communication strategies ($t_{(17)}$=2.895, p<.05), but not significant in criteria Vocabulary ($t_{(17)}$=1.889, ns), Fluency ($t_{(17)}$=2.064, ns), Intelligibility ($t_{(17)}$=2.078, ns) and combined score ($t_{(17)}$=1.889, ns)

Table 2. Mean speaking scores of second language learners by first language background (Related *N*=6; Unrelated *N*=13)

Criteria	Groups	Max. possible	*M*ean	*SD*	Min.	Max.
Content 1	Related *	4	3.50	.45	3	4
	Unrelated	4	2.65	.85	1	4
Content 2	Related	4	3.42	.58	2.50	4
	Unrelated	4	2.46	.85	1.50	4
Vocabulary	Related	4	3.33	.41	3	4
	Unrelated	4	2.65	.83	1	4
Forms and Structures	Related	4	3.25	.42	3	4
	Unrelated	4	2.35	.90	1	4
Fluency	Related	4	3.17	.52	2.50	4
	Unrelated	4	2.35	.90	1	4
Intelligibility	Related	4	3.42	.38	3	4
	Unrelated	4	2.65	.85	1	4
Comprehension	Related	4	3.17	.52	2.50	4
	Unrelated	4	2.19	1.01	1	4

Communication strategies	Related	4	3.42	.49	3	4
	Unrelated	4	2.00	1.14	.50	4
Combined	Related	36	26.67	3.36	23.5	32
	Unrelated	36	19.31	7.01	8	32

Notes: *All 6 learners were from Chinese language backgrounds. For all categories except Content the same descriptors were used to assess both Task 1 and 2 performances. For Content, the criteria were task specific as Task 2 has an input text whereas Task 1 does not. Full details of criteria and descriptors are available at http://www.saale.unisa.edu.au/project.html

Qualitative analysis

Compared with the writing performance, there were fewer features of speaking which stood out as being particularly characteristic of students from the related language group. However, as shown in the writing examples, it was evident that the greater exposure to Japanese outside the classroom and the cultural identification that these students often have with the target language resulted in more natural use of language and greater confidence in use as shown for writing above. The transcript below illustrates this point.

Example 5[iv].

Interviewer: 日本語はどうしてすきですか。

Why do you like Japanese?

Student: 面白くてやさしいと思うから。

Because I think it is interesting and easy.

Interviewer: 漢字は好きですか。

Do you like kanji?

Student: ちょっとむずかしい。

It is a bit difficult.

Interviewer: よく音楽を聞きますか。

Do you often listen to music?

Student: はい、毎晩コンピュータでよく聞きます。

Yes, I often listen on my computer.

Interviewer: どんな音楽が好きですか。

What type of music do you like?

Student: ケイポップ、ケイポップとジェイポップを聞きます。

I listen to K pop (Korean pop music) and J pop (Japanese pop *music)*.

For example, the student is able to answer the interviewer's question appropriately by linking two adjectives 面白くてやさしい (interesting and easy) and also using intensifiers (e.g., よく often, ちょっと slightly).

Pronunciation

It appears that students from the related language background had difficulty in the pronunciation of some words due to negative transfer from Chinese (e.g., China しゅうごく *shuugoku* for ちゅうごく *chuugoku*, difficult むじゅかしい *mujukashii* for むずかしい *muzukashii*), whereas learners from English and other unrelated language backgrounds did not experience such difficulties.

DISCUSSION

The current study has investigated the effect of first language background on writing and speaking task performances amongst Year 10 (mid-secondary) learners of Japanese. Quantitative analysis of the test scores on both writing and speaking tasks show that learners from the related language backgrounds received a higher score across categories than learners whose L1 backgrounds were unrelated to Japanese, though score differences for some speaking categories were not significant. The qualitative analysis also identified a few features in each assessment category which distinguished the two groups. These findings are further discussed below in light of the literature on both language distance and cultural familiarity.

Superior performance in writing tasks by learners in the related language group was expected, but students in the related language group also did better at speaking despite some difficulties in pronunciation as shown in the qualitative analysis. In fact, the mean percentage combined scores for both writing and speaking were 80.8% (Writing) and 82.1% (speaking) for the related language group and 62% (writing) and 60.3% (Speaking) for the unrelated language group. The fact that there were similar benefits for both skills suggests that factors other than kanji and vocabulary might have contributed to their superior performance.

