

Research Paper

## Analysis of Intercultural Interaction Management within a Party Situation

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Through the analysis of a party situation this paper presents a number of issues concerning intercultural interaction in Japan. The data, obtained from a video recording and follow-up interviews, were analysed using the Language Management Model (Neustupný 1994b), making it possible to focus on features of interaction management. Although there were several problems at the party, there were also many positively evaluated events. There is evidence to show that the Japanese participants did not always expect non-Japanese participants to conform to their norms and, in some cases, they even positively evaluated deviations from their norms. An examination of norms, and deviations from those norms confirms that, in contact situations, there is norm divergence even among participants from similar cultural backgrounds.

Key words: interaction management, evaluation, norm divergence, contact situations

### パーティー場面における異文化間インターアクション管理の分析

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本稿は、パーティー場面の分析を通して、日本における異文化間インターアクションの管理の相違を明らかにすることを目的とする。データは、ビデオ録画及びフォローアップ・インタビューによって採取され、言語管理モデル (Neustupný 1994b) に基づき分析された。パーティー場面においては、いくつかの問題が参加者によって報告されたが、一方で、肯定的に評価された出来事が少なくなかった。日本人参加者は必ずしも非日本人参加者が彼らの規範に順応すべきだと思わず、ある場合には彼らの規範に対する逸脱さえ肯定的に評価することが明らかになった。規範並びに規範に対する逸脱の検討により、接触場面においては、文化的な背景の似ている参加者の間ですら規範の拡がり (norm divergence) が存在することが確認された。

キーワード: 接触場面・インターアクション管理・評価・規範の拡がり

#### 1. Introduction

Since Befu's study (1974), the value of entertainment situations as a source of naturally occurring Japanese and Non-Japanese intercultural interaction has been widely acknowledged. This and more recent micro-level studies (Asaoka 1987, Marriott 1988, 1989) have demonstrated that problems in contact situations (Neustupný 1985) can be both linguistic and non-linguistic in nature.

Asaoka's treatment of an informal party situation in Australia highlighted the various problems arising from differences in interactive features such as greetings, networks, communication patterns, and non-verbal communication. Asaoka reported that in greetings and leave-taking Japanese participants applied norms different from both their native norms and those of the Australians. Also, variation among the evaluations made by the participants leads one to

assume that there can be norm divergence among members of the same cultural group. Marriott (1988, 1991), in her study of Japanese-Australian business luncheons, highlighted problems of etiquette and provides evidence to show that cultural transfer can actually be a positive asset in intercultural interaction. She also dealt with the divergence of norms held by Australian and Japanese participants.

However a limitation to these, and other studies within the field of intercultural studies (e.g. Sugito 1994, Sasaki 1994), is their primary focus on problems. Problems do exist, but this negative tendency seems somewhat misplaced considering that participation in intercultural situations is also an enjoyable experience for many people involved (Neustupný 1996). Particularly in the case of parties, it would be hard to contend that the focus of the situation is anything other than a positive one. So far no such analysis has been applied to entertainment situations.

In this paper, I aim to analyse data from a video-recorded party held in Chiba in spring 1998. Although intercultural analysis can include a number of variables, such as age, gender and social status, this study will focus attention on the norms of Japanese versus non-Japanese participants. I will present not only problems that occurred at the party but other interactional features observed and reported by the participants. By viewing the situation as participants themselves see it we can gain a useful insight into not only general interaction patterns within a contact situation, but into participants' norms of behaviour and how they deal with deviations to those norms.

## 2. Methodology and Theory

### 2.1 The Party

The entertainment situation used in this study was an outdoor party held by JM1 and his wife, JF1, during the cherry blossom season in April 1998. JM1 and JF1 informally invited eight Japanese and four non-Japanese guests (including the researcher). The party was held from 1pm in a park next to JM1's offices. A large plastic sheet was laid upon the grass under a cherry tree and

the participants were seated on the sheet forming a oval shape, approximately three by seven metres. Informal party food such as sushi and fried chicken was served along with beer and soft drinks. Although some of the participants moved around to chat with other participants etc., the relatively small area of the party facilitated video recording (see below). After two hours of eating and drinking outside, the party moved to a room in JM1's offices, where the guests participated in two hours of karaoke singing.

