RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

ISSN: 0835-1813 (Print) 1532-7973 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hrls20

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To cite this article: Mariko Kotani (2008) Reinforced Codes and Boundaries: Japanese Speakers' Remedial Episode Avoidance in Problematic Situations With “Americans”, RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION, 41:4, 339-363, DOI: 10.1080/08351810802467761

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/08351810802467761

RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION, *41*(4), 339–363

ISSN: 0835-1813 print / 1532-7973 online
DOI: 10.1080/08351810802467761

Reinforced Codes and Boundaries: Japanese Speakers' Remedial Episode Avoidance in Problematic Situations With "Americans"

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In this study, I describe Japanese speakers' experiences, described in in-depth interviews, of not engaging in a remedial episode to deal with problematic situations with native English speakers. I contrast such experiences with a case in which a participant did engage in a remedial episode, learned a new code element, and negotiated contrasting codes. I show that when the participants did not engage in a remedial episode, their views of the code elements and the boundaries were reinforced, and their stereotypes about the other group persisted. I describe a vicious circle in which the participants were caught. They did not engage in a remedial episode because of their lack of confidence in their ability to speak English, distant relationships with others, and perceptions of themselves and *Americans* as belonging to different groups. Their not doing so, in turn, resulted in confirming these 3 factors. The study contributes to the research on negative events in intercultural communication by describing the interactional dynamics of how participants' views of boundaries and stereotypes can be reinforced.

In this study, I explored the experiences of Japanese speakers living in the United States when they encountered problematic interpersonal situations with native speakers of English. Situations are considered problematic when they are per-

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Convention of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA, in May 2003. I thank Kristine Fitch for many valuable comments. I am also grateful to Gerry Philipsen and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments for revision. Any errors that remain are my responsibility.

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ceived as involving social disorders (Hewitt & Hall, 1973) or failure events (Schonbach, 1980) such as one of the parties' committing an offense against the other and one's failure to fulfill the other's expectations (e.g., making an offensive remark or not showing up for an appointment).

Problematic events have captured communication researchers' interest because in such situations, people's communicative responses are not uniform, even among those who speak the same language, so that their conversational choices or strategies become consequential (Tracy, 2001). Previous research, for instance, has dealt with interactional problems such as declining proposals (Heritage, 1988; Morris, White, & Iltis, 1994) and interpersonal failures between friends (Sell & Rice, 1988), intimate partners (Cupach & Metts, 1986; Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994), managers and employees (Bies & Sitkin, 1992; Morris & Coursey, 1989), and people who are involved in court or mediation sessions (Cobb, 1994; Cody & McLaughlin, 1988). When problematic events involve people who speak different native languages, the situations can be further complicated by the differences: Their communicative responses can be even further from the expected, they may hold different cultural assumptions about appropriate conduct, and the consequences can be more serious. It is vital to understand the ways in which such situations are dealt with in an increasingly globalized society.

Potentially serious consequences of problematic events in intercultural communication situations have been well documented. For instance, the ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979) was proposed in social psychology to extend the idea of the fundamental attribution error that predicts individuals' tendency to attribute others' negative acts to their personality rather than to circumstances (Allport, 1954; Heider, 1958). According to the ultimate attribution error, when individuals perceive negative acts by a member of a different group, they are more likely to attribute it to the actor's depositional, rather than situational, factors (Pettigrew, 1979). Possible results of problematic events, then, are negative attributions about other groups and the reinforcement of stereotypes about them. Empirical research has provided some support for the ultimate attribution error, and intergroup bias has continuously been tested as an important concept in communication between different groups (Beal, Ruscher, & Schnake, 2001; Hewstone, 1990; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Khan & Liu, 2008).

With regard to problematic situations involving Japanese speakers, researchers of intercultural communication have used the concepts of collectivistic cultures and face concerns to characterize culturally distinctive conflict styles. Individuals who subscribe to collectivistic values, including Japanese, have been found to have a tendency to use an indirect, high-context conflict style to maintain other-face or mutual-face and to use more obliging and avoiding styles. Those who subscribe to individualistic values, by contrast, including U.S. Americans, tend to use a direct, low-context conflict style to maintain self-face and use more competitive or dominating styles (Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

These different approaches to conflict can add complexities to already problematic situations between Japanese and English speakers and, therefore, can have serious consequences.

Although the ultimate attribution error and the different face concerns of individualistic and collectivistic cultures provide useful explanations of individuals' cognitive and behavioral tendencies to deal with negative events in intercultural settings, they leave interactional processes of such phenomena in context unexplored. Attribution research, for instance, has been criticized for its heavy emphasis on mental process with little attention to the exchange of messages in face-to-face interactions; its over reliance on experimental settings ignoring real-life situations in context; and its view of actors as rational as reflected in the term attribution *error* (Antaki, 1994; Hewstone, 1990; Langdridge & Butt, 2004; Littlejohn, 1989). In addition, the research on the cultural differences in face concerns has not considered participants' perspectives on why they use, for instance, avoiding conflict styles in given situations and the consequences of their particular choices. To gain a fuller picture of the processes and consequences of problematic situations involving people from different backgrounds, it is necessary to understand how such situations are actually handled in social contexts.

In this study, I aimed to fulfill this need by describing, from Japanese speakers' perspectives, their experiences of problematic situations with native English speakers, exploring how they interactionally dealt with such events in real-life contexts. To accomplish this aim, I use the concept of speech codes and how they are used in social interaction as the framework for the study. In the following sections, I first explain these concepts, drawing on the ethnography of speaking and speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). I then discuss how remedial episodes to deal with problematic situations can be seen as a locus in which participants learn and use speech codes. After describing the data and methods of analysis, I present one instance in which a remedial episode was pursued and several in which it was not, despite the negative consequences of not engaging in remediation.

