

[研究論文]

# Written and Spoken Academic English in Japan

— Some Areas of Concern —

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## Abstract :

Analysis of verb use in four corpora study shows that there is evidence of some confusion between spoken and written styles in Japanese academic English. This paper investigates key areas of confusion. Suggestions are also offered on how to move Japanese academic English more towards international norms, in order to promote Japanese scholarship internationally.

**Keywords :** Academic English, Corpus Analysis, ESP

## 1. Introduction

There has been a great deal of research into the area of written academic English in Japan, and many resources have been produced for Japanese scholars in order to assist them in publishing in English (Day and Gastel, 2006 ; Kawamoto, 2006 ; Kawamoto & Ohtake, 2007 ; Kawamoto & Ohtake, 2012).

These resources are vital, as publications are essential in academic work internationally. Academic employment, job security, promotion, credibility and prestige are largely measured in terms of publications, with pressure to publish in international journals (Altbach, 2013).

Writing papers alone isn't sufficient though, because these papers need to be presented, discussed and defended at international conferences (Hyland, 2009). This study suggests that there has been insufficient focus on spoken academic English in Japan, and aims to explore the topic and make suggestions on how to address some of the more serious current shortcomings.

In section 2, the research methodology will be presented, detailing the corpora to be used, how they were

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受付日 2014. 10. 23

受理日 2014. 12. 16

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collected, analysed and so forth.

In sections 3 and 4, the importance of international academic English will be established, and Japanese written academic English will be compared with international written academic English. From this comparison, areas of concern will be identified, with the most serious being an apparent confusion between written and spoken academic English.

In section 5, two international corpora, of written and spoken academic English respectively, will then be presented, and the key features of written and spoken academic English will be discussed in order to establish norms for this study.

In section 6, Japanese spoken academic English will be compared against multiple corpora, first verifying the validity of the concerns identified in section 4, and then identifying and addressing several areas of concern and making suggestions on how to avoid these pitfalls.

Finally the key points and suggestions will be provided in section 7.

## **2. Research Methodology**

Four different corpora will be used to support this research.

The first two corpora were derived from PubMed.

“PubMed comprises over 23 million citations for biomedical literature from MEDLINE, life science journals, and online books. PubMed citations and abstracts include the fields of biomedicine and health, covering portions of the life sciences, behavioral sciences, chemical sciences, and bioengineering.” (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK3827/#pubmedhelp.FAQs>)

The first corpus, which will be referred to as the J-Corpus, consisted of the English abstracts from articles where the main body of the article was written in Japanese. It was assumed that academics writing the body of their article in Japanese, rather than English or another language, would have Japanese as their first language (L1). Abstracts from articles whose main body was written in Japanese are presumed to have been subjected to less rigorous editing of the English abstracts, thus preserving more natural

Japanese English usage patterns. The J–Corpus came to 11,120,652 words of written academic English by Japanese L1 academics.

The second corpus is the Life Science Dictionary (LSD) corpus, a large corpus of more than a hundred million words, which was also obtained from PubMed (Ohtake, Fujita, Kawamoto, Morren, Ugawa & Kaneko, 2012). This corpus was adjusted to 11,120,652 words to allow easier comparison with the J–Corpus, and will be referred to as the LSDmini corpus (Ohtake, et. al., 2012). The LSDmini corpus represents international academic written English.

The third corpus was compiled from the scripts of 344 of the TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) talks on scientific and biomedical topics, to ensure comparability with the previous two corpora derived from PubMed. The TED corpus has been used extensively in other corpus research, as have subsets of the corpus (Cettolo, Girardi & Federico, 2012 ; Sawai, Komachi & Matsumoto, 2013). The 800,000 word TED corpus represents international academic spoken English.

The final corpus is extracted from the Michigan corpus of academic spoken English (MICASE), filtered to extract results for only Japanese L1 speakers (J–MICASE), a corpus of 45,900 words (Simpson, Briggs, Ovens & Swales, 2002). The results came primarily from the biological and health sciences (74.2%), with the remainder (25.8%) from the field of social sciences and education. The J–MICASE corpus represents a sample of spoken academic English from Japanese L1 speakers.

The top twenty–four most frequently occurring verbs were extracted from the TED corpus. The J–Corpus, LSDmini and J–MICASE corpus were then queried for the frequency of these verbs. To compensate for the different sizes of the corpora they were all adjusted to the same size, 800,000, by simply dividing or multiplying, in order to give a sense of the relative frequency of verbs across the corpora and to allow for comparison.

The relative frequency of verbs across these four corpora will be the focus of this paper and draw attention to areas to be explored in more depth.

