Chiharu Tsurutani* and Eliyathamby Selvanathan

Influence of generational cohort and experience with non-native speakers on evaluation of speakers with foreign-accented speech

Abstract: This article reports the effect of participants' generational differences and subsequent amount of contact with non-native speakers on the perception of foreign-accented speech in the context of internationalization of Japan.

The participants were people in their 50s or 60s who were in variety of occupations. They spent their youth from the 1970s to the 1980s in Japan, when Japanese society went through a rapid change in terms of internationalization. Since then, the number of foreign residents has tripled and non-native speakers are commonly encountered on the street and in media. The participants' perception of speech was compared with that of the younger generation to determine whether the historical period in which people grew up affects their perception. It was found that regardless of the age of native listeners, foreign-accented speech was evaluated less positively than native speech. However, experience of contact with non-native speakers made a difference in some aspects of the judgment by native listeners.

Keywords: foreign accent, language attitude, Japanese language, generation, perception of foreign accents

***Corresponding author:** Chiharu Tsurutani: Griffith University, Australia.

E-mail: c.tsurutani@griffith.edu.au

Eliyathamby Selvanathan: ■■■■

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1 Introduction

Attitudes towards accented speech have been investigated mainly using accented English in English-speaking countries (Lippi-Green 1994; Bayard et al. 2001; Lindemann 2003; Munro et al. 2006; Eisenclas and Tsurutani 2011). Foreign-accented speakers are generally perceived negatively in terms of intelligence in

particular, but more positively in terms of social attractiveness. In general, the stronger the perceived accent, the more negative the attitude of listeners is (Callan et al. 1983; Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010). However, it was not known whether the discrimination towards accented speakers occurred only among English native speakers. In order to complement the existing attitudinal studies, Tsurutani (2012) investigated native-speaker attitudes towards foreign accents in a language other than English, Japanese. Her study on the attitude of university students found that the Japanese participants form a better impression of speakers with fluent native speech than with non-native speech, as do people in English-speaking countries. That is, negative attitudes towards foreign-accented speakers can be seen in any language society if native listeners judge the speaker purely on the basis of speech without any other information on the speaker. The study employed participants from two areas, a metropolitan area and a small country city where foreign residents are few. There was no statistical difference between the results of the two groups. However, the metropolitan group had a slightly more flexible view towards foreign-accented speakers. This result implied that the actual experience of contact with non-native speakers may influence the perception of native listeners. The use of university students also raised the possibility that Japanese native listeners' negative view towards foreign accent might be limited to younger generations who had become accustomed to the existence of non-native speakers in social media. The perception of foreign-accented speech has been investigated from a sociolinguistic perspective in various studies. However, most studies have used university students as their participants for the purpose of obtaining a homogeneous pool of participants. In order to determine the language attitude of society as a whole, perceptions of a different generation will need to be investigated.

In this study, people from older generations participated in the same perception test as that completed by university in the previous study (Tsurutani 2012). Due to the age of participants, they may differ in terms of life experiences, and such differences may result in considerable variety in their views. They spent their youth in late last century; thus we call them *Youth of the 20th century*. Results of the current study will be compared with the results obtained from university students, namely *Youth of the 21st century*. While language attitude might differ depending on the environment people are placed in and their individual interest, the trend and opportunities the social and historical background offer to individuals can shape people's views to some extent. In this study the difference between people who grew up in the daybreak of Japan's internationalization and people who were born after its establishment are compared. The aim is to observe their ideological differences/similarities towards foreign-accented speech in order to depict the view of Japanese society as a whole.

Japanese peoples' view towards foreigners from the west

Japan has been seen as a mono-racial country for centuries and foreign migrants have never been visibly dominant due to the country's history and strict migrant policy. Strictly speaking Japan is not a mono-racial country, considering the existence of Korean and Chinese residents and minority ethnic groups such as Ainu and Okinawan (Sugimoto 2003). However, migrants who have a different appearance due to their biological race, that is, carcasoid or negroid, as opposed to mongoloid, are not seen in Japan as commonly as in western societies.