SPEECH CODES IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

Japanese and English speakers in this study can be considered to come from two different speech communities. On the basis of the definition of *culture* as a system of symbols and meanings (Geertz, 1973; Philipsen, 1992; Schneider, 1976), a *speech community* is the unit that shares the system (Hymes, 1974). Members of a speech community share the specific resources called "speech codes," defined as "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). As a starting point of

the research, I assumed that Japanese speakers and native English speakers basically use two different sets of speech codes.

I note, however, that speech codes are not determined a priori by social categories; rather, they are learned through personal contact in face-to-face interaction (Gumperz, 1982). It follows, then, that the labels *Japanese speakers* and *English speakers* do not necessarily determine the speech codes that these speakers use. Rather, it is more accurate to say that those who use the same speech codes are considered to belong to the same speech community. This view of speech codes as dynamic, as opposed to static, is articulated further in the following characterization:

> Cultures (and by extension, socially constructed codes) are not fixed, unitary, and deterministic, but rather are dynamic, exist in life-worlds in which there are two or more cultures or codes that are used and that have existential force, and are resources that social actors deploy strategically and artfully in the conduct of communication. (Philipsen et al., 2005, pp. 63–64)

Social interaction, then, can be viewed as the locus in which social actors learn and use speech codes (see also Moerman, 1993).

In this study, I focused on a particular kind of social interaction, that which takes place in problematic situations, treating it as such a locus. Philipsen (1997) argued that one occasion in which participants' codes are revealed is when the participants violate a code and they or their cointeractants comment on the violation. Problematic situations inherently involve violations of codes. Interaction in such situations is thus considered a particularly appropriate site for observing participants' codes.

Studies have been conducted to identify speech codes by focusing on specific forms of interaction in problematic situations. For instance, Turner's (1980) concept of social drama—a sequence consisting of a challenge to the conduct of another, a reply (e.g., a repair or a denial), honoring or dishonoring the reply, and a consequence (e.g., the offender's reintegration with the group or alienation)—has been studied as a public form of communication in which speech code elements could be made salient (Hastings, 2001; Philipsen, 1992, 1997, 2000). In another study, Carbaugh (1987) analyzed the talk show *Donahue* and described four communication rules as cultural codes in American society (see also Carbaugh, 1989, 2005). Talk shows of this kind can be considered interaction relevant to problematic events because they revolve around discussion of controversial issues.

These studies are helpful in understanding how to identify speech codes within given speech communities by analyzing instances in which violations of codes occur (see also Coutu, 2000; Ho, 2006; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005). In my study, however, I dealt with instances in which two codes intersect such that participants not only use codes but may learn new ones. Rather than identify and describe specific codes within a given speech community (i.e., Japanese speakers) and make

cultural claims that these codes are shared among members of the community, I attempted to capture situated instances in which participants encounter unfamiliar codes and may modify their perceptions of codes and boundaries in response to problematic situations involving multiple codes. To illuminate such instances, I used the concept of remedial episode to complement the framework.

REMEDIAL EPISODES AS A NEGOTIATION OF CODE ELEMENTS

Participants in problematic situations may attempt to remedy the situations by engaging in "remedial interchanges" (Goffman, 1971) or "remedial episodes" (Morris, 1985). *Remedial episodes* are broadly defined as "restorative sequences of behaviour occurring in problematic situations" (Morris, 1985, p. 74) and are closely related to other concepts that refer to similar phenomena such as accounts (Buttny, 1987, 1993; Cody & McLaughlin, 1985; Scott & Lyman, 1968), aligning actions (Stokes & Hewitt, 1976), alignment episodes (Hall, 1991), alignment talk (Morris, 1991), and social confrontation episodes (Newel & Stutman, 1988). The *remedial episode* is characterized as a "negotiation of rules for social interaction" (Morris, 1985, p. 70; see also Newell & Stutman, 1988). By engaging in such episodes, people negotiate rules for appropriate conduct in an attempt to manage problems. The *remedial episode* assumes the existence of contrasting rules and the possibility of negotiation.

Furthermore, the rules negotiated in *remedial episodes* are viewed as individuals' constructions of behavior standards (Morris, 1985; Morris & Hopper, 1980). People develop particular rules in specific contexts (i.e., an act is appropriate in a certain context in a specific relationship) through the processes of remediation and legislation. This view was relevant to this study in which I investigated participants' sense of appropriate behavior in specific contexts from these individuals' perspectives.

The individuals' rules negotiated in *remedial episodes,* however, are seen as related to the shared rules of their communities. They "develop in concord with the most abstract rules of their communities, but … are more extensive and particular" (Morris, 1985, p. 73). I considered this relationship between specific rules in a given situation and community rules to be consistent with speech codes theory for two reasons. First, according to Philipsen (1997), a *rule,* defined as "a prescription for how to act under specified circumstances" (p. 125), is an element of a code that also involves symbols, meanings, and premises. In this study, therefore, I considered a *remedial episode* broadly as the negotiation of code elements.

Second, Fitch's (2003) study of contrasting codes in intercultural interaction demonstrated the relationship between individual code elements and cultural codes that I considered similar to the idea of *remedial episodes.* Fitch analyzed an instance of disagreement, a kind of communicative response to a problematic

situation, in a family dinner table conversation between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking family members. Fitch argued that the disagreement revealed different "taken-for-granteds" (Hopper, 1981), or unstated assumptions, about personhood and relationship among the participants as enacted in practice, that these assumptions were part of distinctive cultural codes, and that the contact between the codes made it the interaction between different speech communities. Applying these ideas, I assumed that *remedial episodes* between Japanese and English speakers could reveal negotiations of different taken-for-granted assumptions about appropriate conduct, that the differences might be consistent with and part of distinctive cultural codes, and that the contact between the codes makes it one between different speech communities.

