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研究ノート

An Exploration of Perceptions about Japanese University Student Classroom Behavior

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Introduction

According to Jin and Cortazzi (1998), every (sub)culture brings with it both a culture of learning and more specifically a culture for learning foreign languages, which "include culturally based ideas about teaching and learning, about appropriate ways of participating in a class, about whether and how to ask questions... There are always deep rooted expectations about how to behave, and how to interpret others' behavior" (p. 100). When such expectations are violated, negative construals of the cultural "other's" behavior typically result (Matsumoto, 2000). Therefore, when native English speaker (NES) teachers and Japanese students converge in the same foreign language classroom, their divergent culturally-constructed beliefs about how the archetypical roles of student and teacher should be played out can lead them to misinterpret the meaning of each other's behavior.

This paper specifically reports the authors' research-based heuristic findings about how NES teachers and Japanese university students perceive Japanese student classroom behavior. Since various scholars (Anderson, 1993; Brislin, 1993; Doyon, 2000; Hofstede,

1986; Muro, 2000; Nozaki, 1993; Skow & Stephan, 2000; Wurzel & Fischman, 1994) have argued that Japanese students' conduct is interpreted by NES instructors differently from students' intended meanings, the authors of this paper also compared the data about teacher and student perceptions in order to explore which types of behavior might be beset by perception gaps. With these three aims in mind, the following research questions were posed:

1. Based on the literature, what are the classroom behaviors that native English speaking (NES) instructors in Japan should find most challenging among their Japanese students due to divergent culturally-constructed notions about appropriate classroom conduct?
2. Do NES university instructors agree that such behavioral patterns exist among their students in English oral proficiency classes?
3. Among those who answered question number two affirmatively, how do NES instructors interpret such behaviors?
4. Do students have similar or different perceptions regarding their classroom conduct compared to NES instructors?

In order to respond to these questions, three phases of heuristic research were conducted: (1) a literature review to determine which Japanese student behaviors typically challenge NES instructors, (2) open ended interviews with NES teachers to discover whether or not they observe such norms in their classes, and their perceptions of students if and when they engage in such behaviors, and (3) a survey of Japanese students about whether or not they believe that they follow these norms, and if so, why.

Methodology

Interview and Survey Construction

In order to avoid constraining teacher responses and generate highly detailed data, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to twenty university NES instructors for an average of forty five to sixty minutes. Participants were asked if they perceive in their classes the behaviors identified in the literature review and their interpretations thereof. Furthermore, in order to gather richer data about these interpretations, teachers were asked if such behaviors are typically perceived as problematic (i.e., negatively) or

unproblematic (i.e., neutrally or positively) and why.

Teacher responses were then clustered in groups with similar meanings. Due to the fact that people do not always perceive the same phenomenon in a unidimensional manner (Yoshikawa, 1980), the researchers allowed for multiple answers about the same behavior; if a participant offered two or more markedly different interpretations, such as "shy" and "lazy," then these responses were counted separately. Therefore, the number of tallies when describing teacher interpretations sometimes exceeded the number of people interviewed. Furthermore, negative and neutral/positive answers were differentiated, even if the descriptive word utilized was the same. For example, if one subject described student shyness as a negative quality that limits English verbal output, while another neutrally characterized it as a cultural trait that he or she accepted without judgment, then such responses were also tallied separately.

In the student survey conducted to identify how students perceive their own behavior, both the interpretations generated during teacher interviews, as well as others described in literature written about Japanese student perspectives (Anderson, 1993; Hofstede, 1986; Nozaki, 1993; Wurzel & Fischman, 1994), were included as choices in a close-ended questionnaire. The survey instructions and questions were translated into Japanese by one of the authors, a Japanese native speaker and professional translator. When the questionnaire was distributed, students were instructed to check all interpretations that applied to them for each question and to write in their own answers (in Japanese) which did not appear as survey responses. The researchers reasoned that this would allow students the same flexibility for multiple and novel interpretations that was granted the instructors interviewed.

Population Demographics

The teachers surveyed originated from the United States (eleven participants), Great Britain (seven), Canada (one), and South Africa (one). Their university teaching experience in Japan ranged from four months to twenty-one years (mean=7.9 years and median=7 years). Seventy-five first and second-year students at three universities of various levels of academic prestige completed the student questionnaire.

