

*Mutual misunderstanding:
A pragmatic case study of one inter-cultural encounter.*

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Abstract

One principal issue in cross-cultural misunderstanding is that those involved most often do not know it is happening. This study is a pragmatics orientated examination of a situation in which, due to differing cultural values, knowledge of background information and understanding of roles, two actors in an exchange cooperate, each with different understanding of what is going on, and still feel things have been accomplished to their mutual satisfaction.

Keywords: pragmatic, interactional analysis, cross-cultural, misunderstanding, case study

The in depth analysis of verbal encounters among speakers of differing cultural background is a field of linguistic investigation which has clear social relevance since it can serve to uncover communicative sources of social problems in our culturally diverse, modern, industrialized societies that would otherwise remain undetected. Yet at the same time it is also of considerable importance for pragmatic theory in as much as it provides an ideal testing ground for theories of how cultural presuppositions enter into the interpretation of what we see and hear.... along with many other students of discourse, we assume that understanding in everyday encounters is in large part a matter of inferences that rely both on linguistic presupposition and on knowledge of the world, much of which is culture bound. (Gumperz and Roberts, 1991, p. 51-52)

Grice's maxims present conversation as a negotiation towards a common goal, the breach or ignoring of which indicates further meaning to those involved. Jenny Thomas (1983) quotes Miller (1974) as stating "A far more important source of difficulty in communication is that we so often fail to understand a speaker's intention" to establish the term "pragmatic failure". But what happens when one or both of the actors in an interaction, while misunderstanding the social structure and thus intention or meaning behind what the other is saying, complete the interaction to their mutual satisfaction in terms of what both believe was going on. Is this a 'pragmatic failure'?

Several years ago I was involved in such an interaction. This project will attempt to analyze this cross-cultural interaction in terms of the overall background of the participants, the stages of the interaction and what may have affected the behaviour of different actors at different times. This will shed some light on how participants behave when a- all participants know that there are cross-cultural problems at work and b- when some or all parties are unsure of what they want from the interaction.

The fact that this interaction was conducted through an interpreter adds an interesting dimension to the discourse, especially in terms of turn-taking. Unfortunately there isn't space to go into it here, so I will leave such considerations to future research.

The Actors

(Please note that the names of the actors besides myself have been replaced with aliases.)

Patricia -a French national who is a European trained and experienced restoration artist specializing in Tibetan artwork who came to Japan to study restoration techniques approximately six months prior to the interaction and who, upon having encountered significant resistance to what she wanted to do despite having been in contact (with positive response) with another studio for quite some time, had almost given up on the idea. She had taken up wood-block printing in the meantime. Her command of Japanese is minimal. Her English is good, but far from fluent.

Imura san - a male Japanese national who is a Japanese trained restoration artist (as well as painter) from a well-known artistic family who is moving out of restoration into painting due to the inconsistency of the volume of restoration work in Japan, but who is nevertheless keen to pass on knowledge of, as he put it, the real and true methods of Japanese restoration, internationally. His command of English is unknown, but presumed minimal.

Matthew -myself, acting as translator.

Reiko-my friend. An acquaintance of Patricia and a skilled pottery student of a well known Kyoto artist. Her English is of a low level.

Reiko's mother, Tachibana -san- An older lady who seems to have many connections in the artistic world perhaps due to the fact that her husband had his own kimono company for a while. Her English is minimal.

Others indirectly involved-

*Stellar-san-*A long-term resident in Japan who is also a craft master.

Tanabe-san- The restoration artist that Patricia was in contact with before she came to Japan. He is an older man of the old school of craftsmen.

The Background

Reiko, through me, found out about Patricia's frustration, and, upon seeing a woodblock print produced by Patricia, showed the print to her mother and explained the situation on her own initiative. The mother then informed me, through Reiko, of an acquaintance who was a restorer and asked if Patricia would like to talk to him. The mother seems to have had a relationship with Imura-san's deceased mother. To cut a long story short an evening was organized in which Patricia, Tachibana-san, Reiko and I would go and observe one of Imura-san's painting classes. The interview was arranged quickly and there was little chance for any member to get more than a very basic grasp of background information. The interaction will be examined beginning with

this offer by Tachibana-san. I have laid out the details of the introduction as this is more important in Japan than in the West.

The Setting

The interview began in an office in Imura-san's house adjoining his classroom. The participants sat in low, large comfortable chairs and Imura-san's wife later served coffee. The participants later moved on into the classroom/workshop where six of Imura-san's advanced students were working.