In the analysis that follows, I describe concrete problematic situations that were related by Japanese-speaking participants in in-depth interviews. First, I present a case in which a participant engaged in a *remedial episode* to illustrate how she negotiated her view of appropriate conduct with her perception of the other's appropriateness. Second, I offer the main analysis of the situations in which the participants did not engage in a *remedial episode* to demonstrate how the participants' views of taken-for-granted assumptions and the boundaries of their applicability were reinforced as a result. Third, I explore some reasons that the participants expressed for not confronting others. I describe a vicious circle that these participants appear to have fallen into in dealing with the problematic situations. Before I present the analysis, however, I explain the methodological procedure.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

This study was part of a larger project in which I explored how Japanese and English speakers deal with problematic situations with each other by analyzing in-depth interviews and naturally occurring conversations (Kotani, 1999, 2002). I conducted in-depth interviews over a 4-month period with 15 Japanese students who had come to study at five universities in a large U.S. city. At the time of the interviews, the participants' length of stay in the United States ranged from 1 to 6 years. I first obtained access to the participants through personal connections; these participants then introduced to me their friends. I also gained access to others through academic counselors at a private institute that gives advice to Japanese students at area colleges and universities on various matters such as what courses to take, how to adjust to dormitory lives, and how to cope with occasional health problems. All of the interviews were conducted in Japanese, their native language and mine; each interview lasted about 2 hours.

I asked the participants to describe experiences in which they had problematic interpersonal events with English speakers using the unstructured schedule

interview (Denzin, 1989).[1] The interview schedule, included as the Appendix, offered several examples to clarify the nature of problematic events for participants.

When participants described specific incidents, I asked them for details with open-ended and unstructured questions to maximize their freedom to remember and describe the specifics of each episode. During the interviews, I used the ways in which participants defined their cointeractants (e.g., "American," "native speaker") and named their actions (e.g., "apologize," "explain") in an effort to minimize imposing my own categories. I transcribed all the audiotaped interviews and compiled about 300 pages of transcripts in Japanese.[2] Later, I translated the significant parts of the Japanese transcripts into English.

I began the study with an interest in problematic situations. *Remedial episodes* (both enacted and avoided) as the focus of study and speech codes theory as a theoretical framework for explaining them emerged in the course of analysis. During analysis, I focused on implicit assumptions hearable in participants' talk about their experiences of encountering different unstated premises in the problematic situations. I also paid attention to how the participants attributed the perceived differences. When the participants made their cultural identities relevant in their explanations of the differences, it could mean that they perceived situations as contacts between different cultural codes. Consequently, the speech code elements and the boundaries of speech communities that I describe are the ones that are seen from the participants' perspectives rather than from an objective viewpoint.

Because the kinds of offenses and relationships with others varied widely across the episodes described, it was not productive simply to compare episodes in which confrontation occurred with episodes in which it did not. Additionally, reading the transcripts indicated that confrontations often resulted in the participants' redefining the situations and their relationships with the others in fruitful ways. By contrast, the nonconfrontations frequently left the problems unresolved and, moreover, were described as having negative consequences for the participants. Because of the apparently serious consequences of the latter type of episodes, in this article, I focus on cases in which the participants did not engage in a *remedial episode* when they were the offended party. To gain a better understanding of the processes, reasons, and consequences of such instances, however, it is first necessary to look at a contrasting case in which a participant did confront the offender.

The case that follows demonstrates that engaging in a *remedial episode* can lead participants to notice the previously unspoken premises affecting their interaction, potentially leading to different, more enlightened, reactions to similar problematic situations. When participants did not engage in a *remedial episode,* the practical consequences included reinforced stereotypes. A question naturally arises at this point: If engaging in *remedial episodes* apparently had benefits for the participants, whereas not doing so could narrow their chances of dealing better with future situations, why did they choose not to confront the others? I explore this question from the participants' perspectives.

Engaging in *Remedial Episodes*: Learning and Negotiating Codes

The first episode demonstrates an instance in which a participant realized that her assumption about appropriate conduct was different from her cointeractants as a result of engaging in a *remedial episode*. Hitomi (H), a female 24-year-old student who had been in the United States for 3 years and 2 months, described an episode in which she had had an argument with her American boyfriend.[3] Her boyfriend had used the word "Jap" to describe one of the characters in the movie they were talking about with two other American friends in a car. Prior to the following excerpt, she described how surprised she was that her boyfriend had only explained why he used the word without offering an apology (I = interviewer):

Excerpt 1

I: So he didn't apologize after all?
H: Well then, other topics came up, and we started arguing. I said, "But I didn't hear a formal apology from you." In the end, he said, "I'm sorry."
I: In English?
H: Yes. He said, "I'm sorry." Then he said, "But that's a little strange. Do you think it's OK if I did something, something bad, somewhere, whatever I did, if I said, 'I'm sorry,' is it OK with you?" I felt like, no it doesn't sound OK and didn't know what to say. Actually, it isn't OK. … We started talking about childhood. As kids, we did a lot of things like hitting a neighbor's window with a baseball by accident. He said, "For example, if the window was broken because of the ball I hit, what my neighbor expected was not my saying, "I'm sorry." It should be like, "We were playing, but we made sure that the baseball didn't reach your window. But then this and that happened and because of that, it happened in the end. I will never do it again." That is more like an apology for me." When I heard that, I didn't know what was right. Both seemed right and wrong. When I think as a Japanese, if someone said, "I'm sorry. I'll never do it again," it's not so important to pursue what happened and how it happened. We don't see it as so important. But he said, "It is much more important to me."
I: Did the other two friends have the same view?
H: They didn't say anything. After that incident, we agreed that if we did something wrong, let's compromise and say, "I'm sorry," first and then give an excuse. It's just between him and me. It doesn't matter what other people do; we just agreed to do so as a result. On his part, he wouldn't feel OK if I didn't say why what happened happened and how it happened.