### 2.2 The Participants

There were five male and five female Japanese participants at the party (JM1- JM5 and JF1- JF5) and four foreign participants (AM, CM, MM and the researcher). The Japanese husband and wife, JM1 and JF1, held the party for their staff and tenants. JM2, JF2 and JF4 were employees of JM1. JF5 was JM2's wife, and JM4 and JM5 were his young grandsons. JM3, JF3, CM and myself were JM1's tenants. AM and MM were invited as friends of the researcher and had previously met none of the other participants. The employees, JM2, JF2 and JF4, knew each other and the hosts, JM1 and JF2, very well. None of the tenants had met each other before but they had all had some contact with the hosts and their employees.

The participants formed in principle one network. However during the party they often split into groups of: JM1, AM, MM, CM and the researcher; JF1, JF2, JF3, JF4, JF5; JM3, JM4, JM5; and JF5, JM2, JM4, JM5.

### 2.3 The Videotaped Data

The outdoor part of the party was videotaped using a hand-held Sharp Viewcam VL-HL3 video camera. Through the use of video recording a record of the actual events could be obtained, a factor of considerable importance with regard to collecting data on non-verbal communication. Previous studies have used data based on participants' knowledge of Japanese culture (Befu 1974), interviews (Sugito 1994), interaction interviews (Asaoka 1987), or audio-taped data (Masumi-So 1994), however there has been very little research conducted in this field using video data (Marriott

1990, 1991). In the field of ethnomethodology, Yamazaki et al. (1997) have propounded the value of videotaped data in "native" Japanese situations. However, in studies where video cameras have been used, participants have usually been aware that their actions were being recorded for research purposes, subsequently casting doubt on the "naturalness" of the data obtained. As it has become common for people to take a video camera instead of a regular camera to parties, I used a hand-held video camera in order to create as "natural" a situation as possible. Although participants knew that they were being recorded, they were not aware that the videotape would be used for anything other than leisure purposes. Participants JF2, JF3, AM and MM, showed an interest in the camera and requested permission to try to use it. Consequently, for approximately nine minutes of the twelve minutes of recorded footage, I was not in control of the camera. The participants stopped the recording at various stages of the party, so the footage was not continuous and recording did not begin and end

with the beginning and end of the party. A breakdown of the individual events in the party is included in appendix 1. The participants' consent to use the recording for research purposes was obtained after the event.

#### 2.4 The Follow-Up Interviews

Following work by Faerch and Kasper (1987), the value of introspective methods of data collection has been widely acknowledged. The introspective method used in this study was the "follow-up interview" method (Neustupný 1994). Whereas most interview techniques require informants to give an often overgeneralized account of their experiences, the follow-up interview requires informants to be specific about particular events (in this study the events occurring in the video recording). Follow-up interviews were conducted with participants JM1, JF1, JF2, JF3, AM, MM, and CM and their permission was obtained to use the data for research purposes.

Table 1 Foreign participants who took part in follow-up interviews

	AM	CM	MM
nationality/ ethnicity	Austrian	Chinese	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation Japanese Mexican
first language	German	Peking Chinese	Spanish
sex	Male	Male	Male
age	26	23	27
occupation	student	student	student
residence in Japan	1 year	4 years	1 year
Japanese language proficiency	beginner	high advanced	intermediate

Table 2 Japanese participants who took part in follow-up interviews

	JM1	JF1	JF2	JF3
sex	M	F	F	F
age	50's	50's	50's	18
occupation	lawyer/ landlord	office work/ landlady	clerical work	university student
contact with foreigners	20 years	20 years	virtually none	15 years

The videotape was shown to the interviewees who were then asked to comment on the events, focusing on what points they had been aware of at the time of recording. Each follow-up interview was recorded on audio tape and lasted approximately forty minutes. All the follow-up interviews were conducted in Japanese except for those of AM and MM, whose interviews were conducted in English, according to their wishes.

