Onomatopoeia: A Comparative Study of Usage, Awareness, and Perception between Japanese and American University Students

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Significance of the Study

- While studying Japanese at CSUMB, Japanese exchange students used many different onomatopoeia quite often. So I thought to myself, how often and within what situations is onomatopoeia used?

- I became interested in if American students used just as many onomatopoeia or and if they were aware of onomatopoeia usage at all. This also led me to investigate what perceptions both Japanese and American students hold as well.

- I hope to discover the answers to these questions through observation, research and surveys.

Research Questions

1. How is onomatopoeia usage and awareness different between Japanese and American university students?

2. How is the perception of using onomatopoeia different between Japanese and American university students?

Research Background

a. American and Japanese definition of onomatopoeia

b. Examples and types of onomatopoeia

c. Onomatopoeia usage

THE INTERNATIONAL SOUNDS OF
EATING
by JAMES CHAPMAN

ENGLISH CHOMP
KOREAN NYAM
FRENCH MIAM
JAPANESE PAKU PAKU
ITALIAN GNAM
ESTONIAN NAMM
POLISH CHRUP CHRUP
GERMAN MAMPF

American and Japanese Definition of Onomatopoeia

American

- Is a way of expressing a particular sound that does not have a vocabulary.

  (Hugh Bredin, 1996)
- The formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (e.g., cuckoo, sizzle,).

  (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015)

Japanese

- Words to describe sounds, often simple phonetic combinations of letters.

  (urbandictionary, 2015)
- Is broken up into two specific groups, giongo and gitaigo.
- Giongo includes sounds of animals, humans, and actions.
- Gitaigo includes sounds of feelings or certain states of being.

  (Tofugu, n.d.)

Onomatopoeia Examples

American	Japanese
Creak	Ki-ki-
Boink	Bōn
Choo-choo	Shyu shyu
Ah-choo	Hakushyon
Sizzle	Jyu-jyu-
Meow	Nya-nya
Ribbit	Gero gero
Nom-nom	Mushya-mushya
Whirl	Guru guru
Phew	Fu

(Denshi Jisho, 2015)

How to SNEEZE in ten languages
by James Chapman

ACHOO — English
HẮT XÌ — Vietnamese
HAPŞU — Turkish
EICHI — Korean
A-PSIK — Polish
HATSCHI — German
ACHHEE — Hindi
APCHKHI — Russian
ATCHIM — Portuguese
HAKUSHON — Japanese

Onomatopoeia Usage

American

- According to a dissertation written in 2010 by Takashi Sugahara, he was able to gather around **278** onomatopoeia from an Oxford English dictionary.

- Another source puts the estimate at 270 as well.

  (Onomatopoeia Dictionary, 2015)

Japanese

- Out of a Japanese dictionary of 500,000 words around **5,000** are onomatopoeia.

- That is one percent. One word out of 100 is an onomatopoeia. However, there are still many others that haven't been printed due to them being out of date or forgotten.

  (オノマトペラボ, 2015)

Research Method

- Study Participants
  - 58 University Students
  - Ages 18 and up
    - ❖ 29 **American**
      - ▪ 14 Male, 15 Female
    - ❖ 29 **Japanese**
      - ▪ 8 Male, 21 Female
- Research Instrument
  - Online Survey
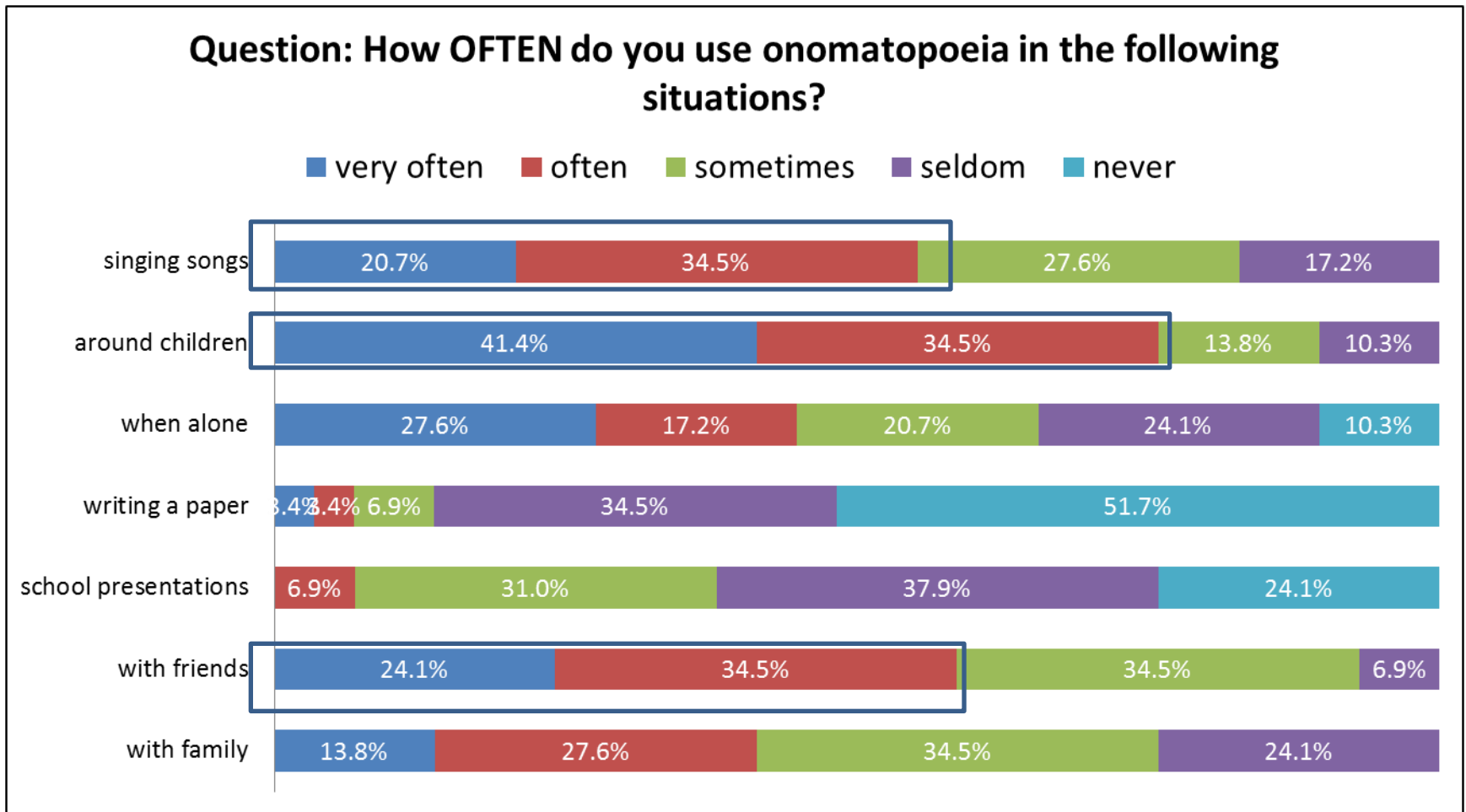   - ❖ English Survey
    - ❖ Japanese Survey

