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Is Japan Truly an "Information" Society?

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In the decade of the 1980s, Japan has firmly established itself as an economic and technological power in the world. People, both native and foreign to Japan, consequently seem to take it for granted that Japan has utilized its technology to successfully build a highly "informationalized" society as well. However, whether or not Japan is truly an information-oriented society on an international level is questionable. Let us analyze Japan in this informational respect.

Databases available in Japan

Information can be computerized and stored in database through digitalization. Databases are no doubt central to a highly informationalized society. There are two types of databases; one is in-house database for distributing and disseminating information within the same organization such as business groups, government agencies, universities, etc. and the other is commercial database for catering to the needs of the general public.

Japan has made remarkable progress in computer technology, catching up with the United States. In the area of databases, however, Japan has been behind its Western counterparts.

This could be due to the fact that the Japanese in general have not been as accustomed to the keyboard as Westerners. Differences in language structure have forced the Japanese to either incorporate written English as the predominant means of information expression or to develop an efficient and 'native' keyboard. In light of this problem, the Japanese database system, particularly in the commercial field, has fallen behind. Furthermore, the system for domestic

database network has been weakly consolidated among localities and various sectors in the country necessitating a need for restrengthening. As for the number of databases readily available, the ratio of domestic and foreign databases have consistently been one to four or five. Much of the information in various fields, retrievable in Japan, are made available by means of foreign databases.

Government's PR activities

Information can be made available through other channels such as government agencies and their affiliated organizations. Every state facilitates exchange of people and information for the purpose of gaining an understanding of its foreign policies and promoting mutual understanding. In Japan, it is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its affiliated organizations like the Japan Foundation that play the role through diplomatic missions and overseas offices.

According to the statistics from the Japan International Information Agency, the combined budget appropriated by the Japanese government for public information and cultural exchange is the least of five major advanced countries, i.e. U.S.A., U.K., France, W. Germany and Japan. The money spent for such endeavors by Japan in 1983 was 26.1 million yen, less than 3% of U.S. expenditures in the following year for the same purpose. The budget for cultural exchange by the Japan Foundation is about one-third of that of the Goethe Institute, a comparable German government affiliated organization that is ranked fourth.

Books translated in the world

In addition to the afore mentioned data, there are more figures revealing the apparent imbalance in information flow. For instance, the volume of information exchanged among different nations may be realized to some extent by the number of books translated worldly. In 1982, 2749 foreign

books were translated and published in Japan - 4.7% of the total volume. Nevertheless, of the thirty two countries listed, Japan occupies the fourth place indicating the wide differences in percentage among the top ranking countries. In the breakdown of books translated in the same year around the world, the share of Japanese books translated into other languages was a mere 0.4% of the total, ranking fourteenth among sixteen countries.

Possible Solutions

Much more information seems to flow in Japan than out. Does this imply that the West is not as eager to obtain information from Japan as the Japanese are in obtaining information from them? To find an answer to this question, a number of surveys have been conducted to look into potential needs for Japanese information in the overseas market and also to find out what kinds of difficulties overseas users might encounter. They have all resulted in similar findings. Because of its economic success and high technological accomplishment, Japanese information is in great demand. However, the problem lies in not knowing exactly what kinds of information are available, but its accessibility, high costs of collecting Japanese data due to the decentralized database systems and most seriously, existent language barriers.

One way of resolving information friction would be to translate at least Japanese information references into English, an international language. The burden of translation has obviously been a factor in stagnating a smoother flow of information on an international level. This burden, however, has been taken on with the rapid progress of computer translation. Such an expert system would replace translators making accessibility of information much easier for overseas users. Currently, there are a number of on-going projects aimed at providing users overseas with Japanese information retrievable in English in the fields of science and technology through the expert system. Once these projects are implemented, they will certainly further facilitate the cooperative efforts of the Office of Japanese Technical Literature within the U.S. Commerce Department between Japan and the U.S., EC-Japan info project between Japan and Europe, already in operation for the purposes of supplying Japanese information.

Another obstacle besides language barrier to information flow are culture related problems as

mentioned earlier. The key to overcome this particular obstacle is through education. Currently in Japan, there has been much debate as to the educational reform needed to promote internationalism in Japan. Ideals and high goals exist but the educational reforms implemented by government such as recruiting more native language teachers into classrooms of junior and senior high schools are in itself problematic and far from establishing internationalism. Further efforts should be made through an increase and strengthening of the staff and budget of affiliated culture centers and public relations offices to provide more up to date services and language classes that will enable Japan to be regarded as a country aware of the importance of educating its people in international understanding.

