Current Issues in Japanese-Foreign Contact Situations

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1. NATIVE AND CONTACT SITUATIONS

The study of Japan can be divided into two streams: the study of native situations, where foreign elements are not of basic importance, and the study of contact situations in which at least one foreign element plays a major role. However, I shall show later in this paper that this definition, although basically correct, requires further specification.

In economics and international politics the study of contact situations has always occupied a prominent position. However, in the humanities and most social sciences contact with Japan has only occasionally constituted a major theme. In the past, all students of Japan who could go to Japan to 'collect data' did that. At one Australian university in the early 1970s fourth year 'honours' students who could not go to Japan were encouraged to write their dissertations concentrating on the study of Japanese local history. There was a collection of books on the history of various regions of Japan in the library and the teachers could not imagine what else the students could do. No doubt, such study was instructive. However, I wonder how much of the data could the students, whose command of the language was necessarily limited, actually absorb. Also, at that time, a large number of the Japanese were already present in Australia and intensive contact between them and Australians was taking place. This contact provided data that remained completely unexplored.

Looking at my own bibliography of that period, I realize that much of my own time was invested in the study of Japanese honorifics, the study of Japanese language policy and the modernization of Japanese — all of which can also be established as contact situation topics, but at that time I approached them qua issues pertaining to native situations.

It was only in the course of 1970s that we gradually learned how extensive cross-cultural contact was and that to understand it was the central task for us as students of Japan. It may be unnecessary to emphasize that the change came with the overall switch-over of paradigms in Japanese studies (Neustupný 1980). The modern paradigm stayed with native situations while the new, post-modern paradigm emphasized international variation and relationships. The world was no more a mosaic composed of unrelated elements but one single world in which varieties of human cultures and societies interacted in a way that could not remain unnoticed.

By emphasizing the importance of contact studies I do not wish to suggest that cross-

cultural contact studies should *replace* all other types of the study of Japan. It is true that contact studies present the real raison d'être of Japanese studies overseas. We are interested in Japan primarily because of our contact with the country. However, there is definitely also a need to understand Japanese native situations, either because that is necessary for assessing the possibilities and impact for contact (so-called contrastive study directly requires the study of native situations), or as a tool for understanding human society in general.

2. FOUR ISSUES

2.1. THE CONCEPT OF CONTACT SITUATIONS

This paper has a limited focus. It will deal with four terms of the theory of intercultural contact that possess particular relevance at this moment. The first of these is the 'contact situation'.

The concept of contact situation was established as a critical reaction to traditional studies which limited their attention to linguistic or cultural borrowing. The study of contact situations pays attention to processes, not only to their easily visible results. For example, the process of communicating something else than what the speaker had intended, common in contact situations, normally does not change the language or communication system at all. However, it carries an enormous importance for the contact situation. Similarly, contact situations cause fatigue, but this may not be reflected in the output of cultural acts at all.

In previous studies (Neustupný 1985a, 1985b) I defined the dichotomy of native and contact situations by reference to 'foreign factors'. Such foreign factors could be the language, but also any other elements of foreign culture including, for example, physical features of the participants. Some of the participants were native participants, while others, who carried the foreign factors, were foreign. The cultural system of the native participants provided the 'base-norm'. For example in Australian-Japanese contact there were Australian-based situations where the base-norm was taken from the Australian culture. The language used was normally English. On the other hand, there were Japanese-based situations in which the base-norm was Japanese and normally the Japanese language was used. Let me add that the concept of the base-norm only implied that the majority of rules of behaviour actually used in that situation derived from the base-norm and directly posited the need for the study of other norms used in contact situations. Norms of the other party also appeared, as when the sitting posture of Australians was evaluated in an Australian-based situation by Japanese participants on the basis of a Japanese norm. On the other hand, there were quite clearly norms developed particularly for the contact situation, as when Australian participants used the suffix -san in English after the names of their Japanese partners. Marriott (1990) has described a number of problems involved in the application of norms in a contact situation.

Problems with the model

This simple model served well in situations of Australian-Japanese contact, in which basically two cultures were present (Note 1). However, the model obviously does not work in

situations that are more complicated than the classical Australian-Japanese situation. Sau Kuen Fan (1992) studied contact between Chinese and Japanese participants in Hong Kong to arrive at a typology that included the classical case but was not restricted to it. She distinguished between:

1. Partner situations (the classical situations in which the language of the other party was used),
2. Third-party situations (situations where a third language was used by the participants, as when Chinese and Japanese participants communicated in English), and
3. Cognate-language situations, where a different variety of the same language is used (e.g. two different varieties of English or Chinese).