Method of research and relevant notes

Reports from the participating members were considered in analyzing the offer and up to the class observation, followed by the researcher's (myself) active participation in and observation of the actual interaction in the role of interpreter. The actual interaction was a little over an hour and a half long. I realize that, as Kasper and Dahl (1991) point out "rather than collecting isolated conversational segments, it is preferable to audio- or video-record complex speech events, and to compare these data with elicited data types." (p. 241) Unfortunately the situation did not allow for this to be recorded, so quotes are short and consist of lines I wrote down soon after the exchange. I have been careful only to include quotes I am sure of. Where possible, the Japanese and my approximate translations have both been included.

The observation of the class itself was followed up by retrospective interviews (as with the gatekeeping encounters discussed in Kasper and Dahl, 1991) "with participants to shed light on their perceptions of the proceeding interaction." (p. 231) These were taped and parts relevant to this discussion were transcribed. Several interviews were also carried out with members of the art world to discover Japanese norms in the scripts involved, in particular, Harry Stellar. All quotes of Patricia included in this study are from the retrospective interview. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances involved, I was unable to have a retrospective interview with Imura-san.

Before continuing I would like to point out that my Japanese level has been rated as advanced in conversation. I learnt Japanese formally in language schools full time for a year, and then part time off and on for the following three years. Despite this, I had to find through trial and error the proper use of differing levels of politeness, address patterns and more general conversation patterns and methods of discourse myself.

Gumperz states "Understanding of communicative strategies is... less a matter of length of residence than of communicative experience" (p. 140). It is important to point out that I have limited experience in the restoration field as well as in acting as an interpreter. However, both Reiko and Reiko's mother, Tachibana-san, expressed satisfaction in the way that I spoke and conducted the translation. Unfortunately this is no accurate guide to my effectiveness. Patricia's pragmatic competence in English is another potential problem that will be discussed later.

Method of Organization and Why

I hope to demonstrate that the main participants' (Patricia and Imura-san) *contextualizing knowledge* of what was going on was different. This brings in the concern of scripts, frames or schemata, amongst many others. As Brown and Yule (1983) point out,

Although there appear to be many different terms employed by different researchers, there is a very large area of overlap in what these different terms are used to describe. (p. 238)

There isn't the space to go into the complexities of this here. The confusion possible due to the wide variety and use of terms, as so well illustrated by Cavalcanti (1983), is enough to put anyone off. So, to keep things simple, I will favour the term 'script'.

"A 'script', which is embedded within a socially defined and recognizable 'Activity Type' is a structuring of expectations..." (Candlin and Willing, 1998, p. 92) therefore, as "'script' is consonant with 'role'" (op. cit., p. 91) and, as Imura-san takes a dominant role, as will be discussed, and thus he controlled turn taking (through an interpreter) and topic, the encounter will be organized as he saw it-the interview of a possible new student.

Any division of an exchange into 'stages' (as I will call them) is artificial, but it aids in the understanding of the differing roles, language in use and expectations of the different 'stages' of the interview. As Levinson (1979) points out-

Elements of the structure of an activity include its subdivision into a number of sub-parts or episodes as we may call them... and within each any pre-structured sequences that may be required by convention, the norms governing the allocation of turns at speaking, and so on. (p. 369)

Approximate Stages of the Interview

The Interview will be organized into four main episodes-Pre-Interview, Office Interview, Class Interview and Follow Up. The Pre-Interview consists of the offer made by Tachibana-san to Patricia. The Office Interview and the Class Interview are the two sections of the main interaction under consideration. The first of these is divided into the establishing of identities, the establishing of aims or needs (of Patricia by Imura-san) and the discussion of action or what can be done. This is followed by the second-the observation of class, including discussion during the class, and finally with decisions upon future or follow up action. In the final section, the Follow Up, the reaction of Imura-san to the interview over the phone are discussed.

It should be noted that I constructed these stages myself from my own understanding of the interview.

Pre-interview

The Offer

Reiko rang me with an offer from her mother, Tachibana-san, to introduce Patricia to Imura-san. Patricia accepted. It should be pointed out here that Tachibana-san, Reiko and I were unaware of the full extent of the frustrations encountered by Patricia up until this point. The lack of this knowledge was to have telling results in our presumptions.

