Japanese Fragments: An Exploration in Cultural Perception and Duality

Adrian Holliday
Department of Language Studies
Canterbury Christ Church University College

Abstract

By looking at a fragment of data representing Japanese high school classrooms and their institutional environment, it is possible to hypothesize about the behaviour of Japanese students in British adult education language classes. It is observed that there are differently conceived notions of formality and informality between the two types of classroom, in which the perceptions of talk and silence play a significant role. In the Japanese high school classrooms observed, there is evidence that silence is a sign of tension and unease whereas student talk is common within a personal, informal domain. This is very different to the British adult education language classroom where silence is a necessity while others are talking, and yet is a hindrance to formal student participation. The often reported silence of Japanese students in British private language school classes may not be a simple feature of Japanese national culture, but also a product of the encounter with a highly 'technologized' classroom culture. To understand their students, teachers therefore need to understand how the culture of the classroom is imposed by the professional régime to which they belong.

This paper discusses the process and outcomes of a small piece of research based on video extracts from Japanese schooling. The outcome is a set of observations about formality, informality, silence and talk, and elements of duality in perceptions of culture, in a Japanese high school context which might have a bearing on the behaviour of Japanese students in British adult education language classrooms[1]. The claims are small, in right proportion for a small subjective qualitative study of this nature. In the first part of the paper I deal with my research orientation. This is followed by a discussion of issues. The next part of the paper presents a discussion of the data, followed by implications for TESOL practice.

Published in 2002, Asia Pacific Journal of Language in Education, 5/1, 1-28

Research orientation

It is particularly necessary for the researcher to be as clear as possible about her own orientation in qualitative research, where scientific rigour in the management of inevitable subjectivity depends largely on being as open as possible about the workings of the research (Holliday, 2002, p. 10). I am including in this section, not only an articulation of the research methodology and the procedures undertaken, but also how current issues connected with Japanese students in TESOL influence what I myself bring to the study.

Thick description from small fragments

The core data comprises video recordings of seven Japanese high school classes, 'playground' and library scenes[2] and interviews with knowledgeable informants about its content. In many ways the default position in qualitative research, especially in ethnography, is that the study needs to be sufficiently extended within a specified cultural environment such as a community, a place of work, a small group of people, a set of documents, or even a single person or activity, to enable thick description (Holliday, 2002, p. 82) – 'the context of an experience' and the 'intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process' (Denzin, 1994, p. 505). Where fragments of data are used they should therefore be sufficiently embedded in a wider setting at which the study also looks. One might therefore expect that these video sequences of Japanese classrooms should be set against a broader experience of Japanese society, whether it be Japanese education, Japanese TESOL, or a particular Japanese community. I would like to argue that in this study this need not be the case. Geertz reminds us that 'the locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighbourhoods ...); they study *in* villages' (1993, p. 22, his italics). I am therefore *not* investigating Japanese classrooms per se. Neither am I investigating Japanese society. I am carrying out a study which is located *in* a set of videos. Many things can be seen in such a location, and the researcher must select a focus which helps her pursue a particular research interest.

In my case I am focusing on instances of educational behaviour which help me pursue an interest I have in the way many TESOL people perceive the behaviour of Japanese students within adult language education classes in the English speaking West. I therefore see the fragments, not as illuminations of Japanese society, of which I know very little, but of an international TESOL society, with which I am far more familiar. I have

been exposed to the considerable discussion about 'quiet' Japanese students in British language classrooms, among colleagues, in academic and professional literature, and at conferences. This has been against a backdrop of discussions of Japanese national culture as it affects education and business. Thus, the 'Japanese issue' is very much part of the broader professional-academic culture to which I belong. At the same time, I have had considerable first-hand encounters with the Japanese English teacher participants of this *international* culture who have been my masters students in applied linguistics. It is on the basis of this experience that I am able to arrive at thick description.

A second point is that what makes thick description possible is not its exhaustiveness of coverage, but the way in which the researcher scans the different facets of the particular setting and comes up with good analysis (Holliday, 2002, p. 83) – enabling a 'working "up" from data' towards theory construction (Richards T. & Richards L., 1994, p. 446). Such analysis can take place quite comfortably within a small case study, as an alternative to 'sample-based research' (Stenhouse, 1985a, 1985b). Thus, 'the determining question [...] whether a field journal squib or a Malinowski-sized monograph, is whether it sorts winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones' (Geertz, 1993, p. 16). The notion that the reliability of a qualitative study depends on the exhaustiveness of coverage in a large cultural setting as a geographical place belongs to a post-positivist, naturalist paradigm which is now widely criticized (e.g. Holliday, 2002, p. 22ff; Miller, Nelson & Moore, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. vi, 19, 38; Guber & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109; Janesick, 1994, p. 216). In line with more progressive, post-modern thinking, the small selection of data in this study represents an illuminatory instance with no attempt at representative sampling. In this sense, the purpose is to promote thought and raise questions rather than offer proof.