Results

Research Question One

Many scholars have predicted that certain Japanese student norms confound NES instructors due to intercultural differences in definitions of appropriate classroom behavior (Anderson, 1993; Barnlund, 1989; Brislin, 1993; Capper, 2000; Doyon, 2000; Feiler, 1991; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Hofstede, 1986; McConnell, 2000; Ministry of Science, Sports, and Culture, 1994; Muro, 2000; Nozaki, 1993; Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996; Skow & Stephan, 2000; Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Wurzel & Fischman, 1994). According to the literature, Japanese students generally:

1. hesitate to speak in front of large groups
2. do not challenge their instructor's statements
3. hesitate to initiate communication with the teacher, either by starting discussions or asking questions about topics of interest
4. do not volunteer responses to questions posed to the class
5. are reluctant to demonstrate extraordinary ability or knowledge
6. are loath to disagree with or correct each other
7. are reluctant to ask questions for clarification
8. feel uncomfortable in unstructured learning situations
9. make less frequent eye contact than students in many NES teachers' countries
10. engage in prolonged periods of silence
11. have less demonstrative facial expressions than students in many NES teachers' countries

Research Questions Two, Three, and Four

The results of both surveys are presented below, with the perceptions about one behavior examined per table. Appearing first is the question which was asked to ascertain how many teachers perceived each behavior occurring in their classes. The corresponding data, i.e., describing the number of students who perceived themselves following this norm, are included next. Afterwards, the three most commonly reported perceptions about these behaviors are listed for instructors who responded "yes" to the previous question (with the number of respondents out of twenty). These interpretations are categorized as negative

or neutral/positive as described previously. Then, the top three student answers appear (along with the number of respondents out of seventy-five) for students who perceived themselves engaging in these behaviors. After each table, additional trends in the data are summarized that are relevant in answering research questions two and four, i.e., those pertaining to teacher perceptions and divergences between student and teacher perceptions, respectively.

Table 1

Perceptions about Speaking English before Large Groups

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students hesitate to speak English in front of large groups?

Yes 20/20 No 0/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 48/75 No 27/75

Most Common Teacher Interpretations of Students Engaged in this Behavior:

1. Shy (negative) = 10/20
2. Shy (neutral/positive) = 9/20
3. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) = 8/20

Most Common Student Interpretations of this Behavior:

1. Unconfident in English ability = 35/75
2. Shy = 17/75
3. Worried about making mistakes = 11/75

The teachers interviewed most commonly perceived students who hesitate to speak English in front of large groups as shy; however, responses were almost evenly split between negative and neutral/positive interpretations. Shyness was typically evaluated negatively because, educators reasoned, it inhibits students from speaking English and hence improving their oral proficiency. Instructors who offered neutral/positive interpretations perceived shyness as an understandable response to students' fear of being

ridiculed for making errors publicly.

Between students and instructors, several perceptual consistencies and differences emerged. Students' self-perceptions of shyness (response #2) and fear of mistakes (response #3) were similar to teacher opinions, but only one educator corroborated the top student answer and explicitly stated that students were shy because they lack confidence in their English speaking ability. Furthermore, eight teachers perceived that students who hesitate to speak English lack motivation. This trend strikingly diverges from student responses: only one student out of seventy-five answered similarly. Moreover, over twenty-seven (36%) students disagreed with the premise that they hesitate to speak in front of large groups, while every teacher surveyed observed this behavior as a predominant trend in their classes.

Table 2

Perceptions about Reluctance to Challenge Professors

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students are reluctant to challenge the instructor's statements or opinions?

Yes 20/20 No 0/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 55/75 No 20/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1. Submissive (negative) = 13/20
2. Nonconfrontational and respectful (neutral/positive) = 9/20
3. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) = 6/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Unconfident in English ability = 36/75

2a. Cognizant that it is forbidden to disagree with the teacher = 2/75

2b. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation = 2/75

Teachers most commonly labeled students negatively as submissive. These educa-

tors typically reasoned that students who avoided disagreement with the instructor were missing valuable opportunities to improve their oral English proficiency through argumentation.

Diverging perceptions between students and teachers are readily apparent. None of the educators acknowledged the most common student response, i.e., they hesitate to disagree because they lack confidence in their English. Moreover, six teachers (30%) concluded that students lack enthusiasm or motivation when they do not challenge them, while only two students (3%) assessed themselves this way. Finally, twenty students (27%) asserted that they do express opinions opposite the instructor's, while all of the educators polled claimed that their students tend not to mount such challenges.

