



Japanese EFL Learners' Past L2 Learning Experience and Lexical Inferencing Strategy Use in the Study Abroad Context

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Abstract

There has been considerable attention among TESOL scholars and educators in recent years given to how ESL/EFL learners infer the meanings of unknown words from context during L2 reading. However, a small number of studies have explored EFL learners' vocabulary strategy use qualitatively based around think-aloud protocols. Even when such protocols are employed, many studies have focused only on the differences in vocabulary strategy use between beginner and advanced learners based on standardised proficiency test scores, which do not take participants' individual profiles into consideration. There is a need for a more detailed investigation of individual cases regarding inferencing strategy use in L2 reading. This case study investigates how Japanese EFL university students' motivation and past L2 learning experiences affect their lexical inferencing strategy use. Three Japanese EFL university students participating in a long-term study abroad program at a British university took part in this study. Data collection included think-aloud protocols as well as semi-structured interviews conducted before and after the protocols. The results indicate notable similarities, differences, and salient patterns within and across individuals, suggesting pedagogical implications for vocabulary instruction in EFL reading classes.

Keywords: EFL learners; past L2 learning experiences; vocabulary strategy use; think-aloud protocol

1. Introduction

1.1 Lexical inferencing strategies in L2 reading

Learning vocabulary during reading is a common approach for ESL/EFL learners to expand their vocabulary. While reading in English, they inevitably encounter unknown words and choose either simply to ignore them or to employ strategies to bridge gaps in comprehension (Hamouda, 2021). One of the most frequently used strategies is guessing the meanings of unknown words, also known as lexical inferencing. Oxford (1990) defined lexical inferencing as "using a variety of linguistic and nonlinguistic clues to guess the meanings of all the words when the learner does not know them" (p.47). Effective use of lexical inferencing strategies can eventually enhance learners' reading comprehension.

Previous research has examined lexical inferencing strategies, identifying their functions and the factors that contribute to successful inference by ESL learners (e.g., Nassaji, 2003; Hu & Nassaji, 2014). Hu and Nassaji (2014) used think-aloud protocols with eleven Chinese ESL learners to distinguish successful from unsuccessful inferencers. They found that successful inferencers not only employed a wide range of strategies but also applied them more effectively. Following Hu and Nassaji (2014), Anvari & Farvardin (2016) investigated fifteen intermediate-level Iranian EFL learners to address the gap between ESL and EFL settings. Their results revealed that success was determined not by the number of strategies used but by how and when they were deployed; for example, successful inferencers adopted strategies in right place and combined them where it was necessary. However, their findings regarding the use of monitoring strategies were not consistent with those of earlier studies (e.g., Nassaji, 2003; Hu & Nassaji, 2014).

1.2 Past L2 learning experience

Some scholars (e.g., Boonkongsan, 2012) argued that investigating learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies requires consideration of both intralexical factors such as orthography, length, and semantic features of the word, and extralexical factors such as the role of memory in vocabulary learning, the first and other languages, and the individual learners' differences. In this taxonomy, Boonkongsan (2012) classified individual difference factors into belief, attitude, motivation, and language learning experience. Among these, the present study focuses specifically on learners' motivation and past language learning experience, as empirical research in this area remains scarce (e.g., Boonkongsan & Intaraprasert, 2014).

With regards to the lexical inferencing strategies, which is a subset of vocabulary learning strategies, Nassaji (2003) highlighted the need for more further research "to examine how success in lexical inferencing interacts with and is mediated by other learner-related variables, such as learners' general cognitive and



learning style preferences" (p.666). Nassaji (2003) also underscored the importance of exploring how learners' background characteristics influence their ability to infer unknown words during reading.

1.3 Present study

Although some of the previous studies examined EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies using think-aloud protocols (e.g., Aljasir, 2025; Allahyari, 2017; Li, 2021), an application specifically into lexical inferencing strategies in the EFL context still remains underexplored. Moreover, even when such protocols are employed, many of them focus only on the differences in vocabulary strategy use between beginners and advanced learners divided based on their standardised proficiency test scores, which do not take participants' individual profiles into consideration (e.g., Aljasir, 2025). Therefore, a more detailed investigation of individual cases will be needed to understand how EFL learners employ lexical inferencing strategies during L2 reading.