### 2.5 Language Management Theory

The language management theory (Neustupný 1994b) was used as a means to pinpoint the participants' interactional norms. This theory maintains that norms concerning language exist and that we may note deviations from those norms. Such deviations can then be evaluated and adjustment plans devised. Adjustment plans may or may not be implemented. In this study, the model has been applied to interactional data, referred to as interaction management by Marriott (1990).

Rather than focusing on solely linguistic features of the discourse occurring at the party, this paper will deal with non-linguistic aspects. By pinpointing items that the participants themselves noted, the management model enabled me to account for not only problems at the party but also for issues that did not become problems and those that were positively received by the participants.

### 3. Data Analysis and Discussion

Based on the video data and information obtained from the follow-up interviews, it was possible to identify deviations noted by the participants. The norms from which the deviations originated were then formulated by the researcher and the occurrence of evaluations and adjustments ascertained. The results of this analysis are listed in Table 3.

50 deviations were noted by the participants, half of which were reported by the Japanese participants and half by the foreign participants. Of these deviations, 19 were clearly evaluated negatively however 19 cases were also evaluated positively. Of the remaining deviations, 8 were not verbally evaluated at all, while the remaining 4 were evaluated in a way that could neither be classified as negative or positive. These have been described as "surprise", "different" and "interesting".

#### 3.1 Negatively Evaluated Deviations

There were nineteen cases of negatively evaluated deviations, i.e. problems, in accordance with the management theory. Of those nineteen cases, twelve evaluations were produced by the non-Japanese participants and seven by the Japanese participants. Not all of these problems were linguistic in nature.

Table 3 Results based on the Language Management Theory

	JM1	JF1	JF2	JF3	A	M	C	Total
noted deviations	5	7	4	9	11	13	1	50
negative evaluation	1		2	4	7	5		19
positive evaluation	4	6	2	1	3	3		19
no evaluation		1		3	1	2	1	8
surprise				1				1
"it was different"						1		1
"it was interesting"						2		2
adjustment plans					2			2
implemented adjustment					3			3

### 3.1.1 Negative Evaluations by Non-Japanese Participants

#### 1) *The varying behaviour of JM1 (the host) toward his guests*

The most emphatically reported problem from the non-Japanese participants concerned JM1's behaviour toward different guests. Both AM and MM noted that CM was being treated differently from themselves. While AM and MM were often engaged in conversation by JM1, CM rarely was, and on a number of occasions was directed to take photographs of the party. Six minutes into the video recording AM volunteered to take a group photograph so that JM1 could also be in the photograph. JM1 declined AM's offer and instead, beckoning with his hand, called over CM to take the photograph. In his follow-up interview, AM said that he felt sorry for CM because it seemed that he was not able to enjoy the party as a real guest. AM assumed that CM was in some way indebted to JM1 and was therefore obliged to "work" at the party. MM made a similar comment in his follow-up interview.

MM: You know maybe he (CM) wasn't a real guest

CM, on the other hand, did not report any deviations concerning being asked to take the photographs. He reported that he enjoyed taking photographs and, when beckoned by JM1, he assumed that he had been in the most easily accessible position.

Even though AM and MM negatively evaluated JM1's behaviour as being discriminatory towards CM, in his follow-up interview JM1 positively evaluated CM's camera skills and his kindness in helping take the photographs of the party. JM1's behaviour might be attributed to his length of acquaintance with the Chinese student (at the time of the party approximately one month), and hence level of familiarity. There was no indication that JM1 had either intended to be discriminatory or had realised that his behaviour might be interpreted in that way. Nevertheless, the fact remains that his actions *were* evaluated negatively by two of his guests. There was

obviously divergence in the norms applied by both JM1, MM and AM. In contact situations some non-Japanese participants may consider certain behaviour as discriminatory, regardless of whether intention was present or not.

MM also noted that JM1 was showing more interest in AM than in himself. At the beginning of the video recording, after asking AM's name and university details, JM1 then turned to MM and asked his name. MM, however, negatively evaluated JM1's lack of interest in his reply. As soon as he had asked the question, JM1 immediately turned away and, as appears in the video recording, seemed to be trying to find something else to focus his attention on.

