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Language life of Japanese expatriates in non-English speaking countries: the cases of Barcelona and Madrid

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Abstract

Starting from the question of whether expatriates can survive a temporary stay in the host society without any knowledge of the local language, this study explores the language life of Japanese expatriates in Barcelona and Madrid. The relationship between language competence, language needs, and the degree of communicative satisfaction and satisfaction with life in general was analyzed. The result suggests that use of the local language in a Non-English-speaking country is very important and can be one of the factors determining the degree of communicative satisfaction, but not necessary satisfaction with life in general.

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Keywords: language life; Japanese expatriates; language use; Catalonia, Madrid

1. Introduction

The economic expansion of Japan has generated a mobility of Japanese companies' workers and an extensive spread of Japanese citizens worldwide. The studies on Japanese expatriates have described this population as a "closed community" with few relations with the local people, which allows them to maintain a life that is not that

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different from the one that they had in Japan (White, 2003; Glebe, 2003; Björnklund, 2007). It is often pointed out that one of the factors of the grouping of these Japanese expatriates is their lack of knowledge of the local language (White, 2003; Wing, 2005). Local language competence is considered to be one of the significant factors involved in adapting to a different cultural setting during a stay abroad, since it allows one to live a normal life. Nonetheless, the strong tie that these Japanese expatriates maintain with their culture and the grouping with their compatriots often stop them from learning the local language(s). However, can they really survive their temporary residence in the host society with no knowledge of the local languages? Or can competence in English help them to complement the lack of knowledge of the local language?

The present study explores the language life of Japanese expatriates in Barcelona and Madrid and tries to identify the factors related to the communicative satisfaction level and satisfaction with life in general. *Language life* is a term employed in Japanese sociolinguistics to refer to language behaviors in daily life, though its definition varies depending on the author and/or the period. For this, the level of language competence and language use according to the communicative scene will be explored. To date, the language life and the language competence of these expatriates have not been analyzed empirically (Fukuda et al., 2013).

2. Japanese expatriates in Spain

The number of Japanese living in Spain experienced a major quantitative evolution between 1966 and 1970. This evolution was due to the growing interest of Japanese companies in the Spanish market and its cheaper labor force. In the seventies, the number of Japanese continued to grow and, in the second half of the eighties, it increased dramatically, responding to the fact that sixty-nine Japanese companies were set up in Catalonia between 1986 and 1991 (Valles, 1998).

The Japanese population at state level continues to grow in a discrete but constant manner. Most long-term residents are without a permanent residence permit. In 2013, 7,680 Japanese were living in the whole of Spain, most of them concentrated in Barcelona (38.7%) and Madrid (25.7%). The fact that Japanese companies are concentrated in these two communities explains this pattern of demographic distribution.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

This study forms part of the project “Language Behaviours of Japanese Native Speakers in Non-English-Speaking Cities”, which has been carried out since 2011.

To obtain the data for our study, we conducted a questionnaire survey with three sections: (1) sociocultural profile, (2) language life, and (3) social network.

Our aim is to explore the language life of Japanese expatriates in Barcelona and Madrid. We are particularly interested in the language practices of sojourners. For this reason, we contacted two entities which have a strong relationship with these Japanese expatriates. Through the collaboration of the Japanese School of Barcelona, fifty copies were distributed and twenty-nine valid copies were returned. Furthermore, through the Association of the Japanese Community of Madrid, we requested collaboration on an online questionnaire and thirty-six valid responses were collected. It should be taken into account that these two entities have a different character: the respondents recruited through the Japanese School of Barcelona are basically sojourners and recently arrived in Barcelona, while an important percentage of the members of the Association of the Japanese Community of Madrid have been living in Madrid for more than five years.

3.2. Analysis and results

To prove our hypotheses (1) language use varies depending on the communicative scene; (2) use of the local language can be a factor determining communicative satisfaction and even satisfaction with life in general; and (3) local language competence and the needs to use this language vary depending on the cities studied, we quantitatively analyzed the relation between language competence, language needs, degree of communicative satisfaction and

satisfaction with life in general.