To date, only a few case studies have looked at EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategies (e.g., Gu, 2003), and there will be a need to deeply investigate individual variations in inferencing strategy use. Duff (2020) argued that a case study is a highly appropriate approach to research in applied linguistics because "less attention overall is being paid to learners' linguistic systems (either at one time or over time) and, instead, more attention is paid to their lives and other systems and processes at work in their past, present, and future engagements with language" (p.220).

Therefore, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach, exploring the characteristics of individual Japanese EFL learners' lexical inferencing strategy use. The following research question guided the present study: How do their motivation and past L2 learning experiences affect their lexical inferencing strategy use?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants in this study were three second-year female Japanese university students. Their first language was Japanese, and their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty years old. They are enrolled in the Faculty of Foreign Language Studies at the same university in Japan, majoring in English. They participate in a nine-month study abroad program at a British university, which is a requirement for their graduation.

2.2 Materials and procedures

Data were collected two months after the study abroad program started. Data collection comprised think-aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face before and after the protocols. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes (a 30-minute initial interview, a 15-minute think-aloud training session, a 30-minute think-aloud protocol, and a 15-minute follow-up interview), although duration varied slightly depending on each participant. These sessions were conducted individually in a campus meeting room.

The initial interview was administered in order to gather demographic information, past L2 learning experience, and vocabulary learning strategy use. This was followed by a training session to familiarize participants with the think-aloud procedure before they began the actual protocols.

The reading text was adapted from Haastrup (1991; See Appendix 3) as cited in Nassaji (2003). The passage comprised 374 words, including ten target words italicised for the study. Two original target words were replaced with lower-frequency synonyms because they could already be known by participants. The ten target words were all content words consisting of four nouns, four verbs, and two adjectives. During reading, participants verbalised their thoughts in their mind and underlined any other unfamiliar words. The percentage of unknown words including target words was 3.48%, 4.01%, 4.54% respectively, all of which were less than 5%. The follow-up interview immediately followed completion of the think-aloud protocols, during which participants reflected on the think-aloud process, their vocabulary learning strategies, and influencing factors.

Throughout all the sessions, participants were allowed to use the language with which they felt most comfortable, and as a result, all of them chose their first language, Japanese. Data presented here are English translations. All the interviews and think-aloud protocols were audio-recorded and transcribed.



3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1 Participants' individual profiles

Table 1 presents participants' demographic information and their scores or grades on standardized proficiency tests, while Appendix 1 outlines their experiences of living in English-speaking countries and their past learning experiences; both sets of data were retrieved from the interview transcripts. All names are pseudonyms. Although the participants demonstrated similar CEFR proficiency levels, their past learning experience varied considerably.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information and their scores or grades on standardized proficiency tests

	Erica	Ann	Sara
Major	English	English	English
Age	19	20	19
GPA	2.60	3.20	3.07
Age when they started learning English ^{*1}	11 years old	5 years old	11 years old
Scores or grades and year taken for standardized proficiency tests			
TOEFL	TOEFL iBT 59 (CEFR B1, 2023)	TOEFL IPT 510 (CEFR B1, 2024) ^{*3}	TOEFL IPT 500 (CEFR B1, 2024) ^{*3}
IELTS	5.5 (CEFR B1, 2024)	5.5 (CEFR B1, 2024)	5.0 (CEFR B1, 2024)
EIKEN ^{*2}	2nd Grade (CEFR B1, 2022)	2nd Grade (CEFR B1, 2019)	Pre 1st Grade (CEFR B2, 2023)

Note

^{*1}. As of 2025, compulsory English education in Japan begins in Grade 3; however, it began in Grade 5 when the participants were in elementary school.

^{*2}. EIKEN is one of Japan's most widely recognized English proficiency exams, administered by the Eiken Foundation of Japan.

^{*3}. TOEFL IPT test is a paper-based test administered by institutions. It comprises three sections: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension.