MM: Look, he (JM1) asked me the question and, but I mean after that he was like trying to look for another kind of thing, flowers or ..... Well I mean I didn't like him so, I mean I don't take care of him [I didn't bother about him- L.C.F.]. For example, he's nice but I think he focused a lot on AM.

Although JM1 and AM, who were seated next to MM, showed no evidence of noting it, the problem was very real to MM. It may be that MM's belonging to a minority ethnic group in his home country made him sensitive to such issues. Van Dijk (1995) has shown in his work on critical discourse analysis that there is a need to "examine the nature of social power and power abuse". Neustupný (1996a) has also raised the issue of differential power relations of Asian students in Japan compared to students of Western origin. The findings in this study suggest that more of the same critical analysis needs to be applied to interactional studies.

#### 2) *Karaoke*

AM and MM negatively evaluated the introduction of karaoke to the party. Towards the end of the videotape AM, who was aware that there would be karaoke in JM1's offices later, made a sarcastic comment in English: "I'm really looking forward to the karaoke".

In his follow-up interview AM made clear his dislike for karaoke.

AM: I hate the concept of karaoke. It's so artificial.

MM also reported his dislike for karaoke.

However, AM reported that he and MM had planned an adjustment strategy before even arriving at the party. They reported that they had decided to make an excuse about having plans in Tokyo in order to avoid the karaoke. This plan was implemented shortly after the karaoke started in JM1's offices. Nevertheless, none of the Japanese participants made any comments in their follow-up interviews concerning the karaoke. AM and MM's strategy was successful in two ways: firstly, they avoided having to sing karaoke, and secondly, it seems that they didn't offend (i.e. induce a negative evaluation from) their hosts by leaving early.

### 3) *Opening a gift of sake*

AM negatively evaluated JM1's failure to open the gift of boxed sake that he and MM had brought to the party. In a European party he would have expected the host to share the drink with his guests, an issue dealt with by Morsbach (1984). On the other hand, MM, who has a partly Japanese background, applied norms similar to the Japanese standard. He reported that he had not expected the Japanese host to open the present but rather keep it for another occasion.

JM1, JF1 and JF2 positively evaluated the non-Japanese participants' present. However, it is interesting to note that, like AM, JF3 had also hoped that the hosts would open the bottle of sake. It can thus be assumed that there was norm divergence among the Japanese participants and, in JF3's case, it appears that her norms had considerable overlap with those of AM.

Besides the obvious sociocultural issue of gift giving, this case is valuable in demonstrating the issue of variation in norms within contact situations. One might expect that people sharing a common cultural background would share the same norms concerning a certain activity. However, in the above example it is clear that there were differences in the norms of the Japanese participants, as well as differences in those of the non-Japanese. Also the case of JF3

and AM shows that shared norms can cross cultural lines. Erikson and Shultz (1982) and Nishizaka (1993, 1997) have pointed out the danger of categorising participants in intercultural situations. It is all too easy to explain people's actions in cultural and ethnic terms rather than see individual differences that might appear at any one given moment.

### 3.1.2 Negative Evaluations by the Japanese Participants

As shown in Table 3, the Japanese participants negatively evaluated 7 deviations, compared with the 12 evaluated by the non-Japanese participants. Two events negatively evaluated by the Japanese participants are analysed below.

#### 1) *Physical position*

At four and a half minutes into the video recording CM is shown lying down on the grass in an attempt to take a photograph. CM's physical position was evaluated negatively by JF2 and JF3 in their follow-up interviews.

JF3: netette no wa sugoi bikkuri shita .... futsū ja nai nā to omotta .... amari sonna kigaru ni katte ni nekorogaru tokoro de nai. "I was really surprised that he (C) lay down (on the grass). I thought that that wasn't usual. It's not really the kind of place to please yourself and lie down freely."