Hitomi's taken-for-granted assumption about appropriate conduct when one has committed an offense was that the offender should offer a word of regret and make a promise that the same thing would not happen in the future without

necessarily explaining how it happened. Her boyfriend's assumption, on the other hand, was that in such a situation, one should explain the processes by which the offense occurred, which was much more important than merely offering a formulaic expression of regret. By engaging in this *remedial episode,* Hitomi found that her assumption about what was appropriate was different from his. In understanding the difference, Hitomi made her *Japanese* identity relevant, as evidenced by her use of the words "Japanese" and "We" in the following quote: "When I think as a Japanese. … We don't see it as so important. But he said …." Rather than attribute the difference between his behavior and her expectation as an individual one, she interpreted it as a difference in cultural codes.

When Hitomi encountered the different code, she "felt like, no it doesn't sound OK and didn't know what to say." She also felt, "I didn't know what was right. Both seemed right and wrong." This was an instance in which the participant wavered between the two contrasting codes. According to Hitomi, her boyfriend had also felt "a little strange" about her idea of what should have been done. As a result, Hitomi and her boyfriend negotiated the codes and decided that they would "say 'I'm sorry' first and then give an excuse." Hitomi characterized this negotiation as "just between him and me," that is, as an idiosyncratic one rather than a cultural one. Nevertheless, her view of appropriate behavior was modified, at least in this relational context, by engaging in this *remedial episode.*

This episode illustrates an instance in which Hitomi's view of a code element (i.e., one should offer a word of regret and a promise that the same thing would not happen again) was activated when it was challenged by her boyfriend in the problematic situation. By engaging in the *remedial episode* to deal with the situation, she learned a new code element (i.e., one should explain the processes by which the offense occurred) and realized the boundary between her and her boyfriend. The *remedial episode* was a locus in which the contrasting codes were negotiated. As a result of the negotiation, she and her boyfriend created a new rule to fit the relational context.

Not Engaging in a *Remedial Episode:* Reinforced Codes and Boundaries

In contrast to the first episode, the excerpts in this section illustrate cases in which the participants did not confront others. These incidents give a different picture of how the participants interpreted the problematic events than the one just presented. Through the analysis of these episodes, I demonstrate how the participants' views of the code elements were unaffected and rather reinforced and how their views of the boundaries were also reinforced to exclude *Americans.*

The following excerpt was related by Yoko (Y), a female 22-year-old student who had been in the United States for 5 years:

Excerpt 2

I: Have you had an experience in which you lent something to someone and then that person broke it, lost it, or didn't return it to you?
Y: I had an experience in which I lent someone a book, but she didn't give it back to me. … That was the book I had used in the class I had taken before. We can sell books after we finish taking a class, right? So I was like, "You could keep it during this semester. Will you give it back to me after that?" But she didn't give it back to me. Every time I saw her, I couldn't say it. I don't know why, but I was overwhelmed.
I: Really? So you couldn't say anything to her? And she didn't say anything to you?
Y: She didn't say anything.
I: You didn't get it back after all?
Y: I couldn't. Maybe she sold it. It's the same with money. If she were a good person, she would return it to me. But if I didn't say anything, she wouldn't.
I: How is it compared with situations in Japan?
Y: If you borrow money in Japan, you give it back, right? And it would be easier to say [in Japanese]. If it were in Japanese, I could ask in a soft tone of voice like, "Do you have money?" Americans are straightforward, so I don't know how to say politely [in English], "Give the money back to me." … Maybe it's not harsh in English, but if we translate it, it sounds harsh, like, "Give it back." The other day we ordered a pizza with a roommate and other people. We each paid $5. Then one of them didn't have $5, so I paid $10. She still hasn't paid it back to me. I always feel, "I have to tell her, I have to tell her," but.…

The problematic event that Yoko experienced was that she did not get back the book or money that she had lent. Her taken-for-granted assumption (i.e., one should return what one borrowed without being asked to do so) was violated. But because she could not confront the others in ways she thought would be culturally appropriate, she did not have a chance to see the events from the others' perspectives (e.g., the others might have simply forgotten the fact that they had borrowed the book or money). We do not see any evidence that her assumption was questioned or modified by contact with the perspective of the others. Although I as the interviewer asked her to use the category, "Japan," in this excerpt, Yoko explained the episodes using her identity as "Japanese" and others as "Americans," as evidenced by her saying, "If you borrow money in Japan, you give it back, right?" and "Americans are straightforward." Her use of these words indicates that she understood the violated assumption as part of a cultural code. To make sense of the situations, she interpreted that the code element applied only to "a good person" and "Japanese" but that the borrowers in these cases fell outside the boundary of its applicability.

These episodes illustrate instances in which Yoko recognized a code element (i.e., one should voluntarily return what one borrowed) and the boundary of its

applicability in the problematic situations. Because she did not engage in a *remedial episode,* she did not have a chance to learn a new code element (e.g., one should remind the other of the lent item in case the person forgot about it). Naturally, there were no contrasting codes or negotiation of them in her experience. As a result, Yoko made sense of the situations by herself. Her view of the code element was reinforced, and the boundary of its applicability was updated to exclude *Americans.*

The following episode illustrates a similar instance. Hiroko (H), a female student in her early 20s who had been in the United States for a year, described an experience in which she did not blame her classmate who had committed an offense against her:

Excerpt 3

H: Once I was taking a political science class, and the subject was related to Japan. And I'm Japanese, right? So an American classmate asked me, "Do you want to study together before turning in the paper?" So we said, "Let's meet in the library at when and when on Sunday" because that was the only day I was off. … I thought it was a good idea because we both could learn from each other. I said, "OK," and we agreed to meet. Then on Sunday, I went to the library, but she didn't show up. I was like, "Oh no," "Why doesn't she come?" I called her, but no one answered. I didn't know if she was in the library somewhere or forgot about it or went someplace else to play. I thought, "Well, it'll be OK if I study by myself and go home." She didn't come after all. And the next time I saw her, she was just like, "Oh, sorry I forgot."
I: Would you explain more in detail? Did you give up and go home that day?
H: I gave up.
I: She didn't call that day or the next day?
H: No.
I: So when you happened to see her the next time
H: Not like I happened to see her, we were classmates, so when I saw her in the next class, she said, "I'm sorry I forgot."
I: She started it?
H: No, I said, "I was there, just in case." I said, "You didn't come." Then she said, "Oh, I forgot."
I: That's it?
H: I thought, "It was you who asked me."
I: But you didn't tell her that? Did you blame her?
H: Well, I didn't have much expectation. It wasn't the first time. I had heard from other people that they agreed to meet Americans but often [the Americans] didn't show up. So I thought, "Maybe this is the way it is." "She is that sort of person, and it couldn't be helped. …"
I: How did you feel when you saw your classmate's reaction?
H: "Oh well, she is American," that's what I felt. She didn't show up not because she had a big accident or something. She made a lame excuse.

I: Did you make another arrangement with her to study together?
H: No, it doesn't make sense to waste [my time].
I: How was the relationship with her after that incident?
H: Well, we talk when we see each other in class, but other than that, we have nothing in particular.

Hiroko confronted the classmate rather passively but "gave up" on pursuing the issue further. Hiroko's sense of appropriate conduct was that one should show up for arrangements that one made unless there is "a big accident or something." In understanding the classmate's violation of this assumption, Hiroko made the classmate's *American* identity relevant as evidenced by her statement, "Oh well, she is American." She regarded her taken-for-granted assumption as applying to the group to which she belonged but not to *Americans,* who belong outside the boundary that she perceived. In other words, she interpreted it as a part of a cultural code to which *Americans* do not subscribe. As a result of not engaging in this *remedial episode* further, her relationship with the classmate did not develop beyond the one in which they just "talk" when they "see each other." Moreover, Hiroko's image of "Americans" as often they "didn't show up," and making "a lame excuse" was reinforced.

Hiroko's episode, like the one related by Yoko in Excerpt 2, illustrates an instance in which her view of a code element (i.e., one should show up for an arrangement unless there is a significant event to prevent it) was violated in the problematic situation. Because Hiroko did not engage in the *remedial episode* further, however, she did not have a chance to learn a new code element (e.g., it's better to confirm the arrangement; otherwise, it is not a promise). Because she did not, there was no contrasting of codes or a negotiation of them in her experience. As a result, the code element she used was reinforced, and her view of the boundary of its applicability was updated and narrowed to exclude *Americans.* The boundary she had perceived between the group with which she identified (i.e. "Japanese") and *Americans* was also reinforced.

The question raised earlier remains: If engaging in *remedial episodes* apparently had more benefits for the participants than not doing so, why did they choose not to engage in a *remedial episode?* I pursue this question from the participants' perspectives in the next section.

Reasons for Not Engaging in a *Remedial Episode:* A Vicious Circle

Some participants indicated that they recognized the importance of confrontation, or a *remedial episode,* as a turning point in the development of a relationship. For example, when I asked Yoko, the participant in Excerpt 2, her opinion about the

kind of incident in which an American did not show up for a get-together with a Japanese and the Japanese did not confront her, she stated as follows:

Excerpt 4

Y: It's better to say something. If it were me, I'm not so tough, but I would say something like, "I was waiting for you." Then she would say, "Sorry." … If I didn't say anything, she would probably think, "I didn't go, but she didn't go either." … If I didn't say anything, the relationship with her would become a distant one, like just exchanging greetings; we would not talk to each other. But if I said, "I was waiting," she would say, "I'm sorry. How about when and when?" Then it could be the beginning of a friendship.

In reality, however, Yoko, as well as other participants, said they often could not confront others when they had problematic events with *Americans.* The question is why they could not engage in confrontations even though they knew it was better to do so. As a way of answering the question, I describe three difficulties that the participants expressed in interacting with *Americans:* their lack of confidence in the English language, their distant relationships with others, and the difference they perceived between themselves as a group and *Americans* as a group.

First, the participants often stated that they did not confront others because they were not confident about their own linguistic ability. For instance, in explaining why she had not engaged in a *remedial episode* in Excerpt 2, Yoko made her language ability relevant. She implied that she would confront others in a soft tone of voice if she were speaking in Japanese; in English, however, she could not because she did not know how to ask without sounding harsh. In the following excerpt, Yoko further explained that she gave up on expressing how she felt because she saw difficulty in language, whereas she viewed her roommate as "good" and "fluent in English":

Excerpt 5

Y: I don't argue a lot, for example, if I have something with my roommate [who is American] and I feel she is the one to be blamed, because she is good in English and Americans are good in making an excuse or justifying themselves, especially when they are fluent in English. So whatever I say, well, I would not say anything but I give up. When they justify themselves, they don't feel sorry for others.

The following excerpt by Mayumi (M), a female 19-year-old who had been in the United States for a year, also demonstrates that her lack of confidence in the command of language is a reason for not confronting others. Prior to it, I asked her why she did not confront a cashier who, she said, had caused trouble for her at a store:

Excerpt 6

M: I think it doesn't help even if I said something. For one thing, I'm afraid of English. If she argued back, I wouldn't be able to say anything. I would lose after all; that's why I don't say it. It's also because of my personality. I'm not so tough.