Daily English immersion

Erica deliberately integrated English into her daily life rather than treating it as a school subject. In high school, she enrolled in an international program that emphasised English study. All students in this program were required to participate in a study abroad program in an English-speaking country, and she spent nine months living in Canada. Before arriving in the United Kingdom, she communicated with her customers in English during her part-time job and enjoyed English songs and movies as her hobbies. When asked why she chose UK for her study abroad, she explained,

I chose UK because I adore European architecture. I really love this kind of atmosphere. Travelling around Europe has always been a huge dream of mine too. ... Plus, I really love talking to people, so making diverse friends and expanding my community were a big factor. And spending time overseas gives me a sense of adventure. I might be able to see things I wouldn't see in Japan.

Early English exposure

A notable aspect of Ann's profile is that she used to live in Singapore for two years in her childhood. Although she was not consciously aware of its impact, her family believed that this experience fostered her international perspective. In contrast, attending a conversation school back in Japan during her elementary school days was a burden for her. She excelled in her junior-high English classes but got to dislike English as the school subject. Once she entered high school, her peers' academic performance made it hard for her to keep up with English classes. She just studied English with grammar and vocabulary books to prepare for university entrance exams outside the classroom. At that time, her three-year-old sister always greatly influenced her English language learning in her life. She wanted to beat and surpass her sister in everything.

Even if I couldn't beat, I wanted to match her, you know? My sister usually took the exam one grade above me. ... In order to catch up with and even beat her, I had to study a lot and definitely pass the exam. I studied vocabulary very hard as well. I was highly motivated to pass at all costs.

Before arriving in UK, she did not push herself to get exposure to authentic English like Erica did; nevertheless, she looked forward to interacting with locals and learning about their lifestyles. An enthusiasm was rooted in her early memories of Singapore.



I didn't particularly like English itself, but my interests were quite international in nature. ... I really wanted to go abroad, live overseas, you know? I wouldn't grasp it if I was not here. Culture, scenes of people's daily lives, that sort of thing. It wasn't just about English; I wanted to experience that too. ... So rather than just wanting to learn English – though I certainly wanted to improve my skills – I wanted to experience that kind of atmosphere more than anything.

Motivated self-study English learning

Unlike Erica and Ann, Sara had never lived abroad prior to the study abroad program in UK. Although her English learning initially centred on classwork and exam preparation alone, she made it a habit to voluntarily study using various English learning materials. She was excited to form relationships with local students and use those connections for future social and professional opportunities.

If I make friends, I'll have more opportunities to speak English, and if we stay in touch after I go back to Japan, I might even be able to visit them again. Of course, studying English is important, but my main motivation was simply wanting to experience traveling abroad again and making many international friends; that's what I feel is most important. ... During this time, I want to practice speaking as much as possible, and when I go back home and when I look for a job in the future, it would be great if I could hopefully find a job that requires English skills.

3.2 Participants' lexical inferencing strategy use

Think-aloud transcriptions were examined to identify what strategies participants used to infer word meanings based on the twelve types of strategies classified in Hu and Nassaji's (2014) study. These twelve strategies were regrouped into four major categories: form-focused, meaning-focused, evaluating, and monitoring strategies. Appendix 2 presents these strategies along with their definitions.

After these strategies were regrouped, the number of correct and incorrect responses was analysed for each participant (Table 2). Nassaji (2003) and Hu and Nassaji (2014) defined a correct inference as one that demonstrated both semantic and syntactic accuracy; a partially correct inference as one that demonstrated either syntactic or semantic accuracy, and an incorrect inference as one that was neither semantically nor syntactically accurate. The present study initially analysed the data from both perspectives; however, the results surprisingly revealed that all participants successfully inferred the parts of speech for all target words. Therefore, Table 2 presents only the results from the semantic perspective—namely, the correct and incorrect inferences of word meanings. A partially correct inference in Table 2 refers to a word meaning that was not entirely accurate but still appropriate within the given context.