A balanced and multi-directional exchange of information is vital to maintaining smooth communication in today's highly interdependent world. As to exchanging scientific and technical information, it seems possible that the current imbalance will be levelled to a greater extent through machine translation technology in the foreseeable future. However, mechanical solutions alone are not sufficient to fill the communication gap between Japan and the West. People living in this highly technological era, tend to regard information as merely a product of computer inputs and printouts. What is often overlooked beyond the keyboard is a "human factor" - the diplomatic filler of gaps in communication across different cultures and languages. After all, it is people, not machinery, that will actually link point - to - point telecommunication networks around the globe.

Fundamentally, if one desperately desires information derived from a foreign country, he / she ought to make every possible effort to obtain it on his own. If that necessitates a study of the language and culture of that country in order to obtain, comprehend, and to better utilize that information, it should be encouraged. This is just what Japan, in its struggles with modernization and catching up with the West, has been doing for some hundred years. They never expect the supplier to readily provide any needed information without first making a show of effort. Now that Japan has itself become a supplier of information, why should the Japanese not expect this of others as well?

There is still much more to be accomplished on the part of Japan to correct the present information

flow. It is not just the responsibility of Japan alone to make efforts to seek possible solutions. It is the responsibility of the whole community of information utilizers to do what is necessary to alleviate the communication gap between Japan and themselves.

References

The Database White Paper 1991. Database Promotion Center, Japan.

Kaigai Jyuyosha muke Nihon Kaigai Gijutsu Jouhou no Kensaku Ekisupaato Sisutemu ni Kansuru Chousa Kenkyuu (Investigative Research concerning an Expert System for Retrieving Japanese Science and Technology Information for Overseas Users). Database Promotion Center, Japan, 1989.

The Information Service Industry White Paper 1986. Information Service Industry Association, 1986.

日米バイリンガル者による あいづちの考察

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「あいづち」の様式と使用頻度は、文化に強く影響を受けるようだ。例えば日本人は、「ええ」、「うんうん」などのあいづちがあまり長い間返ってこないと不安にかられるが、アメリカ人はあいづちがあまり返ってこなくても一向に困らないように思われる。

Yugve(1970)¹⁾は、話し手からのメッセージ、メインチャンネル(main channel)に対してバックチャンネル(back channel)を提唱し、話し手が、“Yes”とか“Uh-huh”などの短い言葉を自分の発話権をゆずらずに聞き手から受け取る時に認められると定義している。この概念を取り入れ、DuncanとFiske(1977)²⁾は、聞き手のあいづちを話し手が送る様々な信号と関連付けて二人の会話のやり取りを研究した。そこでは、“Ah”や“Yeah”などのような短いあいづちだけでなく、相手が始めた会話を補足したり、聞き返したり、繰り返したりするようなものもあいづちとしている。この定義では、「あいづち」を非言語行動と限定せずに言語との境目ぐらいに位置付けている。

またEkmanとFriesen(1969)³⁾は、あいづちを規制的動作(regulators)と称し、話し手と聞き手のやり取りを規制するもので、相手に話しを続けさせたり、繰り返させたり、急がせたりするなどの機能を持っていると説明している。しかも半意識下の中で使われているので、特に規制動作の存在には気がつかないが、指摘されたり、使われなくなれば気がつくというわけである。しかし異文化間のコミュニケーションでは、あいづちの仕方の違

いを会話の規制の仕方が違うと解釈しないで、マナーを知らない悪い態度だと否定的に受け取る傾向にあるようだ。

本研究では、このような特性をもったあいづちに焦点を当て、特に日本人とアメリカ人のあいづち使用が異なるのは、使用言語に起因するのか、話者の文化背景に起因するものなのかを調べようと思った。日本語と英語に精通した16名のアメリカ人と両言語に精通した13名の日本人に、英語と日本語で一回ずつ会話をしてもらった。

一般的にあいづちは非言語メッセージに分類されるが、本研究では、次の五つに分類した。1) 音声を伴わない頭の縦振りのみのあいづちの場合 2) 「ええ、ええ」など短いあいづちを音声で打ちながら頭を振っている場合 3) 「ええ、ええ」というような短いあいづちを打っているが頭の振りを伴わない場合 4) 聞き返し、繰り返す、及び相手が始めた会話を終えるなどの長めのあいづちの場合 5) 他の非言語動作(頭の横振り、笑い、微笑み、しかめ面)のあいづちの場合。

話している言語と話者の国籍を独立変数、上記の五つのあいづちを従属変数とし、ビデオに撮った会話を統計分析し、五つのあいづちの相互関係、頭の振り方、音声による短いあいづちの種類について、分析を加えた。

その結果、使用言語とあいづちの関係では、日本人が英語で話した場合に、日本語で話した時より、統計的に有意に頭の振りが減り、長いあいづちが増えたことがわかった。しかしアメリカ人の間では、なら統計的に有意な違いはみられなかった。従って日本人の場合、英語で話す時と頭の振りが減るような結果が統計上表れたが、五つのあいづちの関係をグラフにするとそれは4)の長めのあいづちの頻度と密接に関わっていることがわかった。つまり相手が話したことに對して、聞き返しや繰り返しを多用すると頭の振りが減るのである。