### **3. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**

The overwhelming majority of international journals are English–language, with 84.74% of the Scopus database articles being in English, and 73.77% of Ulrich’s directory. The second and third most popular

languages for publication were German (Scopus, 5.34%, Ulrich's 12.02%) and French (Scopus, 4.96%, Ulrich's 6.75%), and Japanese was in seventh place, with 1.28% to 2.72% of articles being written in Japanese in Scopus and Ulrich's directory respectively (de Moya–Anegón, Chinchilla–Rodríguez, Vargas–Quesada, Corera–Álvarez, Muñoz–Fernández, González–Molina & Herrero–Solana, 2007).

It is indicative of the lack of focus on spoken academic English that, while a number of studies have been conducted into written academic English, little or no information could be found on the number of conferences internationally where English is the language of presentation. This area requires further research.

The reason why publication in English journals is encouraged is a question of visibility. Papers that are written in English are six to seven times more likely to be cited than those written in German or French, the second and third most popular languages for publication (Poomkottayil, Bornstein & Sendi, 2011).

The emergence of ELF seems to be the result of a range of independent economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological processes, each promoting ELF for different reasons (Coleman, 2006). The existence of documents like the Bologna Declaration attests to the fact that ELF is the standard for academics (Reinalda & Kulesza–Mietkowski, 2005). While other countries may not have recognised English in such a formal fashion, the language of publication reveals that English is the standard, if not *de jure*, then certainly *de facto*.

#### 4. Academic English

Individuals who learnt English as their first language are outnumbered by those who learnt English as their second (or subsequent) language (L2) by more than 4 : 1 (Simpson–Vlach, 2013). It has been argued by Kachru (1985) that : “... the global diffusion of English has taken an interesting turn : the native speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization ; ” (p.30). While Kachru (1985) may be correct in other environments, in academic writing Kachru's argument does not hold true. Most English–language journals require not only strict adherence to one of the inner circle models (usually either U.K. or U.S. English), but also to a specific style (Jenkins, 2013). Some of the stylistic rules are well–documented, such as in the Chicago manual of style, the sixteenth edition of which is a staggering 1,026 pages long. These manuals are a form of linguistic prescriptivism that non–native speakers may find difficult to access and use, although they are accessible to anyone who is prepared to read the manual mostly commonly used in their discipline. Far more problematic are the unwritten rules of academic writing that are not always clear, even to native speakers (Clark &

Thompson, 2013).

The level of English and adherence to written and unwritten rules is so opaque that even L1 English speakers have to go through what Hyland (2009) describes as a “prolonged, and often tortuous, writing and peer review process” (p. 68), mediated by reviews and revisions from colleagues, proof readers, editors, and journal reviewers. Without this network of support from various sources, publication may be much more difficult. Academics without this sort of supporting network, such as English L2 academics who lack easy access to English L1 colleagues and proof readers, find their papers rejected more often and having to resubmit a greater number of times before publication (Belcher, 2007).

This highlights the importance of resources that provide English L2 academics with guidance, such as dictionaries, collocation guidelines, and so forth (Day and Gastel, 2006 ; Kawamoto, 2006 ; Kawamoto & Ohtake, 2007 ; Kawamoto & Ohtake, 2012).

An effect of the cycle of rejections, resubmissions and checking by editors and reviewers, which Mauranen (2006) describes as “a chain of gatekeepers” (p. 148), is that it tends to obscure the difficulties faced