Table 2. Correct and incorrect inferences of word meanings made by each participant

Target words	Erica	Ann	Sara
1. sewage	partially correct	partially correct	partially correct
2. waver	correct	correct	correct
3. scrutinizing	incorrect	incorrect	partially correct
4. contract	incorrect	incorrect	incorrect
5. squalor	correct	incorrect	incorrect
6. curative	incorrect	correct	correct
7. affluence	incorrect	incorrect	incorrect
8. unfathomable	incorrect	correct	correct
9. menaces	incorrect	incorrect	incorrect
10. permeated	partially correct	partially correct	incorrect
Total number of correct inferences	3 out of 10 ^{*1}	4 out of 10 ^{*1}	4 out of 10 ^{*1}

Note: *1. Correct and incorrect inferences were counted as 1, and partially correct inferences as 0.5.

Table 2 shows that participants completely failed to infer word meanings from context in more than half of their attempts. Of all the target words, the most difficult were *contract*, *affluence*, and *menaces*, none of which was inferred correctly by any participant. Conversely, the easiest items were *waver* (inferred correctly by all participants), followed by *curative*, and *unfathomable* (inferred correctly by two participants each).

Association-based paraphrasing practice

The transcripts show that Erica and Ann sometimes misinterpreted target words by confusing them with other words that are similar in form but semantically unrelated. This pattern is exemplified by confusion such as *sewage* versus *wage*, and *affluence* versus *influence*. Nassaji (2003) also pointed out that learners are likely to struggle with inferring word meanings from context when words' appearance is similar to the one of other unrelated words. Erica explained:



I often look for parts of words I've heard of or I am familiar with. For example, affluence in the text looks like influence, so I thought it was related to some kind of influence or something that affects other people.

When a text's topic is familiar, Erica frequently uses her background knowledge as her most effective way of learning vocabulary. She often tends to associate new words with her existing knowledge and describes herself as the one who remembers information visually. Table 3 clearly reflects these comments. Half of Erica's inferencing strategies were form-focused, with associating used for seven out of the ten target words. This pattern becomes especially clear in the following excerpt for the word "waver" (examples shown *italics* represent words or text spoken in English, "quotation marks" represent phrases from the original text directly quoted in English, and the **bold letters** are the target words):

"But when we ourselves become ill," "**Waver...**"? Wave...? Nami (wave in Japanese)? Wavy? "**Waver...**"? Do they become weak? Like they disappear?

In addition, she noted that she often confirms her understanding by verbalising her own thoughts and ideas. Erica employed commenting in five out of ten target words, and she verbally expressed her opinions and comments for other words in the text as well. This result is inconsistent with Anvari & Farvardin's (2016) study, in which commenting was the least frequently used among all the participants, accounting for approximately only one percent. Erica talked to herself in the protocol:

Food poisoning or something? "**Sewage...**" I don't know what "**Sewage**" is. Wage... I've ever heard of this word. I'm like this all the time... That's why I need to understand what the Latin word means.

Erica's general pattern of these strategy use is also related to how she paraphrases sentences in English and how she uses a monolingual dictionary. Table 3 shows that all participants frequently used paraphrasing. For the present study, paraphrasing was divided into two types: paraphrasing in English and translating into Japanese. Erica used paraphrasing in English for five out of the ten target words, and both Erica and Sara interestingly mentioned that their strategy choices were shaped by their high school teachers' advice. Erica mentioned:

My homeroom teacher was fluent in English and constantly told me to avoid using Japanese. When I came across an unknown word and shared its meaning with classmates, I was told not to use Japanese. It would be easier to look up the word in English and use it as it is.

Table 3. Number and percentage of each category by participant

Category	Types of strategies	N		
		Erica	Ann	Sara
Form-focused strategies	Analysing	3	5	1
	Associating	7	4	0
	Repeating (W: Word repeating / S: Sentence repeating)	10 (W: 9 / S: 1)	10 (W: 9 / S: 1)	10 (W: 4 / S: 6)
	Subtotal	20 (50.0%)	19 (40.4%)	11 (35.5%)
Meaning-focused strategies	Using textual clues	3	8	6
	Using prior knowledge	0	0	0
	Paraphrasing (E: Paraphrasing in English / J: Translating in Japanese)	7 (E: 5 / J: 2)	9 (E: 0 / J: 9)	10 (E: 0 / J: 10)
	Subtotal	10 (25.0%)	17 (36.2%)	16 (51.6%)
Evaluating strategies	Making inquiry	0	5	0
	Confirming/disconfirming	1	2	4
	Commenting	5	0	0
	Subtotal	6 (15.0%)	7 (14.9%)	4 (12.9%)
Monitoring strategies	Stating the difficulty	3	4	0
	Suspending judgment	0	0	0
	Reattempting	1	0	0
	Subtotal	4 (10.0%)	4 (8.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Total		40	47	31



Inquiry and translation driven inference

One of the most interesting findings about Ann in Table 3 is that she made an inquiry about five out of the ten target words, whereas Erica and Sara made none. This tendency is evident in the excerpt below, in which Ann organised her thoughts and repeatedly checked her understanding of the word “contract” using textual clues by talking to herself in this process.