Survey Results

Research Question 1:

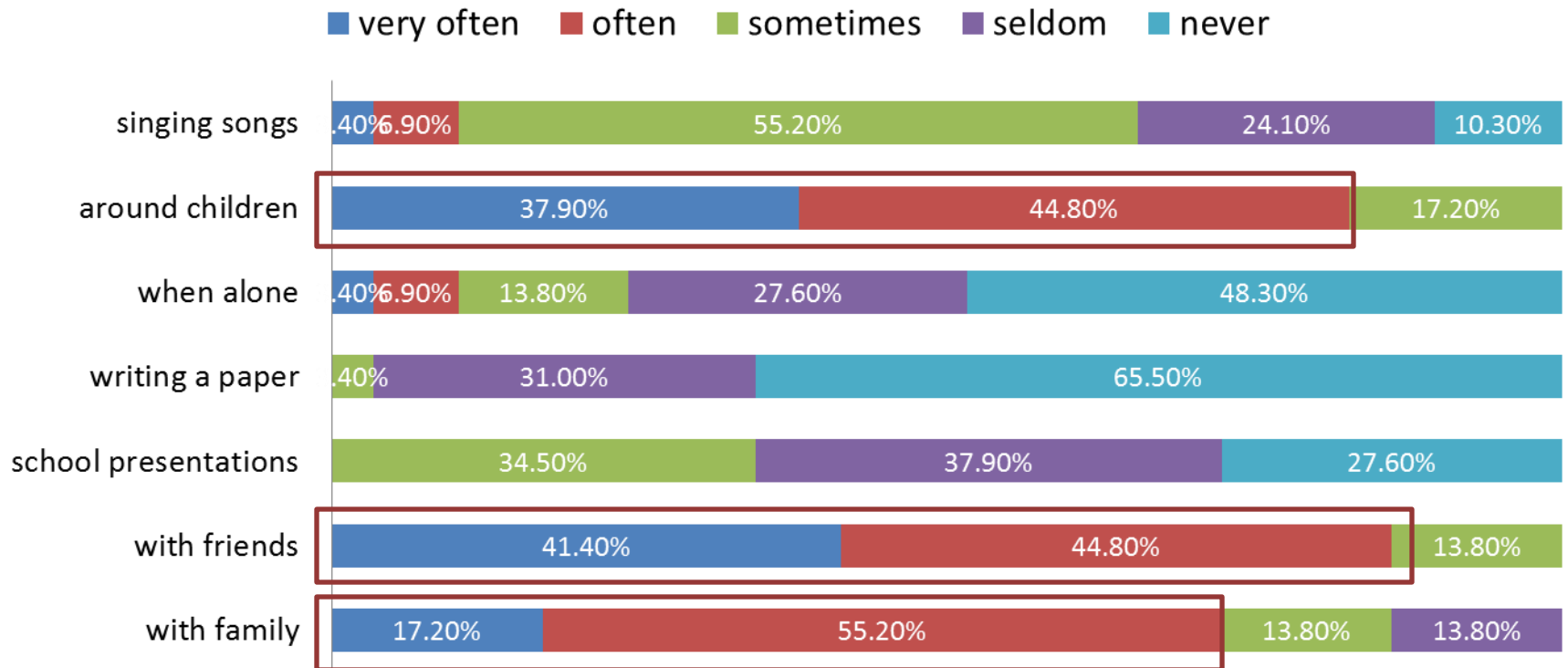How is onomatopoeia usage and awareness different between Japanese and American university students?

Frequency of Usage (American)

Question: How OFTEN do you use onomatopoeia in the following situations?

Legend: ■ very often ■ often ■ sometimes ■ seldom ■ never

Situation	very often	often	sometimes	seldom	never
singing songs	20.7%	34.5%	27.6%	17.2%	
around children	41.4%	34.5%	13.8%	10.3%	
when alone	27.6%	17.2%	20.7%	24.1%	10.3%
writing a paper	3.4%	3.4%	6.9%	34.5%	51.7%
school presentations		6.9%	31.0%	37.9%	24.1%
with friends	24.1%	34.5%	34.5%	6.9%	
with family	13.8%	27.6%	34.5%	24.1%	

American students most often use onomatopoeia with children, friends, and singing songs.

