

A Study of Japanese Persuasion From An Ethnography of Communication Perspective

Shoji Takano

*A Study of Japanese Persuasion
From An Ethnography
of Communication Perspective*

Shoji TAKANO

This paper reports the preliminary results of my comparative analysis of Japanese persuasive rhetoric from an ethnography of communication perspective (Hymes, 1974; Saville-Troike, 1989). This investigation was initially motivated by Saville-Troike's (1993) proposal to compensate for both theoretical and methodological weaknesses in the contrastive rhetoric literature (see Leki [1991] for a comprehensive review). Two of those weaknesses are the focus of the present study: the literature's ethnocentrism and its neglect of the situational context of language use. The study is a preliminary attempt to demonstrate through real data from speech communities that an ethnography of communication perspective would be able to yield significant insights into an understanding of such problems and hopefully provide some potential solutions.

Since Robert Kaplan's (1966) provocative article on some 600 ESL learners' transfer of native language rhetoric in their compositions, comparative studies of culture-bound rhetoric have formed a vigorous field of inquiry called 'contrastive rhetoric' (Houghton & Hoey, 1984; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989). During the last thirty years, contrastive rhetoric research has greatly contributed to the improvement of second language writing theories and teaching as well as comparative rhetorical analysis of a wide variety of first languages. However, the whole theoretical enterprise of contrastive rhetoric and its methodology, which Purves (1988: 15) characterizes as still in its

“formative stages,” has not necessarily been practiced unproblematically.

One of the problems is a degree of ethnocentrism in the analysis (Hinds, 1982; Leki, 1991). As is evident in Kaplan's (1966: 11) classic schematic representations of culture-bound “thought patterns” (e.g., the English pattern is schematized by a single straight-line arrow, the oriental pattern by a spiral), the results derived from cross-linguistic (and cross-cultural) comparisons of rhetoric tend to be English-biased. Namely, comparisons are made predominantly with this English rhetorical organization as the norm: a linear, hierarchical progression of thought evolving from the Anglo-European cultural tradition (Kaplan, 1966). Non-linear patterns of any other cultures are thus likely to be considered to be deviants from the norm.

Ethnocentric characterizations, often stemming from unidimensional, oversimplistic scales such as the degrees of directness and indirectness, have readily evoked negative connotations of Japanese rhetoric (e.g., “indirect,” “circular,” “non-linear,” “circumlocutory,” “beating around the bush,” “evasive,” “implicit,” “vague,” “scattered,” “paratactic,” etc.), and have stereotyped it as ‘ineffective’ especially in argumentative discourse. Moreover, the ultimate ethnocentrism or even a self-denigrating attitude in studies of comparative rhetoric results in the following conclusion of ‘rhetorical disability’ in Japanese communication:

“General problems [that statements made by Japanese are not correctly interpreted by foreigners] lie not only in the Japanese language, but also in Japanese’ unskillfulness in speaking the language and foreign languages” (Chino, 1993: 173; parentheses added by the author).

And Chino's essay ends with the following conclusion:

“It is vital that the Japanese language learns the offensive nature and vitality of English, which are salient in the British tradition of debate poem, without too much appealing to emotional aspects of the poetic language [Japanese] in persuasion” (p. 181; parentheses added by the author).

One of the advantages involved in the ethnography of communication concerns its relativistic stance. As is obvious so far, comparative analysis of rhetoric is often heavily biased with the researcher's native norms, and analyses presented are likely to fail to account for an internal (native speakers') point of view. Saville-Troike (1993: 9) asserts, “The practice of inferring that a different pattern reflects different cultural values is of very questionable validity if it is done from an external point of view.” The ethnography of communication requires communicative events to be interpreted within the context of their host speech community rather than in the outsider's, and the validity of the interpretation is always examined by a native point of view (Saville-Troike & Johnson, 1994).

The second problem prevalent in contrastive rhetoric research is the lack of sufficient accounts of intricate interplay between the language and its context of use in the cultural matrix or in particular discourse communities (Saville-Troike & Johnson, 1994). The contrastive rhetoric research as a subset of text linguistics (van Dijk, 1988) has heavily been oriented to descriptions of textual structures over context; supra-sentential linguistic structures are the primary domain of inquiry, and its context of use secondary. It follows that such an analytical framework does not enable the researcher to penetrate the variables operating beyond the linguistic code, such as the effects of particular rhetorical strategies on the audience, and the social-psychological, interactive properties of texts constructed through the joint efforts by the rhetor and the audience. Most importantly, the analytical framework of text linguistics is incapable

of accounting for why particular rhetorical strategies are more or less likely to be used in varied contexts of communication.

An advantage of the ethnography of communication in these respects is its potential to conduct a legitimate analysis of language “first and foremost as a socially situated cultural form, while recognizing the necessity to analyze the code itself and the cognitive process of its speakers and hearers” (Saville-Troike, 1989: 3). Its framework of analysis puts the utmost emphasis on the functions of language in the situational context and explanatory dimensions of the observed phenomena (Saville-Troike & Johnson, 1994). Within this paradigm, researchers are expected to extract a vast variety of information from the situational context, utilize it in conducting analyses, and explain why a particular communicative event is structured in particular ways. The resources that would make the analyses legitimate from an internal point of view should include information from cultural, social, and political settings as well as physical ones of the text produced; ‘unsaid’ components of the text are regarded as particularly significant units of analysis in the ethnography of communication approach (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985).

The present study explores a legitimate comparative analysis of the rhetoric of Japanese persuasion, based on those insights gained from the ethnography of communication and situated in the context of the Japanese speech community.