The action of going to visit a teacher's class seems to hold different meaning for Japanese and for 'Westerners' (although I realize that this is a gross generalization). I interviewed Harry Stellar, a long-term resident in Japan, who is a recognized artist and teacher in several traditional Japanese fields, in particular wood-block printing. He stated that

If you go that far (to go to a teacher's Ikebana class, etc.) in Japan it's almost a commitment. In the West we hop around from teacher to teacher. In Japan you just don't do that.

There are, of course ways around this. Where if

... a friend points out before hand there are many constraints, time, money and so on and it is a friend of that student then no loss of face is suffered.

None of the above had occurred as Tachibana san had thought that Patricia was applying as a very interested potential student.

As Gumperz (1982) points out "By signaling a speech activity, a speaker also signals the social presuppositions in terms of which a message is to be interpreted." (p. 132) Thus Patricia, in accepting the offer of going to visit the teacher and his class, was signaling her definite desire to study and her position to Imura-san as one of potential student to teacher. While, for Patricia, the latter may have been true, the former was certainly not.

Patricia's lack of knowledge of Japan in this area (and my neglect in not informing her) set the stage for the difference in what each of the main parties considered was at stake in the interview itself. Tachibana-san's offer, in the light of the above, seems to have had a double meaning. On the one hand she was asking if Patricia would like to meet her friend, and on the other, she was asking just how serious Patricia was about all this, which means that, in Searle's words (1975, p. 60 cited in Leech, 1981, p. 334) "one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another" and so this sentence has indirect illocutionary force. Whether or not Tachibana-san was consciously aware of the double meaning of her question is beyond this study but I would suggest the double meaning had, in Fairclough's (1985) words, become naturalized or common sense, and therefore opaque so Tachibana -san's invitation was more than it appeared to Patricia, and while Tachibana san didn't feel she had to embellish on it because the meaning was clear to her, Patricia didn't feel the need to add or ask more because the meaning was clear to her also.

When asked what she expected would happen before the class observation Patricia stated -

um, er.. I didn't really know because with Japanese people I ah, never really know (laugh)

so, er the main thing I expect is, erm, that this man explain me some things about restoration here and how it works, and yeah, how ... how if there is schools and how how could I do even if he couldn't do something for me, maybe help me to know what to do, er how... so that's why..

Patricia continued throughout the interview with Imura-san to appear to be unsure of what she wanted and this may have been a contributing factor in guiding how the interview progressed, as will be discussed.

Office Interview

Establishing identities -As Gumperz (1982) points out

What seems to happen is that, at the beginning of each conversation, there is an introductory phase when interpersonal relationships are negotiated and participants probe for common experiences or some evidence of shared perspective. If this maneuver is successful, the subsequent interaction is more likely to take the form of an interrelated series of moves in which speakers cooperate to produce a well-coordinated sequence of exchanges. (p. 142)

In this crucial phase Patricia failed to respond to what Imura-san was saying. Imura-san began by outlining some of his own experience, handing out the obligatory (in Japan) business cards, and asking to know exactly what area she was interested in. As Loveday (1983) indicates,

Conversational openings are not meaningless mechanisms, but generally bear a significant influence on the rest of the exchange because one of their functions is to set up the relationship between the participants; it is during the opening sequence that the partners evaluate each other and judge whether and in what way further interaction can be developed. (p. 177)

He goes on to state that "In the Japanese speech community the establishment of identity and status is a fundamental prerequisite to a considerable portion of interaction (p. 178)."

Patricia responded to Imura-san's opening gambit with silence while she contemplated. She didn't hand over the business card it turned out later she had. She seemed to be in a state of confusion. She was sitting up, on the edge of her chair in a position of deference while Imura-san was sitting back in his. In this she was acting her part in the Japanese script of potential student coming to see a teacher. As Harry Stellar indicated in his interview, "the students who come to observe don't make a noise".

"The failure to say something that is normally expected is thus interpreted in attitudinal terms by some listeners, while others see it as having identifiable signaling value." (Gumperz, 1982, p. 139) If, from a Japanese point of view, Patricia was a member of the restoration world, she would have then stated her own credentials and answered Imura-san's probe. The fact that she didn't assert her identity at this time relayed to Imura-san the fact that perhaps she was not so experienced and thus, for him, the interview became one of teacher to potential student.

Imura-san's questions and information included several important (in Japan) markers such as

the following-

(Imura-san) In 'X' university, where I got my Masters, restoration is divided into four areas....