Japan's society has tended to admire western culture and westerners since Japan was opened to the west after the Meiji restoration in 1868 (Tipton 2008).

The admiration of western culture is evident in two significant periods in Japan's history. First, through the modernization of society after the Meiji restoration, the Japanese government hired many foreign professionals (*Oyatoi gaijin*) so that Japanese people could learn western systems, technology and lifestyle; and Japanese scholars and government officials were sent to western countries to absorb knowledge and industrial skills. Secondly, after losing World War II against the western allies in 1945, Japanese people again realized the superiority of western, particularly American, economic power. Many became pro-American and copied American fashion and lifestyle while industries were eager to learn modern technology from the U.S. When *internationalization* (*kokusaika*) became a catch word in 1980s, its principle ideal was to promote cultural exchange with the west, particularly the U.S., and young Japanese followed trends in American fashion and culture (McKenzie 2010; Tipton 2008). Japan's internationalization (*kokusaika*) originated from the necessity of the global expansion of the Japanese market in the 1970s to 1980s (Yoshimatsu 2000). *Kokusaika* can be viewed as a Japanese version of the discourse of globalization, which is described as "time-space compression through communication technologies, transnational corporations and the massive trans-border flow of people" (Harvey 1989; Iwabuchi 1994). However, its realization in the Japanese society appeared as enthusiasm for foreign cultures and foreign travel among many Japanese. In the 20th century, the mainstream attitude towards westerners was that they were not required to learn the Japanese language; rather, Japanese people would endeavor to learn western language and culture.

The participants of this study spent their youth roughly 30–35 years ago, in the 1970s to 1980s, thus, they are considered to be Youth of the 20th century. English language schools gained sudden popularity in 1970s and the majority of the participants eagerly attended classes after school throughout their junior and

senior high school days. During their schooling, although English language was compulsory, exchange programs or any sort of international communication was non-existent. Due to the exchange rate (US\$1 = 360 yen) being unfavorable against the Japanese currency, overseas travel was possible only for diplomats or a limited number of wealthy people. As a result, imported goods were expensive and luxury items people admired but could not afford at department stores. They were called *Hakurai* (brought by ship across the ocean) as opposed to domestic products. It is known that some people who are desperate to practice English in non-English speaking countries are keen to strike a conversation with any foreign visitors they spot on the street. This scene was also common in Japan in the 20th century, which might have decreased after overseas travel became relatively affordable for ordinary citizens and the number of foreign residents increased in recent years. In 1970, World Expo was held in Japan for the first time and attracted a massive crowd who were eager to know the world outside Japan. The participants of the current study grew up in the peak of Japan's curiosity regarding the west.

In the last two decades the social network has gone through a dramatic change through the availability of personal computers, the internet and the subsequent online resources for social communication such as skype, you tube and facebook around the world. People are able to obtain news on the day that the actual event happened on the other side of globe. Young generations are familiar with the existence of foreign exchange students in their classroom and can travel overseas as part of school excursion. It would be hard for young people to imagine that overseas travel, international exchange programs of any kind or foreign colleagues (excluding long-term foreign residents from Korea and China whose ancestors migrated to Japan before World War II) were extremely uncommon and seeing foreign visitors on the street was very rare among ordinary citizens of Japan 30 to 40 years ago.