This point is worth emphasis: *Remedial episodes,* by nature, require highly sophisticated language skills. To confront others, participants need to be able to express their views of what happened and how they felt about the problematic events. They also need to listen to and understand others' views of the same events, which sometimes involves learning totally different senses of appropriate conduct than the ones that they take for granted. Negotiating contrasting code elements with others also requires complex communication skills. Moreover, such confrontations, by nature, are adversarial, may involve an unfriendly atmosphere, and can create negative feelings.

When the participants were not confident about their linguistic ability, then, it would have been quite natural for them to choose an apparently easy solution in dealing with problematic situations: avoiding a *remedial episode* and making sense of the situation by themselves instead. It is ironic that for the participants to have their perception of a code element affected, they needed to engage in a *remedial episode;* to engage in a *remedial episode,* however, they needed to have a good enough command of language to manipulate the complex symbols, meanings and premises that are part of the code.[4]

Second, a related difficulty that participants expressed involved their relationships with their cointeractants. They implied that they had difficulty making friends with *Americans* because of their lack of command of English. Hiroko, the participant in Excerpt 3, responded as follows when I asked her why her friends were mostly Japanese and other Asians:

Excerpt 7

H: It would be best if I could make friends with Americans, but it's not so easy. … The main reason is something like a language barrier. I speak to them and try hard to talk, but because I can't yet speak well, the topics just end, and I'd like to talk, but it doesn't go well.[5]

Her sentiments were echoed by Yoko (Y; Excerpt 8) and by Satoshi (S; Excerpt 9), a male 26-year-old student who had been in the United States for 2 years:

Excerpt 8

Y: When they ask me about Japan or about me, I'd like to express my feelings, especially when we get close, right? But I can't find the right words to explain [how I feel] because I'm not fluent in English as I am in Japanese. So I try hard

and think, saying, "Umm, Umm"; then they change the subject. So when I talk with Americans, I'm always a listener. I don't talk about myself. I'd like to, but I can't. They don't have patience either. …

Excerpt 9

S: In the office, we chat. They are mostly Americans. When talking, they often ask me all of a sudden, "What do you think?" They explain to me in detail because they know I'm not so good at English. I always feel bad when they show concern for me like that because then the conversation stops for a while.
I: Even though the conversation stops for a while, do they answer if you ask?
S: They answer if I ask, but I don't feel like asking; that's the truth.
I: You don't feel like asking because you feel bad?
S: Yes. They are just chatting [and I feel bad about] asking them to explain [something] to me. …

In the absence of close, trusting relationships with others, it would be difficult for the participants to confront *Americans.* In contrast, if they had had closer relationships with others, it might have been more comfortable for them to express themselves freely even with their perceived limitations in English, as in the case of Hitomi, in Excerpt 1, who confronted her boyfriend. The result of the participants' nonconfrontations, as we saw, was that they did not learn a new code element but instead had negative stereotypes of *Americans* confirmed by their experiences.[6]

Third, the participants often implied that the difference they perceived between *Japanese* and *Americans* as groups was a reason for their not confronting others. The following excerpt by Mayumi (M), the participant in Excerpt 6, illustrates this view:

Excerpt 10

I: From what you have said so far, it sounds like when you get angry or feel someone is to be blamed, you are more likely to be silent and say nothing to that person. Is that so?
M: I don't say anything. Or it's like, I accept that he or she is like that. I don't feel like insisting on my opinion. I'm like it's OK because she is that sort of person. If she were Japanese, I think I would say something. But I'm like "That's OK." … Maybe because I'm a coward and feel like, "I won't be able to explain it." It's also because I feel it's too much trouble to say it. I don't know. But I would probably say it if that person were Japanese, like, "No that's wrong."

Mayumi perceived *Japanese* and others as belonging to different groups and changed her behavior according to which group she was dealing with. She would confront the other "if she were Japanese," whereas she would not "say anything" otherwise.

Hiroko, in Excerpt 3, also made the classmate's "American" identity relevant in explaining the reasons why she did not engage in the *remedial episode* further. She said that she "didn't have much expectation," that "it wasn't the first time," that she "had heard from other people" about similar experiences, and that "she (the classmate) is American." She clearly perceived herself and *Americans* as belonging to different groups. Yoko, in Excerpt 5, made the roommate's "American" identity relevant as well in explaining the reason for not confronting her, as is evident by her saying, "Americans are good in making an excuse or justifying themselves." She seemed to perceive "Americans" as being more experienced at offering accounts because they have more practice offering them than she does, because she "(doesn't) argue a lot."

As a result of not engaging in a *remedial episode*, Yoko's and Hiroko's images of "Americans" as "good in making an excuse or justifying themselves," not feeling "sorry for others," often not "show[ing] up," and making "a lame excuse" seemed to be confirmed.[7] In other words, the difference that they perceived between *Japanese* as a group and *Americans* as a group, which they stated was one of the reasons for not confronting others, was further reinforced as a result of not engaging in a *remedial episode.* The participants' stereotypes about the other group may have persisted, in part, because of their nonconfrontations.

I have touched only on three possible factors that may have affected the participants' decisions not to engage in a *remedial episode* on the basis of the interview data. There may be other reasons for their decisions not to confront. From what I have demonstrated, however, the participants appeared to be caught in a vicious circle. On the one hand, they were hesitant to engage in a *remedial episode* because they perceived they had difficulty communicating with others because of their own command of English, because they did not have trusting relationships with *Americans,* and because they perceived themselves and *Americans* as belonging to different groups. On the other hand, because they did not engage in a *remedial episode,* their perception of their difficulty expressing themselves in English stayed as it had been before, their relationships with others did not develop, and their perception of the difference between themselves and *Americans* was reinforced.