Frequency of Usage (Japanese)

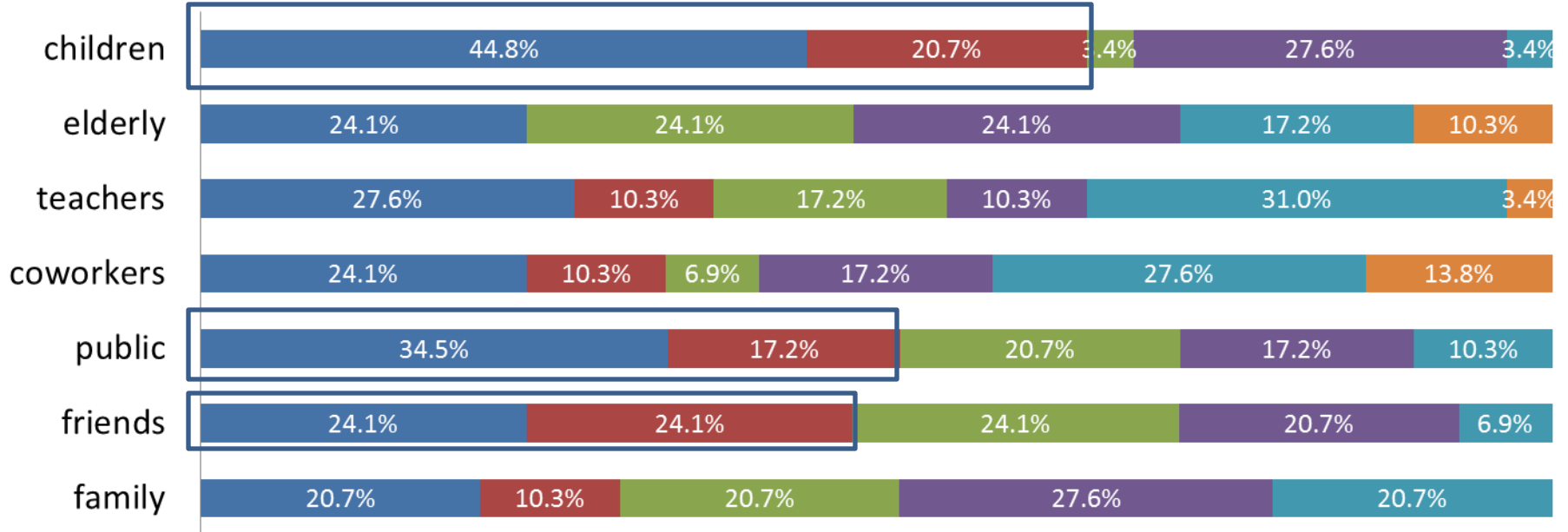Question: How often do you use onomatopoeia in the following situations?

■ very often   ■ often   ■ sometimes   ■ seldom   ■ never

	very often	often	sometimes	seldom	never
singing songs	40%	6.90%	55.20%	24.10%	10.30%
around children	37.90%	44.80%	17.20%		
when alone	40%	6.90%	13.80%	27.60%	48.30%
writing a paper	40%			31.00%	65.50%
school presentations			34.50%	37.90%	27.60%
with friends	41.40%	44.80%	13.80%		
with family	17.20%	55.20%	13.80%	13.80%	

Japanese students most often use onomatopoeia with friends, children and family.

Awareness of Onomatopoeia (**American**)

Question: How aware are you of the onomatopoeia that you use in the following situation?

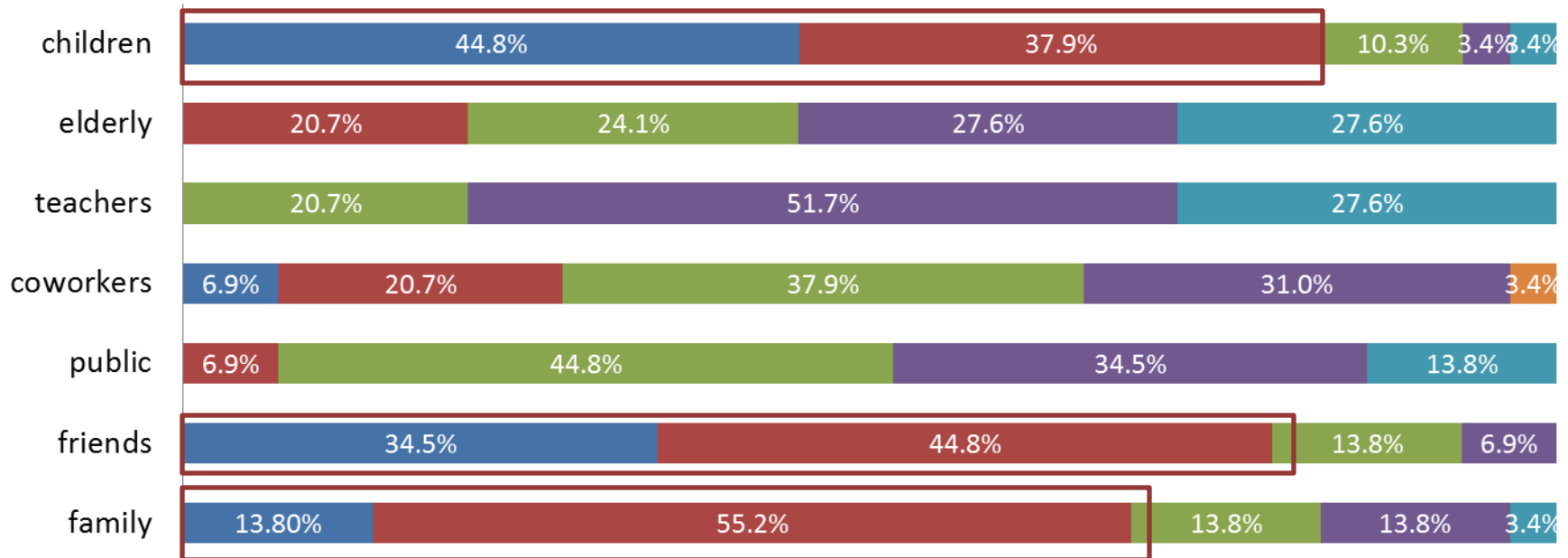Legend: ■ strongly aware ■ quite aware ■ fairly aware ■ slightly aware ■ not aware ■ n/a

