

# Japanese: A Heavily Culture-Laden Language

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## **Abstract:**

Language and culture are interdependent. The uniqueness of the Japanese society makes Japanese language a heavily culture-laden one, which contributes much to the language barrier between Japanese and Americans. It is compulsory that many cultural concepts must be integrated into comparative studies so they can be better understood from a cross-cultural perspective, and communication between Japanese and Americans must always be carried out with culture awareness.

Key Words: uniqueness; language; culture; communication

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## **Background**

Japan, the floating islands, is eastern and very old. Isolated from any continents, the Japanese trace their history to a mythic past when gods and goddesses were upon the land. The legends say that the Japan was born of bawdy laughter. It was the laughter of the gods who were watching strip-tease that coaxed Amaterasu-omikami, the Sun Goddess, from her cave where she had been sucking in darkness. Were it not for that there might be no Japan.

Prior to Meiji Restoration, the Tokugawa Shoguns placed severe restrictions on contact between Japanese and gaijin (foreigners). Japanese who left Japan were forbidden from returning under penalty of death. There were not many contacts between Japan and the outside world before Commodore Perry "opened" Japan to outside contact in 1853; and Japanese history shows it to be a very specially unique culture (Condon, 1984). It is difficult to find on this earth a more homogeneous society, or one more exclusive. To be Japanese is to be born of Japanese parents, to look Japanese, to speak the Japanese language, and to act Japanese—the full set. Change any part and you spoil the symmetry, like a sour note in a sonata. Thus it is that Japanese often report their surprise, when visiting other countries, that they are mistaken as non-Japanese. Meanwhile few Japanese expect outsiders to take to onigiri (rice balls), to thrill to kendo (traditional Japanese fencing), or to resonate with enka (that very Japanese genre of popular music in which female vocalists sing men's songs, and male vocalists sing what seem to be women's songs).

Schilling (2000) noted that for the borrowing from other cultures during the past century or so, the Japanese have remained a fairly clear distinction between what is traditionally Japanese and what is borrowed. These distinctions are reflected, for instance, in the use of words and in the writing system. All foreign and borrowed words—even the words for "glass" or "bread" which have been used in Japan longer than America has existed—are written in a syllabary which is different from the standard Japanese characters. It is as if every word that English could identify as derived from another language were italicized. Nor is it only native and borrowed words that are symbolically distinguished. Clothing, building design, foods are also divided symbolically. Thus the Japanese who excel in borrowing, adapting and, often, improving on what they borrow, are also skilled in keeping tabs on what is traditionally Japanese and what is not (Schilling, 2000).

The Japanese constitute a culturally and socially homogeneous racial entity, whose essence is virtually unchanged from prehistoric times down to the present day; and Japanese culture is very different from all other cultures (Gudykunst, 1993). Great contrast can be drawn between Japan and the West, and in many cases, even other Asian countries.

Japan is often viewed as a homogeneous, vertical society based on hierarchy, shame, duties, harmony, and dependence; while, the United States, in contrast, is seen as a heterogeneous, horizontal, society that

is based on equalitarianism, guilt, rights, rupture, and independence. Communication in Japan is based on a language that prized reticence, sentiment, silence, ambivalence, emotions, subjectivity, situational logic, and particularity. Communication in the U.S., on the other hand, is viewed as being based on languages that value rhetoric, logic, talkativeness, rationality, objectivity, rigid principles, and universality (Maynard, 1998). Reichauer (1994) and Oatey (2000) argue that Japanese do not contrast so sharply with Americans, but they do agree that there is, at least, a quantitative difference among the features of the two cultures, which ever caused and can be causing misunderstandings in the process of Japanese-American communication.

The uniqueness of the Japanese society makes it compulsory that many cultural concepts must be integrated into comparative studies if we are to better understand Japanese language, which plays a central role as one of Japan's most distinctive features.