There is some precedent for using other people's film data. Collier (1979) used film taken by his father ten years previously for a different purpose to the one which motivated Collier's study. Collier found that the footage revealed a social phenomenon which had significance beyond the actual context within which it was originally taken – an Alaskan primary school. When he viewed the film silent and speeded up, he noticed strong patterns in the rhythms in which teachers and students moved, which seemed to correlate with the degree to which the teachers were outsiders to the community (See Holliday, 1994, p. 34, 146, 1996, p. 92). Collier states that his major motivation for using this particular piece of film was that the

footage was 'interrelated in terms of content and locale and that it contain[ed] a high proportion of material believed to be readable' (1979, p. 6). 'However, the main reason for using the Alaskan footage was that it was available' (1979, p. 5).

Like Collier, when I came upon this fragment of film about Japanese schooling I found data which was available, and also 'readable' in the sense that it presented a good demonstration of something which seemed highly relevant to a current discussion. There is a considerable ongoing discussion in the literature and amongst (especially non-Japanese) teachers concerning the 'problematic' behaviour of Japanese students in English language classes in Britain and Japan. The size of this discussion in Britain corresponds with the large number of Japanese learning English in Britain and of British teachers working in Japan. Against this discussion, the data created sharp resonance in that there seemed sufficient evidence to throw doubt on the standard view.

A third consideration is the need to 'bracket' – strategically to put aside easy answers about the expected 'nature', 'essence', or 'reality' of things (Holliday, 2002, p. 25, citing Schutz, 1970, p. 316). In many ways the whole paper is an attempt to bracket the standard view of Japanese students and their culture. Although embroiled in the discussion of these issues, my lack of direct experience of Japan and of teaching Japanese students in Britain allows me a relatively fresh approach to the 'Japanese issue'. I have less stake than many in the issue because I do not have to confront it in the language classroom. Similarly, not having a stake in the school in which the video was taken, I am in a better position to distance myself from the data and treat it more impartially – approaching it as a stranger (Holliday, 2002, p. 16, citing Schutz).

'Standard' view of the 'Japanese issue'

By the 'standard' view I mean the more established, dominant discourse about Japanese students within TESOL. This can be contrasted with a non-standard, or alternative discourse. (This is of course an idealized dichotomy. There will be a range of positions in between.) The standard discussion says that Japanese students fail to interact orally as required by skills- and activity-based teaching methodology[3], and that this behaviour is connected with Japanese national culture and education system, and implies that 'silent', 'passive' Japanese students are locked into a cultural state

which makes them like this. Some examples of this discourse run as follows:

> It is within Confucianism that many of the oft-heard questions from foreign language teachers in Japan [...] can be answered: Why don't my students have opinions? Why don't my students talk? Why are they so willing to memorize? Why do they bury their heads in dictionaries? Why do exams motivate them so? Why are they so obedient? (Stapleton, 1995, p. 13)

Similarly, at college and university in Japan:

> Students do not respond to first names, they do not make eye contact with the teacher, they believe they should not be called upon to speak by the teacher. [...] Students 'rarely initiate discussion, seldom ask questions for clarification, seldom volunteer answers and only talk if there is a clear cut answer to a question. (Cogan, 1995, p. 37, citing Greene & Hunter, & Anderson)

LoCastro describes the 'formality' of the 'typically teacher-fronted, teacher-centred' Japanese high school classroom (1996, p. 49), in which there is a 'lack of interaction between teacher and student, and between and among students, as well as the heavy use of Japanese during the lesson' (1996, p. 53):

> The typical class in Japan will start and end with one student calling the others to order; all stand to bow and formally greet the teacher, who also usually bows, standing. Many classrooms maintain the practice that the student who is responding to a teacher's solicit or is asking a question must stand to do so. In general, however, an overwhelming proportion of class time is composed of teacher talk. During a 50-minute class, just one student may ask the teacher an unsolicited question. (1996, p. 52)

This is set against the commonly cited background of English teaching being rather like Latin teaching in British schools – via L1 medium, more for intellectual development than the acquiring of communicative ability (Law, 1995). In national cultural terms 'the Japanese see themselves as reserved, formal, silent, cautious, evasive and serious. [...] The Japanese 'exquisite politeness can never say "no"' (Cortazzi, 1990, p. 62-63; citing Barnlund & Random).