THE STUDY

TV Commercials as a Relevant Unit of Persuasion

For this investigation, I will analyze message structures in Japanese television commercials, including those of American commercials for comparative purposes. Television commercials are particularly selected as a relevant unit to rhetorical analysis of persuasion on the basis of the following assumptions.

Gerbner (1985) characterizes mass media discourse as representing “comprehensive cultural indicators.” The indicators “will not tell us what individuals think or do. But they will tell us what most people think or do something about and suggest reasons why” (p.24). Thus, a study of mass media discourse will to some degree touch “knowingly shared ways of selecting and viewing events and aspects of life” (p.15), and “deals comprehensively, systematically, and generally rather than specifically and selectively or ad hoc with patterns of collective cultural life” (p.18). Mass media discourse at some level reflects the speech community members’ representational perspectives of value, priority, and relationships in social life, while shaping their attitudes, tastes, and preferences.

Messages in advertisements such as those in television commercials are also “overwhelmingly persuasive in intent” (Rotzoll, 1985). The primary goal the advertisers strive to achieve is to alter audience behavior, levels of awareness, knowledge, and attitudes. Moreover, television commercials present to us vivid, real data, which come from the speech community members’ live performance of language in the rich situational contexts.

Because communicative signals other than the spoken and the written codes become highly interpretable from contextual information in television commercials, I assume that the holistic analysis of the communicative event will be feasible and will contribute to the investigation of what is communicated beyond the text or what is not directly observable through the linear sequence of the code, which text analysis alone generally fails to account for. Particular questions in this dimension, for example, should ask what the absence of speech implies, how visual images interact with the codes, what their communicative effects on the audience are, how significantly different modes of the linguistic code are used and what their integrated functions are.

Data and Analytical Frames

Both the Japanese and the English data to be analyzed are fifteen-minute-long sets of TV commercials. The Japanese data were on the air in Japan during 1990-92. The English data were on the air in the U.S. around 1992. The fifteen minutes contain forty-five commercials in the Japanese data, thirty-one in the American data. Apparently, American commercials tend to be much longer than Japanese commercials.

In collecting data, I restricted the type of commercials to those on the necessities of life such as medicine, health care products, and the like. In those types of commercials, the advertiser's persuasive intent seems relatively evident, in that the advertisers strive to persuade people who face some problems to buy their products by resorting to culturally appropriate rhetorical strategies.

I have applied the data to an analytical frame integrating two components: textual analysis (Connor & Lauer, 1988) and the ethnography of communication analysis of communicative events (Saville-Troike, 1989: 138-57).

The first component primarily aims to conduct a comparative analysis of textual aspects of the commercials to identify cross-cultural differences (and similarities) in the linguistic structures of persuasion. Connor and Lauer (1988), investigating cross-cultural differences in persuasive student writing, suggest a useful evaluative model for text analyses that consists of three distinctive dimensions of the text: 1) superstructure (i.e., the organizational plan of the text), 2) the rhetor's usage of persuasive appeals, and 3) the informal logic of the text.

I. Superstructure

- a) Situation: Background facts and views intended for the orientation of the reader to the problem area.

- b) Problem: The undesirable state.
c) Solution: The desirable state.
d) Evaluation: The evaluation of the outcome of the suggested solution.

II. Persuasive Appeals

- a) Rational appeals: Arguments based on reality; argumentation using a lot of examples, illustrations, models, analogy, and metaphor.
b) Credibility appeals: The rhetor's personal experiences, knowledge of the subject, and awareness of the audience's values.
c) Affective appeals: The use of concrete and charged language, of vivid pictures, and of metaphors to evoke emotion in the audience.

III. Informal Logic

- a) Claim: An assertion, a thesis statement.
b) Data: Experience, facts, statistics, or occurrences in support for the claim.
c) Warrants: Showing that the original claim is an appropriate and legitimate one.

(Connor and Lauer 1988: 142-146)

The second component of the analytical frame stems directly from the ethnography of communication methodology of communicative events (Saville-Troike, 1989: 107-80). This paradigm defines a variety of sub-components of communication (Hymes, 1972: 58-65). The first three of the eleven components are fixed in this study; i.e., 1) the genre (or the type of event) is television commercial or advertisement; 2) the topic (or the referential focus) is health care products; and 3) the purpose/function of the event (or the interaction goals) is persuasion. The remaining eight components are defined as follows (Saville-Troike, 1989: 138-57):

- 4) Setting: Location, time of day, season of year, and physical aspects of the situation (e.g., size of room, arrangement of furniture, etc.).
- 5) Key: Emotional tone of the event (e.g., serious, sarcastic, jocular, etc.).
- 6) Participants: including their age, sex, ethnicity, social status, other relevant categories, and their relationship with one another.
- 7) Message Form: Both vocal and nonvocal channels, and the nature of the linguistic code which is used.
- 8) Message Content: What is being communicated about in the event.
- 9) Act Sequence: Ordering of communicative/speech acts, including turn taking, overlap phenomena, or other relevant incidents.
- 10) Rules for Interaction: What proprieties should be observed in the event.
- 11) Norms of Interpretation: The common knowledge, the relevant cultural presuppositions, or shared understandings, which allow particular inferences to be drawn about what is to be taken literally, what discounted, etc.

Above all, the norms of interpretation (i.e., "the belief system of a community" about communication) (Hymes, 1972a: 58) are the focal component that allows us to 'explain' why particular rhetorical strategies are preferred or dispreferred in varied context of the communicative event.

This multi-dimensional frame for data analysis is supposed to take better account of interactive and constitutive dimensions of the

text and its context as a communicative event from a holistic perspective. I hope that this framework will compensate for the limitation of a solely text-based methodology.