## 1. Loan Words

The Japanese have always taken pride in the supposed native purity of their culture and especially their language, but in actuality the language ever since it was first committed to writing has been decidedly a bastard tongue like English (Yoshio, 2004).

As people in the Western countries, the Japanese also have a genius for importing, borrowing, and then adapting to suit their national purposes. The ease with which Japanese borrows, modifies, and adopts foreign words and idioms is perhaps its greatest asset and in no way detracts from the strength of Japanese culture or its fundamental homogeneity.

According to Reichauer (1994) primitive Japanese was probably already an amalgam of various dialect of Korean type with admixtures of Chinese and other words even before the language started to be inundated with Chinese and its writing system in the sixth century. The Chinese linguistic influx was thoroughly modified and absorbed, but by the ninth century it left a mixed language, natively Japanese in structure but heavily Sinofied in vocabulary. After further additions of vocabulary from China over the next several centuries, Japanese emerged as a language in which more words, especially in the learned vocabulary, were of Chinese than Japanese origin.

Based on Reichauer (1994), a second great linguistic wave, this time from the West, swept Japan. It started with a sprinkling of Portuguese words in the sixteenth century and subsequently of Dutch, but it became a tidal wave in the nineteenth century. The pseudo-classic Greek and Latin terminology of modern science was adopted, and the German contributed especially in the field of medicine and French in the arts, but most of the words came straight out of English, the rising new international language of trade, brought by American and English teachers and merchants. Hundreds of English words were in common use by the time the militarists tried to turn back the tide in the 1930, and thousands more entered the language with the American occupation and the subsequent emergence of Japan into the world market. English words have become so prevalent that the conversation of a contemporary intellectual, the advertisements on television, or even much household chitchat would be quite incomprehensible to person who knew only the Japanese of a century ago.

Japanese uses approximately 7000 English words. To name the parts of his car, a taxi driver can list at least 30 items of English loan words: handoru (handle, or steering wheel), gea (gear), taiya (tire), heddo raito (head light), buleiki (brake), bampa (bumper) and so on and on and on. He called a door that was partially closed a han-doa, Japanese han "half" and English doa "door" — a door that is half shut. The driver goes to a gas station and asks for man'tan, Japanese man "full" and the shortened English "tank" — "Filled up!"

One would imagine that, after such massive linguistic borrowings from the world's two most widespread languages, the Japanese would be well prepared for verbal communication with the outside world and many foreigners would find an open door to fluency in Japanese, but this is not the case. The basic structure of the Japanese language has remained almost unaffected by either Chinese or English. By sheer accident Chinese and English have become languages in which word order determines meaning ("The cat sees the mouse" or "The mouse sees the cat"), but Japanese has remained a strictly agglutinative language in which the concluding word, which is a verb or adjective, ties onto itself subsidiary elements that specify such things as tense, mood, politeness, and whether the sentence is causative, passive, negative,

or a question. Chinese and English are structurally so alike that a person speaking in English words with Chinese word order can produce perfectly understandable Pidgin English. A similar combination of Japanese word order with either Chinese or English words would make only gibberish. For example, the simple verb *kaku*, "to write," can be expanded through agglutination into *kakaserarenakattaraba*, "If (he) had not been caused to write," or dozens of other forms that would defy direct translation into Chinese or English.

Even the individual words borrowed from Chinese and English do not help very much. The Chinese words as used in Japanese were borrowed in now outdated ancient pronunciation and so distorted to fit the limitations of the Japanese phonetic system as to be quite incomprehensible to Chinese. Only a very occasional name or word, such as *Taiwan*, leaps out as being mutually intelligible. In the case of English, more words may be identifiable but certainly not most. Many curious mispronunciations arise from the Japanese inability to pronounce "r" and several other sounds used in English, and in the ending of all syllables with a vowel, except in the case of "n". Thus they have *solli* for "sorry", *kulismas* for "Christmas", *kaado* for "card", *lepooto* for "report" and *hoomu* for "home" and also as an abbreviation of *pulattofoomu*, "railway platform." The Japanese also cannot pronounce most groupings of consonants, and thus break them up into multiple syllables, as in *Saluturu*, the Japanese form for the name of the French philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre.