	strongly aware	quite aware	fairly aware	slightly aware	not aware	n/a
children	44.8%	20.7%	3.4%	27.6%	3.4%	
elderly	24.1%		24.1%	24.1%	17.2%	10.3%
teachers	27.6%	10.3%	17.2%	10.3%	31.0%	3.4%
coworkers	24.1%	10.3%	6.9%	17.2%	27.6%	13.8%
public	34.5%	17.2%	20.7%	17.2%	10.3%	
friends	24.1%	24.1%	24.1%	20.7%	6.9%	
family	20.7%	10.3%	20.7%	27.6%	20.7%	

American students are most aware of onomatopoeia when used with children, the public, and friends.

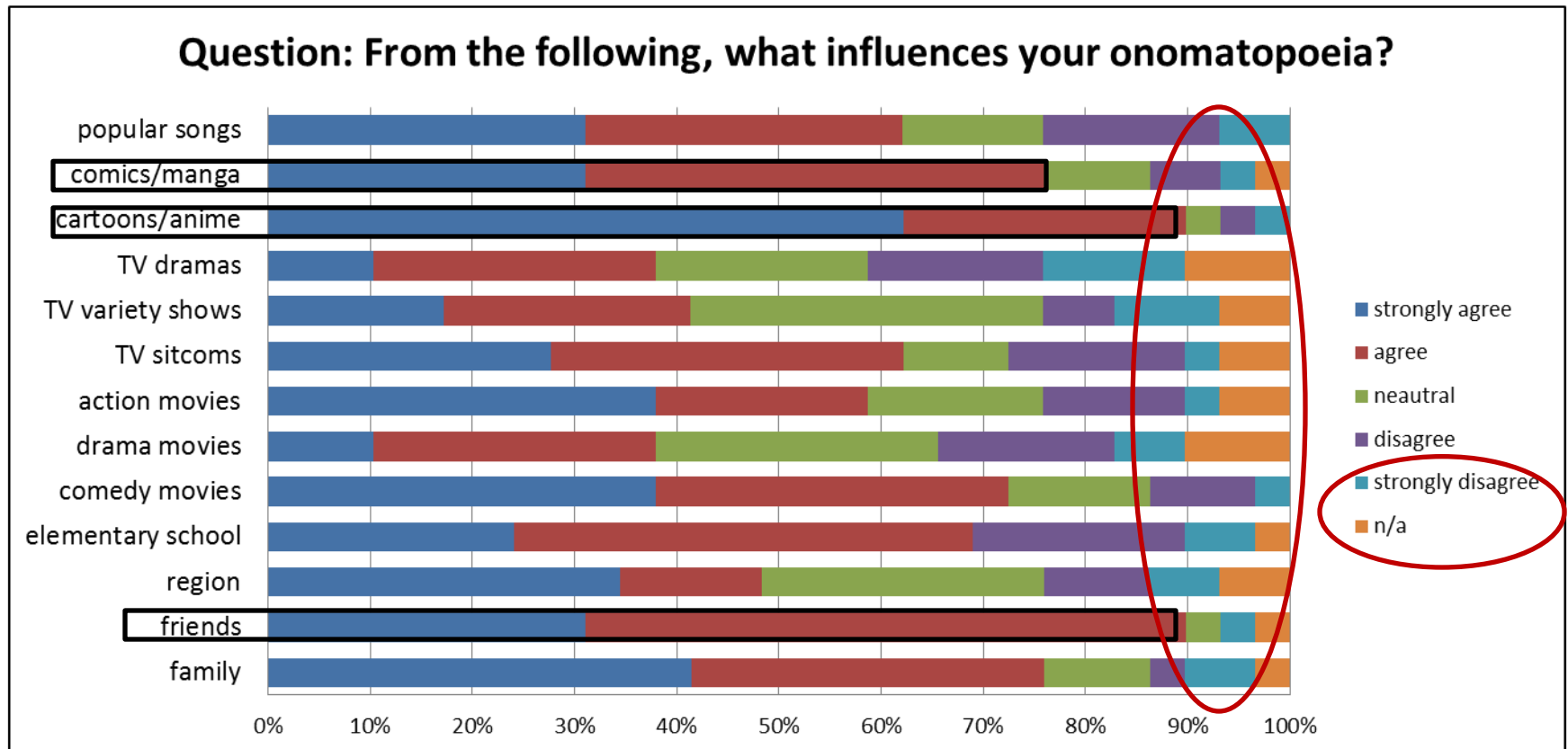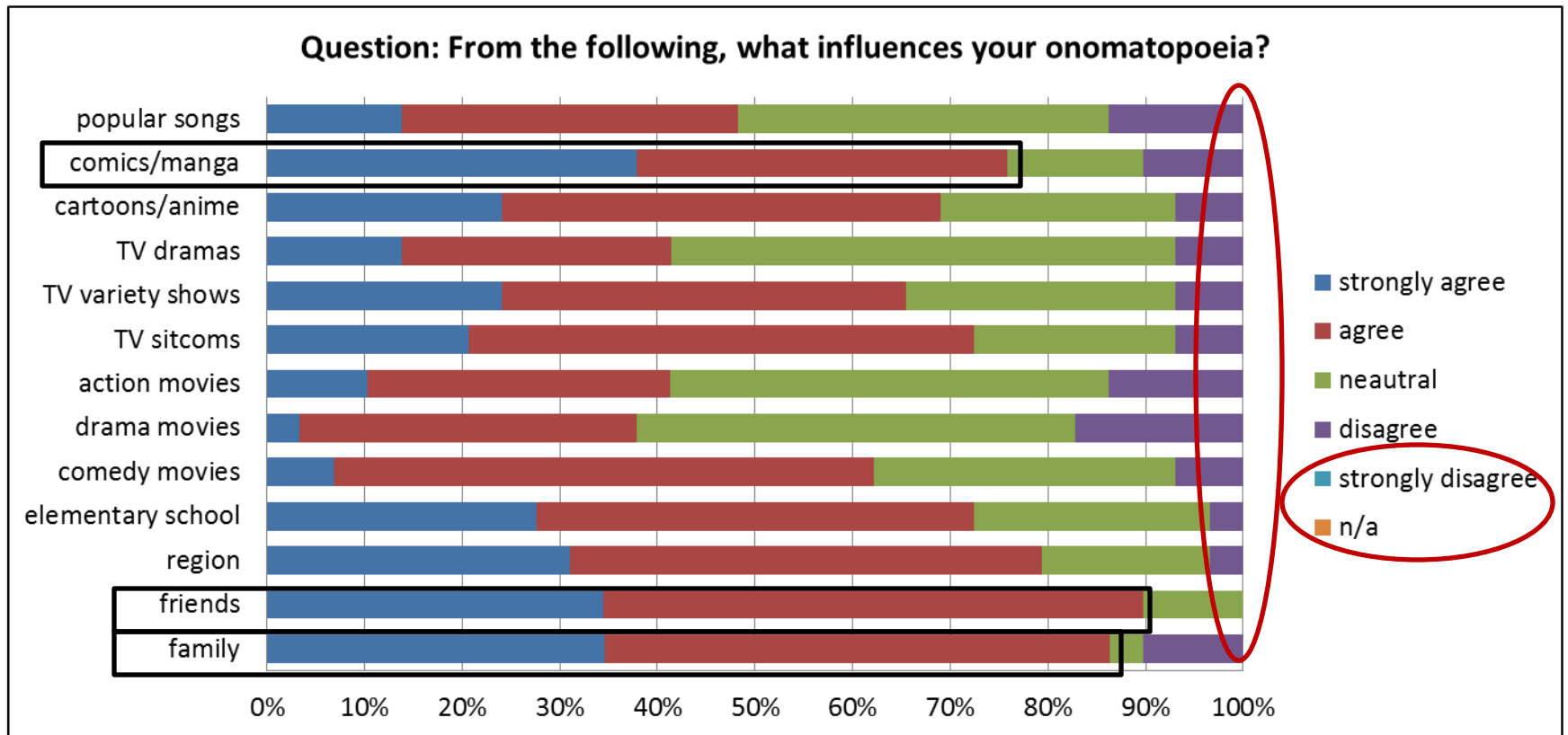# Awareness of Onomatopoeia (**Japanese**)