'Non-standard' view of the 'Japanese issue'

The alternative, non-standard discourse is nevertheless gaining momentum as TESOL thinking becomes more critical. Talking about business behaviour, White explains that 'instead of writing things down, Japanese love to talk (contrary to common belief, the Japanese are not a silent people, even though taciturnity is culturally valued)' (1992, p. 2). Hayagoshi also resists the 'common belief' and embarks upon research to investigate why British teachers claim their students are silent when in her experience as a compatriot and teacher they are not. She states:

> As far as I can tell, *Japanese students are probably not so quiet and shy as their non-Japanese teachers expect.* Because of geographic and historic reasons [...] the Japanese *used* to be reluctant to speak in public. However, such Japanese mentality has weakened over the last decade. The younger generation called *Shin-Jinru* (New-age people) can, relatively speaking, voice their opinion without any hesitation. (1996, 9-10, her emphasis)

In a study of Japanese students in a British language institute:

> Through informal interviews I asked their British teachers about the reasons for their silence and most of them mentioned culture. [...] Through my eyes, however, their quietness seems to be more complex and cannot be explained only by their regional culture. (1996, p. 20)

She thus suspects an over-generalized national cultural stereotype. Nevertheless, she observed that in the British language institute classes "Japanese students *were* very quiet. [...] They were very slow to react and rarely express their opinions" (1996, p. 20, citing classroom observation notes, my emphasis), but not in a straight forward way. She does not interpret this quietness as normal Japanese 'cultural' behaviour but as connected with the British language classroom itself:

> The atmosphere of the classroom was tense. [...] As soon as the teacher went out, I felt the tense (hard) atmosphere drifting in the classroom suddenly changed dramatically to a mild and gentle one. (1996, p. 21, citing classroom observation notes).

Thus, normalcy returns when the teacher leaves; and when the lesson is over:

> After the class, these quiet Japanese became *normal* students with whom I had been very familiar in Japan; lively, friendly and, of course, quite talkative! Some of them asked me which course I was taking and what kind of research I was doing without any hesitation. I asked [...] why they were quiet in the classroom. One student answered that 'there are some *invisible walls* around me which prevent me from speaking in the class' [... In another class] the Japanese students, all of who were newcomers, looked uncomfortable because of their own silence. One in particular looked very tense and uncomfortable. (Hayagoshi, 1996, p. 21)

The notion presented here, that silence might be precipitated by something within the classroom itself is also suggested by Aoki and Smith (1996). It is also to an extent supported by this personal account by a Japanese teacher on a British summer course:

> Our class consisted of about 10 Japanese students including me. We never had the normal formal class style as in Japan. Especially, she [the tutor] hardly had lessons in the classroom. She loved to go outside. We often had lessons on the grass under the shining sun. Sometimes, we went to McDonalds near the school and talked in English. She also took us to the disco and cafe-bar at night. [...] I almost forgot that I was taking lessons. [...] When I was taking lessons in Japan, I always felt uneasy. [...] I found myself speaking English unconsciously. (Murphy, Ito & Kiyotani, 1992, p. 15)

A further contribution to this increasingly puzzling discussion is from British general education, connected with the debate on whether whole class teaching should be brought back to British schools to rectify the (argued) ineffectiveness of liberal activity-based methodology – perhaps taking ideas from the Far East. According to this account, in the Japanese high school:

> A lesson is a joint venture. All pupils participate and, under guidance of the teacher, pupils aid each other to learn. [...] Are the most able and least able disadvantaged in these schools? No, not in lessons in which there is time to think, in which clear explanation, discussion and reflection play a major role, lessons in which understanding is the aim. A poster in a Japanese fourth grade classroom reads 'A classroom is a place to make mistakes. Let's raise our hands freely and make mistakes in our answers and ideas. ... Let's create a classroom where, if we make mistakes ... someone will teach us' [...] The style of whole class

> teaching on the Continent and the Pacific rim enhances individual pupil autonomy rather than producing automatons. (Harris, 1996, p. 81-82, citing Lewis)

This picture of an exciting, rich classroom enterprise, jointly constructed by teacher and students, is very different from the standard view of Japanese students unable to express themselves in restrictively formal teacher-centred classrooms.

Kubota (1999) takes a stronger line and directly attacks what I have called the standard view. In her abstract she states:

> In these arguments, authors tend to create a cultural dichotomy between East and West, constructing, fixed, apolitical, and essentialized cultural representation such as groupism, harmony, and deemphasis on critical thinking and self-expression to depict Japanese culture. This article takes Japanese culture as an example and attempts to critique these taken-for-granted cultural labels. The article argues [...] that the essentialized cultural labels found in the applied linguistics literature parallel the constructed Other in colonial discourse. (1999, p. 9)[4]

This relatively new thinking corresponds with the notion that there is a deep *culturism* in TESOL and applied linguistics, similarly constructed to sexism and racism, where individuals are packaged and reduced – otherized – according to prescribed national cultural stereotypes (Holliday, 1999). Even apparently neutral labels such as 'ESL' may:

> sanction an ethnocentric stance. At the very least, it can lead us to stigmatise, to generalize, and to make inaccurate predictions about what students are likely to do as a result of their language or cultural background. (Spack, 1997, p. 765)

There is a also critical movement away from national cultural reduction in some schools of Japanology, where it is argued that '"Japan" or the "Japanese" are a "social imaginary" constructed through discursive activities' (Sakamoto, 1996, p. 113, citing Harutoonian & Sakai). There are also new critiques of similarly contrasted discourses about other groups of students from the pacific rim. Littlewood, for example, uses a survey of 2,307 students in eight East Asian countries to support the point that 'our preconceptions' of Asian students 'do not reflect what they really want', and that 'there is actually less difference in attitudes to learning between

Asian and European countries than between individuals within each country' (2000, p. 31).

