

Sociocultural Competence and the Japanese Learner of English

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This study examines the challenges which non-native speakers face upon first arriving in the target culture. The informants are six native speakers of Japanese (four females and two males) studying in ESL and graduate programs at an institution in the United States. The informants, who had been living in the United States for three months or less when the study began, had received at least six years of formal instruction in English while living in Japan. They were asked to complete a weekly log in which they would report situations in their daily lives where sociocultural differences between Japan and the United States played a role. Issues related to differences in communicative style were identified in 83% of the log entry items, and in 66% of the items informants expressed difficulty with speech act realization and the use of English discourse patterns. The insights provided by this data may prove useful in the development of assessment tools and curricula for Japanese students learning English.