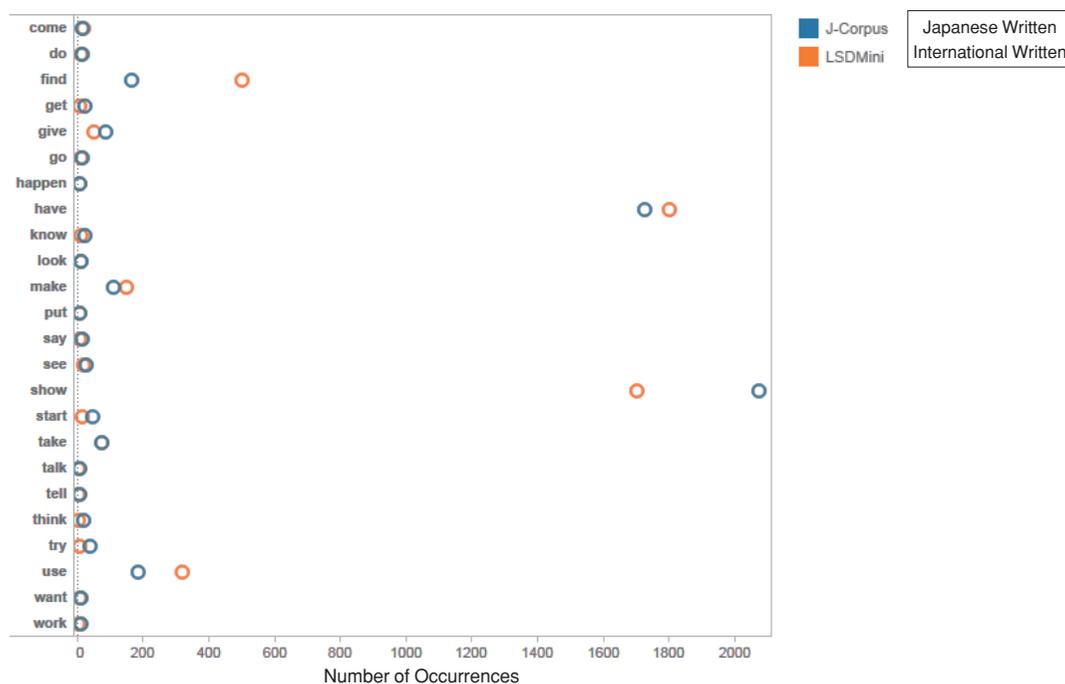


Figure 1 : LSDmini Corpus and J-Corpus Comparison

by English L2 academics in getting published as published materials have been extensively edited by the time they are published, and almost all irregularities in the English have been removed. Research comparing published articles will often show relatively minor difference for this reason. In order to avoid this, the J–Corpus was used, for the reasons previously mentioned.

What Figure 1 highlights is that, with some exceptions, there is relatively little variation in verb frequency between international academics (represented by the LSDmini corpus) and Japanese academics (represented by the J–Corpus).

#### 4.1 Key Differences between Japanese and International Academic Writing

There are instances where the differences between the two corpora are marked, with some verbs occurring twice or more frequently in one corpus than in the other. These differences will be explored here :

##### 4.1.1. Vocabulary Choices and Light Verbs

Some of the variation in verb frequency between the two corpora may be simply a matter of the vocabulary size of the authors. This may be a result of some L2 academics having a smaller lexicon.

This narrower range of vocabulary choices can become monotonous. For example, the verb “get” occurs 8.3 times more frequently in the J–Corpus than it does in the LSDmini corpus.

The verb “get”, which is often used in colloquial or idiomatic English, is also a “general–purpose” (Clark, 2009, p. 170) verb or light verb.

Clark (2009) examined the use of six of these light verbs (go, do, give, put, make and get) by young children, showing that they used light verbs twice as frequently as other verbs, but that the frequency decreased as the children grew older.

**Table 1 : Light Verb Relative Frequency**

	LSDmini Corpus	J–Corpus	Ratio
Go	140	360	1 : 2.6
Do	2,364	2,792	1 : 1.2
Give	2,455	5,698	1 : 2.3
Put	50	171	1 : 3.4
Make	3,021	5,825	1 : 1.9
Get	46	381	1 : 8.3

All six of the light verbs identified by Clark (2009) are present in this study, as shown in Table 1. For most light verbs the frequency in the J–Corpus is higher than that in the LSDmini Corpus. This implies that Japanese academics use more light verbs in their writing that is the international norm. Furthermore, the relative frequency of “go” and “get” are causes for concern, with “go” occurring more than twice as frequently in the J–Corpus, and “get” occurring 8.3 times more frequently. In an academic context, the higher frequency of these words may, consciously or unconsciously, damage the credibility of the study, with the reader linking the light verb repetition with childish or immature patterns.

The higher frequency of light verbs in the J–Corpus may be a product of the writers’ first language, with Miyamoto (2000) pointing out that Japanese language constructions like –suru often just mark action in a general sense, much in the way that “make” or “do” would. Direct translations from Japanese to English might result in a higher frequency of these light verbs.

An additional problem of direct translations is that it can result in collocations that appear unnatural or awkward. Table 2 shows the verb collocations associated with the noun “resistance”.

**Table 2 : "Resistance" Collocations**

	LSDmini (3,505)		J–Corpus (2,764)	
Resistance	confer	196	show	115
	increase	122	acquire	74
	acquire	45	increase	70
	mediate	44	cause	31
	enhance	32	confer	20

In international scientific academic English (the LSDmini corpus) the noun “resistance” most commonly collocates with the verb “confer”, while in Japanese scientific academic English (the J–Corpus) the most common collocation is “show”, with “confer” only the fifth most common collocation. The prevalence of the verb “show” in Japanese academic English writing may be evidence of a direct translation from the Japanese phrase, “*Teikousei wo shimesu*”.

Table 2 demonstrates that Japanese academics may be unaware of common collocations, and that their writing does not conform to normal patterns of written international academic English. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with using the word “show”, it is semantically weak, with several possible meanings, which makes it similar in many ways to light verbs.

Further, light verbs lack gravitas. Typically scientific and medical writing is rich in Graeco–Latin words (Ohtake & Morren, 2001 ; Crystal, 2004 ; Green, 2008). For example, in Table 2 all five of the verbs that international academics collocated with “resistance” are Latinate in origin. “Confer” originates from the Latin *conferre*, “increase” from the Latin *increscere*, “acquire” from the Latin *acquirere*, “mediate” from the Latin *mediatus*, and “enhance” from the Latin *inaltare*. Many of these Latinate verbs came to English through French (Crystal, 2004). By contrast the top collocation used by Japanese authors is “show”, which originates from the Germanic root skau–.