DATA ANALYSIS

The results of data analysis indicate that there are three striking differences between American and Japanese commercials in terms of persuasive rhetoric: superstructure, persuasive appeals, and the point-of-view operation. Discussions for each follow in order.

Superstructure

A textual analysis attests that the four components of superstructure are coordinated and focused in different ways between the two cultures. The contrasts are captured as follows:

| <u>Components of Superstructure</u> | <i>American</i> | <i>Japanese</i> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Situation: | ***** | ----- |
| Problem: | ***** | [****] |
| Solution: | ***** | ***** |
| Evaluation: | ***** | ***** |

In American commercials, all the four components are rather clearly recognized (*****) from the text. Above all, the progression, that the problems are set and the solutions are then presented, seems to be a rigid rhetorical unit shared by most of the commercials in the data. Problems and solutions are given equal weight, and become the center in the scope of the audience attention. Japanese commercials, on the other hand, do not clearly identify the four components. They generally lacks the first (-----), and the second is often missing ([****]).

First, we discuss some American examples.

American Example 1 (A-1)

Spoken

WRITTEN

S-a: In my world...it's everywhere.

Stress gives me a headache, and
sometimes my stomach gets up-
set. I'm just relieved.

There's **TYLENOL HEAD-
ACHE PLUS.**

S-b: New Tylenol Headache plus. **TYLENOL AND ANTACID**

The first medicine with Tylenol
pain reliever for stress
headaches plus antacid for stom-
ach upset.

S-a: It can't take the stress out of my
life, but it can help my head and
stomach feel better.

The ethnography of communication components of this advertise-
ment are as follows:

- TOPIC: A medicine for stress headache and stomachache
- SETTING: The actress tells a story at her home.
- KEY: Serious
- PARTICIPANTS: A middle-aged woman (S-a) as an actor
and an invisible male narrator (S-b).
- MESSAGE FORM: Predominantly the spoken code is used;
S-a uses the informal register; S-b uses the catch-phrase regis-
ter (i.e., only noun phrases in isolation).
- ACT SEQUENCE: S-a sets the scene, and introduces her
problems and the target item. S-b repeats the name of the
item and its effects. S-a reinforces the solution brought by the
item.

(Note: The remaining components are integrated into the
discussions that follow.)

S-a's first statement presents her problematic situation ("it [stress]
is everywhere") and particular problems ("a headache...and stomach
gets upset"). Her last statement concludes the story, referring to the
solution brought by that particular medicine.

American Example 2 (A-2)

Spoken

WRITTEN

S-a: You say your eyes are red, **CLEAR EYES**

irritated, dry.

Don't hide them.

Help them with Clear Eyes.

It gets rid of the redness...

The ethnography of communication components of this advertise-
ment are as follows:

- TOPIC: An eye medicine.
- SETTING: Wedding
- KEY: Serious
- PARTICIPANTS: A bride hiding her eyes with sunglasses; a
bridegroom; and a pastor; an invisible narrator (S-a).
- MESSAGE FORM: The spoken code is predominantly used;
only the narrator (S-a) speaks.
- ACT SEQUENCE: S-a's monologue speaking to the bride
(and the viewer).

(Note: The remaining components are integrated into the
discussions that follow.)

Even in this short commercial, the problem-solution unit is rigidly
maintained. After the particular problems ("red, irritated, dry
eyes") are presented, the solution is presented by the product. Here

again, it is the principal concern that the product itself is the very agent of solving the problem.

Japanese commercials, on the other hand, display different characteristics in superstructure. First of all, the situation component is not generally set up to introduce some problems. This perhaps partly explains why Japanese commercials are made short (with the average length being 15 seconds). Secondly, unlike American commercials, the problem-solution sequence does not seem to be a significant unit in the communicative event. Particular problems are not "thematized" (i.e., given greater prominence than others) (Brown & Yule, 1983: 134). The presentation of the problems is rather in the "background" of staging in the discourse, and the central focus of the audience attention seems to be given to the solution: the desirable state is established in the "foreground of consciousness" of the audience (Brown & Yule, 1983: 135). Third, the problem-solver, which should be the commercial product itself according to the purpose of this communicative event from the advertiser's point of view, tends to be presented in rather oblique ways. Here are some illustrations.

Japanese Example 1 (J-1)

Spoken

S-a: *Mama Ohayoo!*

('Mom, good morning.')

S-b: *Naotta no?*

('Are you OK, now?')

S-a: *Um.*

('Yeah.')

S-b: *Kaze naotta no dare no okage?*

('Thanks to whom, your cold has been cured?')

S-a: *Mochiron mama no okage desu.*

('Of course, thanks to mom.')

WRITTEN

PABURON NO OKAGE

('Thanks to Pabron.')

S-b: *Yoshi. Yoooooooooshi.*

('Right. YOU ARE RIGHT!').

S-c: *Ensan buromuhekishin to enka
rizochiimu ga, areta nodo, kikan-
shi no nenmaku ni sayoo.*

*ENSAN BUROMU HEKI-
SHIN / ENKA RIZOCHIIMU
HAIGOO*

*Kaze no iroirona shoojoo ni
suutto kiiteikimasu.*

('Mixture of H-A-B and RC')

('Hydrochloric acid bromhekisin
and ryzoteam chloride work for
sore throat and bronchial
mucosae.

They will work for other cold
symptoms.')

S-a/S-b: *Yokatta ne. Hayame no
paburon.*

('Good, wasn't it?

[Taking] Pablon earlier
[than necessary].')

*KAZE NO SHO-SHOJOO
NO KANWA NI.*

PABURON ESU.

('Relieving a variety of cold
symptoms.')