I did therefore have a strong agenda in carrying out the study – to follow a hunch that this fragment of video data contained some evidence to support the non-standard view, but also sufficient evidence to suggest, for further discussion, a possible explanation for why Japanese students often *appear* reticent, silent, lacking in autonomy and so on in certain classroom settings. My aim here, therefore, is to take the standard view of Japanese silence in British classrooms as a 'text', against which the video data seems to present an alternative vision which is anomalous.

Research procedure

I began the study by taking my own observation notes of what I saw on the video. The video was itself divided into ten sequences, which comprised seven lesson extracts, playground assembly scene (sequence 4), a library scene (sequence 7), and a second playground scene (sequence 9). A summary of these sequences is in the Appendix. The lesson extracts are on average fifteen minutes in duration, each with a different Japanese teacher, some with an expatriate team teacher, all with different class groups, the others shorter. The observations were of behaviour rather than verbatim transcript because what seemed significant was in the former. By 'significant' I mean that which *emerged* within the spirit of ethnographic interpretation. What was said within the lesson 'transaction' was a very small part of what constituted the culture of each event. I use Widdowson's (1987) definition of 'transaction' as what passes between the participants according to the pedagogic plan of the lesson.

To create a degree of triangulation, I then showed my observation notes for comment to three separate parties who were then interviewed – (1) the British teacher who made the video, (2) two Japanese English teachers, and (3) a group of six British teachers who had taught in Japan. (2-3) were interviewed in groups[5] (See Appendix). The interview data comprises my observations noted down during the interview and written up later. It seemed unnecessary to record and transcribe the interviews verbatim as the actual words of the interviewees are not a subject of investigation. The two Japanese teachers were given the notes taken during their interview to comment on, which they did by email. In the Appendix the interview is marked as 2a and the email comment as 2b. The whole interview strategy was opportunistic, making use of the available people who would have a

relevant view. Group (2) were also invited to watch the video, but did not have time to do so. It would have been logistically too difficult to show group (3) the video. Nevertheless, this was not a problem because I wished to place my initial findings against the general perceptions of groups (2-3) which went beyond the video itself. I limited my choice of teachers to those who were familiar with research and the research discourse of interviews. Within these criteria only two Japanese teachers were available at the time.

My decision to interview only research initiates was due to a suspicion that the controversy underlying the conflict between the standard and non-standard views of the Japanese issue would create undue distortion. I felt that research initiates, who have spent time assessing different views and considering the role of research in such controversies, might be more likely to put this controversy in perspective and be less likely to 'take sides'.

It is important to note that this research procedure is unfinished and detached. It is unfinished in the same way as all qualitative research in which more data can always be collected. I could have interviewed more Japanese teachers in successive cohorts of masters students and contacted other Japanese teachers with whom I am in email contact. I stopped where I did because the moment of intense pre-occupation with the data had passed and because I had reached a point at which an interesting interpretation had been achieved. It is now for those who read this paper to continue the discussion, perhaps to enable me to revisit the issues in the future. The procedure is detached in that the data cannot tell us anything about the realities of the actual teachers, student groups and schools represented on the video. The video fragments must be seen as chance artefacts of a broader educational culture – much as archaeologists use fragments of pottery to catch glimpses of a broader unseen culture. For this reason it is not necessary to seek permission from the people in the video, because it is not their own teaching and learning, as part of their own biographies, which is being scrutinized. There is no reference in this paper to the particular schools; and none of the teachers or students are named. Indeed, this researcher does not know of the location of the schools or of the identity of any of the participants. As the video extracts are not included with this paper, anonymity is total.

Analysis

In this main section of the paper I shall look at my overall impressions. I followed the standard qualitative research procedure of taking the

observations of video data and interviews with teachers holistically as one corpus, as indeed both together served to build up the overall picture I wished to present (e.g. Holliday, 2002, p. 103-104). Along with the principle of bracketing discussed earlier, this is an important discipline to ensure that as much as possible will emerge from the data rather than being influenced by prior knowledge. Although it may be argued that the different sources of data might represent different viewpoints and should be dealt with separately (e.g. Japanese and British teachers), within a holistic approach these differences are allowed to emerge where they are significant – i.e. discovered rather than prescribed. I therefore present the data under four emergent thematic headings *formality*, *informality*, *personal talk*, and *duality*, which are emergent in the sense that they provide a useful means for organising and interpreting the data after the event. I shall refer to data by its type and number as listed in the Appendix.