This preference for Graeco–Latin words may seem archaic and arbitrary in the modern setting ; however, Ohtake and Morren (2001) point out that conforming to expected writing patterns lends face validity. In essence this means that if the paper conforms to the expected stylistic norms it is less likely to be challenged.

This may seem at odds with the oft–repeated advice to prefer simpler words over more complex ones (Norris, 2014) ; however, in medical and academic circles the Dr. Fox effect is well known and very real (Ware & Williams, 1975).

Even when assessed by experts in the field, academic articles that eschew obfuscation and espouse elucidation by employing luculent lexical alternatives are rated less favorably than those that employ complex circumlocutions and abstruse constructions (Armstrong, 1980).

In short, clear writing using simple and easy to understand words is often regarded as simplistic and receives less favorable reviews from peers. Where possible, Japanese writers should prefer Graeco–Latin verbs as they are more likely to conform to the expected patterns of academic writing, and thereby lend weight to the writer’s arguments.

Light verbs are used more frequently in spoken communication than in formal written communication (Fellbaum, 1998), which suggests that there may also be some confusion about the differences between spoken and written academic English in Japan.

This higher frequency of light verbs in written academic English in Japan highlights five areas for improvement :

- Direct translations from Japanese to English may be unsuitable

- Excessive light verb use may be seen as unprofessional and should be avoided
- Where possible, prefer verbs of Graeco–Latin origin
- Japanese academics need to make a conscious effort to vary their word choices
- Japanese academics should be more aware of the differences between spoken and written academic English.

#### 4.1.2. Hedging and Weasel Words – Spoken vs Written

Analysis of the corpora showed that the verb “say” occurred 9 times more frequently in the J–Corpus than in the LSDmini corpus, with the lexical bundle “it has been said” occurring 35 times in the J–Corpus and not once in the LSDmini corpus. The reason for the absence of “it has been said” from the LSDmini corpus is because it might be considered hedging at best or weasel words at worst.

Hedging is including non–committal or vague statements, and it serves many different uses in academic English. Hedges are used to indicate uncertainty and speculation, provide qualifiers, and avoid making definitive statements where it would be inappropriate to do so.

These are examples of legitimate hedging. However, hedging is not always legitimate. Extreme examples of hedging are sometimes referred to as weasel words, words so vague and non–committal that they have little or no meaning, like a hollow egg shell after a weasel has eaten everything inside (Duffy, 2012).

The phrase “it has been said” is a good example of weasel words. Immediately this sort of statement invites the questions such as, “Who said it?”, “When did they say it?”, and “In what context?”.

In academia an unreferenced statement, or one that is not backed up by data presented in the study, is worthless and in fact worse than worthless because unsupported statements tend to attract the criticism of reviewers and peers, which can delay publication. Weasel words are best avoided.

The presence of the lexical bundle “it has been said” in scientific writing by Japanese academics is concerning. The excessive use of hedging was not isolated. Other evidence of hedging included the frequency of verbs such as :

- Think – J–Corpus : 21
- Try – J–Corpus : 32

This drew attention to a more wide-spread phenomenon in the J-Corpus, namely a degree of confusion regarding written and spoken styles and the role of hedging.

Riekkinen (2010) writes that hedging is typically used in spoken academic English as a strategy to soften criticism. Hedging is also appropriate in spoken academic English as the speaker often does not have a precise citation with them, or cannot recall a precise figure, and under those circumstances it is appropriate to properly indicate that one is uncertain. It is used sparingly in written academic English as the author has plenty of time to go and find a citation or look up the figures, and if they cannot find a citation or the precise figures then it is better to state it clearly as an opinion rather than introduce an element of uncertainty into the paper.

The high frequency of the verb “say” in the J-Corpus, 9 times more frequent than in the LSDmini corpus, highlighted another area of concern. The verb “say” refers to a spoken utterance, not something written. Numerous lexical bundles showed evidence of this confusion, such as :

- “... is said ...” (J-Corpus : 80 occurrences)
- “It can thus/therefore/may well be said that ...” (J-Corpus : 25 occurrences)
- “That is to say...” (J-Corpus : 23 occurrences)
- “... may be said ...” (J-Corpus : 17 occurrences)
- “It could not be said that ...” (J-Corpus : 8 occurrences)
- “... we can say ...” (J-Corpus : 5 occurrences)

In the LSDmini corpus, representing a reflective sample of international scientific academic written English, the verb “say” was used almost exclusively when reporting the results of spoken interviews, such as, “22% said they liked it more.”, and there only four examples of “say” being used in a similar fashion to how it was used in the J-Corpus, namely :

- “... these patients are said to have ...”
- “... genes in the human genome are said to have been ...”.
- “...they can be said to possess ...”
- “There is much to be said for this viewpoint ...”