(Tachibana san) Oh, so you graduated from 'X' university.

'X' University is a very prestigious institution and association with institutions is very important in Japan, as Imura-san himself stated later in the interview while advising Patricia. When Patricia's (and everyone else's) responses to this were ones of respect and when Patricia said little about herself to 'match' this, his feeling of being the 'sensei' were reinforced. What may have been politeness on Patricia's part was misinterpreted.

As Scollon and Scollon (1983) point out, "there are three factors that determine what kind of politeness strategy will be used, power, distance and the absolute seriousness or weight of the imposition. Brown and Levinson suggest that different groups may typically treat these factors differently. If one group for any reason should place a value on maintaining distance (+D) between individuals, this will create an overall deference politeness system." (pp. 168-9) From personal experience and Stellar's comments (I cannot prove this here as there isn't space to do a full study) I believe Japan has a deference politeness system. This would mean that Imura-san would expect to be dominant as the sensei, and perform, which is exactly what he did. While in translated exchanges such things as turn taking and topic control take on a slightly different aspect, Imura-san took control of the interview in reaction to Patricia's deference by speaking and telling me when to translate and asking few questions of Patricia.

Patricia's action here may have been affected by what she had been told by Tanabe-san, the restorer who had rejected her. In her interview with Tanabe-san and subsequent chat with Tanabe-san's interpreter (who was one of Tanabe-san's students) she was told that

... if he (Tanabe-san) teach somebody he prefer that this person doesn't have any, um, any school erm background with restoration, he prefer new people and people who will just apply his method...

She expressed some insecurity about formal Japanese situations too -

... and then Tanabe san came but it was very very very tradition Japanese style man and so you know with all the, the traditional things you have to do and to say and and all these things I don't know so it was a bit hard for me...

She went on to state she felt relaxed with Imura-san as her friends were there and she had been introduced. Imura-san then moved on to attempt to find out her aims and needs as a student in Japan.

Establish aims/needs -In continuing with her apparent acceptance of her role in this Japanese script Patricia only responded to questions and never initiated her own questions. Imura-san then laid out the different areas of restoration in Japan and was seeking to find what she was interested in. She answered, but she continued to give the impression that she had not really thought about it. Patricia's non-verbal signals also continued to be very deferential. Imura-san then began 'lecturing', for want of a better word. He began to expect no answer from Patricia,

as indicated by his comments as soon as I finished translating anything, such as “un, sore de....” (yeah, and so/on top of that...) or before I translated “toriaezu sore o iute kudasai” (tell her that first of all)-an indication of more to come.

At this point it may be beneficial to consider why Patricia was being so deferent. There are four possibilities-any one or combination of which may offer an acceptable explanation.

The first possibility is, as Thomas (1983) quotes Glahn (1981),

An asymmetrical power relationship exists between native and non-native speakers (whether the native speaker is conscious of it or not). Non-native speakers may sometimes appear to be behaving in a pragmatically inappropriate manner (e.g. by being unexpectedly deferential) because they (rightly) perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage.” (p. 104)

Thus Patricia’s silence and obvious attempts to be humble and deferential were misinterpreted as those of a student-particularly because she knew, as a non-speaker of Japanese and non-native speaker of English that she was at a disadvantage.

The second may be from Patricia’s character itself. She is a quiet and unassuming person by nature. As Scollon and Scollon (1983) point out

Because communicative style is so intimately associated with one’s identity both as a person and as a member of a group and because one’s own style is used largely out of one’s own awareness, leakage from communicative style is a particularly insidious source of misinterpretation. (p. 157)

Patricia’s style is humble and respecting. Japanese seem to have an image of Westerners as loud and pushy, and thus Japanese probably expect foreigners to be far more forthcoming according to their own images and so Imura-san may have misinterpreted this. Character does not always comply with stereotypes or general images- a thing that makes discourse analysis that much more difficult and interesting!

The third possibility lies in the Politeness Principle. The essence of the Politeness Principle is, in its positive aspect, ‘Give credit to the other person’, and in its negative aspect, ‘Do not cause offense to the other person.’ Perhaps Patricia, unable to perform the former due to her lack of language and her low confidence in English, chose to remain with the latter by remaining silent-especially as she would have needed ‘processing time’ for the English she was listening to, which he rarely gave unless he asked a direct question.