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: A medicine for cold.

- SETTING: Home

- KEY: Casual, pleasant, very happy and refreshing.

- PARTICIPANTS: Mother (S-b); her daughter (S-a); an invisible male narrator (S-c).

- MESSAGE FORM: Both the spoken and written codes are used. S-b and S-a talk in the informal register; S-c uses the formal register.

- ACT SEQUENCE: S-b and S-a talk casually about S-a's condition in the morning at their home; S-c formally explains the medicine. S-b and S-a reinforce the positive aspects of the medicine. No overlap takes place.

(Note: The remaining components are integrated into the discussions that follow.)

In contrast to how the problems are presented in the American counterparts ('stress' in A1; 'eye problems' in A2), the problem ('cold') is 'embedded' in this communicative event rather than given a thematic focus in the course of discourse. The text does not explicitly present any details about the problem ('cold') from which S-a appears to have suffered.

Both S-b and S-a look very pleased with the fact that S-a's cold has been cured by the medicine. It is the pleasant atmosphere the two actresses create which most strongly impresses the audience as the foregrounding component of this particular commercial. Through the message content focused on the pleasant consequence rather than on the excellence of medicine as the problem-solver, the "key" component of this particular communicative event plays the central role in exercising strong communicative effects on the audience: amicable images of the product created through pleasant, jolly atmosphere in a stable, suburban middle-class home environment.

Japanese Example 2 (J-2)

Spoken

S-a: *Watashi wa benpi ni mae muki desu.*

('I deal with constipation in a positive manner.')

Karada o ugokashite, yasai o tappuri totte....

(Doing exercise, eating a lot of vegetables...)

WRITTEN

Demo komatta toki ni wa koorak- KOORAKKU
ku.

('But, when (you) are still in trouble, KOORAKKU.')

Asa odayakana otsuiji.

('For regular passages every morning.')

ASA ODAYAKANA OTUUJI.

('For regular passages every morning.')

KOORAKKU

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: A medicine for constipation.
- SETTING: Various scenes from the actress's outdoor activities.
- KEY: Active, light, happy.
- PARTICIPANTS: A young working woman (S-a) in her 20s who looks very active.
- MESSAGE FORMS: The spoken code is used relatively more than the written code. S-a casually speaks in both the informal register and with the catch-phrase register. The written code reinforces the information she presents.
- ACT SEQUENCE: Only S-a talks.

(Note: The remaining components are integrated into the discussions that follow.)

Again in this text, the situation and the concrete problem ('constipation') are not explicitly thematized. The focus of the communicative event is predominantly on her positive attitudes towards the problem (e.g., through the scenes of various outdoor activities and diet) that is embedded in the story, and the consequent delightful state of accomplishment and success is reinforced by the lively key component of the event. The medicine per se is presented as a subsidiary item or

a secondary alternative (which should be considered in case those exercises and diet did not work) rather than the problem-solver, so that the advertiser's real intent can be masked.

Persuasive appeals

The solutions presented must be evaluated in a fair and comprehensible fashion for the audience and eventually be given sound justifications in order for the persuasion to be successful. The rhetor's presentation of evaluation of the product is a very crucial phase of persuasive discourse, and the ways of presenting it must conform to the audience's native rhetorical norms. In the evaluation component of the superstructure, the rhetors from the two cultures are found to resort to different types of persuasive appeals. While it seems that in both cultures, the rhetor's evaluation is aimed to reach a high level of credibility or warrants for the commercial items, the resources on which the advertiser's evaluation is based seem to be cross-culturally quite contrastive. The following is a schematic representation of the evaluative procedures in each culture:

Data for Evaluation

| | | |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------|
| <i>American</i> | statistics; scientific evidence; -----> authority (Rational Appeals) | Credibility/ Warrants |
| <i>Japanese</i> | user's opinions; experiences; -----> images; impressions (Affective Appeals) | Credibility/ Warrants |

In American commercials, data for evaluation are likely to be objective evidence such as statistical figures, scientific proof, authority's opinions, etc. It seems that such rational appeals are taken as appropriate strategies to affect the audience's views and attitudes. Consider, for example, this commercial for an antibacterial agent.

American Example 3 (A-3)

Spoken

S-a: No matter which kind of bandage you use, if you want those cuts to heal faster, use NEOSPORIN every time you bandage.

Testing shows Neosporin helps cuts heal faster. Four days faster than bandage alone. And it helps preventing infection.

So whatever bandage you use, use Neosporin. Together, they make it better and faster. And for fast healing, plus pain relief, try maximum strength NEOSPORIN PLUS.

WRITTEN

BANDAGE ALONE BANDAGE AND NEOSPORIN
(Dramatization)

MAKE IT BETTER FASTER

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: Medical ointment for cuts.
 - SETTING: Scenes from someone's home and the outdoors.
 - KEY: Formal, serious, scientific.
 - PARTICIPANTS: An invisible male narrator (S-a); many people who show their cuts and demonstrate how to use the medicine.
 - MESSAGE FORMS: The spoken code is a dominant medium, but the written message is also used as reinforcement. The speech is made in the formal register.
 - ACT SEQUENCE: S-a is the only speaker.
- (Note: The remaining components are integrated into the discussions that follow.)

American Example 4 (A-4)

Spoken

S-a: Antibacterial soap
doctors recommend more than
any other.

WRITTEN

DOCTORS RECOMMEND
DIAL.

Aren't you glad you use Dial.

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: Soap.
- SETTING: No setting; only one soap appears on the screen.
- KEY: Formal.
- PARTICIPANTS: An invisible male narrator (S-a).
- MESSAGE FORMS: Both the spoken and the written codes are used, but the latter is still supplementary.
- ACT SEQUENCE: S-a explains.