The reason for the absence of “say” from the international corpus, except when reporting speech, is one of accuracy and precision. It is inaccurate to report something written as if it was spoken or to use lexical bundles normally reserved for reporting spoken English.

There were other examples of this confusion between stylistic differences between spoken and written academic English. For example, the verb “talk” still showed that Japanese academics (J–Corpus) used the term “talk” 14.5 times more frequently than their international colleagues (LSDmini corpus).

This suggested that there may be some confusion in Japanese academic circles regarding the difference between spoken and written academic English.

## 5. Written vs Spoken Academic English

The case studies presented in the previous section suggest that there may be some confusion in Japanese academics’ understanding of the difference between written academic English and spoken academic English. This may be because most of the work done on academic English in the past focused on written English (Mauranen, 2006, Mauranen, Hynninen & Ranta, 2010). While internationally the topic of spoken academic English has attracted more attention, it seems to have attracted comparatively little in Japan.

Written and spoken academic English are substantially different. Ädel (2010) examined the functions of spoken and written academic English. She found that spoken academic English performed all the functions of written academic English, but also performed some special functions which written academic English does not, such as “REPAIRING, MARKING ASIDES and CONTEXTUALISING ... MANAGING COMPREHENSION/CHANNEL and MANAGING AUDIENCE DISCIPLINE” (p. 69). There was also more focus in spoken academic English on what Ädel (2010) refers to as “MANAGING THE MESSAGE” (p. 89), which meant that speakers would often keep referring back to the key point of their presentation in order to aide listeners in making sense of how the current point relates to the central theme of the presentation.

To summarise, Ädel (2010) shows that the functions and foci of spoken academic English are different from those of written academic English.

Fortuño and Gómez (2005) also discuss the manner in which spoken academic English is different from written academic English, especially the choice of verbs and the tenses used. They note that spoken academic English is not homogenous. While there is a growing tendency towards a less formality and more interaction, there is considerable variation, and even cultural variation. They found, for example, that academics from the United States of America generally preferred a less formal style with more audience interaction, while British lecturers preferred a more formal style with less audience interaction.



## 6. Japanese Spoken Academic English

Figure 3 indicates that there is almost no overlap between Japanese L1 academics’ spoken English (as represented by the J–MICASE corpus) and international academic spoken English (as represented by the TED corpus).

While Fortuño and Gómez (2005) allow that there is wide variation in presentation styles in spoken academic English, citing Dudley–Evans and Johns’ (1981) three styles, “reading style... conversational style... rhetorical style” (p. 134), the current trend is, despite individual and cultural differences, generally towards a more interactive and less formal presentation style. The wide gulf between Japanese spoken academic English and international spoken academic English shown in Figure 3 is a source of considerable concern.

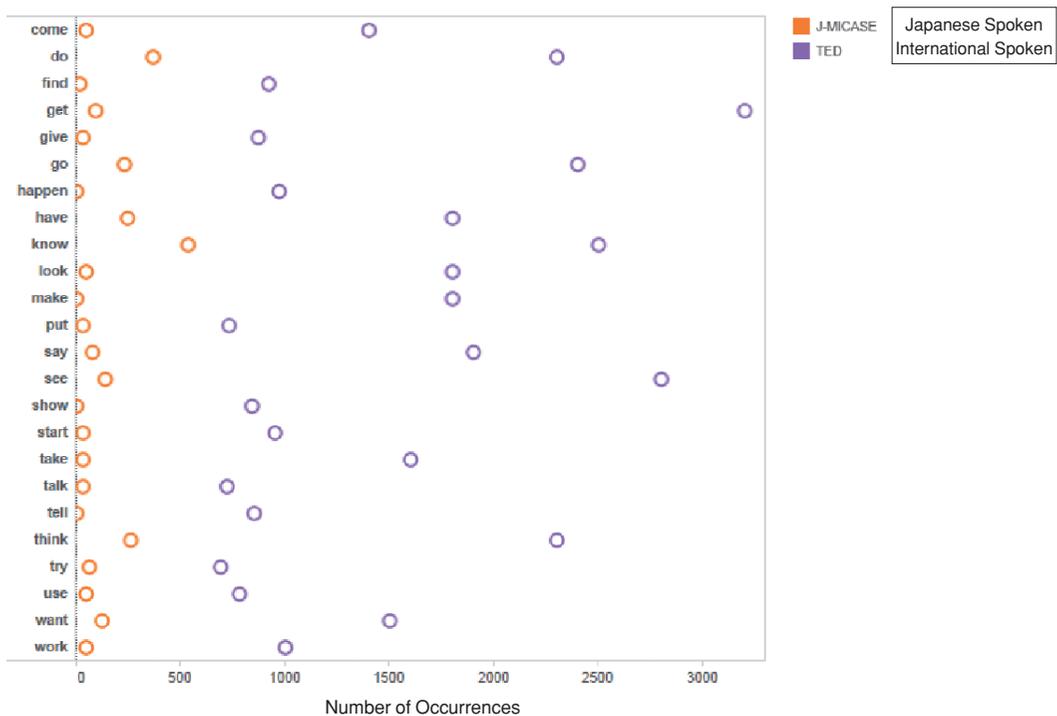


Figure 3 : TED Corpus and J-MICASE Corpus Comparison

Hyland (2009) stresses the importance of academic English as a requisite for participating in “academic discourse” (p. ix), and includes a number of activities that highlight the importance of spoken academic English ; “to deliver lectures, ... to participate in meetings, to present at international conferences ... are all part and parcel of every successful academic’s competence.” (p. ix). Hyland (2009, p. 29) presents a