The fourth, and final possibility lies in Patricia’s interpretation of the situation in comparison with her former experience. When I asked her about how, compared to Tanabe-san, she felt about Imura-san she said -

I was completely different-ah, the age, was hmm he’s younger, so (yeah) I don’t mind about the age but here I think maybe it’s not the same generation, it’s not the same culture nearly, it’s very different. Less stronger, less strong. More... not occidental, not er Western style, but nearly. (laughs)

Her view of him as more Western perhaps encouraged her in use of what are perhaps normal politeness strategies that he misinterpreted as deference to his status as a teacher and the dominant party in this exchange.

On the other hand, I could be misinterpreting. There could be another explanation. I mentioned Imura-san seemed to go into 'lecture mode'. In discussing Sacks, Thompson (1984) states "An interesting feature of much conversation is the way in which turn-taking machinery is temporarily suspended by the telling of stories." (p. 113) Perhaps Ishikawa-san was telling a story-the story of restoration in Japan and his role in it, and that is why he appeared to dominate.

While it is true that this is what Patricia came to hear it would seem an odd reaction on Imura-san's part if he wasn't playing the sensei, unless he felt he had to perform to fill the silence (as he did later on in the observation of the actual class) or, just like in Sack's analysis of the joke recounted in Thompson (1984, pp. 113-4) he was telling a story for a purpose-to elicit a reaction, that being Patricia's telling of her own stories to establish her own identity.

This seems unlikely. When discussing the work of Sinclair et al. Thompson (1984) states -
 Language is a very important medium for the expression of relations of power; but it is not the only medium and it cannot be assumed that such relations are fully disclosed within discourse. When a teacher canes a pupil or police open fire on protesting students, power is expressed in a form which is not discursive. (p. 108)

Patricia's body language throughout was deferent while Imura-san's became more and more confident-in the way he sat, his gestures and his moving the conversation away from just himself and Patricia (through me) to include Reiko and Tachibana-san. This leads me to conclude that he felt himself to be the teacher in the script of teacher interviewing new student. Now that he knew Patricia was interested in studying and had outlaid the choices she had he turned to discussing what action she should take.

Discuss action -Imura-san laid out a series of choices for Patricia in terms of schools and what was available in Japan very clearly, counting them off on his hand. He offered to introduce her to a museum so that she could spend a day there observing to get an idea of what she wanted to do, which she responded to positively. He then insisted that he get a time-frame from her for how long she intended to study.

It was at this point that she stated that she had to return to France to do some work for the Guimet Museum-a large, well-known and prestigious institution which is in fact THE National Museum of Asian Art in France-and that due to her commitments she could only stay a couple of years after completing that.

At the mention of the Museum's name (which Imura-san seemed to know well) he sat up on the edge of the seat and suddenly appeared to give Patricia his full attention. Until that time he had looked at me while speaking and only looked at Patricia while I was translating. From this period on he only looked at Patricia unless I was having some problem with translation. The script had changed because their roles had changed. Imura-san decided to take us in to observe his students in the class soon after.

Class Interview

Observation of class and discussion -Imura-san took us into the class, introduced the students and gave us a quick run-down on what was going on. Once again Patricia, after a few questions, became quiet. This prompted Imura-san to comment.

Ima shitsumon shite okanai to... dakara ippai kiite ne. Muko ni kaeru to shitsumon dekinai shi... (If you don't ask any questions now.... so you should ask a lot. 'Cause when you go back there you can't ask any...)

Patricia agreed, but did not ask, so, with her face in peril (as she had introduced Patricia and Patricia's silence was obviously disquieting to Imura-san who perhaps was not sure where he stood), Tachibana-san stepped in to fill the silence with her own questions. While Patricia did ask a few more, the rest of the class observation consisted primarily of Imura-san describing things to Reiko and Tachibana-san, as well as technical terms to me as I was translating what he said for Patricia's benefit. After a 'respectable period' Patricia stated that she had seen enough and didn't want to disturb his class anymore.

Decide upon future action -It was decided that, as Imura-san said -

Dakara, toriaezu watashi wa muko ni (the museum) denwa shite, sono ato Masshu san no tokoro ni renraku iremasu (So, I'll ring the museum and then I'll get back to Matthew...)