文化とあいづちの関係では、アメリカ人と日本人であいづちの回数が違うだけでなく、音声を伴った頭の振りや音声だけのあいづちが、特にアメリカ人には少ししか使われていないことがわかった。また滞在年数との関連では、アメリカに住んでいる日本人の間では滞在年数に比例してなら統計的に有意なあいづちの変化はみられなかったのに対し、アメリカ人は、日本に長く滞在した人ほど頭の振りや短い音声のあいづちが増えているという結果が出た。話者との同調現象を考えると日本人に顕著なあいづち使用はアメリカ人にとって真似がしやすいのかも知れない。紙面の都合上他の詳細は省くが、データの分析と観察を総合的に見ると、あいづちは使用言語より話者の文化的背景と密接に関係していると言えそうである。

(1) Yugve, V.H.(1970). On getting a word in edgewise. In M. A. Campbell et al. (Eds), Paper from the Sixth Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society. Chicago: University of Chicago. Department of Linguistics.

(2) Duncan, S. D., Jr. & Fiske, D. W. (1977).

Face-to-Face Interaction: Research, Methods, and Theory. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- (3) Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (1969). The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding. *Semiotica*, 1, 49-98.

新春講演会開催

新春早々の1月20日に当研究所の主催で姉妹校：神田外語学院（東京・神田）にて異文化コミュニケーション講演会が開催されました。講師は遠山淳桃山学院大学教授。同氏は「異文化交流のコチラ側…日本のコミュニケーションの源流を探る」というテーマのもとで、日本人の異文化受容の歴史とコミュニケーションの型を豊富な事例を挙げて説明され、80名の熱心な参加者に多くの知的刺激を与えられました。

学会・研究会予告

日本コミュニケーション研究者会議

日 時：1993年5月15日(土)・16日(日)
テーマ：コミュニケーションの分析
場 所：南山大学
問い合わせ先：日本コミュニケーション研究者会議
事務局 岡部朗一
名古屋市昭和区山里町18 (〒466)
南山大学外国語学部英米科内

異文化間教育学会 第14回年次大会

日 時：1993年5月22日(土)・23日(日)
場 所：大阪女学院短期大学
問い合わせ先：関根秀和
大阪市中央区玉造2-26-54 (〒540)
大阪女学院短期大学

異文化コミュニケーション講演会

日 時：1993年6月11日(金)18:30~20:30 (予定)
講 師：星野 命 (異文化間教育学会会長)
テーマ：異文化理解教育と人権 (仮題)
場 所：東京 神田外語学院
問い合わせ先：異文化コミュニケーション研究所
千葉市美浜区若葉1-4-1 (〒261)
神田外語大学

日本コミュニケーション学会 第23回年次大会

日 時：1993年6月25日(金)・26日(土)
場 所：西南女学院短期大学
問い合わせ先：橋本満弘

福岡市博多区南八幡町2-12-1 (〒803)
西南女学院短期大学

研究所からのお知らせ

異文化コミュニケーション研究 原稿募集

1994年4月発行予定の当研究所紀要「異文化コミュニケーション研究」第6号の原稿を一篇募集します。論文執筆を希望される方は下記の寄稿規定にしたがって寄稿して下さい。

寄稿規定 (一部)

1. 異文化コミュニケーション、コミュニケーション及び関連分野の研究者は自由に寄稿できます。
2. 寄稿された原稿を掲載するか否かは、本紀要編集委員会で判断します。
3. 枚数は原則として400字詰め原稿用紙30枚とします。
4. 原稿の締切日は1993年11月30日とします。

原稿に関するお問い合わせは、当研究所まで。寄稿希望の方には詳しい執筆要領をお送りします。

図書室より

当研究所が購入している定期刊行雑誌のうち英文のものには下記の通りです。()内は学会名か出版社名です。ご利用をお待ちしています。

Communication Abstracts (Sage)
Communication Monographs (SCA)
Communication Quarterly (ECA)
Communication Research (Sage)
Critical Studies in Mass Communication (SCA)
Foreign Affairs
International Journal of Intercultural Relations (SIETAR)
Japan Forum (Oxford University Press)
Journal of Conflict Resolution (PSS)
Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology (Sage)
Journal of Peace Research (Sage)
Quarterly Journal of Speech (SCA)

編集後記

・今回の内容はいかがでしたか。当ニュースレターは海外でも読まれていますので、今後も英文の記事を掲載していく予定です。ご意見やご感想がありましたら、ぜひ御一報下さい。

・We hope you have enjoyed reading this issue. Since we have quite a few international readers, we are planning to print at least one English article in our newsletter. Any feedback from you would be very much appreciated.