Question: How aware are you of the onomatopoeia you use in the following situations?

	strongly aware	quite aware	fairly aware	slightly aware	not aware	n/a
children	44.8%	37.9%	10.3%	3.4%	3.4%	
elderly		20.7%	24.1%	27.6%	27.6%	
teachers			20.7%	51.7%	27.6%	
coworkers	6.9%	20.7%	37.9%	31.0%		3.4%
public		6.9%	44.8%	34.5%	13.8%	
friends	34.5%	44.8%	13.8%	6.9%		
family	13.80%	55.2%	13.8%	13.8%	3.4%	

Japanese students are most aware of onomatopoeia when used with family, friends, and children.

Influences for Onomatopoeia
(American)

Question: From the following, what influences your onomatopoeia?

Americans are most influenced by cartoons/anime, friends, comics/manga. Also, there are a small percentage that believe specific elements are "not applicable" and "strongly disagree" about influences.

Influences for Onomatopoeia
(Japanese)

Question: From the following, what influences your onomatopoeia?

Categories (top to bottom): popular songs, comics/manga, cartoons/anime, TV dramas, TV variety shows, TV sitcoms, action movies, drama movies, comedy movies, elementary school, region, friends, family

Legend: strongly agree, agree, neautral, disagree, strongly disagree, n/a

Japanese are most influenced by friends, family, and manga. Also, under "strongly disagree" and "n/a," there were **zero responses**.

Research Question 1 Summary of Findings

- In general Japanese students have more **awareness and usage** compared to Americans.

- Both Japanese and Americans often use onomatopoeia with **children and friends**, however Japanese show high usage with **family** as well.

- American students show onomatopoeia is most influenced by **cartoons, friends, and comics** while Japanese are most influenced by **friends, family, and manga**. Also, Japanese see "**region**" as a large part of their influence as well.

- Americans did have a small percentage of students that found some of the influences to be "**strongly disagreed**" and "**not applicable**," however, Japanese had <u>no responses at all lower than "disagree"</u>.

Survey Results

Research Question 2:

How is the perception of using onomatopoeia different between Japanese and American university students?

# Perceptions of Mature or Childish Onomatopoeia (**American**)

Question: From the following, which do you feel are more mature or childish?