On the other hand, there has been a sense of national pride and cultural superiority long evident through terms such as *wakon yosai* (Japanese spirit and western technology) in the 19th century (Sugimoto 2003) and the establishment of the Japan Foundation in the early 1970s to promote Japanese language and culture abroad (Tipton 2008). The concept of *Nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese) claiming Japanese language and culture are unique (Suzuki 1978; Gottlieb 2005) upholds that only those who are born to parents of Japanese blood, grow up in Japanese society and speak Japanese from childhood can ever really understand the language and how it works in Japanese society (Carroll 2001). Some still hold this view even though around the world there are millions of non-Japanese people who do not satisfy all three criteria but are highly competent in Japanese language (Gottlieb 2005). Consequently inside Japan ordinary Japanese citizens have not really expected foreign visitors to speak Japanese when they first meet on the

1 street. Two or three decades ago, it was uncommon to see a westerner who could
2 speak Japanese, whether non-fluent or fluent, and thus westerners who spoke
3 Japanese were a novelty and were respected (Neustupny 1986).

4 This socio-historical background suggests that Japanese people, older gen-
5 erations in particular, can have very positive attitudes towards the foreign ac-
6 cents of westerners speaking Japanese.

9 3 Foreign residents in Japan

12 Currently 2.1 million foreign residents live in Japan (Homusho 2011), but roughly
13 60 percent of them are Korean and Chinese people who have been long-term resi-
14 dents and live as fluent native speakers of Japanese. Even though some of these
15 Korean and Chinese citizens have a slight foreign accent, they are not easily rec-
16 ognized as non-Japanese since their physical appearance does not distinguish
17 them. The remaining one million non-Japanese residents are only a small portion
18 (less than 1 percent) of Japan's population of 120 million, and are concentrated in
19 big cities. Although the number of foreign residents is on the rise and the number
20 of international students is at an historical high of 123,829 in 2010 (Japan Student
21 Services Organization 2010), compared with other migration nations, foreign
22 residents are still a very small minority in Japan. Nevertheless, the number of
23 registered foreign residents whose ethnicity is noticeable on the street has in-
24 creased dramatically. The number of foreign residents registered in 2011 (2,134,151)
25 is 3 times as many as the number (708,458) in 1970. In addition, 90 percent of
26 registered foreign residents were Chinese or Korean in 1970, but their propor-
27 tion in the entire foreign population in Japan decreased to 55.8 percent by 2009
28 (Homusho 2009). This means the actual number of foreign residents with notice-
29 able foreign appearance increased roughly from 70,000 to 850,000; that is, there
30 was a ten times increase in 40 years. (See Figure 1).

31 This increased presence of foreign residents in Japan has likely helped to
32 shift Japanese people's attitudes towards non-native speakers of Japanese. If so,
33 the shift may be evident towards western people who are visibly non-Japanese
34 and among the young generation who readily accept the presence of non-native
35 speakers. Japanese television today screens westerners speaking Japanese flu-
36 ently or at near-native level, but chances for ordinary Japanese people to have
37 direct contact with westerners are still mostly limited to particular areas in big
38 cities or at famous travel destinations that foreign tourists visit in Japan. This
39 study was conducted in a region which is not adjacent to metropolitan areas and
40 a typical regional prefecture, using participants aged over 50 years who have

Fig. 1: The number of foreign residents and their origin 1948–2011 (Homusho 2011)

various occupations. Results will be compared with those from a similar study using younger participants.

4 Methods

4.1 Participants

A total of 79 people ($M = 35$, $F = 44$) from Yamaguchi prefecture participated in the study. All had given prior agreement to participate in the study. They were recruited through the community and work organizations, and were paid a small amount of money for their participation. The participants' ages ranged from 53 to 60. Consequently, their personal contact with non-native speakers is limited compared to younger generations and varies depending on their occupation.

Yamaguchi prefecture is located at the edge of the main island of Japan and its population of 1,420,953 is the 25th largest of 47 prefectures in Japan. Foreign visitors are rare in Yamaguchi prefecture. This is also the case in other rural prefectures away from metropolitan areas, unless the prefecture has well-known tourist attractions, such as the Peace memorial in Hiroshima or the ski resorts in Hokkaido.