fuller list of spoken and written academic English areas, showing that spoken academic English is at least as important as written academic English. Despite this, the area of spoken academic English appears to have received little attention in Japan.

Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011) in their review of ELF research, make the prediction that, “... those unable to orient themselves towards ELF, ... may be more at risk in future.” (p. 302). While Jenkins, et. al. (2011) were writing about English L1 academics who are unable to adjust to ELF, the comment is also true of English L2 academics who are unable to adjust to international ELF norms in spoken or written academic English.

It is therefore with the warning of Jenkins, et. al., (2011) in mind that we proceed with our examination of spoken academic English in Japan. In order to facilitate this discussion we will compare all four corpora to determine patterns in spoken academic English in Japan.

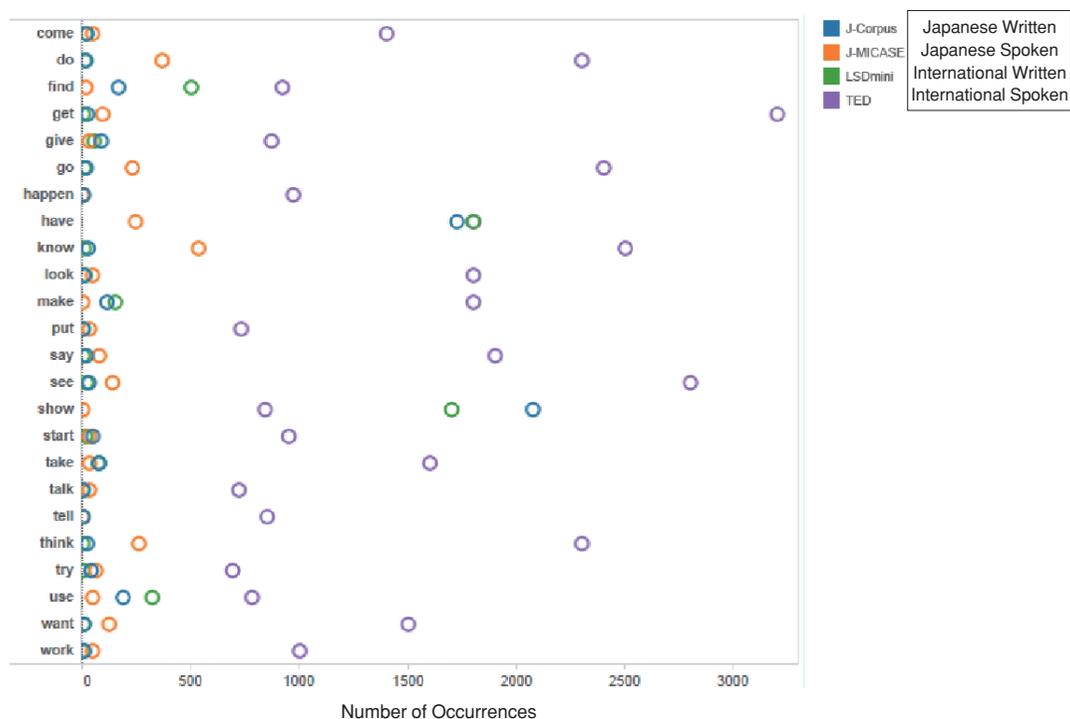


Figure 4 : LSDmini, J-MICASE, J-Corpus and TED Corpus

As can be seen in Figure 4, the spoken academic English of Japanese L1 academics (represented by the J-MICASE corpus) is closer in word choice to written international academic English (as represented by

the LSDmini corpus) than to spoken international academic English (as represented by the TED corpus).

While reading a prepared paper is a recognised and appropriate presentation style (Dudley–Evans & Johns, 1981, in Fortuño & Gómez, 2005), it is not in line with current international spoken academic English norms, and does not encourage audience involvement and engagement.

Rowley–Jolivet and Carter–Thomas (2005) point out that the language, “at international scientific conferences nowadays, is almost exclusively English” (p. 47), and argue that “conference presentation (CP)” (p. 45) English is a critical academic skill.

In order to give concrete recommendations to academics in Japan seeking to improve their spoken English, the following section will present some cases from the corpora to highlight some of the most serious areas of concern.