In the third-party situation all participants are foreign and it is by no means clear whether under these circumstances a 'base-norm' exists. We feel that it is correct to call the cognate-language situations contact situations but it would be difficult to claim that any of the participants is foreign.

There are other complications. First, foreign participants clearly possess different types of competence. In language acquisition studies some authors make a clear distinction between native, second and foreign language users. While second language users employ the language in daily life situations (immigrants, foreign students), foreign users possess only limited opportunity to actually use it. An English speaker from Singapore is a second language speaker, while an average German speaker of English typically is a foreign speaker. The type of their competence is different and we can assume that the character of contact situations in which they participate also differs. Moreover, foreign participants are also characterized by different degrees of competence. For example, the fact that someone is a second language speaker does not necessarily imply that his/her competence is very high. Among English speakers in Singapore there are authors, as well as taxi drivers or room cleaners, each of them 'fluent' in English within the situation(s) in which they frequently participate. If these distinctions are applied to culture in general, they further complicate the definition of contact situations.

Second, Fan's category of cognate-language situations, immediately brings to mind Haugen's famous concept of 'semicommunication' (Haugen 1966) for which he employed the example of Norwegians and Swedes communicating with each other, each using their own language (cf. Jernudd, forthcoming, on the 'Scandinavian' variety of contact communication in the case of expatriate sojourners). This concept of semicommunication may not be relevant as such for Japan-related contact situations. However, some Asian languages share certain features with Japanese and it is meaningful to ask what influence such affinity exerts on the character of the corresponding contact situations. This issue has been noted by Fan (1992)and Clyne (1994) has recently used the concept of communication area (Sprechbund, Neustupný 1978, p.102) as one of the basic elements of his theory of cross-cultural contact.

A third difficulty is introduced by the fact that native speakers, too, possess a differing degree of competence in their language. Among the Japanese with restricted competence are,

for example, people who avoid reading and writing, people educated abroad or ethnically Japanese people born and educated in Brazil or China and recently returning to live in Japan. There are ethnic Koreans, born and educated in Japan, who sometimes retain communicative features of the culture of their ethnic origin. Situations in which many of these people participate become contact situations.

A fourth issue concerns regional and social variation between native speakers. Where participants from Tokyo meet with Okinawans or a middle class person from Osaka meets a farmer from Tohoku, the result is a cognate-language contact situation. An additional dimension can be seen in the generation of speakers: speakers who grew up in the Early Modern period can be expected to possess attitudes to contact situations that are different from those of Modern and Postmodern speakers (Neustupný 1995).

In fact, one can legitimately doubt whether non-contact situations exist at all. Of course, when considering this question we should realize that language in the narrow sense (grammatical competence) is not the only component of communication. Linguists will have to get used to the idea that grammatical competence is not the most important matter to judge.

This much can be said as a hypothesis. However, whether a situation is a contact situation or not can only be decided if we know how strongly it is characterized as such by deviations which participants attribute to foreign factors. For example, we can imagine situations with highly competent foreign speakers which contain virtually no deviations noted by participants and should not, therefore, be classified as contact situations. When the competence of some participants in the base-norm is particularly low, it is likely that the degree of contactness will rise. This is why empirical studies of a large number of potential contact situations is needed before our model-building in this area can proceed further.

2.2. PARTICIPANTS WITH DIFFERENT POWER

Another important point of our future thinking about contact situations concerns the differential power of participants. Participants do not possess identical rights and this fact should not be ignored. From sociocultural unequality a straignt path leads to communicative and linguistic unequality.

Jernudd (forthcoming) has turned our attention to linguistic consequences of 'conquest' and, in particular, to its sub-category 'colonization'. This macro-level phenomenon results at the micro-level in contact situations where the distribution of power strongly favours one side.

Even in sojourner situations the picture is similar. In 1982 I pointed to the fact that foreign participants in foreign-Japanese contact situations are at a disadvantage and should be given particular consideration (Neustupný 1982). Fan (1992) speaks of some participants acting in partner situations as hosts and others as guests. Hosts employ correction strategies different from guests, act as pivots in contact situations and govern, to a large extent, the application of norms. A host can, for example, verbalize his/her negative evaluation of the behaviour of a guest and enforce thus the application of a certain norm.