With 11,801 registered foreign residents (1.3% of its population), Yamaguchi prefecture has the 23rd largest foreign population among 47 prefectures (Yamaguchi Kokusaika Handbook 2011). Apart from Tokyo, which accommodates 20 percent of the foreign population of Japan, most regional prefectures accommodate less than 2.5 percent of Japan's foreign residents (Homusho 2012). Yamaguchi prefecture is a sister city of provinces in China, Korea and Spain, but their ties are nothing outstanding among other prefectures of Japan. Thus, we could say Yamaguchi prefecture is an average prefecture in terms of internationalization. Slightly more than 50 percent of the participants (41/79) had never had communication with non-native speakers while the rest of the participants (37) had some experience of meeting non-native speakers, who were trainees, language teachers, tour guides or exchange students. The former group was classified as Group 0 (No contact with non-native speakers) and the latter, Group 1 (some contact with non-native speakers).

The distribution of occupation of all the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Occupation of participants

	Group 1		Group 0		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Company worker	1	5	9	5	20
Civil servant	5	5	7	1	18
Teacher	3	5	1	0	9
House wife	0	7	0	14	21
Business owner	0	0	4	0	4
Medical profession	3	0	0	0	3
Counsellor	0	1	0	0	1
Other	2	0	0	1	3
Total	14	23	21	21	79

4.1.1 Comparative group

A perception test of the same format as that used in the current study was conducted with university students from two areas in 2010 (Tsurutani 2012). The group who resided in the metropolitan area were chosen for comparison since some members of this group had contact with foreign students. The comparison group consisted of 58 university students ($M = 7$, $F = 51$) who were studying subjects related to international relations at universities in Tokyo at the time of data collection. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years, which means they were born between 1990 and 1992. Some of their lecturers are non-native speakers and 60 percent of the group (32/58) had a foreign friend who spoke Japanese with them.

4.2 Materials

Participants were asked to listen to readings by native and non-native male speakers. The reading material was a short passage, a Japanese translation of *The North Wind and the Sun*, which is known for testing English pronunciation of English L2 learners. The researcher modified the translated passage so that it contained phonemes and sound sequences (e.g., the contrast of long and short vowels and consonants) phonetically difficult for native English speakers. A romanized version of the passage follows with underlining of geminate consonants, long vowels, contracted sounds and word initial *tsu* and *fu* that are difficult for non-native Japanese speakers to pronounce.

Kitakaze to taiyoo ga dochiraga tsuyoika arasoimashita. Sonotoki, hitori no tabibito ga michi o kudatte kuruno o mite, taiyoo ga "Anohito no uwagi o totta hoo ga tsuyoi to ierunjanai. Mazu kimikara da" to itte kumo no ushironi kakuremashita. Kitakaze wa tabibito ni mukatte byuu byuu kaze o fukitsukemashita. Shikashi, kitakaze ga fukebafukuhodo, gyakuni tabibito wa uwagi o shikkarito osaetsuke tobasarenaiyooni shimashita. Kekkyoku, kitakaze wa akiramerushika nakattanodesu.

[The north wind and the sun argued which of them has greater strength. Then, the sun saw a man traveling down a road far below. "As a test of strength, let us see which of us can take the coat off of that man. You go first", said the sun and hid behind the cloud. The wind blew so hard, but the harder the wind blew down the road, the tighter the shivering man clung to his coat. In the end the north wind could do nothing but give up.]

4.3 Speakers of stimulus tape

Six male speakers, of whom two were native Japanese speakers, two were non-native speakers with a mild accent, and two were non-native speakers with a heavy accent, recorded the Japanese passage. Two speakers were used for each group to try to minimize the influence of characteristics of a particular voice on listeners' judgment. At the time of the study all six speakers were university academics or researchers in Japan and Australia. The four non-native speakers were all native Australian and British English speakers who had lived in Japan for more than a few years.

The strength of accent of the six speakers was classified according to the judgment of three experienced native-speaking Japanese language teachers. These judges marked the reading of the four non-native speakers using a Likert scale with potential responses ranging from 1 (native like) to 9 (non-native like). Speech with an average score below 5 was regarded as being slightly accented, and an average score above 5 indicated a heavy accent. The language backgrounds of the speakers are presented in Table 2.