3.2.1 Language use

Both cities show a clear difference regarding language use. In Barcelona, an important percentage of respondents (75.9%) responded that their main language in daily life is Japanese in general, though language use varies according to the communicative scene. If we classify the fifteen communicative scenes presented into four categories (based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages*), it can be observed that, in the private and educational domains, Japanese is used predominantly except in leisure activities and/or hobbies, where more than 70% of respondents use Spanish. This result suggests that a significant percentage of respondents enjoy their leisure with the local population. As most of the respondents enroll their children at the Japanese School of Barcelona, the use of Japanese in the educational domain is inevitably high.

On the other hand, in the official domain, most of the respondents employ Spanish. In restaurants or in commercial establishments, Spanish is used exclusively, whilst in official transport services English is also used by a small percentage of respondents. This implies that the respondents employ Spanish in the scenes where they can carry out procedures with few words, but when they find themselves in a scene which requires a detailed explanation, English can serve as an alternative tool. With regard to Catalan, only three respondents declared that they had learned this language. Thus, its use is almost zero.

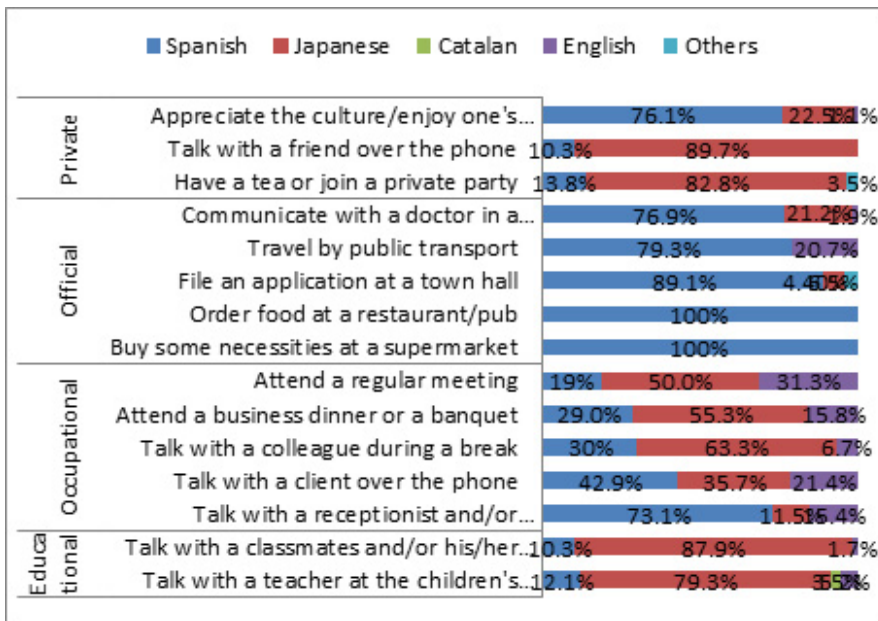


Fig. 1. Language uses according to scene. Barcelona.

In Madrid, on the other hand, Spanish predominates in all domains to different degrees, and the use of Japanese is much more limited than in Barcelona. Even in the private domain, Spanish is more used than Japanese. This implies that, also in the private domain, the respondents relate more to the local people than those of Barcelona. Similarly, in the occupational domain, the high use of Spanish suggests that an important percentage of the respondents work with the local people. Amongst the rest of the languages, English stands out, being employed particularly in meetings, which means that English is used as a common language between local workers and foreign workers, or even as the “official language” in some companies.