Legend:
- mature
- slightly mature
- neither
- slightly childish
- childish
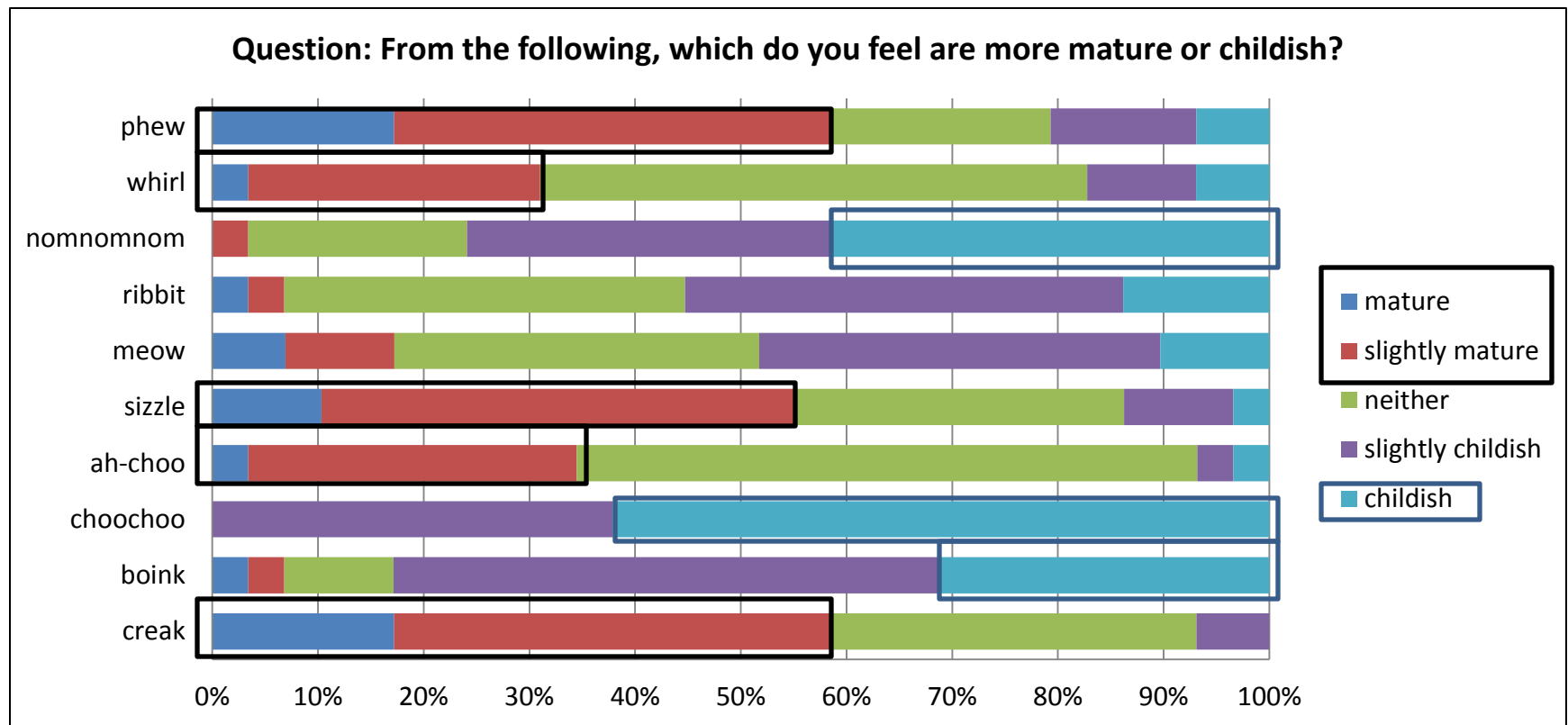
Americans perceive that five out of the ten onomatopoeia shown are "slightly mature" to "mature." Also, nom-nom-nom, choo-choo, and boink show the highest percentage of being childish.

Perceptions of Mature or Childish Onomatopoeia (Japanese)

Question: From the following, which do you feel are more mature or childish?