Recordings of the readings were made in a sound-treated room with high-fidelity audio equipment. Speech rate and pitch range data were also measured since they could affect the listeners' judgments of each speaker's personality. All speakers read the passage at a similar speed, taking from 48 to 61 seconds (average reading duration was 53 seconds). Heavily accented speech was perhaps inevitably slower than the average. Pitch range differed across speakers from 78 Hz to 178 Hz, as seen in Table 2. Since the two levels of non-native speakers had both narrow and wide pitch range, the effect of pitch range was minimized.

Table 2: Voice characteristics of the six speakers

	<i>Speakers' L1</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Years of residence in Japan</i>	<i>Accent strength</i>	<i>Reading duration (seconds)</i>	<i>Pitch range (Hz)</i>
S1*	<i>Aus. English</i>	53	2.5*	2.3 Mild	51	81 (177–96)
S2	<i>Japanese</i>	53	–	1	49	174 (251–77)
S3	<i>Aus. English</i>	42	14	4 Mild	54	162 (228–66)
S4	<i>Aus. English</i>	39	9	6.3 Heavy	55	137 (214–77)
S5	<i>Brit. English</i>	36	2	8 Heavy	61	78 (168–70)
S6	<i>Japanese</i>	43	–	1	48	168 (259–91)

*S1, a Japanese language teacher in Australia, was judged to have only a mild accent despite his short period of residence in Japan.

4.4 Procedure

Recordings of the six short readings were stored onto CD and distributed to the participants. As they had various occupations and work commitments, it was difficult to collect them in the same venue. The participants were asked to listen to the recordings and to try to imagine each speaker's personality. They were not told whether the speakers were non-native speakers. A listening task was conducted, using the following instruction:

This research aims to investigate the perception, from sociolinguistic point of view, of Japanese people who reside in Japan. You will listen to the recordings of six male speakers who read *The north wind and the sun*. Judge the character of the speaker and circle the number on the Likert scale with potential responses ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very). There is no right and wrong answer. Just follow your intuition as a native listener. Also imagine the occupation and mother tongue of the speaker. The entire task will take 15–20 minutes.

The recordings were presented in two different orders, randomized between participants, in an attempt to reduce order effects. Order 1 was used for 38

participants and Order 2 was used for 41 participants. The correlation between results for Order 1 and 2 was 0.910 ($P = 0.01$). Thus, there was taken to be no significant difference in results between the two orderings.

The beginning of the CD presented the first five seconds of each speaker's recording, so that listeners could gain an idea of each speaker. Then, the participants rated the speaker using a 7-point semantic differential scale with anchors of *not at all* (1) and *very* (7). The scale included 13 personality traits, in random order, that fall under the categories of competence, integrity and social attractiveness (Lambert 1967):

Competence	[competent, knowledgeable, intelligent, confident]
Integrity	[serious, sincere, organized, enthusiastic]
Social attractiveness	[kind, patient, friendly, cool, entertaining]

After listening to and rating each speaker, participants were asked open-ended questions regarding their perception of the speaker's likely occupation and native language. At the end of the task, participants indicated their occupation, age, gender, and experience of interacting with non-native speakers. The entire procedure took approximately 15 minutes to complete for all six readers.

5 Results and analysis

This section presents the data analysis using various statistical techniques for the two groups, *Youth of the 20th Century* and *Youth of the 21st Century*. Individual results then will be compared, and difference and similarities between the two groups will be discussed.

5.1 Identifying native tongue of speakers

An open-ended question asked participants to identify each speaker's native tongue. Tables 3 and 4 present information on the number and percentages of participants from both groups who correctly identified the speakers' native tongue.