(Note: The remaining components are integrated into the discussions that follow.)

In A-3, it is evident that scientific evidence ('testing shows,' 'preventing infection') and statistical figures ('four days faster') constitute a major, foregrounding aspect of this particular communicative event. The dramatization of comparing the healing effects also strengthens the credibility of the medicine. In A-4, the appeal to authority ('Doctors recommend') is also strategic, reinforced by the use of the written message ('DOCTORS RECOMMEND DIAL').

As discussed earlier, the progression from the problem to the solution tends to be highlighted in the superstructure of American commercials. Because of this emphasis on the product's ability to solve problems and make situations better, it also seems quite common in American commercials that the values of the product are

often determined by its superiority to any other product of the same kind, which is judged by objective criteria such as scientific evidence, statistical figures, authoritative opinions, and direct comparisons.

In Japanese commercials, on the other hand, the evaluation focuses largely on the user's subjective opinions or experiences about the commercialized item. Affective appeals to evoke emotion in the audience seem to take priority over rational appeals. When rational appeals are occasionally seen, they are consistently situated in the backgrounding domain of the communicative event. The appeals to the audience's emotion are foregrounded, constituting major portions of the commercials. Here are some illustrations

Japanese Example 3 (J-3)

Spoken

WRITTEN

S-a: *Hana no guai mo daibu osamatte
kita kedo,*
(Although my nose has become
better,

Yasuko ga yasashii shi,
(Yasuko is kind to me, so...)

Moo sukoshi kaze de iyoo...
(I've decided to stay in bed with
this cold a little longer.)

Sore ni shitemo RURU wa yoku kiku.
 ('RURU works really well, doesn't it?')

KAZE NO SHO-SHOJOO NO KANWA NI
 ('For relieving a variety of cold symptoms.')

RURU
OTONA IKKAI 3 JOO ICHINI-CHI 3 KAI
 ('Adults 3 capsules at a time; 3 times a day.')

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: A medicine for cold.
- SETTING: Someone's home; a man (S-a) stays in bed with cold; a woman feeds him with a spoon. The camera is the viewpoint of the man watching the woman, so the man does not appear.
- KEY: Casual, friendly.
- PARTICIPANTS: A sick man in bed; a woman named YASUKO.
- MESSAGE FORMS: Both the spoken and the written codes are used, but the former plays a central role and the latter is still supplementary.
- ACT SEQUENCE: Only S-a talks.

Japanese Example 4 (J-4)

Spoken

S-a: *Nanka hakadonnai noyonee.*
 ('I wonder why this has made little progress.')

WRITTEN

S-b: *Naron eesu wa itami no moto to tsutawari o daburu burokku.* *DABURU BROKKU*
 ('NARON ACE blocks both pains and their aggravation.')

S-a: *Fu tte kieteku no.*
 ('(The pain) instantly disappears.')

S-c: *Zutsuu ni naron eesu.*
 ('NARON ACE for headaches'
 [in singing voice])

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: A medicine for headache.
- SETTING: Someone's kitchen; a woman (S-a) is preparing for a meal, but does not feel well.
- KEY: Serious, but informal.
- PARTICIPANTS: A housewife (S-a); an invisible male narrator (S-b); female chorus group (S-c).
- MESSAGE FORMS: The spoken code is a dominant medium. S-a uses the informal register, whereas S-b uses the formal register. S-c calls the name of the medicine in singing.
- ACT SEQUENCE: S-a expresses her bad feeling. S-b provides technical information. S-a expresses her happy feeling which has been brought by the medicine.

The characters' expressions of affection and intimacy with his wife (in J3) and relief from the pain (in J4) greatly contribute to the current amicable consequence that has been realized by the products. Especially in J-4, the homemaker's final statement of relief and happiness ('[The pain] instantly disappears.') works quite effectively in contrast to the preceding undesirable state, which is again represented in terms of the character's unpleasant feelings rather than being

explicitly verbalized ('I wonder why this has made little progress').

The users' favorable experiences and opinions create good images and impressions of the product on the part of the audience. The users' direct testimonies along with affective appeals rather than with rational information contribute to the audience's empathy with the users and lead to their acceptance of the product. Ordinary people's consensus seems highly valuable. An evaluation from a peer's point of view is highly esteemed over scientific evidence from some authority.

The dominant focus on the construction of good images and impressions through affective appeals in Japanese commercials is represented by the repetitive use of the catch-phrase register. Written catch-phrases with vocal superimposing repetitively appears on the screen, emphasizing the name of the product and its good properties, and the solutions or effects brought by the product. For this specific purpose, the written code is much more actively used in Japanese commercials than in American commercials. Here is some illustration:

Japanese Example 5 (J-5)

| <u>Spoken</u> | <u>WRITTEN</u> |
|---|---|
| S-a: <i>Shampoo shite rinsu shitara,</i> (('Shampoo and rinse, then...')) | SHAMPUU SHITE RINSU SHITARA (('SHAMPOO AND RINSE, THEN')) |
| <i>Riize pasatsuki booshi foomu</i> (('Liize Protection Against Dry Loose Hair.') | LIIZE PASATSUKI BOOSHI FOOMU (('LIIZE PROTECTION AGAINST DRY LOOSE HAIR')) |
| <i>Riize pasatsuki booshi foomu</i> (('Liize Protection Against Dry Loose Hair.') | LIIZE PASATSUKI BOOSHI FOOMU (('LIIZE PROTECTION AGAINST DRY LOOSE HAIR')) |

S-b: *Neteru aida ni uruou.*

(('While sleeping, your hair gets
moisturized.')