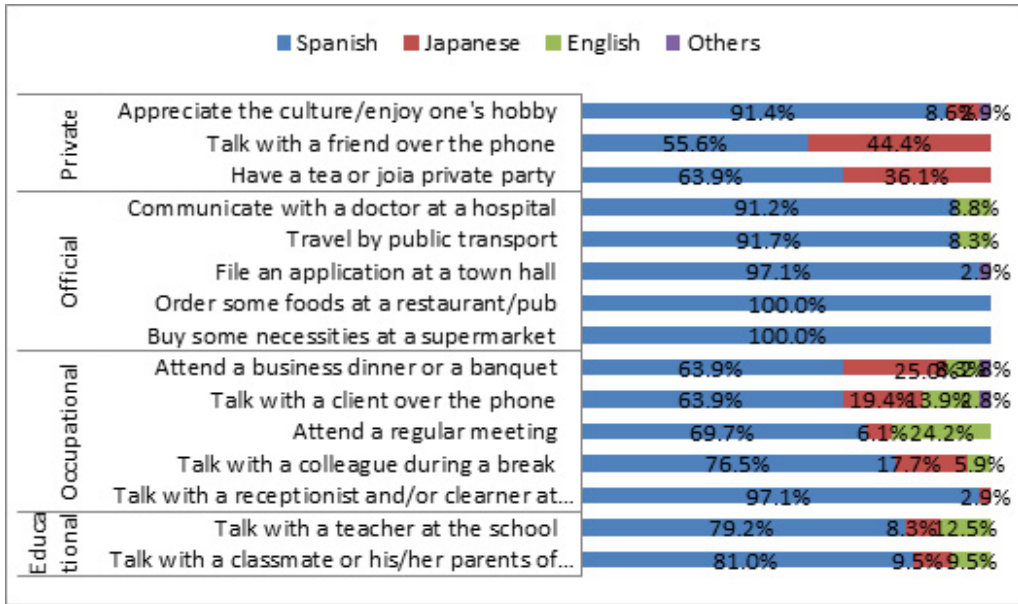


Fig. 2. Language uses according to scene. Madrid.

3.2.2 Degree of communicative satisfaction and satisfaction with life, and language competence

The respondents were asked to evaluate their degree of communicative satisfaction in each domain of communication on the basis of a scale which goes from 1 (Not satisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied) and to evaluate their level of local language(s) and English competence regarding the four basic competences (listening, speaking, reading and writing) on the basis of a scale which goes from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (With total fluency). The four competences were classified into oral and written, though we used only oral competence, since we supposed scenes of oral communication.

The respondents from Barcelona declare a fairly low level of Spanish competence in general (Figure 3). Regarding Catalan, the result of the questionnaire shows that almost none of the respondents have learned this language. The respondents suppose that they should learn Spanish, since it is the Spanish state’s language, whilst they perceive Catalan as something irrelevant for them (Fukuda, 2009).

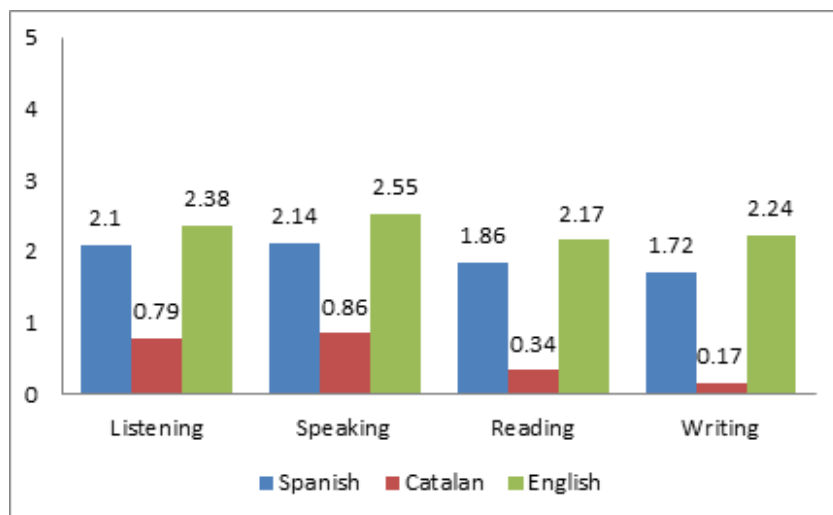


Fig. 3. Language competence. Mean (Barcelona).