Table 3

Perceptions about Infrequent Student-Initiated Communication

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students tend not to initiate communication, either in the form of discussions or questions, about topics of interest to them?

Yes 19/20 No 1/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 58/75 No 17/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1a. Passive (negative) =10/20

1b. Possessing little cultural training in initiating discussions—accustomed to listening to lectures (neutral/positive) =10/20

3. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) =6/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Unconfident in English ability=34/75
2. Afraid of making mistakes=16/75
3. Shy about speaking English publicly =14/75

Ten instructors perceived students as passive. The reasons for this negative

evaluation were neatly summarized by a teacher interviewed:

The students' attitude toward universal education is that information must be delivered to them, but they do not see themselves as active participants in the educational process. Since two-way communication is important in language acquisition, students' passivity inhibits language learning.

Although six (30%) educators interpreted an absence of student-initiated communication as indicating a lack of motivation, only two (3%) students agreed. Finally, seventeen (23%) students responded that they do ask questions or initiate discussions, which contradicts nineteen (95%) teachers surveyed who did not typically observe these behaviors in their classes.

Table 4

Perceptions about Hesitation to Volunteer to Class-Directed Questions

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students hesitate to volunteer answers in response to questions posed to the class as a whole (as opposed to a specific individual)?

Yes 20/20 No 0/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 47/75 No 28/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1. Nonplused due to inexperience in responding to such questions (neutral/positive) = 8/20
2. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) = 6/20
3. Averse to standing out (neutral/positive) = 5/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Unconfident in English ability = 34/75
2. Shy about speaking English publicly = 15/75
3. Worried about making mistakes = 11/75

Most commonly, teachers neutrally perceived students as untrained in responding to

questions posed to the class, adding that students would answer if called upon by name. Other educators perceived students as reluctant to stand out (either by making mistakes or being perceived as showing off for volunteering) and risk facing peer ridicule, which was similar to the second and third most common student responses. None of the students agreed with the teacher perception that they were not motivated to study English, and conversely, the student lack of confidence in English ability was not cited directly by any of the instructors interviewed. Furthermore, twenty-eight (37%) students reported that they respond to questions posed to the class, which contradicts the observations of all of the teachers that they usually do not.

Table 5

Perceptions about Hesitation to Demonstrate Superior Knowledge, Intelligence, or Competence

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students hesitate to openly demonstrate knowledge, intelligence, or competence which is high compared to most of their classmates?

Yes 17/20 No 3/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 51/75 No 24/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1. Averse to standing out (negative) =7/20
2. Averse to standing out (neutral/positive) = 6/20
3a. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) =4/20
3b. Shy (negative) =4/20
3c. Averse to appearing that they are showing off (neutral/positive) = 4/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Averse to appearing that they are showing off=21/75
2. Shy -11/75
3a. Averse to standing out= 10/75

3b. Worried about what others will think of them 10/75

While teachers commonly mentioned "aversion to standing out," they construed such aversion negatively and neutrally/positively with almost equal frequency. Educators cited the following reasons for negative interpretations: when students hesitate to display knowledge, they "lose opportunities to practice English," "learn from each other's insights," and/or "demonstrate leadership." Neutral/positive responses typically consisted of nonjudgmental descriptions of students' wishes to avoid unnecessary attention that could result in peers' negative sanctioning.

Students and instructors commonly agreed that students feel inhibited about displaying superior knowledge because of shyness (i.e., responses #3a and 2 among teachers and students, respectively) and anxiety over negative peer perceptions (responses #1, 2, and 3c among teachers and 1, 3a, and 3b among students). Conversely, while none of the students reported a lack of motivation for studying English, four educators did (response 3a), claiming that such students are "reluctant to challenge themselves," "lazy," and/or "wasteful of their own skills and time." Furthermore, twenty-four (32%) students asserted that they do not hesitate to demonstrate knowledge or ability which is superior to that of their classmates, which contradicts the responses of the seventeen (85%) instructors who observed this hesitation as a predominant classroom norm.

Table 6

Perceptions about Reluctance to Disagree with Peers

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students are reluctant to disagree with or correct each other?