“Contract”? What’s that? “Contract... contract...” What’s that? “Contract”? They ought to spend much time. Why they themselves do not “contract”? Infection? Infectious diseases? “Contract” Some of the serious and infectious diseases that so many of their patients die from? Like to focus? To engage? Hmm, what is it? Not to deal with something properly?

Ann and Sara translated almost all the target words into Japanese, whereas Erica primarily paraphrased in English as stated above. The excerpt above, in which Ann kept asking herself about word meanings in Japanese, also reflects her reliance on translation. One possible reason for this pattern is how she looks up unknown words in her daily life. Ann usually translates each word into Japanese on websites such as Google Translate and DeepL Translate, although she puts them into English every now and then because she recognizes the importance of learning English words in English.

Firstly, I look up the word in Japanese, then I read the sentence again. If the sentence still doesn’t make sense and the Japanese translation doesn’t fit, I look up the same word in English. I sometimes think it easier to understand the text that way and it fits the sentence.

Reliance on textual clues and sentence repetition

Sara rarely used form-focused strategies except for repeating; instead, she devoted the highest percentage of the meaning-focused activities among the four categories. In particular, she frequently relied on textual clues as shown in the following excerpt. With regards to textual clues, Anvari & Farvardin (2016) stated that based on their qualitative and quantitative analyses, participants significantly differed on the frequency of using textual clues strategy among successful and less successful participants.

“Squalor”? “Squalor...”? People are killed by their environment? Like, um, rather than dying from disease, they are killed by the environment? The lack of food and money, or maybe conditions? “Squalor”? I think squalor means something you need to live. Is it an environmental term? A place to live? A clean place? Hmm, but “they live under” right? Is that an environmental term?

Sara also mentioned that she usually reads texts in a way she gradually narrows down meanings based on the surrounding text rather than paying special attention to each sentence structure or every unknown word. This is consistent with how she read during the think-aloud protocols. She explained,

I usually read the sentence again and again from the previous line when I encounter unknown words. I try to understand the meaning contextually, kind of intuitively. For example, if several words are arranged in parallel, I guess they probably belong to the same category or share a similar meaning.

As with the paraphrasing strategy, repeating was also categorised into two types: word repeating and sentence repeating for the present study. Erica and Ann used word repeating for nine out of the ten target words, whereas Sara engaged in sentence repeating for six. The following excerpt shows that Sara made an attempt to infer word meaning of the word “unfathomable” by repeating the entire sentence many times and ultimately ended up inferring the correct word meanings.

*“The causes of heart disease are far from being unfathomable...” Fathomable? What does “caused by affluence” mean? Something related to environment? Human problem? “Far from being mysterious and unfathomable—they are as well known as the causes of tuberculosis?” What is this? “Other diseases are due to manaces?” Manaces? “In the natural conditions in which we live Such symptoms are true signs of an unhealthy world.” “Far from being mysterious and unfathomable. ... In the rich world many diseases are caused by affluence. The causes of heart diseases, for instance, are far from being mysterious...” Far from this point? “Mysterious”, and ... “Un” means “not”, right? Not **fathomable**. I don’t know what “tuberculosis” means. “For example, unfathomable...” the person is responsible for something... “unfathomable...” It cannot be explained? No, mysterious and cannot understand the cause? It means cannot understand the cause clearly?*

4. Discussion

Based on analysis of the think-aloud and interview data, I examined how participants’ past learning experiences related to their use of inferencing strategies through Dörnyei’s (2005) model of L2 Motivational



Self System (L2MSS). This model comprises three components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience.