If we take a look at the use of language, it is observed that the degree of communicative satisfaction is high in the domains where the use of Japanese is high. Conversely, in the domains where the use of Spanish is high, the degree of satisfaction is rather low. The result suggests that the respondents feel satisfied communicatively when they can use the language in question well, which implies that if they have a high level of Spanish, they are satisfied in the domains where they use this language. Indeed, we found a positive strong correlation between the degree of communicative satisfaction and the level of oral competence in Spanish in these domains.

Nonetheless, the competences of the local language(s) do not necessarily determine the degree of satisfaction with life in general. Regarding English, no correlation was observed between competence and the level of communicative satisfaction and satisfaction with life.

Table 1. Percentage of use of Spanish, mean of degree of satisfaction and correlation between oral competence in Spanish and the degree of communicative satisfaction according to the scene. Barcelona.

Scene	Frequency	Percentage of use of Spanish	Mean of degree of satisfaction	Correlation between oral competence in Spanish and the degree of communicative satisfaction
Buy some necessities at a supermarket	29	100%	3.76	.700**
Order food at a restaurant/pub	29	100%	3.55	.744**
File an application at a town hall	23	89.13%	3.09	.707**
Travel by public transport	29	79.3%	3.55	.714**
Communicate with a doctor in a hospital	26	76.9%	3.48	.459*
Appreciate the culture/ enjoy one's hobby	28	76.07%	3.43	.579**
Talk with a receptionist at the office	13	73.08%	4.21	.737**
Talk with a client over the phone	14	42.76%	4.14	.693**
Talk with a colleague during a break	15	30%	4.4	.468
Attend a business dinner or a banquet	19	28.95%	4.05	.546*
Attend a regular meeting	16	19%	4.2	.417
Organize a private party; have a tea	29	13.79%	4.29	.287
Talk with a teacher at the school	29	12.07%	4.43	.346
Talk with a friend over the phone	29	10.34%	4.57	.278
Talk with a classmate of one's child	29	10.34%	4.57	.436*

On the other hand, the level of Spanish of the respondents from Madrid is considerably higher compared with those from Barcelona (Figure 4). The result is closely related to the fact that the Association of the Japanese Community of Madrid includes members who have also settled down there.

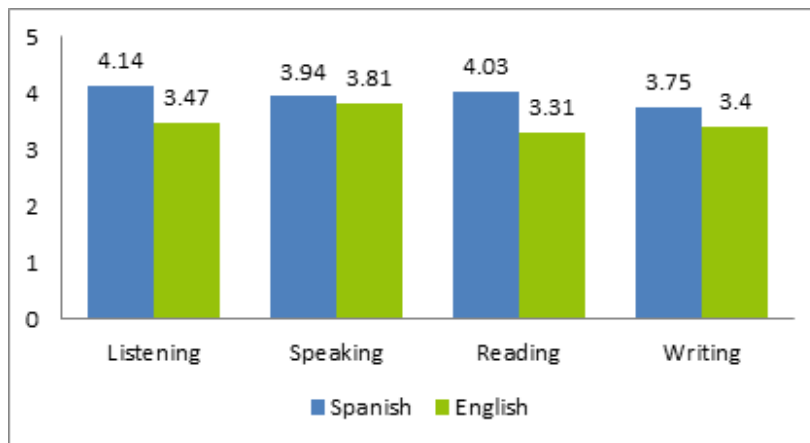


Fig. 4. Language competence. Mean (Madrid).

Table 2. Percentage of use of Spanish, mean of degree of satisfaction and correlation between oral competence in Spanish and the degree of communicative satisfaction according to the scene. Madrid.