Yes 17/20 No 2/20 Don't know 1/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 36/75 No 39/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1a. Avoiding an adverse effect on interpersonal relations (negative) =8/20

1b. Avoiding an adverse effect on interpersonal relations (neutral/positive) 8/20

3. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) =3/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Avoiding an adverse affect on interpersonal relations =12/75
2. Averse to appearing as if showing off their ability =9/75
3. Shy =8/75

Teachers most commonly thought that students do not commonly disagree with each other because they want to avoid having an adverse effect on interpersonal relations; however, such perceptions were evenly divided between negative and neutral/positive evaluations. Negative evaluations arose from two types of criteria: four instructors valued the open expression of ideas so much that they criticized students for avoiding conflict (labeling them, for example, as "conformists," "afraid," or "unimaginative"), while four other teachers objected to this communication style on educational grounds. As one participant explained, "I want students to focus on learning correct English, and when they avoid disagreement, they also impede open discussion, which is important in learning how to express one's views fluently." Neutral/positive responses included affirmative characterizations of students who avoid conflict as "empathetic," "considerate," and "not wanting to embarrass others."

Among students and instructors, the most common response in each group was the same (i.e., "avoiding an adverse effect on interpersonal relations"). However, the students surveyed fundamentally disagreed with educators as to whether at all they engage in the behavioral norm in question: thirty nine (52%) students responded that they disagree with or correct their peers, while seventeen (85%) teachers said that they generally do not.

Table 7

Perceptions about Hesitation to Ask Questions for Clarification

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students hesitate to ask questions for clarification (i.e., about the content of your lesson or a set of instructions that you issued)?

Yes 19/20 No 1/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 14/75 No 61/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1. Avoiding embarrassment that would result from admitting ignorance publicly (negative) = 7/20
2. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) = 6/20
3. Demonstrating respect by not interrupting the teacher (neutral/positive) = 4/20

Student Interpretations:

1a. Unconfident in English ability = 3/75

1b. Unable to phrase the question in English = 3/75

1c. Lacking courage = 3/75

The most popular instructor response, i.e., that students are ashamed to admit ignorance publicly, was characterized negatively for two reasons. First, many educators valued clear communication over face maintenance. As one interviewee explained, "Students don't want to stand out as the ones who don't understand when no one does, which results in a collusion of ignorance." Other teachers stated that misunderstandings about lesson or exam instructions could undermine lesson objectives or result in a poor test grade; therefore, from an educational viewpoint, hesitation to ask about unclear points was not beneficial.

Several perception gaps are suggested by the data. Among the three most common teacher responses (i.e., avoiding embarrassment, lacking motivation, and demonstrating respect to the teacher), only one, zero, and two students, respectively, gave identical answers. Furthermore, sixty-one (81%) students responded that they ask their instructors for clarification, thus disagreeing with nineteen (95%) of the teachers who stated that students typically hesitate to do so.

Table 8

Perceptions about Discomfort in Unstructured Learning Situations

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students feel uncomfortable in unstructured learning situations (that is, those without precise objectives, detailed instructions about

how to proceed, and/or strict timetables)?

Yes 18/20 No 2/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 39/75 No 36/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1. Unaccustomed to unstructured situations (neutral/positive) = 7/20
2. Passive· overly dependent upon teachers for directions (negative) 6/20
3. Confused about what to do (neutral/positive)· 5/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Unaccustomed to unstructured situations=20/75
2. Confused about what to do=11/75
3. Worried about making mistakes=10/75

Teacher and student interpretations of this behavior were relatively similar, as two of the top three responses among each population were shared (i.e., "unaccustomed to unstructured situations" and "confused about what to do"). Two salient differences are that none of the students perceived themselves as passive (while six instructors did), and also eighteen (90%) educators stated that students are uncomfortable in unstructured learning situations, yet thirty-six (48%) students disagreed.

Table 9

Perceptions about Infrequent Eye Contact

Teacher Question: Have you observed that students avoid eye contact with you while you are teaching?

Yes 12/20 No 8/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 31/75 No 44/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1. Maintaining Japanese cultural norms of eye contact (neutral/positive) 8/20
2a. Being polite and respectful to the teacher (neutral/positive) = 3/20
2b. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, or motivation (negative) = 3/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Trying to avoid being called upon = 26/75
2. Shy = 2/75
3a. Want to avoid appearing as if glaring at the teacher 1/75
3b. Feeling that too much eye contact would be strange = 1/75

Student and instructor perceptions regarding eye contact were similar in that eight (11%) teachers and forty four (59%) students claimed that students do not avoid it. Contrarily, only two educators mentioned the most common student response, i.e., that students want to avoid being called upon, while only one student cited the most popular teacher response, i.e., that Japanese students follow norms for not making eye contact with teachers during lectures.