Formality

The *Collins English Dictionary* defines 'formal' as 'following established or prescribed forms, conventions' and 'characterized by observation of conventional forms of ceremony, behaviour, dress'. This is clearly an extremely interpretable term: in some contexts, noisy classrooms in which students stand on desks might be the 'established or prescribed form' and therefore formal. However, if 'established' is taken as 'traditional', which, in what seems to be an internationally accepted notion of education, implies older forms in which quiet classrooms with ('traditionally') authoritative teachers 'transmitting' ('established') knowledge, much of the way in which the lessons in the video are conducted might be construed as formal. The lessons comprise mainly repetition, which takes a variety of forms – choral, individual, and with teachers and students taking parts. For example, in one lesson the teacher 'announces page number and asks the students to read after him. Choral work as they repeat terms related to pollution etc.' (video sequence 1). In another, where there is an expatriate team teacher:

> Two students are standing at the front and to the side of the expatriate teacher. The Japanese teacher and the expatriate teacher read out the dialogue; all students, including the two standing at the front, repeat in chorus after each. The two teachers read along with the choral repetition. [... later] The expatriate teacher speaks out phrases and the class and the Japanese teacher repeat. [...] Each item is said once, repeated once, said again and repeated again. Later, the Japanese

> teacher asks individual students to stand and read out all the items. (video sequence 8)

Where expatriate teachers team with the Japanese teachers, they thus appear to play the role of providing native speaker example and monitoring within this repetition model.

Other activities involve students and teachers writing and explaining words on the blackboard, and students working individually in exercise books. The teacher position is always standing, with apparently no place to sit, mainly at the front, but sometimes monitoring work from other parts of the class. The medium of instruction is generally Japanese, with varying degrees of Japanese teachers using English. The lessons can also be said to be formal in the sense that students stand when answering questions and reading aloud and show respect to the teacher, and stand at the beginning and ends of lessons. The setting of the schools appear formal in the sense of severe, rectangular grounds and building and classroom arrangement:

> School playground. Large quadrangle with a very high tennis-court-like fence. [...] The school rises up behind the playground in four concrete stories – harsh in appearance, looking like an office block. The walls are undistinguished yellow'. (video sequence 4)
> Large echoey room with seats and desks in rows, one student per desk. (video sequence 1)

In the school assembly there is further evidence of formality:

> All the students in neat lines. Small group in front. One Japanese teacher [...] walking between lines. All face a pale blue platform structure. [...] Then the students space themselves with hands on shoulders in front. Loudspeaker voice is shouting instructions. Students bow to the voice briefly. Camera moves to platform. Single figure on platform speaking. Formally dressed man speaking into microphone. Makes a speech. Some students have heads bowed and look down. (video sequence 4)

There is nothing however unusual, or particularly Japanese in this type of formality, which can be found in many schools in many places. Even if one hypothesizes successfully that the similarity of the two school buildings (video sequences 4 and 9), and the three classrooms (video sequences 1-3, 5-6, 8, 10) represents a tendency toward a centralized educational system,

this is not an uncommon tendency[6]. Also, there seems little evidence of the type of formality described by LoCastro (op. cit.). Although the lessons in the video are clearly teacher-centred, though not always teacher-fronted, and the students stand when nominated to speak, and do not initiate formal response, there is no bowing in the actual lessons, and more than a few students take part in reading aloud and repetition. Appearances can also be deceptive. While the students in all sequences seemed very formally dressed, the Japanese teachers interviewed stated:

> The students in the video wear very smart uniforms probably because it is a private school. In other schools, as in Britain, students can be very creative with their uniform dress in an attempt to minimize it. (interview 2a)[7]

Informality

However, what seems significant about the video sequences is not the formality, but the way in which this formality contrasts with an equally evident informality in other aspects of school and classroom life depicted in the same sequences. The most marked example of informality in the lessons is the degree to which students talk, not as part of the formal lesson transaction, but as part of the interaction. I use Widdowson's (1987) definition of 'interaction' as the social, non-pedagogic aspect of what happens in the classroom. For example:

> Japanese teacher reading aloud while writing on blackboard. Students copying. Blackboard work very neat and clear. Suddenly students burst into talk as Japanese teacher explains when the exams will be and when they can not come to school. Needs to raise his voice over their apparent excitement. (video sequence 1)
> Students are coming to the front of the class to collect something from the teacher's desk. There is considerable noise and talking. Someone in the background seems to be banging on a desk; several students seem to be shouting. The expatriate teacher is smiling and pointing at something on the teacher's desk as a student picks it up. (video sequence 8)

There is however no evidence that this talk causes disruption to the lessons. Indeed, this talkative interaction seems to support work in some cases, and to contribute to the rhythm of the lesson:

> [Japanese teacher] walks down aisle while students do work connected with blackboard. Some students talking quietly to each other. They work with their exercise books. General atmosphere of studious work. (video sequence 3)
> The Japanese teacher walks around at the back monitoring while the students work. Those writing seek comment from their peers. General talkative working environment. Some uneasy laughing in embarrassment. Japanese teacher then reads out from the blackboard – what they have written. He asks person near the camera if one is the right answer. She replies "I think it's strange". This causes mirth. [...] Student near camera leans back to speak to friend. One girl student arranging hair. Several students talk to peers while Japanese teacher explains. This does not seem to be a problem. Student who has been "talking" is also clearly getting on with work. Japanese teacher briefly disciplines a talking student, quietly and firmly with just a few words, and continues to work. (video sequence 3)

The last sentence here is reminiscent of cases in Egyptian university classrooms where students' informal talk does not seem to inhibit them from listening to the teacher at the same time, within the context of a broader society where watching, listening and talking can inhabit the same time and space without problem (Holliday, 1994, p. 38, 1996, p. 93). In some cases, when students have to perform individually, they seem to be supported by the social talk:

> Two students standing at front facing each other, speaking aloud, heads down. [...] Then one students turns to class for help, still with head down. Students support in Japanese. [...] Later, bright, smiling male student standing at back and speaking in Japanese – laughs and gets support from other students. (video sequence 5)
> There is a loud cheer and some clapping when one boy is selected to stand and read aloud. Some students turn around to watch him (at the back). [...] Other students clearly laughing at the way he reads – but he continues to smile – seems good humoured banter. (video sequence 6)

Students 'walk by camera, laughing, smiling and waving' at the end of the school assembly (video sequence 4), are seen 'standing behind desks talking' and 'laughing' before the beginning of a lesson (video sequence 5), and 'stand and talk loudly' at the end of a lesson so that 'the Japanese teacher shouts over the rush to leave' (video sequence 10). This would not normally seem significant if it were not for the standard view, described

earlier in this paper, of Japanese being silent. Another sign of informality is the casual dress of several of the Japanese teachers (Appendix). According to the Japanese teachers interviewed:

> Teachers [...] can dress informally, even in training clothes and sandals. Teachers' dress is not something with which colleagues can interfere. The lower the status of the teacher, the more she or he might feel the need to dress formally. (interview 2a)

Although, this 'very much depends on the person' with 'an unspoken rule' upon which 'other colleagues don't judge you' (interview 2b), one of the teachers also stated that dress perhaps did not have 'anything to do with their social status' but 'personal taste' (interview 2b)[8].

Personal talk

The interview with the two Japanese teachers threw considerable light on the incidence of talk. They refer to it as 'personal talking' and explain that it is a means whereby the students cope with the pressures of the lesson. My interview notes read:

> In the classroom, when students answer questions they are put under a 'spotlight'. They are 'nominated' by the teacher; and the exchange takes on the form of a 'performance'. The rest of the class play the role of 'supporting' the student. [...] In the social interaction sphere there is a 'negotiation' going on in which all participants feel that they have a 'responsibility' to preserve a 'happy' atmosphere. 'Personal talking' plays an important role here. (interview 2a)[9]

The two teachers emphasized that this negotiation is complex (interview 2b) and that the sense of responsibility is often tacit (interview 2b). They also distinguish between the social interaction part of the classroom interaction, where the negotiation and personal talk take place, from the pedagogic transaction. (I impose Widdowson's terms here, though this distinction was clearly made by the interviewees using other words, and unelicited.) They explain how the social relationships in the classroom contribute to this negotiation and personal talk: 'There are many "friendship groups" in the classroom in which different students may play the role sometimes of "baby" and sometimes of "sister"' (interview 2a).

Other research has drawn attention to the importance of social interaction in the classroom. Shamim (1996) discusses the significance of where students sit in Pakistani secondary school classrooms; Mebo (1995) discusses how students help each other to find seats in large classes in Kenyan Universities. It is suggested that only by capitalizing on this interaction can the pedagogic transaction be culturally successful (Collier, 1997; Holliday, 1994, 1996; Coleman, 1996). The two Japanese teachers interviewed in this study (interview 2a) go further and explain how students use this social interaction to *support* the pedagogy[10]. This supportive role of talk is contrasted with the opposite role of silence: 'Silence signals "rising tension". As this tension escalates, the distance between the teacher and students can increase. Japanese people are not comfortable being silent' (interview 2a). The issue here is complex. It seemed sensible, because of the existence of the standard view that Japanese students are silent, to ask the Japanese teachers how far they and their colleagues found the personal talk of students disruptive to their lessons and a matter of poor discipline. It became evident that the issue of personal talk invokes a sophisticated classroom management issue. On the one hand there is the view that personal talking, though a social reality, is really not allowed. Thus, 'teachers are not very happy with personal talking' (interview 2b), and 'some "transmission" teachers do not want personal talk in their classes' (interview 2a). When asked if these teachers were older or more 'traditional', they stated that 'this is more a matter of their personality rather than tradition or age' (interview 2a).