Riize pasatsuki booshi foomu

(('Liize Protection Against Dry
Loose Hair.')

S-a: *Asa no kami pasatsukanai.*

(('Your hair doesn't get dry in the
morning.')

ASA NO KAMI PASATSU-
KANAI.

(('YOUR HAIR DOESN'T GET
DRY IN THE MORNING.')

The ethnography of communication components of this advertisement are as follows:

- TOPIC: A hair-conditioner.
- SETTING: S-a's bathroom, and a walk on the street.
- KEY: Casual.
- PARTICIPANTS: A young woman (S-a) is washing her hair, and feels good. S-a, with shiny, good-looking hair, walks on the street. An invisible male narrator (S-b) simply repeats the catch-phrases.
- MESSAGE FORMS: Both the spoken and written codes are repetitively used; the catch-phrases overlap with the spoken messages.
- ACT SEQUENCE: S-a demonstrates the product at her bathroom, repeating the catch-phrases. S-b also joins S-a, repeating the identical phrases.

Here are some other examples for the catch-phrase register and its repetitive usage:

- a. ...New Elegance. Elegance, Yes...
- b. ...Containing Fragile Granules. Clear Clean.
- c. For Shiny Hair With No Damage.

- d. Newly Developed Superrich. New Superrich. Care of Damage of Every Single Hair. Lax Superrich
- e. Powerful Washing. Powerful Rinsing. New Surf II
- f. A Day Without Damaged Hair. What The Shampoo Gave Me. Beautiful Hair Since (one) Washes With The Shampoo. VO 5 Shampoo and Conditioner for Damaged Hair.

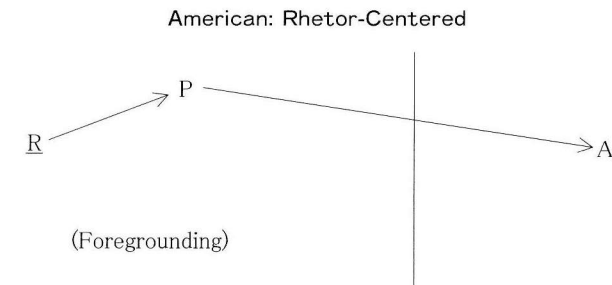
The communicative effects that this particular strategy may produce is the reinforcement of good images and impressions on the product. The rhetor repeatedly emphasizes the names and good properties of the product, using catch-phrases rather than 'explaining' the quality of the product to the audience in an expository manner.

The point-of-view operation

The final noteworthy difference between Japanese and American commercials concerns the strategic manipulation of "audience design" by the rhetor (Bell, 1984). For effective persuasion, each culture seems to exploit its own unique system of participant framework, in which the relative stance of the rhetor to the audience manifests itself quite distinctively but in comparatively quite intriguing ways. The varied stance of the rhetor is indicated by the rhetor's choice of style and mode of the linguistic code, and also by particular syntactic choices and communicative strategies. The rhetor's specific stance also contributes to the establishment of certain social relationships between the rhetor and the audience in the way that the illocutionary force of persuasion becomes more effective.

First, the rhetorical structure of American commercials can be characterized as being 'rhetor-centered,' in that the rhetor's participant stance in relation to the audience is consistent in making direct persuasive appeals and constitutes the very core of this communicative event. The following schematic representation depicts the

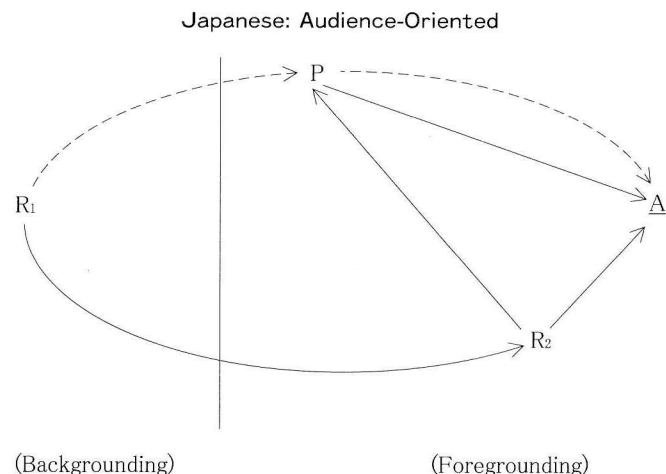
participant framework typical of American commercials:



For the rhetor (R), the product (P) is the entity to be advertised. The rhetor is consistent in that position and tends to refer directly to the product's quality, explains its characteristics, and points out its superiority to any other similar products. As far as the audience (A) is concerned, it is always made clear that the product is the entity to be 'explained' by the rhetor. The rhetor's position is consistently on the side of the persuader (or the advertiser), whereas the audience invariably remains on the persuadee's side. In addition, it is the rhetor himself or herself who plays a major role in advertising the item in the foregrounding domain of the communicative event.

In American commercials, certain linguistic characteristics contribute to such patterns of point-of-view operations. The spoken code is a predominant medium when the rhetor presents the product to the audience. As seen in A-2 (e.g., 'Don't hide them,' 'Help them with Clear Eyes') and A-3 (e.g., 'Use NEOSPORIN,' 'Try maximum strength...'), directives are very commonly used, which reflects the persuader's straightforward approach to the audience. The written code, on the other hand, seems supplementary, playing a minimum role. It is mostly used to reinforce technical information and practical knowledge (e.g., name of the product, price, phone number, scientific descriptions, etc.) along with the spoken messages.