A further complication is the changed meanings Japanese give to many borrowed words. *Handolu*, from "handle," is a steering wheel, and *kulkushon*, from the outmoded word "klaxon," is the horn on a car. Even more mystifying are Japanese inventions from English words. *Kuulaa*, from "cooler," is an air conditioner, a *naita* ("nighter") is a night game in *beesu-boolu* ("baseball"), a *Guliin-kaa* ("Green Car") is a first-class coach on a train, and a *salaliman* ("salary man"), as we have seen, is an office worker (Reichauer, 1994).

When a Japanese says, "I live in a mansion," he does not mean an elegant manor house, but just an apartment building. Once, some enterprising real estate salesman glamorized his modern apartment building by calling it the "...mansion," and the name has stuck for any new apartment building with pretensions of being up-to-date. In a restaurant, when rice is requested as *gohan*, it comes in a bowl; if requested as "rice" (pronounced approximately as *laisu*), you will get the same rice served on a plate (Natsuko, 1998).

Abbreviations of English words, which tend to become annoying polysyllabic in Japanese, are still more baffling but often ingenious. *Zene-suto* for *zeneraru-sutoraiki* is a general strike, and *pan-suto* means "panty stockings," more usually called panty hose in America. *Beesu-appu*, or "base up," means an across-the-board raise in base pay, an important concept for which they have no convenient term, and special honors should be paid to the delightful *sayonara hoomu-ran*, which quite reasonably is a home run that wins the game in the last half of the ninth inning.

If a Japanese friend suggests that you have some "pine juice", don't expect a new Japanese pine-flavored drink. It is only the abbreviation for pine-apple juice. The man walking up and down the railroad station platform shouting "Aisu! Aisu!" is, of course, selling ice cream. One lives in an *apaato* (apartment), watches *telibii* (television), drinks *biilu* "beer" and goes shopping in a *depaato* (department store).

Such terms are, of course, incomprehensible to English speakers, and Japanese are dismayed to discover that hundreds of the English words they habitually use are so much Greek, or Japanese, to speakers of English. The common witticism that the United States and England are two countries divided by a common language might better be applied to "Japanese English" (Reischauer, 1994).

Condon (1984) observed: travel writers call almost any foreign country "land of contrast", but only Japan is often called, by writers of all kinds, a "land of contradiction." Moreover, *Time Magazine* illustrated on its cover (March 1981) an eighteenth-century Japanese man who was carrying in addition to his *bangasa* (paper umbrella), a pocket calculator, camera, digital watch, golf clubs, car keys and other modern day Japanese products. This picture vividly characterized the contradictions in the Japanese culture.

According to Condon (1984), contradictions exist in every society, but Japanese can always find perfectly rational reasons for theirs and enjoy them with great comfort. The American way of thinking resembles the logic of the sciences, where a new theory may replace the old. The Japanese way, in this case, is more

like the logic of the arts: one may enjoy Bartok and Bach. Thus, the Japanese "still" use chopsticks, "still" write Chinese characters, and "still" want Shinto Priests to consecrate the land for every new construction, including the new Tokyo Disneyland. The Americans still say "still."

This can as well be said of the Japanese language with its large proportion of loan words of various origins. Except for its overly cumbersome writing system and unusually frequent occurrence of borrowing words, the Japanese language is an admirably efficient medium for Japanese who live in Japan and who deal with other Japanese.

Borrowing and adaptation are not uncommon in many languages, but few can be brave, and sometimes willing, enough to go that far as the Japanese do and can "still" manage them with such ease.

