Appeared in The JSAA Newsletter Vol.2, No.2,
(September 1990), pp. 31-34.

(JSAA = Japanese Studies Association of Australia)

THE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

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Within the old paradigm of contact studies, linguists concentrated on data which had the form of items usually handled in traditional linguistics. They collected words, phrases, syntactical structures, phonemic units, etc. as these appeared in speech. Participant observation or tape recording were the main procedures applied.

However, these techniques are totally insufficient for further work in (socio)linguistics and for the study of norms in particular. In sociolinguistics we are interested not simply in items but also in processes. The process of deviation from a norm - such as happens in contact situations - can change the surface form of a linguistic item but in many cases it does not. For instance, a speaker may use an excessive amount of energy for the generation of a speech act, thus breaking the native norm of energy spending, but this deviation may not be reflected in the surface form of the sentences used. Or, in the case of pre-correction (Neustupny 1973) of a speech act, a complicated process may be at work, without leaving any trace in the surface form of speech at all.

In order to understand behaviour in contact situations, we must develop techniques which will enable us to detect all significant deviations, whether they have surfaced or not. For instance, a Japanese participant in a contact situation may apply his or her native posture norms in relation to the English interlocutors, and evaluate their relaxed manners negatively, while suppressing totally any expression of such evaluation. Yet, the fact of the participant's evaluation is a legitimate fact of the interactive situation concerned, and cannot be omitted from consideration. In other situations the participant's evaluation may be explicitly expressed in discourse, may be noted by the English speaker, and corrective adjustment may ensue. We must therefore try to find ways in which all behaviour in contact situations can be recorded. I wish to discuss here in particular a technique, developed in the 1970s, which has been referred to as 'follow-up interview' (Neustupny 1981).

In a follow-up interview participants in an encounter are asked a set of questions which help to establish their awareness of various process taking place in the encounter. It is, therefore, only natural that a follow-up interview can only reveal aware norms: participants in speech acts cannot be expected to report on processes which remain for them unconscious. The interview is a powerful procedure, in particular suited to the study of

contact situations, but its power should not be overestimated. Other procedures are necessary in order to provide a full picture of what happens in contact discourse.

A follow-up interview is ideally conducted immediately after the recording session and is itself recorded. This means that two tape-recorders are needed: one for the replay of the original recording and another one for the recording of the follow-up interview. Each participant is interviewed separately from others. Basic components of a systematic follow-up interview are as follows:

(1) Explanation of the aim of the original recording session in which the participant took part and of the aim of the follow-up interview.

(2) Establishing what were the knowledge and expectations of the interviewed with regard to

(a) other participants in the session,
(b) the character of the session, and
(c) his/her own role in the session.

(3) Questions concerning any particular usage, own or of other participants, noted by the interviewee. Such questions normally elicit, apart from actually noted features, stereotype attitudes to the use of language in general and to particular problems of the recording session. Such pronouncements can later be compared with other results of the interview and evaluated. Usually, some of them reflect real norms used by the speakers in contact situations; others are components of 'folk linguistics' which lack immediate connection with the language practice of the interviewed.

For instance, the information volunteered contains such items as the attempt of the (native English) speaker to speak slowly and distinctly, and his or her general views on English competence of the Japanese. Japanese native speakers frequently comment on the lack of their own competence and forward assertions such as that most Japanese cannot speak English but that they are quite good at reading.

It is not advisable to develop this part of the interview into a long discussion because the central aim of the interview is to establish what happened in the course of the recording session itself.

(4) In the central part of the interview each short segment of the original session is reproduced for the participant and a series of questions is asked:

(a) Do you have any comments?

(b) What did you actually say? (Very often this is not clear from the recording.)

(c) What did you actually mean to say? What did you expect the other participants to say?

(d) Did you notice any deviations from norms either in your own behaviour or in the behaviour of other participants?

(e) Did you evaluate any such deviation? Do you think that other participants evaluated such deviations?

(f) Did you decide to correct your behaviour? What was your decision and how did you implement it (or, why did you not implement it)?

(g) Did you think of any possible explanation for points p, q, r ...?

All these questions are asked in a variety of language easily comprehensible to the interviewed. Unless the competence in English of the interviewed is very good, it is preferable to conduct the follow-up interview in Japanese. Needless to say, we cannot use words which are not easily comprehensible to non-linguists (such as 'norms', 'deviation', 'correction', etc.) in the follow-up interview.

It is important to remind the subject that throughout this set of questions the interviewer is interested in what happened at the moment of the interview rather than what the views of the subject are at the moment of the follow-up interview.

Each section under point (4) can be closed with a general question such as "What do you think of the problem now?". Such a question reinforces the subject's understanding that you wish to distinguish systematically between the time of the session and the time of the interview, while giving the subjects an opportunity to voice their observations on each point.

Although some of the questions (e.g., "What did you mean?) may not apply in the case of each segment of the interview, it will be easily understood that the follow-up interview requires a multiple of the time necessary for the original recording session.

Also, the norm consciousness of a subject who has gone through a follow-up interview is normally aroused to such an extent that he/she cannot be used for further recording sessions, at least not in the same area of investigation. A further shortcoming of the follow-up interviews may be seen in the fact that the researcher cannot rely on the sincerity of the subject or on the accuracy of his/her memory. However, should a too-sceptical attitude be allowed to prevail, much of social science which depends on interviews would have to be abandoned. Rather than giving up the idea of interviews, we should make further attempts to develop and improve the techniques used.

A systematic follow-up interview represents an enormous advance compared with the classical methods of simply recording the message alone. There is no doubt that any serious (socio)linguistic study of language or communication will be of necessity accompanied in the future by a follow-up interview, which will further enhance the validity and value of the collected data.

Understandably, the laboriousness of the procedure implies that requirements concerning the amount of data for one single study will change. However, quantity will be replaced by quality, because the type of information obtained will enable a much wider range of conclusions to be reached about discourse.

(Originally written as an Appendix to the author's paper, "Language Norms in Australian-Japanese Contact Situations", in Australia, Meeting Place of Languages, ed. M. Clyne, pp. 161-170. Canberra: Pacific Lingustics 1985.)