## 6.1 Managing the Message

Young (1991) writes about the importance of jussive imperatives in managing the key message of a presentation. Ädel (2010) would refer to this as managing the message.

Oral presentations differ from written presentations in that the people listening to a presentation cannot flip back a few pages to refresh their memory about something that was covered earlier, and even when handouts are provided it is useful to draw the audience’s attention to relevant portions of the handout. Examples of jussive imperatives would be :

- “Remember I talked about...” (Young, 1991, p.78)
- “... go back and look at...” (Young, 1991, p.78)

In Figure 4, one can see that certain key words, such as “talk”, are far more frequent in the TED corpus than in the J–MICASE corpus. The corpora were queried to obtain examples of how these verbs were being used.

### 6.1.1. "Talk"

In the TED corpus the verb “talk” was used in a variety of ways, and this section will focus on the most common functions.

There are numerous examples of “talk” being used to manage the core message of the presentation in the TED corpus, for example :

- **Establishing the core message** – “What I want to basically talk about is...”, “I’m going to be talking about ...”, and “... what I’m going to be talking about ...” are good examples of how the speakers establish the core message from the very start of the presentation.
- **Revisiting the core message** – “We’ve also talked about ...”, “We are talking about...”, “I’ve been talking so far about ...”, “I talked to you about ...”, “I just talked about...” and “We’ve been talking about ...” are examples of how the speaker draws the audience’s attention back to the core message of the presentation and how the section that has just been presented relates to the core message.
- **Focusing the core message** – “... I can talk about ...”, and “... we could talk about ...” are examples of where the speaker wants to briefly mention something as being relevant and show that they are not ignoring this factor, but rather excluding it for the sake of maintaining focus in the presentation.
- **Reinforcing the core message** – “I’ve talked about ...”, and “We’ve talked about ...” are examples of how the presenter revisits the key points of the presentation, with these lexical bundles particularly common near or at the end of presentations as a means of reiterating the core message of the presentation.

Only two examples using “talk” to establish the core message were found in the J-MICASE corpus, and there were no examples of revisiting, managing or reinforcing the core message.

Japanese academics are recommended to examine these four functions of “talk”, and apply them to their presentations to help establish, revisit, focus and reinforce the core message in order to provide presentations that are focused and assist the audience in understanding the key point the academic wishes to make.

#### 6.1.2. "Going to" + verb

A very common collocation in the TED talks was, “going to” + verb, and examples are presented here of this structure being used in all four of categories of managing the core message of a presentation.

- **Establishing the core message** – “I’m just going to show you ...”, “I’m going to argue that

...”, “I’m going to be talking about ..”, “I’m going to talk about ...”, “What I’m going to do is ...”, “We’re going to look at ...” and “ ... we’re going to talk about ...”

- **Revisiting the core message** – “I’m going to ask you to repeat that ...”, and “I’m going to re-view ...”
- **Focusing the core message** – “Now I’m going to focus on ...”, “I’m going to skip through ...”, “I’m not going to get into ...”, “I’m not going to talk about ...”, “... we’re not going to deal with ...”, and “... I’m only going to say ...”
- **Reinforcing the core message** – “I’m going to leave you with that.”

## 6.2 Audience Involvement

Fortuño and Gómez (2005) write about the importance of maintaining a connection with the audience, and Ädel (2010) writes of managing the audience.

Apart from managing the core message of the presentation the use of the construction “going to” also creates a sense of dynamism and activity in the presentation, giving the audience a sense of participation.

For example the lexical bundle “I’m now going to...” is followed by a series of active verbs such as, “show”, “talk”, “move”, “play”, and so forth, giving the audience a sense of active involvement in the presentation despite their passive listening stance.

The verb “talk” was also used in a similar way, to reduce distance between the audience and the speaker, such as :

- Creating a sense of audience permission and involvement – “I want to talk to you about ...”, “I’d like to talk to you today about ...”, “Let’s talk about ..” and “Let me talk about ..”
- Creating the illusion of dialogue – “That’s what we’re talking about.” and “We are talking about...”

Reducing distance between the speaker and the audience is an important way of making the audience feel involved and invested in the presentation, even when they have little or no input.

In written academic English, complex arguments can be presented and supported by evidence, such as references to other studies, and the reader has the leisure to consider the arguments carefully, check the references and consider the evidence.

In spoken academic English the complexity of arguments is reduced to a few core points, and the listener does not have the time to check references or consider the evidence being offered for longer than it takes for the speaker to move on to the next point.

As a result the role of making the audience feel involved in the presentation as participants, rather than looking in at the presentation from the outside as critics, is vital in presentations as it makes the audience more sympathetic to the presenter and helps to deflect criticism. This is not to say that a poorly constructed or badly thought-out idea would escape criticism by using these techniques, but rather that fostering a sense of audience involvement helps to compensate for the difficulties of presenting complex ideas in a spoken format.