As can be seen from Table 3, about 40 percent of the participants believed that English was the native tongue of Speakers 1, 3 and 4, which is a slightly higher frequency than among *Youth of the 21st century* shown in Table 4. Approximately 28–37 percent of older participants believed that the native-like speech of speakers S6 and S2 as belonging to non-native speakers. Some listeners were

Table 3: Identification of speakers by participants – Youth of the 20th century

	Correctly identified	Incorrectly identified			
		European	Asian	African etc.	No response
S1 Mild	32 (41%)	33*	13 (5**)	0	1
S3 Mild	30 (38%)	30	15 (3)	2	0
S4 Heavy	34 (43%)	32	10 (3)	2	1
S5 Heavy	16 (20%)	21	25 (2)	12	0
S6 Japanese	50 (63%)	12	14	2	1
S2 Japanese	57 (72%)	13	6	2	1

*The number of responses

**The number in brackets represents the number of respondents who identified the speaker as Japanese

Table 4: Identification of speakers by participants – Youth of the 21st century

	Correct	Incorrect			
		European	Asian	African etc.	No reply
S1 Mild	15 (27%)	27	11 (0)	0	5
S3 Mild	20 (34%)	24	5 (0)	3	6
S4 Heavy	22 (37%)	24	4 (0)	2	6
S5 Heavy	9 (15%)	16	19 (0)	7	7
S6 Japanese	30 (50%)	5	25	0	8
S2 Japanese	40 (70%)	10	2	0	6

over-cautious and suspected that the foreign-accented speakers were native speakers who feigned a foreign accent.

Table 4 provides details for the younger participants. As can be seen from Table 4, the correct identification rates varied from 15 to 37 percent for non-native speakers, and 50 to 70 percent for native speakers. About 30 to 50 percent of listeners believed that the native-like speech of S2 and S6 could belong to non-native speakers. It is understandable that participants could not easily identify the native tongue of non-native speakers, whose accent is less familiar to the participants and can easily suggest several possibilities. Some older participants confessed they had no idea and just guessed. It is imagined that most participants did so without a background of linguistic knowledge and clues to look for in their knowledge. Considering that many fluent foreign speakers of Japanese appear on TV shows across Japan, participants' overestimation of non-native

speakers' ability is also reasonable.¹ However, some participants in both groups of listeners found it difficult to identify whether a speaker was Japanese-native, even though speaking in the participants' own native tongue. This misjudgment was contrary to our expectation.

A one-way ANOVA was used to test whether there was any significant difference in the rate of correct identification between the *Youth of the 20th century* and *Youth of the 21st century* groups. The test statistic was $F = 0.449$ with a p-value of 0.52, suggesting that the two groups do not differ in the rate of correct responses. The ability to identify the native tongue of accented speakers is similar between the two groups.

5.2 Personality traits and status evaluation

5.2.1 Influence of speaker's accent on Japanese natives' judgment

The participants' ratings of their expectations of the six speakers' personality traits are presented in Figure 2, followed by the ratings by the younger group in Figure 3. These graphs present the average score of all participants' evaluations, with 1 as least positive evaluation on the scale and 7 the most positive.

Participants' judgments were most positive for the two native speakers, followed by the two speakers with mild accents and lastly the two with heavy accents. The difference between the participants' evaluations of native and non-native speakers was greater for Competence and Integrity than for Social Attractiveness; this is a typical pattern of judgment towards accented speakers (Seggie et al. 1982; McKenzie 2010). However, unlike the ratings provided by the younger participants (see Figure 3), older participants' evaluations of native speakers are higher than non-native speakers in all aspects. The difference between the older and younger groups was tested using MANOVA with regard to the three categories (Competence, Integrity and Social Attractiveness) and their corresponding subcategories. Judgments of Competence (knowledgeable) and Social Attractiveness (patient) in the case of mild accent, and Social Attractiveness (entertaining) in the case of native speakers, were found to be statistically significant at the .05 level between the two groups. The MANOVA results also reveal that when heavy accented speakers were considered, none of the judgments differed significantly between older and younger group. The older group appears to be

¹ Some foreign TV talents have lived in Japan for more than one decade and have a Japanese spouse. One of them, Nishanta from Sri Lanka, has a PhD from a Japanese university and has been lecturing Asian economics in Japanese at Japanese universities (Nishanta 2012).