Table 10

Perceptions about Long Silences

Teacher Question: Have you experienced long silences in your classes when waiting for a response from students?

Yes 19/20 No 1/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 55/75 No 20/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1a. Averse to standing out (neutral/positive) = 7/20
1b. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) = 7/20
3. Averse to standing out (negative) = 4/20

Student Interpretations:

1. In the process of formulating a response -44/75
2. Unaware of the answer=9/75
3. Uncomfortable about answering the question=7/75

Two of the three most common instructor interpretations were that students want to avoid standing out. Although teachers were divided between negative and neutral/positive perceptions, they cited many of the same reasons why they believed this is true: students do not want to be embarrassed by making a mistake, admitting that they do not know the answer, or being perceived as showing off for volunteering. Instructor responses differed in that the neutral/positive teachers tended to nonjudgmentally accept these reasons, typically citing a lack of training in taking risks in front of one's peers in the Japanese educational system. Negative responses included rejection of these fears because students failed to speak and improve their oral English proficiency; other teachers placed a higher value upon taking risks than face maintenance, consequently disparaging students as lacking courage or insecure.

The data suggested several perceptual differences between students and teachers. While none of the students indicated that their silence symbolizes a lack of motivation, seven of the educators did. As one instructor explained, "They are just waiting for someone else to volunteer." Moreover, only two educators surmised that students are silent because they are formulating an answer, which was the most common student response. Finally, many students disagreed that they engage in this norm at all: twenty (27%) claimed that they are not silent when asked questions, while nineteen teachers (95%) observed this trend in their classes.

Table 11

Perceptions about Unexpressive Faces

Teacher Question: Have you observed in class that students' facial expressions appeared unchanging and lacked vivid expression?

Yes 17/20 No 3/20

Number of Students Who Reported Engaging in this Behavior:

Yes 18/75 No 57/75

Teacher Interpretations:

1a. Expressing themselves in a culturally-natural manner (neutral/positive) =7/20

1b. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (negative) =7/20

3. Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation (neutral/positive) 5/20

Student Interpretations:

1. Expressing themselves in a culturally-natural manner=9/75
2. Focusing on the lesson's contents=5/75
3. Shy=1/75

"Lacking enthusiasm, energy, and/or motivation" was a common response among NES instructors. Negative interpretations tended to include attributions about students' internal traits for such deficiencies, such as poor motivation or a weak affinity for studying. However, teachers responding neutrally/positively mentioned factors external to the students, such as heavy course loads or uninspiring teaching, as causes of motivational lacks.

Student interpretations differed most notably on two counts. First, none of the students cited a lack of motivation or dislike for English in accounting for their facial expressions. Furthermore, fifty-seven (76%) students responded that they are not expressionless, thus disagreeing with seventeen (85%) educators who perceived the opposite.

Discussion

In this section, trends in the data will be highlighted and responses offered for research questions two through four.

Response to Research Question Two

Before responding to the second research question, i.e., "Do NES university instructors agree that the behavioral patterns described in the literature exist among their students in English oral proficiency classes?," a note is necessary about how questions were posed during the teacher interviews. Educators were asked if they observed these norms

among the majority of their students in the majority of situations. All participants astutely noted that there were exceptions to these trends, which tended to occur when students were placed in small classes, possessed exceptional language ability, or had significant experience studying with NES teachers. The effects of class size, language proficiency, and previous educational experience with NES instructors on student behavior should certainly be addressed in future research.

With this caveat, a response can be offered to the second research question: the teachers interviewed demonstrated a strong consensus (seventeen to twenty affirmative answers, or 85-100%) that the norms described in Tables 1-8, 10, and 11 exist in their classes. Despite having the lowest response rate, twelve instructors in Table 9, or a majority (60%), observed infrequent eye contact from students. Therefore, the data indicates that all of the norms described in the literature were observed among students by many of the NES teachers interviewed.