Categories: mature, slightly mature, neither, slightly childish, childish

Items (top to bottom): phew, whirl, nomnomnom, ribbit, meow, sizzle, ah-choo, choochoo, boink, creak
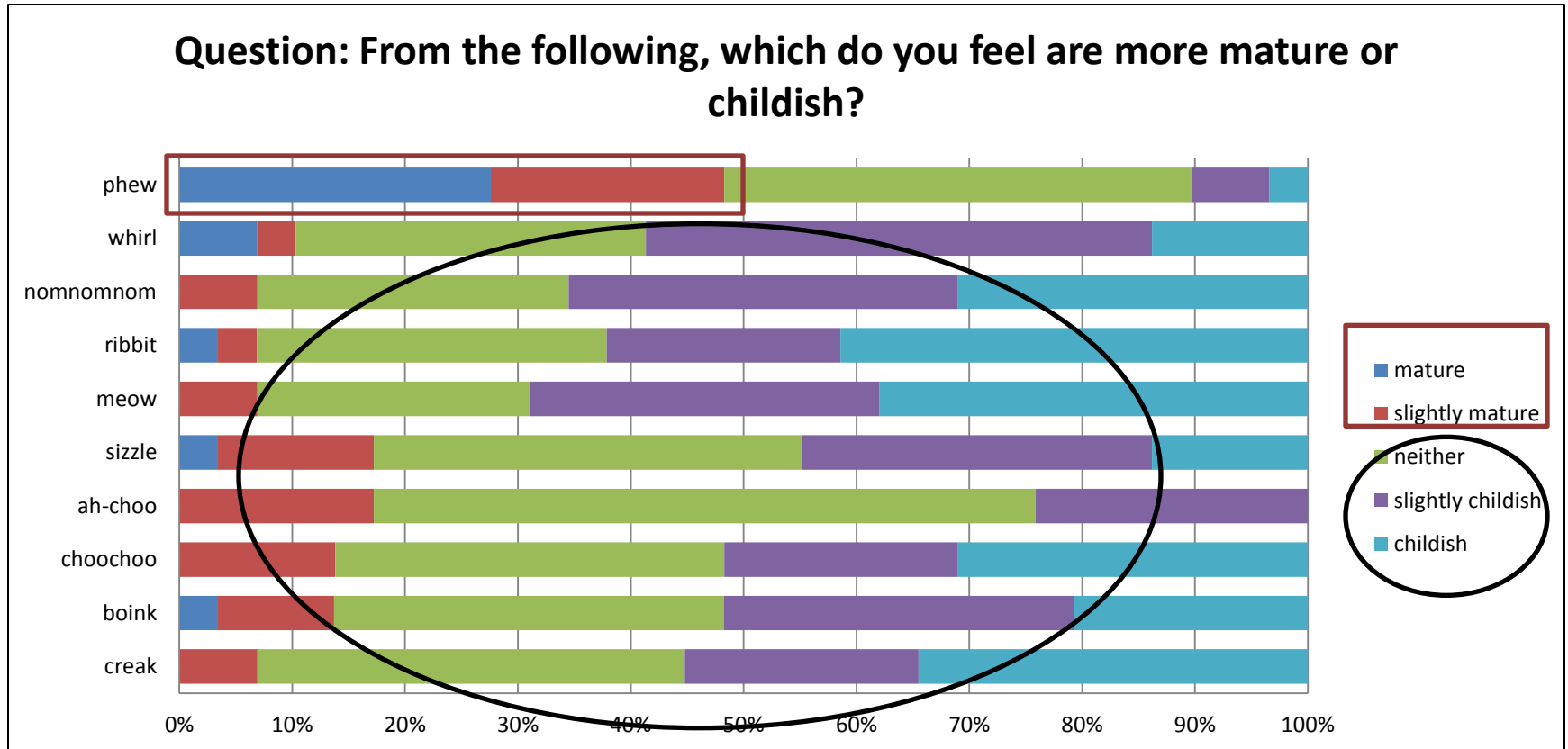
Japanese perceive that "Phew" is the most mature out of the ten shown. However, the majority of onomatopoeia remaining are closely divided between being "neither" **or** "slightly childish" and "childish".

Individual Importance of Onomatopoeia
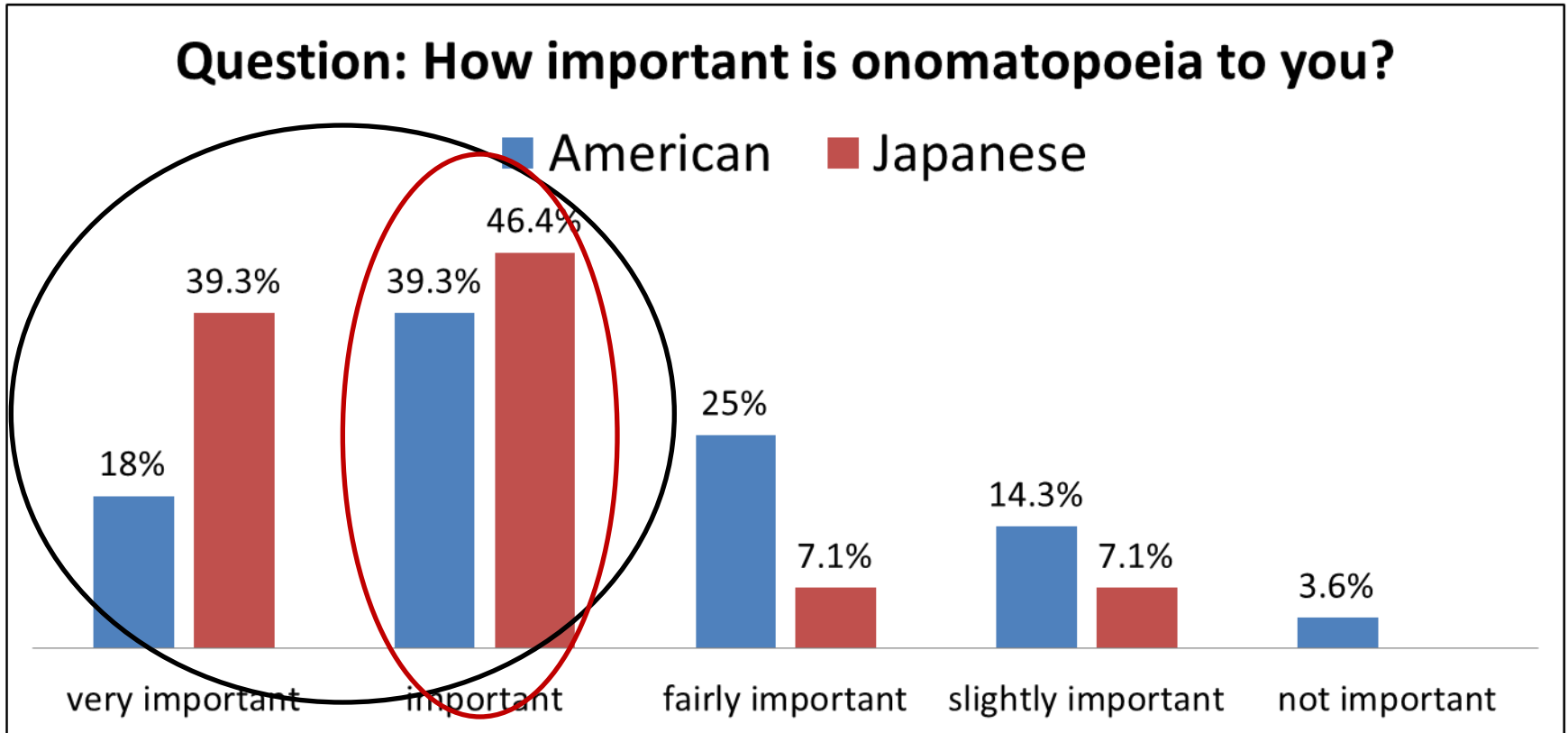
Both Japanese and American students show high percentages of importance for onomatopoeia. The black circle shows the higher combined importance from Japanese compared to Americans.