As explained earlier in the paper, a higher level of performance by learners in the related language group may be partly attributable to the larger amount of positive transfer due to the proximity of their L1 (in the case of Korean) to Japanese as well as to a shared vocabulary and a common writing system (in the case of Chinese). These results are in accordance with the findings of the previous studies in which learners from a language closer to the TL had an advantage of acquiring vocabulary (e.g., Odlin, 1998; Ringbom, 1987) and kanji words (Chen, 2003; Hasuike, 2007; Iwashita & Sekiguchi, 2008). Also the natural flow of the language observed in the use of adverbs (e.g., すごく very much やっぱり as expected) and some expressions (e.g., どうすればいいですか。 What shall I do?) in Example 3 by the Korean learner show some of the benefits of learning a language which is close to the

learner's L1 (Korean). Furthermore, we observed a tendency among Chinese learners to use words derived from Chinese vocabulary, although it is uncertain whether these words were used to fill a lexical gap, or in the belief that they are indeed part of the Japanese lexicon as observed in Kellerman's (1997) and Kato's studies (2005). The former explanation seems more likely, as the proficiency level of the students in this study is much lower than those in Kellerman's (1977) and Kato's (2005) studies, given that they only have had studied Japanese for a few years at secondary school.

Among the several categories assessed in both writing and speaking, a feature which clearly distinguishes the two groups is the rich content that learners in the related language group produced using a variety forms and structures. As has been demonstrated, they scored significantly higher in both Content and Form & Structure categories than learners in the unrelated language group. The qualitative analysis suggests that the linguistic closeness of their L1 to L2 was not the only reason for their superior performance given that grammatical system of the target language is no closer to Chinese than it is to English. Rather, it appears that learners were able to take advantage of their familiarity with Japanese culture and include more relevant cultural information. In fact in an attitude survey conducted as part of the larger study (Scarino et al., 2011) many learners in the related language group expressed positive attitudes towards Japanese culture and familiarity with various aspects of Japanese culture through frequent visits to Japanese websites of interest to them. Visiting Japanese websites may be easier for learners in the related language group since they are familiar with many kanji words appearing on the site. Many popular comic books are also translated into their first language perhaps creating a greater motivation and capacity to engage with such material in Japanese. However, given the ambiguous findings of previous research with respect to the relationship between familiarity with the target language culture and motivation (Matsumoto, 2009; Svanes, 1987) we should be wary of drawing firm conclusions on this issue.

CONCLUSION

The current study has investigated how learners' first language can influence both the level and nature of performance on production tasks. We first undertook a quantitative comparison of the assessment scores of Writing and Speaking task performances of learners from the two language background groups (i.e., related and unrelated to Japanese) and then identified the features which characterize learners of the two groups qualitatively. As expected, learners in the related language group outperformed the unrelated language group students in many areas. Their higher level of performance was not just limited to the use of kanji and vocabulary as might be expected, but also covered other aspects of the performance in both Writing and Speaking tasks. As discussed earlier, their superior performance may be partly due to positive transfer given the proximity between features of their L1 and those of the

target language (in the case of Korean students) as well as (in the case of Chinese students) to vocabulary and kanji words shared with their L1. These findings were further discussed in light of cultural similarity, which may have made online materials more readily accessible to these learners thereby providing greater amounts of exposure to Japanese.

These findings indicate that familiarity with aspects of target language culture may enhance L2 development and that culture is an integral part of language learning. Teachers would be well advised to capitalize on this by familiarizing themselves with learners' cultural interests and incorporating these into teaching with reference to online material where possible. Learners whose first languages are related to Japanese could also be called upon, where feasible, to share their knowledge and experiences with other learners through peer tutoring activities. It should be noted, however, that the gap in scores between the different groups was quite wide both for writing and speaking and that attempting to teach learners with related and unrelated first languages in the same class may ultimately be frustrating and demotivating for both groups. Acknowledging these differences in achievement and offering opportunities for acceleration to the more advanced Chinese and Korean learners would seem highly desirable and perhaps the only means of allowing such learners to achieve their full potential in the target language. Furthermore, the implications of the study's findings for assessment should also be seriously considered. While the common instruments used in the current study have been useful for comparison purposes, previous research has questioned the validity, for high stakes assessment, of applying common assessment instruments and scales to assess learners from diverse L1 backgrounds (e.g., Brown & Iwashita, 1996, 1998; Elder, 1996, 2000) suggesting that scores yielded from such measures may have different meaning for the groups concerned. Common assessment tasks for learners of diverse abilities may also be pedagogically unhelpful in classroom contexts, encouraging high performers to rest on their laurels rather than strive for excellence, and discouraging low performers from continuing their study of Japanese.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations of the current study. The sample size of for the speaking task is very small and only a handful of learners from what we have termed 'related languages' participated in the oral speaking assessment. It is therefore hard to generalize from the findings about the larger learner population. It should also be noted that data drawn for the current study is from a limited number of schools across the country and that the conditions under which the study was undertaken did not allow us to explore differences between schools. It is generally known that students with Chinese and Korean language backgrounds are better represented in higher ranking than in lower ranking schools. Thus, it is possible that performance differences between related and non-related language groups were not only a function of L1 background, but also attributable to the nature of the