The rhetorical structure of persuasion in Japanese commercials, on the other hand, is characterized as being 'audience-oriented':



Two different kinds of rhetor positions are characteristically established in Japanese commercials. As a culturally appropriate point-of-view operation, the original rhetor (R₁) shifts his or her point of view into the side of the audience (A), and shares good experiences and opinions about the product (P), and enjoys the current desirable consequence as a co-member of the user group (R₂). The product is evaluated and praised from the user's standpoint rather than the advertiser's (R₁). The pleasant atmosphere, which is created by Rhetor 2's providing positive testimonies about the product, contributes to the establishment of good images and impressions of the product. From the viewer's point of view, it is Rhetor 2 rather than Rhetor 1 who constitutes the foregrounding phase of the commercials, receiving the center of the audience's attention.

Rhetor 1 (e.g., the narrator/the advertiser), on the other hand, remains consistently in the 'backstage' as a provider of information

rather than an active agent (R₂) of experiencing the product. Rhetor 1's task of providing technical information and practical knowledge for the audience corresponds with that of the rhetor in the American participant framework. The relative stance, however, is maintained in the backgrounding domain in relation to the stance of the audience — together with Rhetor 2 — who participate within the foreground domain.

A clear distinction between the foregrounding and backgrounding domains is consistently made in the Japanese participant framework through this kind of point-of-view operation: the former domain is created for Rhetor 2 to take care of the folk-level awareness and perceptions of the product in profitable ways, whereas the latter domain is maintained for the advertiser (Rhetor 1) to support Rhetor 2 in moderation.

Stylistic alternations are found to work as a strategic "staging device" (Brown & Yule, 1983) to determine the rhetors' relative positions in Japanese commercials. In general, there are two types of styles in Japanese: distal style (polite, honorific, out-group-encoding) predicates, and direct style (casual, intimate, in-group-encoding) predicates. Distal style indicates that "the speaker is showing solicitude toward, and maintaining some linguistic distance from, the addressee" (Jorden & Noda, 1987). This style, then, characterizes the speaker as being less direct and more formal with a sign of deference to the person(s) addressed and/or the topic of conversation. Direct style, on the other hand, allows the speaker to talk directly, intimately, familiarly, abruptly or carelessly to the addressee(s) and/or about the topic (Jorden & Noda, 1987). It is observed that Rhetor 2 typically uses a direct style, establishing rapport and intimacy with the audience as a peer (see J-1, J-3, and J-4), whereas Rhetor 1, who is often an invisible narrator addressing from the backstage with technical information about the product, is more likely to use a distal style, establishing formal relationships

with the audience (see J-1). Gumperz (1982) calls the former type of strategic manipulation in particular “metaphorical” style-shifting, which produces special connotations and illocutionary effects of the act on the addressee. Informal, casual, and intimate style allows the speaker (Rhetor 2) to metaphorically place him or herself on the audience’s level and obtain agreement and empathy from them as his or her peers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A great deal of comparative research on cross-cultural differences in communicative events has thus far pointed out that various components of the communicative events are manipulated variably according to the norms of the speech community to which the speaker belongs. The “frame,” which defines which components are meaningful and in what ways they interact with one another in a single communicative event, is determined differentially across particular speech communities or cultures (Saville-Troike, 1989). The outcome of this preliminary investigation has also revealed that there is a wide variety of discrepancies in the framing of the communicative event of persuasion between American and Japanese cultures.

An ethnography of communication perspective suggests relativistic interpretations of phenomena from an internal (native speakers’) point of view. Without that perspective, Japanese persuasive rhetoric is often perceived as ill-structured or illogical because of the absence of the Japanese rhetor’s explicit presentation of problems and the lack of focus on the progression from problem to solution (in terms of American norms of persuasive rhetoric). An ethnography of communication perspective, however, identifies the identical phenomenon as culturally appropriate or unmarked on the basis of some behavioral norms deeply rooted in the Buddhist tradition in Japanese culture, for example, which includes an emphasis on the exclusion of

desire (Matsuyama, 1983). It may be that this emphasis contributes to a rhetorical organization in which aggressiveness and goal-oriented behaviors are greatly discouraged, though further penetration into such an interpretation is certainly needed.

Japanese culture is also often portrayed as a proto-typical “negative polite” culture where imposing communicative behaviors on others are highly abhorred (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is likely that the American rhetor’s emphasis on causal conjunctions imposes on the audience his or her own view and demands agreement from them, which violates interactive norms in Japanese culture. Thus, the insignificance of ‘cause’ (‘problem’) can be interpreted differently once we go beyond the organization of the text per se and seek answers from the cultural/situational context. The lack of the cause-and-effect structure from this more relativistic perspective does not necessarily indicate ‘ineffectiveness’ or a deficit in Japanese persuasive rhetoric from the internal point of view. Rather, it reflects the native speaker’s communicative competence operating within the cultural matrix.

The present analysis also illustrates that the Japanese rhetor’s affective appeals are highly esteemed over rational evidence. The construction of good images and impressions of the product in question is the core facet of the persuasive strategy; repetition and redundancy of information also seem to be frequent rhetorical strategies to reinforce such communicative effects.

Referring particularly to Chinese and Japanese cultures, Becker (1986) tries to define the concept of ‘truth’ as being “not propositional but humanly embodied” (p.79). He argues that Japan’s historical situation of “close-knit densely populated village societies” has formed people’s view of social harmony as more essential than “precision” or “scientific experimentation” (p.80). ‘Truth’ is then drawn from a quality of humanity, not from the accuracy of propositions or logicity alone; in other words, truth is defined in terms of folk

consensus rather than absolute scientific truth. It follows that stronger appeals in Japanese persuasive rhetoric tend to consist in this sociocultural value of 'truthhood' derived from general agreement and harmony rather than in absolute 'correctness' based on independent objective evidence.