British students of cross-cultural communication have presented more radical schemes concerning contact 'encounters'. In particular Murray and Sondhi (1987) have claimed that

black participants in job interviews are not people with the same rights as their interviewers and that this point must be taken into account in any study of cross-cultural communication.

The case of Japan

Similar claims can be made, and should be investigated, in the case of Asian students in Japan. The high degree to which they assimilate to Japanese culture may not 'naturally' result from their 'guest' role and may in fact reflect the differential power of participants in contact situations. A hypothesis that Western students do not assimilate to the same extent is meaningful here. Of course, analysis based on actual interaction processes is needed.

The differential power between Japanese and Western personnel in contact situations, with an implication that the Japanese are the weaker partners, has recently surfaced in Japan in considering the issue of the order of Japanese names. The European order of Japanese names (personal name + surname) has been connected by some Japanese participants in the discussions with Western imperialism. In fact, the differential power of the Japanese and Westerners in contact situations in the Meiji period may indeed have contributed to the establishment of this norm. Many Japanese participants in the discussion obviously still interpret the order 'Akira Kurosawa' as a consequence of Western dominance and claim that the norm should be removed. This is not an altogether senseless suggestion if we realize that the Japanese still normally occupy the position of 'guests' (and, therefore, weaker participants) in contact situations with native speakers of English, and even in third-party situations, if their competence in English is limited, are likely to be close to the 'guest' status.

Again, what matters is establishing in actual native situations what features of dominance occur in actual behaviour.

2.3. HOW MUCH SHOULD PARTICIPANTS ADJUST

To what extent should participants in contact situations adjust to the base-norm is a relatively new question. It has often been emphasized that foreign participants in contact situations should behave as 'visitors' and that it was impolite for them to violate rules of the base-norm. This was particularly true for people who were in fact visiting the country in which the base-norm was the home norm. We used to emphasize that students of Japanese and other foreigners in Japan should adjust to all norms of Japanese language, communication and, although it may not have been said directly, to sociocultural norms. Recently a Western JET participant wrote in The Japan Times that 'JETs are not here to enlighten Japanese educators on the way other parts of the world teach their students' (July 25, 1994). In other words, they should not evaluate.

However, the matter is not simple. Already some 10 years ago there were students of Japanese in Australia who resented using Japanese honorifics because 'they didn't want to flatter anyone'. The matter whether their perception of the function of honorifics was right or wrong (and it was wrong) is not examined in the context of this paper. The important point is that the perception existed.

Adjustment to sociocultural competence

More recently a group of JET participants in a Japanese course, which included the

study of Japanese culture, showed a considerable resilience to changing their own attitudes to certain cultural norms. The position is perhaps best illustrated in the following comment concerning the Japanese education system:

> 'Although I have only been in the Japanese schools for one and a half years, I have to call your attention to the thousands of glazed-over eyes, to dull reactions to our requests for creative or on-your-feet thinking. . . And while the United States certainly has its own problems and while I have not taught in the United States, I have been a student. And what I remember — lively classes, library work, creative writing, debates — is vastly different from what I see here. I believe these are valuable things.'

Again, whether the student is right or wrong (and I believe that he is more wrong than right), the important point is that he refuses to adapt himself to the Japanese system.

The matter of adjusting to the base-norms is simple in the case of linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing). It does not hurt to form the past tense in a different way or to use different words. In the case of other communication rules the matter is more complicated. This is the case of address forms or honorifics. However, to change one's attitudes to non-communicative sociocultural facts, such as the education system, is the most difficult of all.

So far, only linguistic competence was the object of teaching and the issue of sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms did not arise. With the development of interactional approaches to language teaching (or better: interaction teaching), the situation is changing. As we teach more of other-than-linguistic rules, the question to what extent such rules should be adopted by foreigners in Japanese-based contact situations has assumed fundamental importance.

As I have written elsewhere (Neustupný 1994), the opinion that 'visitors' to a different culture should remain silent is outdated. Members of the international community have the obligation to speak up. However, that requires evaluation and such evaluation should be well considered. It may be a Japanese rule in certain situations to treat boys as superior to girls, but we shall probably not accept the rule as our own only because we live in Japan. This case is relatively simple. With the Japanese education system the matter is more complicated. Honorifics, in general, should not invite negative evaluation, even if some of the non-reciprocal usage is probably unsuitable for active adoption. In any case — the issue how much we should adopt will remain.