Scene	Frequency	Percentage of use of Spanish	Mean of degree of satisfaction	Correlation between degree of communicative satisfaction and oral competence in Spanish
Buy some necessities at a supermarket	36	100%	4.25	.821**
Order food at a restaurant/pub	36	100%	4.28	.866**
File an application at a town hall	35	97.1%	4.03	.867**
Talk with a receptionist at the office	35	97.1%	4.19	.804**
Travel by public transport	36	91.7%	4.33	.750**
Appreciate the culture/ enjoy one's hobby	35	91.4%	4.19	.783**
Communicate with a doctor in a hospital	34	91.2%	3.94	.883**
Talk with a classmate of one's child	21	81.0%	4.29	.505*
Talk with a teacher at the school	24	79.2%	4.33	.552**
Talk with a colleague during a break	34	76.5%	4.06	.842**
Attend a regular meeting	33	69.7%	4.00	.689**
Have a tea or join a private party	36	63.9%	4.50	.535**
Talk with a client over the phone	36	63.9%	4.36	.733**
Attend a business dinner or a banquet	36	63.9%	4.31	.616**
Talk with a friend over the phone	36	55.6%	4.50	.535*

3.2.3 Degree of need for local language(s) and language competence

The mean of the degree of need for Spanish amongst our respondents from Barcelona is higher than that for Catalan: whilst more than 79% of respondents consider that Spanish is necessary in their daily life, those who consider that Catalan is necessary only represent 37.9%, and 34.4% consider it unnecessary. The degree of need for

English is higher than for Catalan, with a mean of 3.66. The competences in Spanish and the language needs show a strong positive correlation ($r=.519, <0.01$).

On the other hand, all of the respondents from Madrid consider that Spanish is necessary in their daily life. The degree of need for English varies a little, though more than 50% of the respondents consider it necessary. No correlation has been observed between oral competence in Spanish and the need for this language ($r=.321$).

Table 3. Level of language competence and degree of needs. Mean (Barcelona)

	Spanish		Catalan		English	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Oral competence	2.12	1.2	0.83	1.055	2.47	0.876
Written competence	1.79	1.221	0.26	0.607	2.21	0.996
Degree of needs	3.76	0.435	2.93	1.033	3.66	1.233

Table 4. Level of language competence and degree of needs. Mean (Madrid)

	Spanish		English	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Oral competence	4.04	0.98107	3.73	0.96252
Written competence	3.89	1.10913	3.45	1.10133
Degree of needs	4.89	0.319	3.22	1.333

3.2.4 Degree of satisfaction with life and degree of communicative satisfaction

The mean of the degree of need for Spanish amongst our respondents from Barcelona is higher than that for Catalan: whilst more than 79% of respondents consider that Spanish is necessary in their daily life, those who consider that Catalan is necessary only represent 37.9%, and 34.4% consider it unnecessary. The degree of need for English is higher than for Catalan, with a mean of 3.66. The competences in Spanish and the language needs show a strong positive correlation ($r=.519, <0.01$).

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Finally, the result of the correlation analysis shows that, in the case of Barcelona, the degree of satisfaction with life in general is not determined by the degree of communicative satisfaction (private domain: $r=.112$, official domain: $r=.177$, occupational domain: $r=.072$, educational domain: $r=.280$). Conversely, in the case of Madrid, except in the educational domain, a strong positive correlation is shown between the degree of satisfaction with life and communicative satisfaction (private domain: $r=.506$, official domain: $r=.702$; occupational domain: $r=.670$, educational domain: $r=.143$).

4. Conclusions

The preliminary results of this study suggest that use of the local language in a non-English speaking country is very important and can be one of the determinant factors of the degree of communicative satisfaction, but it does not determine satisfaction with life in general. The respondents from both cities studied show quite different language use patterns due to their different profile, though use of Spanish is fairly important in both cities. On the contrary, use of English is quite low compared with the local language, though an important percentage of the respondents

consider it necessary in their daily life. The significant use of Japanese by the respondents from Barcelona implies their frequent relations with their compatriots.

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