Fig. 2: Participants' average score for speakers' likely characters – Youth of the 20th century

lieve that mild-accented speakers are more knowledgeable and patient, and native speakers are more entertaining, compared to the younger participants. The older participants seem to believe that an intelligent person is socially attractive as well. Intelligence is highly valued in Japanese society. This tendency was observed in the responses from younger group, but was not as strong as in the older group.

A good example of this respect for intelligence in Japanese society is found in Japanese quiz shows where the participants' academic knowledge and common sense are tested using school entrance exam questions. The participants are television personalities, actors or comedians who indicate the university from which they graduated, and sometimes compete with scholars. Apart from scholars who are supposed to be knowledgeable, the other participants had occupations not typically associated with high intelligence. However, high performers of the show are praised and respected by the MC and the audience in the studio. In contrast, participants who answered common questions for school entrance examinations (sometimes very difficult) wrongly are ridiculed. There are no programs like this outside Japan, at least in western countries. Japanese society is notorious with its fierce competition in education and tends to assign undue importance to academic background. Being bright is a very attractive personal asset in Japan when people judge others.

Fig. 3: 58 university students' average score for speakers' likely characters – Youth of the 21st century

In contrast, younger participants' evaluations conformed to the pattern typically demonstrated in this type of perception test: fluent speakers were evaluated highly in terms of Competence and Integrity, but their Social Attractiveness was lower than that of accented speakers. Participants' actual contact with non-native speakers is considered to be the factor that raises the Social Attractiveness scores for accented speakers, as university students generally have more exposure to foreign students and culture.

The participants of this study (older group) were further divided into two groups, Group 0 (no contact with non-native speakers) and Group 1 (contact with non-native speakers), depending on their contact experience with non-native speakers. (See Figures 4 and 5).

As before, a MANOVA was conducted to test whether there was any significant difference between Group 0 and Group 1 in terms of judgments in the three categories (Competence, Integrity and Social Attractiveness). The results show that the differences between mild accented speakers and native speakers were statistically significant at the 5 percent level of significance only for the category of Integrity (serious and sincere). There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups (0 and 1) in the case of native speakers and heavy accent speakers for any of the three categories. Previous studies involving Japanese learners of English found that three months of experience of living in an English

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Fig. 4: Group 0, which had no contact with non-native speakers

Fig. 5: Group 1, which had contact with non-native speakers

speaking country has a significant effect on language attitude study (Yashima et al. 2002). Thus, three months can be considered as the cut-off point for judging the effective level of previous exposure to the target language.

A short overseas trip or an encounter at a restaurant did not make a significant impact on people's attitude. However, better scores in terms of Integrity were given to mild accent speakers, which shows that the experience of contact with non-native speakers results in listeners experiencing trust and favorable attitudes in regards to unseen foreign accented speakers.

5.2.2 Status evaluation – speakers' likely occupations

The participants were asked to imagine the occupation of each speaker. Participants offered a wide range of jobs from teacher, student and salary man to athlete, chef, dancer and announcer (see Appendix 1). The researcher categorized occupations as high or low status according to the job's requirement of a university degree. Table 5 and Table 6 show the number of older and younger participants, respectively, who identified high-status and low-status likely occupations for the three groups of speakers.

Table 5: Participants' evaluations of speakers' likely job status – Youth of the 20th century

	High status	Low status	No reply
Japanese-native	84% (133)	12.8% (20)	3.2% (5)
Non-native mildly accented	69.6% (110)	26.6% (42)	3.8% (6)
Non-native heavily accented	46.2% (73)	48.7% (77)	5.1% (8)

These tables reflect the results shown in Figure 2. High-status occupations were attributed most frequently to native speakers and least frequently to non-native speakers with heavily accented speech. However, in regard to accented speakers, older participants' judgments of job status differed from younger participants' judgments. Specifically, the older generation did not equate heavily accented speech with low-status employment. This suggests that older participants do not expect non-native speakers with high-status employment to speak fluent Japanese, which reflects the traditional view that non-Japanese cannot speak fluent Japanese.