instruction and/or the resources available in the relevant schools. Finally, it is worth mentioning that all related language group students are bilingual in their first language and English or indeed multilingual. Thus is it possible that these learners' broader multilingual experiences and capabilities, as mentioned by Scarino (this issue) rather than simply cross-linguistic influence from their mother tongue, were responsible for their superior performance in Japanese. Other variables including length of study, in-country experience (though limited) were not taken into account in the analysis of this particular set of test results, and therefore the extent to which these variables might have affected the results is unknown. The interaction of language transfer with any or all of these variables with the language transfer phenomenon is worthy of further investigation. Furthermore, due to space constraints this study has not investigated any task effect on test-taker performances (as did Kim, this issue). The language characteristics of each group's performance might differ across tasks and indeed in relation to other tasks beyond those that were used for the SAALE study. Lastly, space constraints have precluded our inclusion of data on learners' attitudes to Japanese and the extent of their familiarity with Japanese culture, which were collected for the larger study (Scarino et al., 2011). Therefore, the extent to which these aspects had an impact on their performance remains as speculation.

Nevertheless, the current study is an important first step in documenting the variability of performance among the diverse population of second language learners of Japanese in Australian classrooms. Future studies addressing the limitations of the current research are needed to unveil the complex nature of cross-linguistic influence on L2 development and provide useful information to teachers who teach students from various L2 backgrounds.

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APPENDIX

EXAMPLE 1

はじめまして。私は 　　　　　で 今 高校 一年生です。私は今十六才で
中国人です。私の学校の名前は 　　　　　　　　です。
私のかぞくは四人で父と母と弟です。弟は今八才ですごくうるさい男の子と
思います。父と弟はスポーツが大好きで 週まつに いつも テニスをしますけど
私は あまり スポーツは 好きじゃないです。スポーツより しずかなこと の方が 好きです。
ひまな時にたくさん色々な本とざっしを読みます。それにえも書きます。
日本のマンガのスタイルが好きですから、よくマンガを書きます。こくさいおんがく
が大好きで私のiPadにあまり英語のおんがくがありませんけどたくさん
日本語のおんがくや中国語のおんがくやかんこく語のおんがくがあります。日本の
ドラマもよく見ます。休みの時に友達といっしょに町によく行って買い物を
したりえいがを見たり時々カラオケをしたりします。休みにもじゅくにはたらきます。

私の学校はとても大きくていい学校と思います。好きなかもくは英語と日本
語とびじゅつです。私は クリエティブ な人と思いますから、そのかもくはとてもおもしろくて
楽しいと思います。中学校三年生の時に学校の学生と日本に行きました。
とてもすばらしいの休みでしたから、来年かぞくとまた行きたいです。

(Translation)

How do you do? I am XXXX, and now in the first year of high school. I am now 16 years old. I am Chinese. The name of my school is XXXX.

There are four people in my family including father, mother and younger brother. My brother is eight years old now and I think he is a very noisy boy. My father and brother like sports very much and always play tennis on the weekend, but I don't like sports very much. I like

quiet activities better than sports. At my spare time I read a lot of various books and magazines. Also I draw pictures. As I like style of Japanese comics, I often draw comics. I like international music very much, and I don't have a lot of English music in my iPod, but I have lots of Japanese language music, Chinese language music and Korean language music. I often watch Japanese drama, too. During holiday, I often go to the city with my friends and go shopping, watching a movie and doing karaoke at times among other things. I also work at Juku (Cram school) during holidays.

My school is very big and I think it is a good school. My favourite subjects are English, Japanese, and art. I think I am a creative person, and therefore, I find the subject very interesting and enjoyable. When I was at the third year of junior high school, I went to Japan with students of my school. It was a wonderful holiday and therefore, I would like to go to Japan again with my family next year.

EXAMPLE 2

私の名前はア　　　　す。十五才で高校一年生です
たん生日は二十日八月千九百九十四年です
好きなかもく　は　が学では　とてもおもしろくて　ちょっとむずかしいです
だれ、よかった．だれ数学がきらいでは　ちょっとできませんでした．だれ　今数学ができます
好きなスポートは　かことといありどです　我は　くいで　茶色な
ベルトです．
私のかぞくは　四人で　あねと母と父で　あねは十七才で　あたま
はとても割　　です　よいで父は五十一才で　ドクトォートのが　もっている．
母は四十五才で　先生でやさしい人です．
私のしゅみはコンピューターゲーミングです　今、ドミニトンズ3が
に　大女で　とてもおもしろくてむずかしいです　AI はあたまが　よいって
だれ　しょうぶが　ちょっとできませんでた、パッチの　アプッ・グレーダド
のA.I. は　とても　よいで　ちょっと　できません
私の　アザー・かもく　は　英語と　味語と　メタル・フークと　ウッド・フークと
かが学と数学とび休了です
リプライが　たのしみにいます！

(Translation)

My name is XXXX. I am fifteen years old and in the first year of high school. My birthday is August 20, 1994. My favourite subject is chemistry (science). It is interesting, but a bit difficult. Who, good, who, I don't like mathematics and I could not do well, but I can do mathematics now. My favourite sports are karate and iaido. I am good at the sports and have a brown belt.