It was at this point that Patricia produced her business card and one of her wood-block prints. I handed the print over on her behalf, stating

Kore wa meishi gawari ni (this is in place of the card-a loose translation) to which everybody laughed. Later I asked Reiko why-was my Japanese incorrect? She said no-they just didn't expect me to know that custom. Putting aside the fact that this may have been influenced by our relationship (although I think she answered honestly as she is the first to tell me when I say something incorrectly, especially in a formal situation) this is interesting as, even though I spoke the language well enough to translate it seems that it was presumed I wouldn't know about the culture. This would seem to be an interesting path of research in the future.

To return to Imura-san and Patricia, as Thompson (1984) points out

The use of language in social interaction is an extremely complex process which, from time to time, is bound to go astray. But if language use has intrinsic sources of trouble, it also has a 'mechanism for dealing with them intrinsically' (p. 112)

Until Patricia mentioned the museum Imura-san was sure of where he was. Then, once he had moved on to the classroom where he knew his role, he settled back into what he knew. As Halliday (1978, cited in Fairclough, 1985, p. 746) states "By their everyday acts of meaning, people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and knowledge" so Ishikawa seemed to have decided whatever her status or role, Patricia had something to learn, so he returned to the role he had

taken before as teacher.

Patricia, for her part, didn't seem aware of this and pronounced satisfaction with the interview as a whole. When asked if she were happy about it, she replied -

Oh yeah, because I had, I had... maybe a door open for the future, maybe, it's not just closed.... with the other Tanabe san always told me yes, you have to bring your resume, but he knew that he couldn't do something for me, but he tried again to make me do things and things and phew, yeah...

Follow Up

In subsequent phone calls and informal interviews Patricia continued to express her satisfaction with the encounter as she had found out what she had set out to do, but Imura-san remarked to Reiko that Patricia has to “mo chotto shikkari shinai to...” (take things a little more seriously and really consider what she wants-a very loose translation) thus he continues to identify Patricia as a potential student who needs guidance.

Potential problems involved in this study

Apart from problems arising from my level of Japanese (in terms of vocabulary and so on) and Patricia's level of English there are several points that deserve mention here.

Relative little attention has been devoted to other areas of second language learners' sociolinguistic competence, such as sensitivity to the norms associated with turn-taking in conversational interaction, the ability to use appropriate registers of the language, or the use of language variants to indicate social group membership or to mark relative status of members within a group. (Tarone and Yule, 1989, chapter 8)

and so the question arises as to my level of sociolinguistic competence in these matters.

On top of that there is the fact that this interaction was conducted through an interpreter to be considered. Because of this Imura-san was forced to speak in completed utterances for translation. As Loveday (1983) points out, “Plain statements are fundamentally avoided by the Japanese speech-community who prefer to discuss matters indirectly and tentatively”(p. 182) therefore Imura-san was forced to speak more directly than he may regularly. How does this affect the discourse?

In addition to that we should take into account the question are interpreters in themselves a form of gatekeeper? If so, then what Scollon and Scollon point out has to be kept in mind, that is “gatekeeping for international encounters breaks down in two significant areas 1-if gatekeeper shares the applicants membership in some group and 2-communicative style (p. 157). I share both membership of some groups with Patricia (we live in the same house and we're both Westerners in Japan) as well as a similar communicative style, compared to Japanese and English. There is not the space to even begin contemplating the differences between French speakers and English speakers.

On the other hand, in a sense the conversation, as it was through an interpreter, was very much like the radio conversation in task 26 in Cook, 1989 (chapter 4) therefore it's a useful situation in which to analyze background more clearly. Naturally there was 'natural' discourse between Patricia and the interpreter, the interpreter and Imura-san and Imura-san and Reiko and Tachibana san.

Lastly, unfortunately "because the activity-specific rules of inference are more culturally-specific than other sorts, they are likely to play a large role in cross-cultural or inter-ethnic miscommunications..." (Levinson, 1979, p. 393) and an equally large role in any potential misunderstanding of the situation by me.

Conclusion

It seems that, as in Ranney's study cited in Tarone and Yule (1989) where four Japanese students and four American students produced different scripts for a visit to the doctor's office, so too did Patricia and Ishikawa san produce and act out different scripts for the visit to the class without fully realizing what the differences were.