## 2. Yamoto Kotoba

Virtually every educated Japanese today accepts that the language is a composite of words and phrases borrowed from China and other countries in the past 1400 years, plus novel words the Japanese have devised or invented by themselves, upon a base of the original "pure" Japanese language called Yamoto Kotoba, where Yamoto means both pre-sixth century Japan and the people who have ruled the country since "ancient" times, and Kotoba means language. In some ways, this view of the Japanese language is similar to that which discriminates between pre-Norman old English, an almost purely Germanic tongue (which we can think of as the Yamoto Kotoba), and the later heavy borrowing from French, Latin and other languages (March, 1996). In fact, contributions which come from other language families like Chinese have been integrated in the core of the Japanese language.

However, while there have been occasional attempts to keep English "pure," virtually no English speakers have any awareness of or interest in old English (March, 1996).

The situation in Japan is different. There is an intimate connection between Japanese attachments and the language of the people. Educated Japanese to this day remain aware of Yamoto Kotoba, and there is a consensus on which words in Japanese are Yamoto and which are borrowed or later constructions. This awareness is aided by the convention of using only Yamoto Kotoba in the construction of waka and haiku, the traditional poetic forms. Books continue to be written about Yamoto Kotoba as the "heart" or "soul" of the Japanese language, and educated people are easily involved in discussions on the subject.

The preservation of Yamoto Kotoba in poetry and specialist books is a symptom of continuing Japanese interest in the "roots" of their nation. When Western philologists first began to study the Japanese language, they had difficulties in relating it to any other. This was taken by many Japanese to prove that they were a "unique" people, of mysterious origins, who once spoke in the poetic, connotatively rich language of Yamoto and who, more importantly, even today can take soothing spiritual recourse to Yamoto Kotoba alone, dispensing with foreign loan words.

According to Professor Shoichi Watanabe (1971, cited in March, 1996) of Tokyo's Sophia University, in at least the following situations Japanese prefer to use Yamoto Kotoba: 1. When a Japanese yearns to embrace something with fond memories for him, he uses Yamoto Kotoba. In contrast when he brims with ambitious or masterful feelings, he uses borrowed words; 2. When the soul of a Japanese is touched directly at a time of inner serenity, he will use Yamoto Kotoba. But his use of borrowed words increases when he thinks intellectually, or distances himself from things; and 3. Yamoto Kotoba comprises the complete lexicon for poetry written in the traditional forms, but borrowed words are preferred in scholarly treatises. Besides, when a Japanese feels introverted, as well as Yamoto Kotoba, Chinese loan words will be suitable, of which many have already been absorbed even in primitive Japanese, comprising a high and indispensable proportion of its vocabulary, and have since been considered by the Japanese as their own.

Watanabe has a special view of Yamoto Kotoba: (When) Yamoto Kotoba is spoken from feelings, it is as gentle and soft as mother's skin, as a nipple, or as a mother's womb.... In contrast, borrowed words are hard and stiff (like playing games with men or having an intellectual discussion). Everyone knows that you don't slip under the bed covers to nestle against your father's muscular body, but against the softness of your mother.

Nothing in English-language culture can prepare its speakers for such a sexist view of the ancient language that the Japanese seem to hold. The illusion to prenatal existence, the suggestion that the old language is nurturing, is Freudian to many (Oatey, 2000)

It seems that the Japanese learn to become highly sensitive to what is happening internally. They put great importance on the feedback they get from their bodies and minds. This makes for an absorbed privacy that all Japanese recognized at least intuitively, that they enjoy being along with other Japanese. Knowing such special qualities of "Japaneseness" is of great importance to understand the people and their language.