This data suggests that Japanese participants possess rigid norms concerning certain body positions and postures, and that participants whose actions deviate from these norms may be evaluated negatively. However, not all of the Japanese participants made the same evaluation. JM1 positively evaluated CM's physical position whereas JF1 did not note it at all. It is evident that all Japanese participants do not note and evaluate deviations in the same way.

#### 2) *Group photographs*

JF3 negatively evaluated the repeated taking of group photographs.

JF3: toranakya ikenaitte kanji .... chotto mendokusai. (I felt as if we had to take [lots of photographs] ... it was a bit troublesome.)

It can be assumed that JF3's norms diverged from those of the other participants, Japanese and non-Japanese, concerning the amount of time devoted to group photograph taking in this situation. Obviously just being Japanese cannot explain JF3's application of norms. Other factors, such as age, gender, and personal history may influence the formation of norms.

### 3.2 Other Evaluations

As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of evaluated deviations fall into this group, highlighting the arguments proposed by Neustupný (1996), that problems are not the only issues in intercultural interactions. These 'other' evaluations include positive evaluations, "surprise", finding something "interesting", recognising something as "different", and a lack of evaluations altogether.

#### 3.2.1 Positive Evaluations

As shown in Table 3, the same number of deviations were evaluated positively as negatively. Indeed, all participants stated that they had enjoyed the party, despite the various problems mentioned above. Murie (1976) pointed out in her studies of intercultural business negotiations that if the outcomes of the meeting were successful then the intercultural problems would be largely ignored. However if the negotiation were unsuccessful there was a tendency to blame this on intercultural factors. The data in this study, however, indicate that even if fairly serious problems, such as discrimination, occur the overall impression will still be positive. Further research is obviously needed to discover just at what point and under what kind of circumstances participants' overall impression will become negative.

Neustupný (1996) has shown that positive evaluations can occur when there are deviations from norms or when there are no deviations. JM1,

JF1, JF2 and CM all commented about how blue and beautiful AM's eyes were. In an Asian only situation it is usual for participants to all have dark eyes. As a deviation from this norm, AM's eyes were evaluated positively. However, what participants evaluate positively is based on their noting and this does not necessarily correspond to physical reality. Different noting may result in different evaluation. For example MM and JF3 did not note AM's eyes as particularly blue nor did they make positive evaluations.

A *lack* of deviations was also evaluated positively. The very existence of this variety of positive evaluations suggests that there are different norms applied to internal (Japanese only) and contact (Japanese and non-Japanese) situations. JF1 positively evaluated the non-Japanese participants for being able to eat sushi. It is unlikely that the same kind of evaluation would be applied in a native situation so we can assume that JF1 had expectations concerning a contact situation; i.e. she did not expect everyone to eat sushi. This was confirmed in her follow-up interview.

JF1: o sushi o totta toki nē, ee yokatta o sushi ga suki nan da nā to omotte, o sushi ga kirai na hito mada iru ja nai "When you took some sushi I thought that was great. I thought, oh good, you like sushi, you know, because there are still people [=foreigners] who hate it."

Positive evaluation of a lack of deviations implies that Japanese participants expect that Japanese norms will be violated in contact situations. This finding runs counter to the widely accepted notion that in entertainment situations non-native participants should always try to adapt their behaviour to that of natives (Befu 1974).

#### 3.2.2 Evaluations that Were Neither Positive nor Negative

In the course of my analysis it was evident that reactions to some deviations could not be categorised explicitly into positive or negative evaluations. Firstly there were 8 cases where a

deviation was noted but *no evaluation* was reported. For example, JF3 noted a deviation concerning CM's jacket.

JF3: watashi no shôgakkô no toki no janpa to niteiru to omotte. "It looked like the jacket I had when I was in elementary school."

Although there was no verbal explanation, from her tone of voice I considered JF3's noting of the jacket to be a deviation from her norms concerning the kind of jacket that an adult male should wear.

There was a case where JF3 reported *surprise* at being recorded on the video by JF1 for the first time. She noted this deviation but, rather than reporting it as negative or positive, she merely expressed surprise. JF3 appeared in the video recording a number of times after this, however no other deviations concerning the video were reported. From the eleventh minute of videotape she even tried using the video camera herself.