The interview transcripts show all participants have a strong Ideal L2 Self, reflecting the learner's vision they aspire to be. Their motivation extends beyond attaining high English proficiency; it encompasses engaging with British culture and community and becoming a globally engaged individuals.

The second component, the Ought-to L2 Self, represents the version of themselves they feel they should be under external pressures or expectations. Slight differences emerged among the three participants. Ann's motivation stemmed from a perceived sense of rivalry with her elder sister, which created a beneficial sense of pressure, and from the need to meet academic standards and peer performance. These pressures likely shaped her motivation, demotivation, and anxiety. Although Ann held positive attitudes towards diverse cultures, she struggled to motivate herself to study English as a school subject. In contrast, Erica and Sara preferred using a monolingual dictionary, which was shaped by their Ought-to L2 Selves, because both of them considered their teachers' advice as a key influence. This suggests that external expectations might have impacted their vocabulary strategy selection. Sara also exhibited external motivation related to future career prospects. She internalised the idea that her English proficiency would be valuable in the job market.

The third component, the L2 Learning Experience, was defined as "situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (p.106), including the impact of teachers, curriculum, peer groups, and experiences of success. All participants expressed gratitude for their opportunity to learn English in UK, where daily communication in English is possible. It was a good practice for them to talk with their host families. They lived with: a host mother and a Swiss international student (Erica), host parents, a one-year-old baby, and a Malay intern (Ann), host grandparents (Sara). Moreover, their past language learning influenced their current learning experiences as well. For example, Ann's high school classroom experiences in Japan initially demotivated her, but later she engaged in independent study, driven by the external goal of university admission.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This qualitative case study explored Japanese EFL learners' lexical inferencing strategies during reading, investigating how their motivation and past learning experiences affected their strategy use. The findings reveal that participants faced difficulty inferring word meanings, even though they reported knowing more than 95% of the words in the text. Think-aloud data indicated that the most common inferencing strategies were: repeating in words and in sentences, translating in Japanese, and paraphrasing in English. These strategies were used to examine the relationships among different parts of the text and to check their guesses against a wider context.

Furthermore, the interplay between past learning experience and strategy use became evident in each case. Erica's study abroad experience in Canada, her teacher's dictionary advice on how to look up unknown words, and her daily immersion in English appeared to have helped her strategy use such as associating, paraphrasing in English, and commenting in English. Ann's protocol data reflected her frequent use of translating in Japanese in the same way she usually looks up unknown words in Japanese on websites. Although her life in Singapore fostered her positive attitudes towards foreign cultures, her subsequent learning in Japan, driven by entrance exam preparation, had a more profound effect on her strategy selection. Sara comprehended the text by keeping a good balance between using textual clues and repeating sentences many times. Despite having no overseas experience, she effectively used English learning materials available in Japan, which led to the way she translated in Japanese and repeated in sentences during reading.

It is important to note that participants for the present study are different from typical Japanese EFL learners who learn English domestically, in that they are in the study abroad context. They needed to interact with local residents, enrol in courses, socialise with peers, and live with host families on a daily basis. Interview data suggested that they were fascinated by local culture in UK.

For pedagogical implications, educators should keep in mind that although they often advise students to guess word meanings from context, it is important to teach them exactly how and when to apply this strategy. Students usually use a variety of sources such as their background knowledge and linguistic clues in the text; however, they could use multiple strategies in varied ways to infer a single unknown word. Vocabulary instruction should be as specific as possible to promote autonomous word learning.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the significant insights, this study has several limitations. First, the scope of investigation is limited because this is a qualitative study with only three participants and a short passage containing only ten target words. Second, the participants were homogeneous in terms of their age, gender, major, and studying context. These factors may limit the generalizability of the findings.