### 3. Expressions of Hierarchy

Culture is "the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations;" and it also means "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" (Merriam Webster Online, 2005). Communication reflects culture patterns and communicators' values. Japanese language is a diversity-conscious tongue. Even if one does not assume any direct correlation between language and culture, one must acknowledge that Japanese, which is sensitive to diversity, reflects Japan's culture patterns to a considerable extent. Japanese is a sexist language, differentiating between male and female vocabulary, expressions, and accents. The male language is supposed to be coarse, crude, and aggressive, while the female language is expected to be soft, polite, and submissive. Even at the level of self-identification, the male expressions for "I", *boku*, *ore*, and *washi*, differ from their more formal and refined female counterparts, *watashi* and *watakushi* (Oatey, 2000).

Japanese is also a hierarchy-oriented language (Yoshio, 2004). There is no doubt that hierarchical differences affect interaction between Japanese people in their every day lives.

Indeed, in many situations it is difficult to know how to behave unless one can place other people present in a hierarchical order to oneself. This begins from the moment of greeting, for bowing is a good example of the expression of status differences. One bows deeply to a superior than to an inferior, and one should stay down longer than one's superior. An amusing situation arises where the relation is unclear, for each side will try to stay down longer, on the assumption that it is better to err on the inferior side than on the superior one. The custom of exchanging name cards on meeting a new person helps to resolve such problems.

Speech in Japanese also varies depending on the relationship between the partners engaged in a conversation. The complicated system of speech levels makes it possible to show different degrees of respect or self-deprecation, and the choice of inappropriate levels can sound very offensive. It is even possible to be rudely over-polite. Verb ending vary and some common words, such as "go", "come", and "speak", have completely different forms according to the degree of being used and the location of their use. It is virtually impossible to have a conversation without making a decision about the appropriate level to use (Hendry, 2003).

One of the most distinctive features in Japanese is probably the sharp differences in levels of politeness and formality. Even though all languages have such differences---"I wonder if you would be so kind as to tell me the time, Sir" and "Hey, Bud, what's the time?"--- these differences are particularly marked in Japan, for two reasons. One is the importance of social and age differences that lie not far back in Japan's feudal past; the other is the tendency of Japanese to omit from sentence elements, especially the subjects that are already clear from the context or the level of politeness (Reichauer, 1994).

Terms of address also vary. In the family, brothers and sisters are always distinguished according to whether they are older or younger, and this same model is transferred into wider relations between children. As a general principle in the house, inferior members address superior ones with a term of relationship, while superior ones may use personal names, and this same form of distinction is carried into the world at large. Within specific institutions, where members occupy named positions in the hierarchical scale, they will be addressed by their titles by more junior members, whom they will address by name. Interesting modifications to the language have occupied in Hawaiian Japanese, where,

presumably in response to the American cultural milieu, English words like "brother" and "sister" have been adopted to replace some of the Japanese words which imply differences of status.

#### 4. Indirectness

Americans complain that the Japanese use vague words and ambiguous expressions so that it is hard to know where they stand. Sometimes even other Japanese say that they are not sure of what to conclude about some discussions in Japanese (Condon, 1984).

This is one of the many ways that Japanese culture is reflected in its language. The value of harmony is reflected in a variety of ways including cautious and indirect speech, taking time to sense another's mood before venturing an opinion, and avoid as much as possible disagreement. Japanese language has at least 16 ways to avoid saying "no" and makes use of many *aisatsu*, or "lubricant expressions," that serve to reinforce feelings and interdependence and harmony. In English, "yes" and "no" clearly mean acceptance and rejection. In Japanese, however, where creating a mood is more important than the judgment, "no" is rarely used and "yes" may mean "I hear what you are saying" or even "yes, but...."

For example, in 1969, President Nixon asked Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato to impose quotas on textile exports in exchange for the return of Okinawa. Sato replied, "Zensho shimasu," which can mean "I'll take a proper step" or "I'll take a favorable action," Sato means "no"; but Nixon's translators heard "yes" (March, 1996: 30).

Today, though, that reluctance to say no may be fading. When President Clinton asked for measurable trade targets, Prime Minister Hosokawa said "Totei doi dekimasen" — "There is no way I can agree with that."