Response to Research Question Number Three: An Analysis of Perceptual Differences among Teachers

Teachers' negative interpretations of student behaviors fell into two categories: pragmatic ones justified by the criteria of efficacy in promoting language acquisition, and those based on educators' personal values. The former group reasoned that when students engage in Japanese classroom norms, which originate from a translation-based approach to English education (rather than one that promotes oral proficiency), they are losing valuable opportunities to improve their spoken English. For example, some teachers lamented that students' hesitation to demonstrate superior knowledge or ability in front of their peers (see Table 5) resulted in lost chances to speak English. When employing the latter type of evaluative criterion (i.e., based on NES teachers' personal values), instructors often compared their preferred norms for classroom interaction to Japanese ones and ultimately deprecated Japanese student behaviors. For example, some educators who value leadership and associate it with public displays of knowledge negatively perceived students who did not demonstrate their abilities before classmates. Such hesitation is not the only student norm where negative evaluations were based on both educationally pragmatic and personal criteria; the same distinction was previously made regarding Tables 6, 7, and 10.

A salient difference between instructors' negative interpretations based on personal values and neutral/positive ones is whether they contained internal or external attributions. The former usually contained internal attributions, which Matsumoto (2000) defined as those that "specify the cause of behavior within a person" (p. 421). Such internal attributions effectively labeled students with undesirable traits. Guided by such reasoning, for example, students fail to demonstrate desirable behaviors in Tables 1 7, 10, and 11 because they lack motivation, energy, or enthusiasm for studying spoken English.

Neutral and positive perceptions among teachers typically consisted of external attributions regarding Japanese students' behavior, which, according to Matsumoto (2000), are "those that locate the cause of the behavior outside of a person" (p. 421). Such external causes included two kinds: those engendered by social systems or by other students. For example, in Table 3, ten teachers perceived that students do not initiate discussions about topics of interest because they have not been trained to do so in the Japanese English education system (a systematic reason), while in Table 1, nine teachers perceived that students hesitate to speak in front of large groups due to shyness that stems from an understandable apprehension of being ridiculed by other students for making mistakes (i.e., a fear caused by other people). In both cases, since teachers cited a reason over which students had no control, they accepted such fears without construing them negatively. Another characteristic of many positive interpretations is that teachers made positive internal attributions of student traits, such as nonconfrontational and respectful (see Table 2) or empathetic and considerate (see description following Table 6).

An additional trend in the data on teacher perceptions was the rifeness of ambivalence; most participants responded to at least one question in this survey with both negative and neutral/positive interpretations of the same behavior. Two types of ambivalence were evident among the educators interviewed. The first case involved teachers who negatively perceived Japanese student behaviors on educational grounds (as previously described), yet neutrally accepted or even saw positive merits in the same behavior in other social contexts. For example, an instructor disparaged students who remain silent in response to his questions posed in class for wasting an opportunity to speak English, but he also qualified his answer by extolling the grace of silence in Japanese traditional arts such as tea ceremony. Another teacher reported negative perceptions of silence in the classroom but neutral acceptance of its use in everyday communication with Japanese people outside

of school.

The other type of ambivalence involved conflict between educators' emotional reactions toward students' behaviors and their intellectual appraisals of them. When teachers' expectations for appropriate classroom behavior were contradicted, they often had negative reactions, but this was mollified by knowledge and understanding about Japanese culture. For example, one participant, who had taught in Japanese universities for twenty-one years, observed:

> When students are silent, I can get impatient and frustrated due to my [American] cultural background. But intellectually, I see this as a cultural phenomenon, which balances things a little. So how I feel about something and how I look at it intellectually can be totally different.

Therefore, a repertoire of knowledge about Japanese culture can help a teacher to ameliorate negative emotional reactions. However, this ambivalence expressed by many educators interviewed suggests that their perceptions of students and acceptance of their norms is quite complex—infused with contradictory cognitive and affective appraisals of Japanese students' behavior. Because ambivalence was commonly encountered among the educators interviewed, it is recommended that future questionnaires written to explore similar perceptual issues in intercultural communication allow for a variety of emotionally-valenced evaluations from a subject about the same behavior.

Risks of Cultural Biases and Oversights in Teacher Responses

When making negative interpretations of students' behavior, the criteria that teachers used in reaching such conclusions frequently included culturally-induced oversights and/or biases of which they seemed unaware. For example, while instructors' negative interpretations of students' behavior on educational grounds reflected justifiable concern about lost opportunities to speak English, they sometimes encompassed myopic assumptions about the methods through which teachers' educational objectives could be accomplished. Specifically, many instructors attempting to reach certain pedagogical goals, such as proficiency in argumentation or student initiative in asking questions when they are confused, were also expecting behaviors that are anathema in Japanese classrooms (e.g., students debating the instructor or posing questions publicly for clarification of teacher instructions).