### 6.3 Light Verbs in Spoken Academic English

Finally, Ädel (2010) refers to managing audience comprehension. Understanding the limitations of spoken academic English is critical to understanding how to deliver a clear and comprehensible message.

A carefully written article might easily address a dozen or more ideas, dealing with each in turn in neatly numbered sections for easy reference.

In spoken academic English the speaker is limited by the time they have to present, how much information the audience can remember, how complex ideas can be presented in a spoken format, and so forth. While audio-visual aides, such as videos, slides, and so forth, may assist in this endeavour, there is a limit to how much information can be presented in spoken academic English.

As such, spoken academic English can be seen to be substantially simpler than written academic English. Figure 4 shows a large number of light verbs, indicating simpler language choices.

This is an area where Japanese academics merely need to exaggerate an existing tendency, namely the existing tendency to use light verbs.

Earlier in this paper Clark’s (2009) findings on light verb use were discussed in the context of written academic English, with corpus analysis showing an over–abundance of these verbs in written academic English in Japan. Japanese academics were advised to avoid the light verbs “go”, “do”, “give”, “put”, “make” and “get” in written academic English where they could find alternatives.

Japanese academics should keep in mind that these verbs are far more common in international spoken academic English, as can be seen in Table 3.

Light verbs are used in spoken academic English because they simplify grammar (Clark, 2009), make the message more accessible to the audience, and make the speaker sound more casual and friendly (Ädel, 2010 ; Fortuño & Gómez, 2005 ; Young, 1991).

**Table 3 : Light Verb Relative Frequency**

	TED Corpus	J–MICASE	J–Corpus	LSDmini Corpus
Go	2,376	229	29	11
Do	2,277	366	223	139
Give	861	31	456	196
Put	737	46	14	4
Make	1,782	142	466	242
Get	3,168	105	30	4

(All figures in Table 3 have been adjusted to allow comparisons between corpora)

The key point that Japanese academics should carry away from this study is that spoken academic English is, in many ways, simpler than written academic English as the listener does not have the opportunity to re–read a paragraph, but rather the language used should be simplified, and the core message condensed down to a few key points.

Presentations are not the same as papers, and arriving at a presentation and reading the same article that one intends to publish in a journal is not in line with current norms in academic English.

## 7. Conclusions

This study has highlighted several problem areas in academic English in Japan, for both written and spoken English, and has made suggestions on how these areas can be addressed. The problem areas and suggested remedies are as follows :

## Japanese Written Academic English : Areas of Concern and Recommendations

### 1. Excessive use of light verbs in Japanese written academic English

Recommendations :

- i . Vary word choices
- ii . Avoid excessive light verbs use
- iii . Avoid direct translations from Japanese
- iv . Be aware of the differences between spoken and written academic English

### 2. Excessive hedging

Recommendations :

- i . Avoid statements that cannot be attributed directly to a source
- ii . Avoid statements that do not contribute evidence or weight to the argument being presented
- iii . Avoid phrases such as, “it has been said” or similar phrases. A simple rule should be to ask who it was said by, and when. If these questions cannot be answered then the phrase should not be used.
- iv . Do not use spoken idioms such as “say” and “talk” when referencing something that was actually written. These are spoken conventions, not written conventions, and once again underline a lack of clarity on the difference between spoken and written English.

## Japanese Spoken Academic English : Areas of Concern and Recommendations

### 3. Written academic style makes managing the message in presentations difficult

Recommendations :

- i . Establish the core message of the presentation clearly.
- ii . Revisit the core message of the presentation repeatedly, and link back to the core message at the end of each section
- iii . Focus the core message by excluding portions that may appear in the written version of the study, but are too long or too complex to explore in a spoken format
- iv . Reinforce the core message at the end of the paper
- v . In section 6.1 of this paper some phrases used to perform these functions (establishing, revisiting, focusing and reinforcing) are recommended

### 4. Written academic conventions make connecting with and managing the audience difficult

Recommendations :

- i . Create the illusion of audience permission and participation

- ii. Create a sense that this is a dialogue rather than a monologue
- iii. Use the phrases provided in section 6.2 to achieve these two objectives, help to deter criticism, and avoid interruptions

5. Insufficient use of light verbs in spoken academic English makes the speaker difficult to follow, particularly to an international audience who may not be English L1 speakers

Recommendations :

- i. Use light verbs more frequently in spoken communication in order to communicate more clearly and simply, which is important given the limitations of the spoken mode.

On a final note, it should be added that this study focused exclusively on exploring the differences between spoken and written academic English through verb frequency and collocations in the corpora. This does not by any means represent the full range of differences between spoken and written academic English. Perhaps as a by-product of corpus analysis having started with written corpora there is a tendency to try and simplify spoken corpora to the same level. Further research is required into spoken academic English corpus analysis.

### Acknowledgment

This research was partially supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) (No. 24590622 ) of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, Japan.

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