Table 6: 58 university students' evaluations of speakers' likely job status – Youth of the 21st century

	High status	Low status	No reply
Japanese-native	70% (81)	13% (15)	17% (20)
Non-native mildly accented	44% (51)	42% (49)	14% (16)
Non-native heavily accented	28% (32)	55% (64)	17% (20)

It is possible that the younger generation knows many non-native speakers who are fluent Japanese speakers with mild accents, and thus believes that heavily accented speakers are unlikely to have high-status occupations. Approximately half of the younger participants believed that the mildly accented speakers held high-status jobs, while a greater proportion of older generations believed this to be the case. *Youth of the 20th century* (the older group), believe higher possibility for mild accent speakers to have high status job. A Z test showed that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant only for mildly accented speakers ($F = 3.25$). This suggests that the more familiar people become with non-native speakers, the higher their expectation for them to speak Japanese become.

6 Conclusion

This study compared perceptions of foreign accented speech between participants who grew up in the 20th century and those who spent their youth in the 21st century. Although the older participants grew up in an era marked by strong admiration towards western society and westerners, these participants did not evaluated foreign-accented Japanese speech higher than native speech. This result was identical to the one obtained using younger Japanese participants. In addition, the current results are similar to those involving native English speakers' attitudes towards accented English.

Taken together, the results of the current and past research suggest that native listeners across languages have a better impression of speakers with fluent native speech than speakers with non-native speech when they judge speech without any other information regarding the speaker. In the current study, the historical context in which participants grew up did not have a strong impact on attitudes towards foreign accent, but did appear to affect evaluation of speakers in terms of social attractiveness. Regardless of their contact with non-native speakers, the older generation evaluated native speakers more positively in all aspects including social attractiveness, which normally tends to be evaluated

more positively in non-native speakers in this format of survey. Older participants' contact with non-native was brief and not as intense as the younger participants' contact with non-native speakers in the context of school or employment. Apparently the judgment of social attractiveness reflects the amount of interaction with non-native speakers as well as social value of intelligence in Japanese society. The younger generation appears to perceive accented speakers as socially attractive as they are familiar with the existence of non-native speakers around them.

Humans' judgment of speech itself is intuitive and unforgiving. If a native speaker experienced no contact with foreign culture or non-native speakers, his/her evaluation of non-native speech will be negative in all aspects. However, contact with non-native speakers brings flexibility to native listeners' judgments. In the current study, older participants who had experienced contact with non-native speakers evaluated mildly accented speakers more favorably than the participants who had no contact with non-native speakers in terms of Integrity. Thus, contact may not have been sufficient to allow judgments of whether non-native speakers are funny or attractive (Social Attractiveness), but the contact may have allowed participants to judge speakers with foreign accents as nice and trustworthy (Integrity).

Participants in the current study experienced contact with non-native speakers through the international work experience in the local community, guest invitation at an English-language school, or a friend they met in a sister-city engagement. Although they are brief, these grass-root experiences of internationalization are bringing a slow but steady change in the society. Internationalization efforts should continue such that non-Japanese people and accented speakers are treated in the same manner as typical members of Japanese society.

Appendix: Participants' speculation about speakers' social status and occupations

High status	teacher, professor, banker, businessman, doctor, language instructor, salary man, scholar, architect, civil servant, priest, IT staff, lawyer, engineer, announcer
Low status	singer, dancer, waiter, cook, athlete, actor, shop assistant, sales person, baker, labor worker, artist, driver, student*

*Student was included in "Low status" as s/he has not yet obtained a university degree.

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