However, teachers who cited educational reasons for their negative interpretations of student behaviors rarely verbally acknowledged that these goals could be achieved through sanctioned Japanese classroom norms. For example, as one interviewee noted, students might be quite comfortable asking questions for clarification if the teacher circulates around the room shortly after an explanation, thus allowing them to approach him or her away from their peers' eyes. Or instructors could develop rhetorical skills by requiring students to write and deliver position papers on their opinions, rather than by expecting students to disagree publicly with them. When teachers disparaged student behaviors, yet omitted discussions of such pedagogical alternatives, their oversight is clear: students are being negatively judged for feeling inhibited about contradicting their habituated classroom norms without an attempt on the part of the instructors to reach the desired goals using more culturally-compatible educational methods.

When teachers negatively perceived student behavior based on their own values, other types of culturally based oversights were evident. For example, equating demonstrations of superior knowledge with leadership is a cultural construction that might hold true in some NES teachers' home countries, but according to student perceptions in Table 5, such displays are more likely to result in ostracization for being ostentatious than being lauded and followed for one's intelligence.

Response to Research Question Number Four: Consistencies and Disparities between Student and Teacher Perceptions

In formulating a response to research question four (i.e., "Do students have similar or different perceptions regarding their classroom conduct compared to NES instructors?"), gaps and convergences in student and teacher perceptions are described in this subsection. However, due to the heuristic nature of this research, it is not possible to generalize such results and unequivocally conclude that culturally rooted perception gaps exist between teachers and students; rather we can note when the data suggests their existence. On the other hand, since teacher and student interpretations of the same behaviors diverge rather extremely on many points, it is important to consider if and how intercultural differences in classroom norms and behavioral expectations may be influencing these groups' perceptions. The following analysis is devoted to this purpose.

The specific interpretations of student behaviors offered by the teachers and stu-

dents have been described in the tables above. In sum, four patterns are discernible: agreement that these behaviors are practiced—with the (1) same, (2) similar, or (3) strongly divergent perceptions between students and teachers about their meaning, as well as (4) disagreement between teachers and students as to whether or not students engage in these behaviors at all. Most tables contain amalgamations of these patterns. For example, Table 5 illustrates that both students and teachers perceived that students hesitate to demonstrate knowledge which is superior to classmates because they are shy, averse to standing out, or want to avoid appearing as if they are showing off (pattern one). Students similarly reported that they are worried about what other people may think about them if they make such displays (pattern two). Many teachers concluded that students lack motivation, whereas none of the students surveyed agreed with this assessment (pattern three). Finally, almost one third of the students disagreed with the premise that they do not share their expertise in class (pattern four).

By examining these patterns in each table, three striking trends in the data emerge that suggest pervasive perception gaps between Japanese students and NES instructors. First, many teachers attributed student norms to a lack of motivation or enthusiasm for studying spoken English (see Tables 1-7, 10, and 11). However, students rarely, if ever, described themselves that way, despite the fact that they were explicitly notified both verbally and in the questionnaire's written instructions that they should not write their name (so as to maintain anonymity), their answers would have no bearing whatsoever on their grades, and the results would be used only for research. Therefore, many teachers labeled students as lazy, bored, or indifferent, when in fact students appeared ready to learn. Such attributions likely were made when educators did not receive verbal and/or nonverbal feedback from students that they associate with motivation, for example, challenging instructor opinions, displaying animated facial expressions, and initiating discussions.

In addition, while students commonly responded that their lack of confidence in their English precluded them from engaging in a variety of classroom behaviors, such as speaking English before large groups, initiating discussions, etc. (see Tables 1-11), teachers rarely cited this factor explicitly as a force affecting students. While some similar answers were offered, such as "shy" in Table 1 or "averse to standing out" in Table 4, instructors tended to attribute student reticence mostly to other factors. Therefore, the data suggests

that at best teachers perceived only an ancillary influence of confidence in English ability on student behavior, and at worst, failed to recognize its relevance.