Nevertheless, Communication differences continue between the United States and Japan. In April 1997, House Speaker Newt Gingrich visited Japan and spoke to the Japan National Press Club. According to newspaper accounts, Gingrich drew sustained but nervous laughter as he professed administration for Japanese negotiators: "We'd love to buy something very soon, but we can't quite figure out how to buy something, but we are really glad you're here and soon we are going to actually make progress on something where you and we can agree, but we can't quite explain yet, but we absolutely will in the not-very-distant future. We really are glad you're here, and would you like some more tea?"

"I believe this is done with such elegance and charming that it has taken Americans 30 years to break the code" (Jandt, 2003:153).

Like people in the Western countries Japanese believe that what is heard is only a fraction of what is meant, the tip of the meaning iceberg, as well (March, 1996). Even in everyday verbal discourse, the Japanese tend to avoid categorical comments. If one Japanese asked another, "Are you tired?" the likely answer will be, "Not specially," or at most, "A little," but certainly not a forthright, "yes, I am." The social point of this kind of behavior in Japan is to appear undemanding, flexible, or non-egotistical, all of which are desirable qualities. Asked to make choices, such as, "Will you have black (coffee) or white?" or "Will you eat or bathe first?" good manner in Japan dictate that first response should be, "Either is fine." The questioner is then likely to follow up with, "Which do you prefer?" so that the respondent is forced to make a choice. Everyone in Japan knows the rules of social interaction and customary language, and thus the system works well. But put Japanese with such social/language habits among foreigners and things will not proceed as smoothly. Foreign flight attendants are baffled when, in response to the question, "Coffee or tea?" some Japanese passengers answer, "Either is fine."

Indirect expressions become sources of irritation in communication with foreigners. That the Japanese use many ways of indicating "no" without actually saying so explicitly often misleads the non-Japanese. "That will be difficult," and "I'll think about it" are common circumlocutions. Japanese who hear such statements have a pretty good idea that the answer is definitely "no", but non-Japanese usually interpret the word "difficult" literally, as meaning inability or incompetence. If a non-Japanese tries to assist the Japanese to solve apparent problems of inability or incompetence, confusion and misunderstanding can escalate quickly, for the apparent problems do not in fact exist. Being "difficult" is merely a Japanese euphemism for "impossible". Misunderstandings are also likely if a "think about it" response is taken literally as a promise to consider the matter (March, 1996).

Nevertheless, the Japanese perceive few communication problems among themselves, believing that they have perfect indirect, nonverbal ways of communication that are efficient, sophisticated, and elegant. Indirect expressions, intuitive understanding, use of euphemisms, silence, nonverbal language and gesture and the like, are also regarded by the Japanese as esthetic acts, because they are done with style to effect communication with the minimum of words of effort (Masao, 1996).

In addition, speech-minimizing behaviors are also considered both elegant and efficient. Japanese use them stylistically to communicate feelings or uncomplicated ideas. This ability to simplify is very important in Japan, because the speaker must be sure that the words chosen are appropriately respectful to the subject or the listener. Nonverbal communication such as gestures or euphemisms that do not directly "call a spade a spade" is socially "safer" for the Japanese to use and much "cleaner" because they lack the nuances and overtones of direct verbal reference that might give offence or lead to misunderstandings. Such nonverbal messages have an obvious economy, clarity, efficiency, and directness that words cannot achieve (March, 1996).

Just as the foreigners can become confused when faced with Japanese indirectness, Japanese can become confused about Western directness, feeling that it must have some ulterior motive or meaning, as would likely be the case in Japan. An American writer, who worked from his suburban Tokyo home, was under heavy pressure to meet a deadline. Rather brusquely, he said to his Japanese wife, "The children are making too much noise. I can't concentrate. Take them to your mother's place, and don't come back until tonight." But the wife believed that the husband was actually telling her and the children to leave permanently, and did not return. It took sometime for this particular misunderstanding to be clarified (March, 1996).

