

Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research and Research Assistance

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For around four years beginning in September 1983, I lived in Philadelphia to pursue a PhD in linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia is well known as the home of the Liberty Bell and the place where the Declaration of Independence was signed (and through association with the Philadelphia Museum of Art entrance with the steps that Sylvester Stallone ran up in the movie, *Rocky*). Through that entire period, I studied under Professor William Labov, who had secured a series of grants from the National Science Foundation. Although I did not benefit directly from that grant funding because I already had a three-year scholarship and was employed as a teaching assistant in my final year, many of my friends and colleagues in graduate school were able to cover their living expenses and engage in data gathering and research for their doctoral dissertations by serving as research assistants for projects that had received grant funding.

Late in the autumn of 1986, I was fortunate to have my application for a position with the Keio University International Center accepted. Hence, in the spring of 1987, I returned home to Japan somewhat earlier than planned. During the summer break that year, I once again traveled to the US to put the finishing touches on my doctoral dissertation. One day, shortly after I had returned to Keio's Mita campus, autumn was in the air and I had a chance encounter with Professor Yukio Otsu of the Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies (today he is Vice President of Meikai University). On that occasion, Professor Otsu asked whether I had taken the time to pick up any Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (Kakenhi) application forms. Although my prospects for the completion of my dissertation were at last taking shape, here I was, still a fledgling first-year faculty member completely preoccupied with the day-to-day affairs of my classes and university duties, and my reply was accordingly a lame "Huh, what's Kakenhi?" This is certainly not a response that would be expected nowadays from young researchers as they are fully aware of the existence of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) because most apply for Research Fellowships for Young Scientists-DC while in their doctoral program. As we chatted in the shade of a tree, Professor Otsu informed me that Kakenhi would be essential to my research from that point forward and

with a smile, encouraged me to head right over to the research grant office. He also shared some extremely practical advice—namely, that I make my first application for a Grant-in-Aid for Encouragement of Scientists (A) because the age limit was 37 and recipients did not need to file written reports following the completion of their funded research.

After our chat, I went straight to the grant office and picked up an application form. I put together a research proposal by poring over the application guidelines and just barely managed to submit an application before the deadline. Having written off this first submission as a trial run, I had completely forgotten about it by the start of the new year. Needless to say, I was absolutely stunned that spring when I received notice that I had “won” (perhaps an imprudent term here but at the time I felt as if I had actually won the lottery). From that point and over the ensuing five-year span, I continued to have grant applications approved for projects in the same research category. At this stage in my career, sustained grant funding enabled me to acquire recording equipment essential to the collection of natural conversation data samples in a relatively short time frame and more firmly establish myself as a researcher. For this, I am deeply grateful.

However, in the sixth year, my Kakenhi application was not approved. Bearing in mind that the type of assistance I sought was limited by researcher age (although I was still some years away from the ceiling age of 37), I took this as a message that it was time for me to “graduate” from my young researcher mind-set and accordingly decided to submit a grant application for research in a different category. However, the hurdles proved higher despite several repeated submissions. Partly because this coincided with my second stint in the US—this time as a visiting associate professor at Dartmouth College—in the end I decided not to file an application at all one year.

So, for some years, Kakenhi would not be a part of my life, but in fiscal 1997 a new opportunity arose. That was my inclusion on the linguistic development team involved in a five-year project under the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research for Priority Areas (later became the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Priority Areas (A)) category led by (then) University of Tokyo Professor Shigeru Kiritani as principal investigator on the theme, “*Kokoro no hattatsu: ninchi-teki seicho no kiko*” (“Development of mind: mechanisms of cognitive growth”). Although I had hitherto done most of my research on an individual basis, my participation in this project gave me a profound awareness of the value of joint research and equipped me to engage in research projects in the

Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A, B, C) category with research fellows affiliated with other universities. My experiences during this five-year undertaking also proved highly worthwhile especially in various dimensions of project management. In my pursuit of these research endeavors, I believe I would have faced an array of obstacles had the project in Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research for Priority Areas category not been available. When I began my graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania, I had almost never pictured myself leading research projects with outside funding. Nor, of course, did I ever imagine that 30 years later as a university president, I would be striving to boost the grant application acceptance rate for the university overall. However, looking back on my own about-face introduction to and experience with Kakenhi, I have become painfully aware of the importance of encouraging young researchers to apply for grant funding especially immediately after they have received their degrees, and of providing them with adequate institutional support.