A third major pattern discerned from the data is that many students disagreed with teachers that they engaged in the norms described in the literature. This perceptual gap may result from different forms of signals (when comparing Japan and NES teachers' native cultures) used to communicate that these behaviors are being enacted. In other words, the Japanese students are likely performing, or encoding, these behaviors in a manner that Japanese teachers would typically understand; however, NES teachers are not perceiving such actions in the same way because they are not culturally-trained to decode these messages as intended by their students.

One possible cause of such intercultural miscommunication could have been different cross-cultural norms in the frequency of a behavior's display. For example, fifty-eight (75%) students in Table 3 averred that they ask questions and initiate discussions about topics of interest to them, which may be so by Japanese cultural standards. However, the nineteen (95%) teachers interviewed who perceived the opposite trend may have disagreed because such behaviors were performed by Japanese students less commonly than NES instructors had been trained to expect in their native cultures and consequently did not make a striking impression.

This perception gap may also have occurred because the behaviors in question were encoded by students, verbally and/or nonverbally, in a manner with which their NES teachers were unfamiliar and therefore unable to accurately decode. Hence, when Japanese students perceived themselves contradicting the norms described in the literature, the NES instructors did not recognize that their students were engaging in these behaviors. For example, various sources (Condon, 1984; Skow & Stephan, 2000; Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Wurzel & Fischman, 1994) describe differences in direct, verbal, and confrontational communication styles found within the cultures of the teachers interviewed in this study (primarily American and British) and indirect, nonverbal, and conflict-avoiding styles employed by most Japanese. Therefore, students may challenge their instructors using more indirect means than teachers expect, using negative questions such as, "Don't you think that...." rather than direct statements, e.g., "I disagree because...." Or they might show their disagreement nonverbally with averted eyes or silence. Teachers might not realize that such indirect expressions are meant as disagreements, and hence

form the impression that students do not challenge them.

Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The results presented in this paper are best conceived of as a first step in examining NES teachers' and their students' perceptions about Japanese student behavior, as well as where perception gaps between teachers and students might lie. While it is inadvisable from a scholarly perspective to make unequivocal conclusions from the preliminary data in this study, the patterns highlighted in this paper can be used as a compass for future research by illuminating important questions and directions to be pursued.

In future studies, in order to more precisely ascertain the nature of teacher and student perceptions, as well as the gaps between them, questionnaires should be developed that can be quantitatively analyzed and generate conceptually equivalent data. Furthermore, we suggest that a large population of instructors' perceptions be analyzed on two levels: as a composite group and also by culture (e.g., British, U.S. American, etc.). Also, to minimize confounding variables, an ideal population would include students and teachers who share the same classes.

Conclusion

The data in this study suggest that a variety of culturally-novel behaviors are observed by NES instructors among their Japanese students, and that educators' interpretations of such norms are varied and emotionally complex. Moreover, many perception gaps appear to exist between Japanese students and NES teachers. While some points of agreement can be observed, many Japanese students and NES instructors consistently disagree as to why students behave in the manners that they do, as well as whether students demonstrate these behaviors at all. In order to improve the quality of intercultural teacher student relationships, which can only have a positive effect on English education, it is critical that teachers discern the extent and nature of such miscommunication in their own classes. Naturally, responsibility for effective intercultural communication is reciprocal, but with decisions about curriculum ultimately residing with the teacher, he or she has the unique opportunity to provide leadership in closing such perception gaps.

The advantages of doing so are plentiful. Primarily, if teachers understand student

behavior as the students themselves intend it (e.g., they do not volunteer answers in front of the class because they lack confidence in their English ability), then instructors can avoid rushing to many of the negative judgments which were reported in this study. Accurate mutual perception is a critical basis for successful intercultural communication, and Matsumoto (2000) described some of the damaging effects of misperceptions resulting from conflicting behavioral expectations:

> Because our cultural filters and ethnocentrism create a set of expectations about others, communicating with people whose behaviors do not match our expectations often leads to negative attributions... These attributions form the core of a stereotype of such people. (p. 368)

Such negative attributions and stereotypes can only hamper both intercultural communication and effective language education (by causing teacher-student friction). Furthermore, if instructors understand what motivates student behavior, they are better positioned to give students what they need to learn effectively, such as confidence building exercises to compensate for the lack of self assurance that students expressed in Tables 1-4.

In sum, the benefits of improved understanding of intercultural perceptions in the classroom are numerous and compelling both for students and teachers. This study has constituted our attempt to contribute to research dedicated to this important goal for both educators and scholars in the field of intercultural communication.

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