On the other hand, there seemed to be an acknowledgement that personal talk is a social fact which has to be acknowledged as having social value:

> But sometimes some teachers think they have to accept [... personal talk] to some extent if it is concerning the topic going on. Sometimes that relaxed atmosphere helps students feel free to talk in the classroom. (interview 2b)

Personal talk therefore becomes a factor, desirable or not, which teachers need to address. Thus, 'a good teacher can manipulate this balance of silence and talk which then comes under the heading of "discipline"' (interview 2a). Where this is done successfully, in '"good" classes (where classroom management is successful)' personal talk can be constructive in creating a 'happy atmosphere' for which students take some 'responsibility' (interview 2b). However, where the reality of personal talk is not successfully manipulated:

> Sometimes it works the other way round. In those classes there is the atmosphere that doesn't allow them to talk even if they want. That's difficult to describe but it's different from disciplined or well-behaved. Something negative. Just like they watch each other and they kill their positiveness [with] each other. (sic, interview 2b)

Duality

The major outcome of the interview with British teachers was that the juxtaposition of noisy talkativeness and formality in the video sequences represents a strong duality between formality and informality in Japanese society (interview 3). This notion of duality struck a chord with their own experiences – that once this formal barrier is crossed, there is a relaxing informality in Japanese society (interview 3). This corresponds with much of the literature which describes the formal code for behaviour which surrounds the concept of *tatemae,* or face behaviour, in contrast with *honne,* or informal, real self. This duality between formality and informality is not of course restricted to Japanese society. It underlies the distinction between *formal* and *informal orders* in Egypt made by Holliday (1992, 1994, p. 129, 142) citing Swales' experience in Sudan and Coleman's in Indonesia – in which formal statements about the state and workings of the institution did not correspond with the informal reality. Although possibly precipitated by the strain of meeting government directives in under-resourced situations, a formal-informal duality, where people say and pretend one thing and do another, may well be a feature of all societies, seen in different forms and intensities in different places.

A sense of duality indeed runs all the way through the issues presented in this paper. Within the 'Japanese issue', there is the duality between the standard and non-standard views. This is not, as one might expect, a difference of perceptions between insider Japanese and outsider non-Japanese practitioners and theorists, for both exist on both sides. In my two Japanese informants' analysis of personal talk (above), there is a degree of ambivalence concerning whether or not personal talk in the classroom is 'allowed', and perhaps how far it actually happens. It is not therefore surprising that after a seminar presentation of the ideas in this paper, one of the British participants approached me afterwards to say that it could not be the case that Japanese students are noisy in the classroom because a Japanese informant in his own class had told him that Japanese students never talk in the classroom. Regardless of the background to this informant's comments, I would hypothesise that what was being expressed

was a formal view of the classroom which would not recognize student personal talk. This may also be the reason why at the beginning of interview 2a, the two Japanese teachers stated that my 'observation notes seem "surrealistic" – mentioning things a Japanese person might not'. I feel that seeing this complexity, which contributes to the conflict between the standard and non-standard views of the 'Japanese issue', confirms my strategy, described earlier, in choosing only research initiates as interview subjects.

Emerging arguments

The outcome of research of this size with this degree of speculation can only produce arguments which might make us further question areas of problematic practice. In this case, the *problem* is that Japanese students often *appear* quiet in English language classes. There are however broader implications. In the final part of this paper I shall therefore present two arguments arising from this study concerning: the behaviour of Japanese students in English language classes in Britain; and the way in which the culture of the classroom interacts with other cultural influences which the students bring with them.

Japanese student behaviour in British language classes

Although the discussion so far has also concerned English teaching in Japan, I shall relate the outcomes of the study to what might be happening with Japanese students in the British language classroom. As I have suggested, the standard view is that Japanese students are quiet in English classes as a direct consequence of the national culture of the Japanese, of which quietness is a central feature. The data and subsequent discussions in this study show something different – that Japanese students can be far from quiet, at least in Japanese classrooms. This supports Hayagoshi's suggestion (op. cit.) that Japanese student quietness in British classrooms is not normal Japanese behaviour, and indeed *anomalous*.

As a tentative explanation for this anomalous behaviour I suggest that:

a) the quietness of Japanese students in English classes in Britain is brought on by the strangeness (to them) of the way in which talk is constructed.
b) The video data shows students in Japanese classes talking a great deal in the *social interaction* part of the lesson, and much less so, in terms of individual contribution, in the *transaction* part of the lesson.

c) In contrast, in the British class they are expected to be quiet in the social interaction part – to be silent while the teacher is talking – and to talk only in the transaction part – when the teacher specifies, either as individual response or in organized group activities.
d) The proper place for talk in the British class is thus controlled by the teacher, and personal talk which is not authorized by the teacher is prohibited.
e) Therefore, unable to indulge in personal talk in the social interaction part of the British lesson, tension rises amongst Japanese students, and they subsequently become more silent and less able to engage in the talk which is required in the transaction part of the lesson.