2.4. POSITIVE EVALUATION

So far, the study of cross-cultural interaction concentrated on interaction problems. This is not surprising. Until the 1960s social problems in general were ignored. When studies of cross-cultural communication commenced, it was necessary to establish that problems did exist and that they were not only language problems in the narrow sense of the word, but communication and interaction problems in general.

However, at present it is time to proceed further. Cross-cultural contact situations are not only the source of problems. People often participate in such situations not out of necessity

but because they want to. Many people enjoy meeting foreigners. An example are community helpers, designated normally in Japan as volunteers (borantia). In contact situations in which these people are involved problems undoubtedly occur, but there is also positive evaluation. Teaching foreigners Japanese can be a very enjoyable activity.

Japanese people who travel abroad encounter interaction problems of considerable magnitude but unless we assume that the contact situations in which they participate are also evaluated positively, we cannot explain why they continue participating. A similar conclusion must be made about those who study English. The study situations are of course contact situations and involve problems. But course participants do not simply persevere because they have to but because they do enjoy the activity.

Japan has a long tradition of what has been called seiyoo kabure. In this tradition everything foreign (Western) was accepted, while Japanese alternatives became the object of rejection. This again means that foreign elements are positively evaluated.

The mechanism of positive evaluation

What is the mechanism of these evaluations? I believe that the process starts from the application of norms of behaviour appropriate for the particular situation. The norms are compared with the behaviour generated in the situation and from such comparison researchers can produce lists of deviations from norms. However, what matters is the way such deviations are processesed by participants. For example, if the norm prescribes that a foreign participant will speak English, all deviations from English grammar, lexicon, pronunciation and speech rules will became deviations. Several stages of the process can be identified:

— Some (but not all) of the deviations can be noted by one or more participants,

— If noted, a deviation can be evaluated,

— A strategy for adjustment may be selected, and

— Such adjustment may be implemented.

Deviation itself does not constitute a problem. It can be completely unnoted or it can be noted but not evaluated. It becomes a problem only when it is negatively evaluated by one or more participants in the situation. Participants who deviate, for example, from pronunciation norms of the contact situation (which will normally be the pronunciation norms of the base-language) may note the deviation and evaluate it negatively. For instance, a Japanese participant in a contact situation may evaluate his own pronunciation negatively and as a consequence suffer emotionally or withdraw from communication. This type of negative evaluations (inadequacies) has been the object of the traditional theory of language problems.

An analysis of contact situations which takes account of their positive acceptance must also make reference to the processes referred to in the preceding model. Participants may

(a) Evaluate positively the lack of deviations or the relative lightness of deviations. This may be the case of some deviations in the case of Japanese learners of English.

(b) They may mark positively deviance from the everyday norms of their usual behaviour as, for example, in the case of consuming foreign food.

(c) They may acquire the ability not to note or not to negatively evaluate deviations. We can

assume that at least some Japanese participants develop this competence when participating in contact situations. Many native participants also develop this ability and, indeed, we assume that to learn more about this process provides a necessary base for the promotion of positive evaluation of non-native participants in contact situations.

Let me add that following positive evaluation, adjustments take place similar to what happens after negative evaluations. Such adjustment may be emotive only ('a good feeling'), involve verbalization ('he speaks faultless English') or require an adjustment act, such as repetition (a class, an ethnic meal), creation of networks for further contact (volunteer's organization) or involve convergence (accommodation, Giles et al. 1987; imitation, foreign language use, or borrowing).

A detailed analysis of positive evaluation in contact situations constitutes thus another urgent task for understanding cultural contact.

3. ON THE STUDY OF CONTACT SITUATIONS

The study of contact can take various forms. A traditional form is to examine cultural borrowing as the result of contact. This procedure is important but not sufficient. As mentioned above, contact situation may involve a large number of specific processes of noting, evaluation or adjustment but may not result in the change of norms of the base-language or any other language present in the situation.

Another popular idea concerning the study of contact situations is that it should proceed via contrastive analysis. Admittedly, contrastive analysis may furnish useful results but it certainly falls short of showing what actually happens in the situation.

If we want to examine the actual process of contact, the best way is to study it as such in individual contact situations. We must know what happens at the micro-level in individual interaction acts. Only from there we can proceed to generalizations.

Notes

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1 On reflection, I realize that some of the Australians involved were bicultural immigrants and as such generated situations in which more than two cultural systems were present. These situations only partly overlap with Fan's third-party situations (see later in this paper).

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