Reasons Why Onomatopoeia is Used

Question: What are the reasons why you would use onomatopoeia?
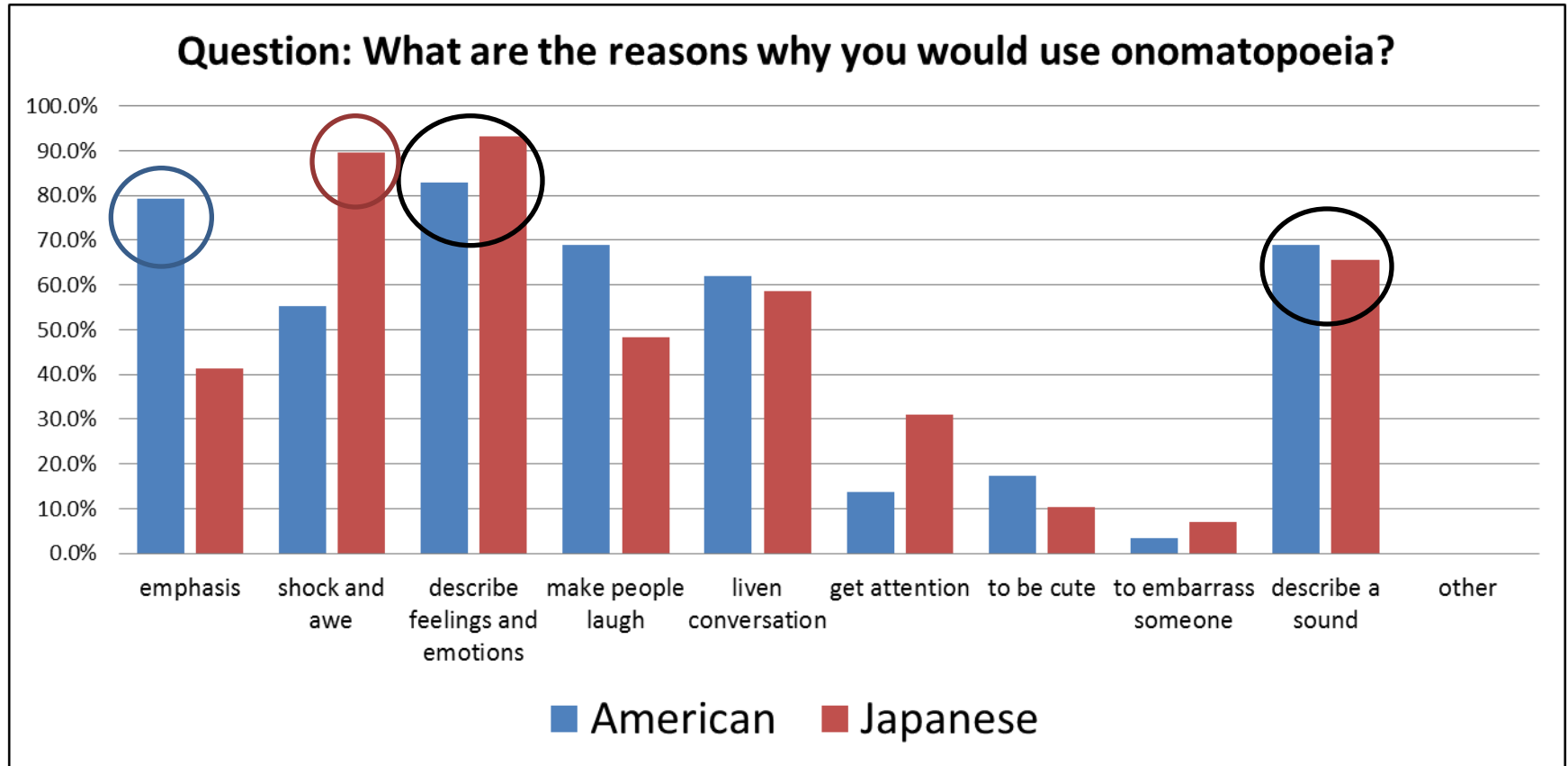
Americans find "**describing feelings and emotions**," "**emphasis**," and "**describing sounds**" to be the most popular reason to use onomatopoeia. Japanese find "**describing feelings and emotions**," "**shock and awe**," and "**describing sounds**" to be the most popular.

Research Question 2 Summary of Findings

- Perceptions of onomatopoeia being <u>mature or childish</u> are more varied in Americans while Japanese find that a majority are <u>neither</u>.

- Japanese and American students both find onomatopoeia to be **important**.

- **Describing feelings and emotions**, and **describing sounds** are similar reasons to use onomatopoeia for Japanese and Americans. However, Japanese also picked **shock and awe** while Americans picked **emphasis** as reasons as well.

- There are twice as many American students than Japanese students that find **emphasis** to be a reason for onomatopoeia usage.

Conclusion

- **Onomatopoeia is found throughout the world**. **Not every country uses the same ones.**

- Americans have a much **smaller amount of onomatopoeia** to choose from in comparison to Japanese.

- Americans have **different usages, awareness and perceptions** compared to the Japanese.

- The survey data shows that **Japanese have more usage and awareness than Americans.**

- Some of the **perceptions** of onomatopoeia are **similar but there are many differences as well.**

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