CONCLUSIONS

I have described Japanese speakers' experiences of not engaging in a *remedial episode* in problematic situations with native speakers of English in the United States. I contrasted such experiences with a case in which a participant engaged in a *remedial episode* and, as a result, learned a new code element, negotiated contrasting codes, and learned to manipulate two sets of code elements, depending on the relationships and the situations, for future interactions. When the participants did not engage in a *remedial episode,* I demonstrated that their views of code elements

were reinforced; their perceptions of the boundaries seem to have been updated to exclude *Americans;* and, as a result, their stereotypes about the other group appeared to have been reinforced. I also explored some reasons why the participants did not engage in a *remedial episode* and described the vicious circle into which they appear to have fallen.

These observations await further exploration due to the nature of the data. All the participants were college students dealing with offenses in which the stakes were not very high, such that data about more serious offenses—in which employment, reputation, or a long term relationship are at risk—are needed. These interviews suggested that how close the relationship of participants was had a significant impact on how willing they were to engage in the *remedial episode*; in this study, only the romantic partner relationship occasioned remediation. In addition, it is worth investigating to see whether participants can engage in *remedial episodes* but still fail to have their views of code elements affected. It would also be fruitful to analyze naturally occurring interactions that take place in problematic situations, to complement this study, which relied on the participants' perceptions and recollections of the events in the interviews. Despite its limitations, the in-depth interviews allowed me to have access to the participants' interpretations and evaluations of the events and how their views were modified or reinforced in the course of the problematic events.

This study contributes to the literature by describing, with concrete data, interactional dynamics of how participants' views of the boundaries and stereotypes can be reinforced as a result of problematic situations in intercultural encounters. Previous research has suggested that intercultural communication, when it is not successful, can generate or confirm stereotypes about other groups (e.g., Chick, 1985). In social psychology, for instance, the contact hypothesis claims that although positive contacts between individuals from different cultures produce positive feelings about another culture, limited personal experiences and negative contacts can produce prejudice (Allport, 1954) because, as the ultimate attribution error explains, individuals tend to attribute others' negative acts dispositionally rather than situationally (Pettigrew, 1979). Previous research, however, has not demonstrated empirically the process by which participants' views of the boundaries and stereotypes are reinforced in interaction. This study contributes to the literature by providing an illustration of such a process.

Three further implications follow from this analysis. The first is that it was not the negative events themselves that resulted in reifying the participants' views of the boundaries and stereotypes as the contact hypothesis and the ultimate attribution error would explain. Rather, it was how the participants dealt with the events afterward that had a strong impact on their views. In fact, when the participant in Excerpt 1 and other participants engaged in *remedial episodes* after problematic events, they often began to interpret the events less in terms of cultural boundaries and more in terms of individual relationships and situations. When, on the other

hand, the participants did not engage in a *remedial episode,* they explained the events using names for categories such as *Americans.* The analysis thus suggests the view that actors have choices in how they deal with negative events and that whether they engage in *remedial episodes* is crucial to the success of future interactions.

The second implication is that the Japanese-speaking participants' decisions to avoid a *remedial episode* cannot simply be attributed to their face concerns or their dispositions as members of collectivistic culture, as previous literature has proposed. Rather, they were caught in the vicious circle that involves other factors such as their lack of confidence in the English language, relationships with others, and perceptions of themselves and *Americans* as belonging to different groups. The participants' perspectives in this study suggest that Japanese speakers do not necessarily value or prefer avoiding a *remedial episode* but instead recognize the importance of confrontation, even when they have difficulty achieving it.

The third implication is that the *remedial episode* is a locus in which people may learn, negotiate, manipulate, and update their views of speech codes and as such, a communicative form in which the dynamic nature of codes can be empirically observed. Speech codes theory has argued that culturally distinctive codes are woven into speaking and suggested that the observers pay special attention to such communicative forms as rituals, myths, and social dramas (Philipsen, 1992, 1997; Philipsen et al., 2005). This study suggests that the *remedial episode* is an interpersonal version of the social drama, until now studied primarily in public scenes, making such episodes a promising site for observing the interactional moments in which speech codes are negotiated and possibly modified.

On the basis of this study, it seems fruitful to consider ways to encourage participants to engage in *remedial episodes* in practice. Of course, there may be cases in which it is wise simply to forget about problems when they involve trivial matters or cases in which it is not practical to confront because of the obvious power imbalance between the interactants. Considering the consequences of not engaging in a *remedial episode,* however, this solution does not seem to be productive in many cases for the individuals (i.e., for their future interactions and relationships) as well as for society (i.e., possibly producing and reinforcing stereotypes). Moreover, the participants were aware of the importance of confrontation but were caught in a vicious circle in these situations.

One way to encourage participants to engage in *remedial episodes* when it is feasible, however, is to reconceptualize the problematic situation from one involving negative events to an opportunity to learn a new code element, broaden the possibility for dealing more positively with future interactions, and establish closer relationships with others. The use of the term *remedy* may help the reconceptualization because it sounds more positive than other adversarial terms such as *confrontation* and *reproach,* which seem to be based on the Western tradition and may not fit members of other speech communities.[8] It is also important to

reconsider an assumption that problematic situations are managed through verbal arguments over disagreed-on issues because when participants' command of English is limited, this assumption could put them in a powerless position. Moreover, there may be a possibility that the participants see other means than verbal argument as appropriate ways to deal with the situations.[9] Considering these possibilities, culturally distinctive ways of remedying problematic situations must be explored in future research. In addition, there very often is an imbalance in power between individuals who are involved in problematic situations because of various factors such as the language they use, their roles in society, and the contexts in which the problems occur. Therefore, ways to empower individuals in the powerless position should also be considered.