Another case involved a deviation being noted but, rather than a clear evaluation, the report only mentioned that the behaviour "was *different*". In this case MM noted that there seemed to be a difference in the behaviour of the Japanese men and women at the party. He observed that for a great deal of the party the Japanese women occupied one half of the party area while the Japanese men sat on the other side. The men all drank beer, while the women drank soft drinks. MM stated in his follow-up interview that he really hadn't thought of their actions judgementally but, rather, had just noted the difference from his own norms, where he would not have expected such differentiation along sex lines. It is possible that "it was *different*" is a weak negative evaluation or simply a lack of evaluation.

Finally, there was one instance where MM described an event as "*interesting*", an expression which in English can have both positive and negative connotations. MM used "interesting" to

describe JM1's particular interest in AM.

MM: (JM1) was always interested in (AM), all the time he was asking him a lot of questions .... so it was interesting.

At this stage MM's evaluation seems to be neutral, however it is interesting to note that later (as shown in section 3.1.1. above), when it is clear that there is a difference in JM1's behaviour towards AM and himself, MM started to evaluate JM1 negatively. This example suggests that the repetition of a similar kind of deviation, combined with a comparison, may affect the outcome of an evaluation.

#### 4. Conclusion

The evidence in this study has primarily shown the value of analysing cultural interaction based upon participants' individual norms. Rather than making generalisations about the norms of an ethnic group as a whole, the data used here demonstrates that members of one particular cultural group, in this case the Japanese, do not always share the same norms and evaluate others' behaviour in the same way. Indeed, evidence has been given to show that, in certain cases, a Japanese participant can have norms that diverge from those of his/her compatriots, but overlap with those of a non-Japanese participant. Of course, further sociological analysis will be necessary to determine whether other variables, such as participants' age, gender and background, influence their norms of behaviour.

The data in this study has also helped to highlight specific issues pertaining to intercultural interaction. These included problems concerning gift giving, karaoke, "normal" physical posture and the more serious issue of the different treatment of racial groups by the Japanese host. It is clear that there are issues where the norms of Japanese and non-Japanese participants diverge.

However, it is clear from this study that contact situations, and in particular party situations, are not merely minefields. If they

were, surely no one would want to participate in them at all. Although there were problems, the Japanese participants also positively evaluated the non-Japanese when their behaviour was both similar to and different from their norms. There were also evaluations that could neither be classed as positive nor negative. On the whole, all the participants judged the party a success. It is therefore imperative that future research does not lose sight of this point and mistakenly create an unbalanced image of events focusing only on problems and misunderstandings.

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## Appendix 1

A breakdown of the events shown in the video recording

- 0.0 JM1 asks AM his age and about his university course.
- 0.50 JM1 cannot catch the pronunciation of AM's name  
AM repeats his name and JM1 writes it down
- 1.26 JM1 asks MM his name
- 2.0 JF1 operates the video camera
- 2.40 JM1 pours beer to AM
- 2.50 JM3 speaks to the video camera
- 3.04 CM takes a photograph of JF1 using the video camera
- 3.22 MM talks to the video camera
- 3.43 JF3 and JF5 talk to the video camera
- 3.57 JF1 asks the participants to move to pose for group photographs
- 4.02 CM takes photographs of the group
- 4.33 CM lies down on the grass to take a photograph
- 4.40 JF1 asks the participants to move to the other side of the area
- 5.55 JM1 takes a photograph of the group
- 6.07 AM offers to take a photograph
- 6.10 JM1 calls over CM
- 8.01 MM presents a gift of sake to JM1  
MM, AM and JM1 pose for photographs with the sake
- 9.10 JM1 speaks to AM and MM about the video camera
- 9.30 JM1 comments about the colour of AM's eyes
- 10.01 JM1 leads AM, MM, CM, JF3 and JM3 to some other cherry trees
- 11.05 JF3 starts to use the video camera
- 11.20 JM1 asks about the video camera
- 12.00 End of the recording

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