In Japanese persuasive rhetoric, the rhetor also characteristically merges into the position of the audience, does 'staging' in which he or she experiences the product and speaks from the peer audience's point of view, and creates a rapport to obtain their empathy (i.e., the point-of-view operation). Japanese communicative style, which is acquired through the processes of children's socialization, is characterized as relying heavily on mutual cooperation and empathy among the conversants (Clancy, 1986). Communicative effectiveness is largely determined by the listener's ability to infer what is meant by the speaker rather than by the speaker's skillful, eloquent presentation of ideas (Hinds, 1987; Shibatani, 1991). Japanese are also said to prefer indirect, suggestive intuition to exact oral explanations (Becker, 1986). The point-of-view operation unique to Japanese rhetoric of persuasion clearly attests these traits of the culturally appropriate communicative competence. The key to success in Japanese persuasion seems to lie in the rhetor's role not in persuading people in a straightforward, eloquent manner but in providing the frame where some vague, reserved intent of the rhetor is left for the addressee to 'feel' or make judgments themselves.

Text analysis alone may result in Japanese rhetoric's being characterized as using a "restricted code," in comparison with the more "elaborated" American rhetoric, because of these superficial deficits (Bernstein, 1961, 1972). We must, however, be cautious with such an interpretation. Those codes might simply capture different "display rules" at the surface level rather than differences in the speakers' cognitive systems (Tannen, 1980). We should also be reminded that native speakers from a speech community are capable

of manipulating both types of codes according to tasks and settings they face. The ethnography of communication approach to Japanese persuasion enables us to investigate socio-cultural reasons why the restricted code is preferred or ought to be used for certain illocutionary effects. Without that relativistic perspective, researchers are very likely to overlook the Japanese rhetor's ability to use a restricted code to achieve elaborate communicative effects.

REFERENCES

- Becker, C. B. (1986). Reasons for the lack of argumentation and debate in the Far East. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10: 75-92.
- Bell, A. (1984). Language style as audience design. *Language in Society*, 13: 145-204.
- Bernstein, Basil. (1961). Social structure, language and learning. *Educational Research* 3: 163-176.
- _____. (1972). Social class, language and socialization. In P. P. Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context: Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books. pp.157-178.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chino, T. (1993). Kotoage senu kuni no kotoba: Nihongo to settoku no retorikku ('The language of a country blessed by word-spirits: Japanese and the rhetoric of persuasion). *The Journal of the College of Foreign Languages*, 6: 172-182. Himeji Dokkyoo University.
- Clancy, Patricia. (1986). The acquisition of communicative style in Japanese. In B. B. Shieffelin & E. Ochs (eds.), *Language and Socialization Across Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.213-250.
- Conner, U., & Lauer, J. (1988). Cross-cultural variation in persuasive student writing. In A. C. Purves (ed.), *Writing Across Languages*

- and Cultures. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Gerbner, M. (1985). Mass media discourse: Message system analysis as a component of cultural indicators. In T. A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. (1989). Writing in a second language: Contrastive rhetoric. In D. Johnson & D. Roen (eds.), *Richness in Writing*. New York: Longman. pp.263-283.
- Gumperz, John. (1982). *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hinds, J. (1982). Contrastive rhetoric: Japanese and English. *Text*, 3
- _____. (1987). Reader versus writer responsibility: A new typology. In U. Conner & R. Kaplan (eds.), *Writing Across Languages: An Analysis of L2 Texts*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. pp.141-152.
- Houghton, D., & Hoey, M. (1984). Linguistics and written discourse: Contrastive rhetoric. In R. Kaplan (ed.), *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 3: 2-22.
- Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics*. New York: Basil Blackwell. pp.35-71.
- _____. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jorden, E. H. & Noda, M. (1987). *Japanese: The Spoken Language, Part I*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kaplan, R. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16: 1-20.
- Leki, I. (1991). Twenty-five years of contrastive rhetoric: Text analysis and writing pedagogies. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.2: 123-143.
- Matsuyama, U.K. (1983). Can story grammar speak Japanese? *The Reading Teacher*, 36: 666-9.
- Purves, A. (ed.) (1988). *Writing Across Languages and Cultures*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Rotzoll, K. B. (1985). Advertisements. In T. A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1989). *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- _____. (1993). Comparative rhetoric: an integration of perspectives. Manuscript. The University of Arizona.
- Saville-Troike, M., & Johnson, D. (1994). Comparative rhetoric: An integration of perspectives. *In the Proceedings of the Pragmatics and Language Learning conference* at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Shibatani, M. (1991). *The Languages of Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tannen, D. (1980). A comparative analysis of oral narrative strategies: Athenian Greek and American English. In W. L. Chafe (ed.), *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Tannen, D., & Saville-Troike, M. (eds.), (1985). *Perspectives on Silence*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1988). *News as Discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[ABSTRACT]

This preliminary study is a comparative analysis of Japanese persuasive rhetoric from an ethnography of communication perspective. This investigation was motivated to compensate for two particular deficits involved in contrastive rhetoric research, which has heavily been oriented to text analysis: its ethnocentrism and its neglect of the situational context of language use. Comparatively analyzing television commercials from Japan and the U.S., the present study reveals that the two cultures differentially manipulate a wide variety of components of the communicative event of persuasion. Specific discrepancies include the superstructure of the persuasive rhetoric, the rhetor's uses of persuasive appeals, and the rhetor's point-of-view operations. The ethnography of communication approach leads us to go beyond the code structure per se in conducting comparative analysis and to seek relativistic explanations of the phenomena within a cultural matrix.