We are interested in D, P, and R only to the extent that the actors think it is mutual knowledge between them that these variables have some particular values. Thus these are not intended as *sociologists'* ratings of *actual* power, distance, etc., but only as *actors'* assumptions of such ratings, assumed to be mutually assumed, at least within certain limits. (Brown and Levinson, 1987/1978, pp. 75-76)

Were these mutually assumed? What did the actors themselves assume? It appears there were some differences and some parts both were unaware of. Patricia's request to be a student is quite an imposition in Japan, so it must be noted that -

It is cross-cultural mismatches in the assessment of social distance, of what constitutes an imposition, of when an attempt at a 'face threatening act' should be abandoned, and in evaluating relative power, rights and obligations, etc., which cause sociopragmatic failure." (Thomas, 1983, p. 104)

However, it was not a real failure as both came away believing the interaction had been completed in a way that they understood it to have been completed. As Patricia herself put it in discussing teacher-student relationships in Japan -

I don't know (about the difference between teacher-student relationships between the two countries) because I'm not a student, um... in the school where I was with my teacher we were just six of us so it was quite small.. so it was really friendly..... You don't spend ten years to learn something (in the West). I think you, you see more teachers, you have more teachers, and it's less time, but you have a lot of lot of information in few minutes, it's less time, more information.. and because they speak to you and you answer questions and there is a lot of discussion... and everything is based on discussion... There was always lot of discussion, not only looking and trying to do the same, no never. That's completely different.

Imura-san seemed more willing to provide that discussion and those answers, and so perhaps she unconsciously treated him in a more Western way.

Both misunderstood the BGK (Background Knowledge) of the other, but both were happy at the end. The conversation in general proceeded smoothly, error correction occurred in terms of status, but then went back again. No error correction in terms of background differences occurred. There was an interpreter, so turn-taking and topic-control were perhaps affected, and through them dominance asserted, but that doesn't seem to have impeded the satisfaction achieved.

As Brown, Gillian and Yule (1983) point out,

Johnston-Laird's notion of understanding via the construction and manipulation of mental models provides a useful metaphor for the way a piece of text can be 'understood' at different levels. It also accommodates that aspect of discourse understanding... which allows interpretations in different receivers' minds to differ from the interpretation intended by the discourse producer. The individual hearer's mental model of the discourse can differ from the speaker's... (p. 254)

and so it seems that this has occurred without sufficient damage to alert correcting mechanisms.

Therefore, in conclusion, there are many faults which make this study far from ideal such as the inability to tape the exchange and thus the reliance on my memory, my personal relationship with many of the members and the possibility it may lead me to see things lop-sided. There are also many problems to factor in, for instance, how Patricia's level of English as opposed to her character affected his dominance and her demeanor, my own Japanese, my level of sociolinguistic understanding and the absence of other researchers to balance my opinion. However, this study does raise an interesting issue-how two actors in an exchange can cooperate, each with different background knowledge and understanding of what is going on, and still feel things have been accomplished to their mutual satisfaction.

Was there a communication break down in the discourse? It appears not, but there is definitely a cross-cultural issue that needs to be addressed in the different understandings of roles and scripts that the two principal participants maintain. Gumperz and Roberts (1991) make a point that is relevant here -

To sum up, negative outcomes in interethnic encounters are likely to occur in the following types of situations. First, when there are mismatched expectations as to how personal or fact orientated an account is to be. Depending on the particular case, an individual may be seen as either unnecessarily emotional or hostile or *as lacking in personal motivation*. Second, when there are mismatched expectations as to how concrete the account is to be or how much and what kind of detail to present, speakers are likely to be seen as either *vague* or overly general or impersonal and not knowing their business, or uncooperative." (p. 78, italics are my own)

The parts in italics would seem to apply to Patricia from Imura-san's point of view, especially in the light of her seeming inability to pinpoint exactly what she wanted to do. This study, therefore, provides a good illustration of the following quote by Edward Sapir -

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Edward Sapir, quoted by Benjamin Lee Whorf, 1956, quoted by the Linguistics 904 course notes, p. 108)

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相互誤解

—ある異文化間の出会いについての語用論的事例研究—

クラフリン・マシュー

要 約

異文化間の誤解の主な問題に、多くの場合、関係者が誤解の存在に気づいていないという点がある。本研究は、ある状況を語用論的な観点から検討する。その状況とは、文化的価値、背景知識、役割理解の違いにより、2人の行為者が、会話では協調していながら、各々状況理解を異にし、それでいて、双方とも相互に満足のいく結果が得られたと感じるというものである。

語用論的：相互作用分析，異文化間の，誤解，事例研究・ケーススタディ。