Future studies could recruit more participants from more diverse backgrounds and employ other methods such as eye-tracking technology to achieve a more accurate and detailed investigation of lexical inferencing strategies.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Participants' experiences of living in English-speaking countries and past learning experiences

	Erica	Ann	Sara
Experience of living in English-speaking countries			
Country	Canada	Singapore	N/A
Purpose	Studying abroad was mandatory in her program in high school.	Her father was transferred there for his work.	N/A
Period	Six months (2021-2022)	Two years (2011-2012) ^a	N/A
Institution	Local high school	Japanese kindergarten and Japanese elementary school	N/A
Accommodation	Lived with her host family	Lived with her family	N/A
Exposure to English in daily life prior to a study abroad program in UK			
Work (frequency)	Served her customers in English at a café, a sushi restaurant, and a hotel during her part-time job (five or six times a week)	N/A	N/A
Hobby (frequency)	Listened to songs (every day), watched movies with English subtitles (once a week), and had a chat with her friends on social	Listened to some rhythm of her favourite songs (very occasionally)	Listened to her favourite band's songs on the way to school and back home (on weekdays) and watched movies on TV



	media (occasionally)		(once a week)
English learning materials (frequency)	Practised reading aloud sentences based on certain topics on social media (half an hour every day)	Learned new words or phrases with a vocabulary book available at a bookstore (almost every day)	Listened to English learning programs on the radio (15 minutes every day), prepared for TOEFL with her textbook before the exam, and studied with YouTube and apps for her vocabulary learning (on the days when she had English classes)

Note

*1. Ann was required to take English classes at her Japanese kindergarten and Japanese elementary school in Singapore for two years. She returned to Japan at the age of seven, after which she attended weekly one-on-one lessons with a native-speaking teacher at a conversation school.

Appendix 2. Types and categories of lexical inferencing strategies

Strategy	Definition
Form-focused strategies	
Analysing	Analysing a word using knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, punctuation, or grammar.
Associating	Attempting to infer the meaning of the target word by associating the word with other similar words.
Repeating	Repeating the target word or part of the text containing the target word out aloud.
Meaning-focused strategies	
Using textual clues	Guessing the meaning of the target word by using the surrounding context clues.
Using prior knowledge	Using prior knowledge or experience to infer the word meaning.
Paraphrasing	Paraphrasing or translating part of the text that contains the target word.
Evaluating strategies	
Making inquiry	Questioning their own inferences
Confirming/disconfirming	Confirming or disconfirming the inferences made by using the information in the text
Commenting	Making evaluative comments about the target word
Monitoring strategies	
Stating the failure/difficulty	Making statements about the failure of inferencing or the difficulty of the target word
Suspending judgment	Postponing the inference making and leaving it for a later time
Reattempting	Discarding the old inference and attempting to make a new one

(Hu & Nassaji, 2014, pp.30-31)

Appendix 3. Text used for the think-aloud protocols

Health in the Rich World and in the Poor

An American journalist, Dorothy Thompson, criticises the rich world's health programmes in the poor world. She describes her trip to Africa where she got food poisoning and her friend malaria:

The town is very dirty. All the people are hot, have dust between their toes and the smell of **sewage** in their noses. We both fell ill, and at ten o'clock in the morning I got frightened and took my friend to the only private hospital in town, where you have to pay. After being treated by a doctor, we caught the next aeroplane home.

Now, I believe that the money of the World Health Organisation (WHO) should be spent on bringing health to all people of the world and not on expensive doctors and hospitals for the few who can pay. But when we ourselves become ill, our beliefs **waver**. After we came back to the States we thought a lot about our reaction to this sudden meeting with health care in a poor country. When **scrutinizing** modern medicine, we often forget that without more money for food and clean water to drink, it is impossible to fight the diseases that are caused by infections.

Doctors seem to overlook this fact. They ought to spend much time thinking about why they themselves do not **contract** some of the serious and infectious diseases that so many of their patients die from. They do not realize that an illness must find a body that is weak either because of stress or hunger. People are killed by the conditions they live under, the lack of food and money and the **squalor**. Doctors should analyze why people become ill rather than take such a keen interest in the **curative** effect of medicine.

In the rich world many diseases are caused by **affluence**. The causes of heart diseases, for instance, are far from being mysterious and **unfathomable**—they are as well known as the causes of tuberculosis. Other diseases are due to **menaces** in the natural conditions in which we live. Imagine the typical American worker on his death-bed: every cell **permeated** with such things as chemicals and radio-active materials. Such symptoms are true signs of an unhealthy world.

adapted from Haastrup (1991) as cited in Nassaji (2003)