

Seinan Gakuin University

## An Interview

with President Murakami

24/03/2004 10 am-11 am

**Interviewers:**

**Natsuko Fukue**-English Major,  
Bordeaux Business School 2002-2003  
(Japanese Version)

**Rui Hosomi**-English Literature Major,  
San Diego State Univ. 2002-2003  
(English version)

**Q: Seinan is known for its language competence. Are the students really that good at languages?**

A: The answer varies if the object of comparison change.

As for the TOEFL score, I believe Seinan is one of the top schools in western Japan. Actually, I've done research which compared about 30 universities in Japan, several in Korea, and also several in China. Seinan ranked near the top. Therefore, I think the English language competence of Seinan students is near the top in Japan.

**Q: I (Fukue) think the students' motivation has been dropping compared to that of the past.**

A: There certainly are some good students, but it all depends on the individual student and whether or not he/she studies. Some students start to play around once they join the school...the overall motivation is not as high as it used to be. Perhaps it is that the gap between those who are diligent in their study and those who aren't has been getting bigger. Actually, the number of mandatory subjects for the

students to take has decreased. The students used to be required to take English classes and other language courses. I think that kept up the overall level of the students. However, they are no longer required to take those courses if they do not want. The problem now is whether they study on their own free will or not.

**Q: The mandatory courses have become small in numbers, and what do you think the university can do to support the students in terms of language learning?**

A: I think the Language Laboratory and Tape Library can help the students. However, the reality is that the study hours at the LL conflicts with the school classes, and as a matter of fact, I don't know how much the facilities are being used. It appears the Commerce Department faculty want to improve their students' English competence. Of course, some teachers here are not satisfied with the English learning situation as well as some students who think they deserve a better education. The division of English Literature has been working on a programme to improve English education.

**Q: We often hear students not majoring in foreign languages say, "I feel I'm not well informed about the language facilities. I didn't know that I could take courses with the foreign exchange students here."**

A: We inform the first year students at the orientation in April about the LL facilities, but it seems the amount of information is too much and they do not absorb all the information. One of the solutions to this problem is to put the information on the school website so that the students can get the information from there.

**Q: Unfortunately, most of the courses in division of foreign languages are taught in Japanese. Some students say they would not be able to follow the courses if they were taught in English.**

A: I see. When I was teaching at Kyushu University, I did all my classes in English. One time I was talking in the cafeteria, and I heard a student sitting behind me say, "Oh, he speaks Japanese!"

**Q: We, the exchange students of 2002-2003, are working on a project called Seinan Crew Project. We've planned study abroad fairs and we are now making a website which will contain our experiences abroad.**

A: I see. That's great.

**Q: Do you have anything that you want former exchange students to do for the school?**

A: There is nothing that I want those students to do for the school in particular, as I think what they should do is to learn and experience something while they are abroad. They are obligated to go see the coming foreign exchange students at the airport in September, but they do that not because it is mandatory but because they want to. They were also helped while studying abroad, and they want to return the favour. (We nod to this) The International Centre and foreign exchange students appreciate the help.

**Q: So, there is nothing in particular that the school wants the returnees to do?**

A: No. However, the International Centre might need their help.

**Q: Exchange students are required to write a monthly report and also have to write a long report when we return. There are more things that the International Centre has to deal with, and it seems they cannot do more than that.**

A: Recently, the number of overseas exchange universities has increased. It must be demanding for the International Centre to take care of all the things. The I-House, which is a new dorm for the exchange students, has just been completed. It took 10 years. Japanese students may also live in the I-House. There are also international students who are from countries like Myanmar among ordinary Japanese students. It would be good if the International Centre could arrange some activities so that Japanese students and international students can do cultural exchange.

**Q: You have studied overseas?**

A: There was no exchange programme when I was a student at Seinan, but I have been to the University of Edinburgh as a visiting professor.

**Q: So, a long time ago, few people went to study abroad?**

A: Well, the dollar was equivalent to 360 yen, and I think many people wanted to study abroad all the more. In those days, the means to go abroad was by ship, not by plane. I was pretty confident in my English, because I joined Seinan as a junior high school student and I learned English from missionaries.

**Q: The number of the overseas exchange universities has been increasing. Seinan is in Fukuoka, which**

**is a gate to Asia. Wouldn't it be great if more Asian people could access to Seinan easily?**

A: As a matter of fact, I was the one who suggested having exchange schools in Asia. However, it is difficult to have contract with schools in Asia because of financial matters. We have scholarships for Jilin students, therefore they are able to come to Seinan. Also, Korean students can afford to attend Seinan, because the standard of living in our two countries is very similar. However, in general, it is quite demanding for students from other parts of Asia to afford to live and study in Japan. Language itself can be a problem. If we want to send our students, say, to Italy, the school needs to find a student who can speak Italian. Actually, an Italian university is interested in beginning an exchange programme, but the reality is Seinan does not offer any Italian courses. Therefore, it is difficult to have an exchange programme with an Italian university.

**Q: Some schools in Malaysia and Singapore teach their courses in English.**

A: Yes, schools in Hong Kong also use English as a means of teaching. When we were preparing to begin the programme with Bordeaux Business School, we wondered whether our students needed to be fluent in French. Then they told us that the students don't necessarily need to be good at French. Many students at Bordeaux Business School speak English.

**Q: Yes, they do.**

A: When a faculty member from Bordeaux visited us in Fukuoka, we spoke in French. Later, I found that he also spoke English, from then on, we spoke some in French and some in

English.

**Q: When did you study French?**

A: I studied French when I was in college. I had learned German when I was in high school. I wanted to take an advanced German class, but I had to start from the beginning, so I decided to take a French course instead. After graduating from college, I started working as a translator in Tokyo. I used to go to a language school called Athenee Français when my working day was over. It was not a problem for me to speak French, but it was difficult for me to listen and understand, because I was not immersed in French speaking environment all day long.

**Q: Did you learn German in high school? I (Fukue) also went to Seinan High School. There were neither German nor French classes. I was taught English in order to do well on the university entrance exams.**

A: I see. When I was a student at Seinan Gakuin University, I joined the Bible class and I also audited the courses that the division of Theology was offering, so I can read Greek.

**Q: Greek?**

A: One time I was travelling in Greece with some Australian friends. Whenever they saw something that was written in Greek, they asked me what it meant. The funny thing was I was speaking with those friends in English, but one of them had a very strong accent and we needed another friend as an interpreter.

**Q: How was English in Edinburgh? I (Hosomi) was almost lost when I went to Liverpool. I could barely understand what the people there were saying.**

A: It was hard for me to understand English spoken in Edinburgh. Besides, in the countryside of Scotland, Gaelic is still spoken and some of the people there do not even speak English. I needed about a year to get used to and understand what people were saying. What I think is important to improving your language ability is to go back to an English speaking country after your first studying abroad experience.

**Q: You've studied English, French, German, Greek...what about language fascinates you so much?**

A: Well, it is interesting to know different languages. I still want to study Chinese and Korean. When I went to Korea, I found myself wanting to understand what all the signs said in Korean. I also want to study Arabic. Since having read the Koran, I have wanted to read the original one. I think it is better to read a book in the language it is originally written.