There are four people in my family including an older sister, mother and father, and my older sister is 17 years old and she is very smart, and my father is 51 years old and has a doctorate. My mother is 45 years old, a teacher and a kind person.

My hobby is computer game. Currently I like 'Dominions' very much, and it is very interesting and difficult. AI is very smart. AI of patch upgrade is very good, but I can't do.

My other subjects are English, Japanese, metal work, woodwork, science (chemistry), mathematics and arts.

I look forward to your reply.

EXAMPLE 3

まな かひろこさんへ

こんにちは! です。私は17才で今 の りょうに住んでいますが休み には 私のおばさんのうちに います。6月は オーストラリアは 冬ですが あまりさむくない です。日本の冬は すごくさむいから、大じょうぶですよ。学校は クロイドンに あって八時 二十分に はじめて三時に おわりますよ 私は 学校に 英語とかがくとけいざい と 数学と日本語をべんきょうしています。学校は ともだちに 芸ってはなしたりいっしょ どしょうかんで べんきょうしたりします。私の 一番好きなかもくはやっぱり 日本語です けど けいざいはむずかしくてつまらないからきらいです。私は今は スーぷーシを していませんけれど らい月には テニスを しますよ。ひろこさんは 肉を食べないですか? 私は 肉が すごく大好きですよ、とふっとていますよ。どうすればいいですか?しいえ.. 肉の中で チーキンが 一番好きですが 魚は 食べません。ちょっと 魚のくちいが 好きじゃないからです。オーストラリアでは 肉もたくさんありますけれど べシタリ アンの 食物も いっぱいありますよ! しゅくだい がんばってね! じゃあね!

ダナより

(Translation)

Dear Hiroko Manaka

Hello. I am XXX. I am 17 years old and now lives at XXX's dormitory, but I stay at my aunt's place during holidays. In Australia June is winter, but it is not very cold. As winter in Japan is very cold, you will be okay (in winter in Australia). My school is located in XXX and it starts at 8:20am and finishes at 3pm. I study English, science, economics, maths and Japanese. At school, I spend chatting with my friends and also studying at the school library. My favourite subject is Japanese indeed, but as I find economics is difficult and boring, I don't like it. I don't play sports at the moment, but next month I'll play tennis. Hiroko, you don't eat meat, do you? I love meat and very big. What can I do? My mother likes chicken among other meat, and does not eat fish. It is because she doesn't like the smell of fish. In Australia, there are a lot of meat dishes, but we have many vegetarian dishes too. All the best for your homework. Bye. From xxx.

EXAMPLE 4

(Translation)

Hello. I am XXX of an Australian student. How do you do? I am 16 years old, and study at a girls' school called XXX in Melbourne. Hiroko, you are coming to Melbourne in July, aren't you? Are you looking forward to it? The weather in Melbourne will become a bit cold. Please bring a jacket. My school has classes from 8am till 3pm. I get up at 7am every morning. Then I walk to school. I study English, Japanese, mathematics, history and geography among other subjects. I like Japanese best, and history least. For I don't have any hobby (interests) about history. Every week we have two sport classes. Sometimes I play tennis.

I buy lunch at the school cafeteria with my friends. I always eat sandwiches. It costs me only five dollars per sandwich. It is cheap. I don't like meat very much, but Australians generally like meat and eat a lot. Thanks for sending me a letter. All the best for your time in Japan. I look forward to seeing you, Hiroko in Australia. Bye for now.

ENDNOTES

i   Kanji are logographic Chinese characters that are used in Japanese writing system. While kanji are essentially Chinese *characters* used to write Japanese, there are now significant differences between kanji used in Japanese and Chinese characters used in Chinese. Such differences include (i) the use of characters created in Japan, (ii) characters that have been given different meanings in Japanese, and (iii) post-World War II simplifications of the kanji (Taylor, 1995).

ii   In Chinese 開 means 'open', 'turn on', 'hold (meetings)', 'found (a company)' 'begin (as in the new semester begins)', 'drive', 'boil' while in Japanese the same character refers only to 'open' and 'hold a meeting'. 看 in Chinese means 'watch a TV', 'read', 'visit', 'visit a doctor', 'take care of', 'look after', 'to understand' while in Japanese it means 'look after'.

iii   大女で should be 大好きで, which means 'I like xx very much'.

iv   Examples (Written samples) 1-4 are shown in the Appendix due to their length.