March (1996) further notes that Western managers of foreign company in Japan commonly experience problems of this kind. One English manager decided to award good work by a young Japanese woman staffer with a trip to the parent company office in London. He expected her to be pleased, but she remained stone-faced and showed no interest. After repeated questioning, she eventually said, "I know what you are really trying to do. You are just trying to create an obligation in me so that I will have to stay with this company." This seemingly paranoid reaction is certainly not typical in Japan, but it does illustrate how Japanese tend to look behind what they are told, in search of the "real meaning".

Such indirectness and allusiveness indicate that the Japanese attitude to language is different to that in the U.S. What's more, the American preference is for linear—lines of argument, lines of reasoning, while the Japanese style, like the Japanese flag, favors the curve. To go around something rather than "straight to the point" is preferred. Points stick out, points might injure someone. In Japan one takes care to avoid either eventually. Even though indirectness is also seen in American culture, Americans are more likely to associate it with just more sensitive matters or they may tend to be indirect only when their interlocutor personality or status requires them to be very careful. However, indirectness in Japanese society takes place much too often and is simply a commonplace.

From the Japanese perspective, being direct and to the point can mean being insensitive to the other's feelings as well as lacking in esthetic subtlety, at least in the setting of a formal occasion (McClure, 2000).

The Japanese often perceive self-disclosing communications as inappropriate in social relationships. They view harmony establishing or harmony maintaining as a dominant function of communication. Communication is a means of seeking consensus and, as such, is by nature intuitive, emotional, and adaptive (Blaker, 2002). Said a Japanese professional interpreter: "Japanese indirectness is a part of our way of life."

Again, a point need to be cleared up here is that we are not saying that Japanese is imprecise by nature and English the opposite. Japanese can be very vague, but only when the speaker wishes it to be. One can be equally imprecise in English, but the Japanese, who commonly seek a cautious approach to consensus rather than a sharp clarification of differences of opinion---"Let's get down to brass tacks"---are more likely to cultivate vagueness of expression. When they want to be clear, as in drafting laws or explaining technological processes, Japanese can be used as precisely as English. In literary writing, on the other hand, most Japanese prefer a suggestive, sometimes ambiguous style to the crystal clarity favored in

some Western countries, but this is a difference fostered by literary preferences, not by the nature of the language (Reichauer, 1994).

## Conclusion

Communication is an element of culture, it has often been said that communication and culture are inseparable. Culture is a code people learn and share, and learning and sharing require communication. Communication requires code and symbol that must be learned and shared. Godwin C. Chu (1997, Cited in Jandt, 2002) observed that every cultural pattern and every single act of social behavior involves communication. To be understood, the two must be studied together. Culture cannot be known without a study of communication, and communication can only be understood with understanding of the culture it supports.

When people from different cultures communicate with each other, they must remember that culture and communication are strongly connected. The way that people view communication—what it is, how to do it, and reasons for doing it — is part of their culture.

In intercultural communication situations, it is important for people to be aware of the potential for various misunderstandings and to avoid them. However, despite of the best intentions, serious misunderstanding and even conflicts can occur. One reason for this is that even though people consciously attempt to avoid problems, they are still making judgment about what others say and how others express things based on their own cultural values as they are communicating. Cultural differences affect both their communication decisions and interpretation of what others communicate.

In general, people from Asian and Western cultures have the greatest chance of misunderstanding each other, with Japan and the United States at the two extremes. Since Japanese language is a heavily culture-laden one, which has to be understood and used in a culture-oriented way and Japanese culture patterns contribute much to the language barrier between Japan and the United States, communication between Japanese and Americans must always be carried out with culture awareness. People who want to be intercultural communicators should try to understand, respect and accept other's value perspective, and a good understanding of the culture is indispensable to successful communication.

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