Future research should explore conceptual as well as practical dimensions of the phenomena in which people who speak different native languages experience problematic situations with each other. The *remedial episode* is a promising site for observing how participants' views of boundaries may be confirmed or modified, and speech codes theory proves to be a useful framework for such analyses.

NOTES

1 In the unstructured schedule interview or nonschedule standardized interview, "… certain types of information are desired from all respondents but the particular phrasing of questions and their order are redefined to fit the characteristics of each respondent" (Denzin, 1989, p. 105).

2 I transcribed the data word for word because transcription details, such as overlaps and length of gap, were not necessary for this analysis.

3 All the participants' names were changed to protect their privacy.

4 Note, however, that it was the participants' perception of their ability to communicate, not necessarily their objective fluency in English, that seems to have affected their decisions not to confront others. For instance, we do not know whether those who engaged in *remedial episodes* (e.g., Hitomi in Excerpt 1) were more fluent in English than were those who did not (e.g., Yoko and Hiroko in Excerpts 2 and 3).

5 The situation that Hiroko described in this excerpt is similar to the dilemma described in Buttny (1999) between "the imagined ideal" (e.g., the African American students wanting to form friendships with Whites) and "the everyday reality" (e.g., their being unable to do so). The difference is that Hiroko, as well as other participants in this study, mentioned language as the reason for the difficulty, whereas the participants in Buttny's (1999) study gave race as the reason.

6 The participants' difficulty resembles the dilemma faced by potential learners of knowledge about discourse conventions, described by Gumperz (1982) as follows: "They must establish long lasting, intensive personal relationships in order to learn, yet their

very lack of the necessary strategies for setting up conditions that make possible learning makes it difficult for them to achieve this" (p. 209).

7 Moreover, the participants' use of the term *Americans* in their talk itself may have not only reflected but discursively reconstructed and reinforced the national boundary that they perceived (Buttny, 1999; Moerman, 1993). It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to examine the discursive constructions of national categories.

8 Griefat and Katriel (1989), for instance, described the cultural code of the Arabic folk term *musayara* in Israel. *Musayara* is associated with an other-oriented attitude with the effort to maintain harmony by trying to avoid topics of potential discord or remarks that are considered confrontational.

9 For different means, see, for example, the study of "Teamsterville" in Philipsen (1975). Also, see Basso (1970) for situations in which silence is considered appropriate in the culture of the Western Apache.

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APPENDIX

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule consists of four parts:

1. Questions about participants' background.
2. Questions about their interaction in general.
3. Questions about problematic situations with native English speakers.
4. Questions about their views of communication.

In what follows, I quote only the third set of questions, the main part of the interview.

Questions About Problematic Situations Involving Native Speakers (original in Japanese; translated into English)

Now I would like to ask you to remember some of the episodes that you have experienced with [Americans] (Here I used the name for the category that the participant had used in the previous parts of the interview) that you mentioned. Please take a minute to think about the situations in which you communicate with them. In any of the relationships that you mentioned, can you remember any episode that you were involved in, in which you found the situation problematic or uncomfortable [so you felt you needed to say something to the person? Or someone said something?] Could you describe the episode in detail?

1. Where did it occur?
2. When did it occur?
3. What was the nature of the relationship between you and the other person?
4. What triggered the incident?
5. What did she or he actually say or do to you?
6. How did you respond?
7. How did you feel about what happened between you and him or her?
8. Did the incident have a long-term effect on your relationship with him or her?
9. Have you had a similar experience with [the Japanese]?

The following are some of the examples of situations:

A. When your expectations weren't met, for example,
   -someone couldn't accomplish what she or he had said she or he would
   -someone wasn't accessible to you

-someone was late for an appointment, date, or meeting with you
-someone did not show up for an appointment, etc.
-someone had to end a conversation because she or he was in a hurry (in person, on the phone, or at a party)
-your invitation was turned down
-your request to someone to borrow their notes, book, or CD or to help you move was turned down
-your offer for a ride or date was declined

or when you couldn't meet the other's expectation, for example,

-you couldn't accomplish what you had said you would
-you weren't accessible to friends
-you were late for an appointment, date, or meeting
-you did not show up for an appointment, etc.
-you couldn't meet a deadline
-you had to end a conversation because you were in a hurry (in person, on the phone, or at a party)
-you had to turn down an invitation
-you had to turn down a request to lend someone your notes, books, or CD or to help someone move
-you had to decline an offer for a ride or date
-you were late for class, late to take an exam, or turned in a paper late
-you didn't do well in class or on an exam
-you didn't do what someone had advised you to do (e.g., to drop a class, to go to see a doctor, to watch a TV movie, etc.)

B. When you were misunderstood by someone, for example,
-someone didn't understand what you said
-someone misunderstood your intention
-someone couldn't hear/comprehend what you said

or when you misunderstood someone, for example,

-you didn't understand what the other said
-you misunderstood someone's intention
-you couldn't hear/comprehend what the other said

C. When someone made a social mistake with you, for example,
-someone said something offensive to you
-someone said something that she or he had promised not to
-someone couldn't remember your name

or when you felt you made a social mistake with someone, for example,
-you said something offensive to someone
-you said something that you had promised not to
-you bumped into someone whose name you couldn't remember

D. When someone made you upset, for example,

-someone lost/damaged what you lent them
-someone used your belongings without asking for your permission

or when you made someone upset, for example,

-you lost/damaged what you borrowed
-you hit someone in a car accident
-you used someone's belongings without asking for permission

E. When you had a conflict or argument with someone
F. When you received an apology from someone or when you did not receive an apology when you felt one was necessary, or when you apologized or felt you needed to apologize to someone
G. When you received an explanation, excuse, justification, or account from someone or when you gave an explanation, excuse, justification, or account to someone

Do you remember any other incident? Could you describe it in detail?