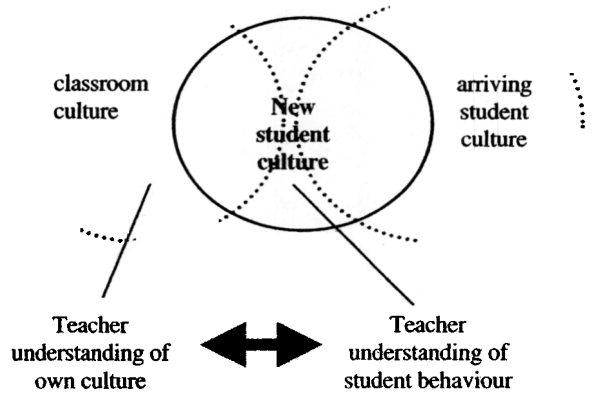
Cultural dynamics of the classroom

An implication of this explanation is that anomalous student behaviour is probably caused at least as much by the culture of the language classroom as by any cultural influences brought from outside. This may not seem surprising if one considers how the classroom culture is constructed among a mélange of teacher, student, institution and other cultures (Holliday, 1994, p. 29). However, I would like to suggest that the culture of the classroom presents a particularly significant influence that overrides other cultural influences because of the special way in which it prescribes behaviour. The British language class presents a powerful culture based on the highly technical discourse of ELT professionalism (Holliday, 1997a). As in with other technologized discourses, talk has a specific role. Fairclough notes that: 'conversationalization' as a marker of 'increased openness and democracy, in relations between professionals and clients for instance, and greater individualism' is increasingly technologized in 'organizations like the professions, social services and even the arts which are being drawn into commercial and consumerist modes of operation'. Hence, 'a central objective of the technologization of discourse is the achievement of a shift towards more conversationalized discursive practices as part of these broader organizational and cultural changes' (1995, p. 101). Hence, the way in which talk is constructed in the British language classroom is not simply British 'values' of individual, 'democratic self-expression' represented innocently in the classroom. It is rather a highly institutionalized form of professionalized practice.

When Japanese students encounter this powerfully technologized classroom culture, they need to form a new culture with which to deal with what they encounter. Figure 1 illustrates that the make-up of this new

student culture will be as much a reaction to the classroom culture as a derivation from the arriving student culture. This new culture is in effect a 'middle culture', set at the interface of cultural encounter, through which cultural dealing can take place (see Holliday & Hoose, 1996)[11].

Figure 1: Understanding student culture



This model of cultural interaction may be simplistic; but it draws attention to an important issue concerning how British language teachers might read the behaviour of their Japanese students, and indeed their other students – in cultural terms:

1. The cultural make-up of students is likely to be a product of the *interface* between the specific classroom culture and whatever culture the student brings to it, rather than a clear window onto the culture of the students before they arrive.
2. Hence, to understand their students, the teacher needs also to deconstruct the culture of her or his own classroom régime with which they have to deal (Figure 1).

Conclusion: The complexity of cultural interaction

An underlying theme of this paper is the complexity of cultural interaction. What we observe in others may be as much to do with what they encounter in us as with where they come from. This principle can be related to a wide variety of professional and personal encounters. As

teachers, researchers, evaluators or innovators, we project powerful technical cultures on the lives of those with whom we deal[12]. We need to understand the impact of these technical cultures if we are to understand and work with the people with whom we interact professionally. In many ways, this research is not so much an instance of Japanese student behaviour as an illumination of the impact of a certain type of TESOL professionalism. Perhaps it is this which we need to investigate more in the future – not in terms of the efficiency of its techniques and methodologies – because these efficiencies are themselves locked inside its dominant discourse – but by standing outside the discourse and seeing classroom practice as a sociological phenomenon.

It is therefore the research approach which is also significant. I hope that I have demonstrated that a qualitative approach, looking at social behaviour rather than, as is so often the case, classroom talk, enables the researcher to 'see' the classroom and its inhabitants in such a way as to unravel the issues of culture. The traditional study of classroom activities in terms of their talk, focusing on the pedagogic transaction, looks from inside the professional discourse, and will not uncover the broader social issues that characterise the culture of the classroom and its relations of power. The discipline of bracketing is significant here in that it makes the researcher try hard to disregard issues which have been dominant in her own professionalism and to see situations as they speak to her in their own terms.

Notes

[1] I am aware that the features of British adult education language classrooms have much in common with others in North America and Australasia, referred to as BANA in Holliday (1994) and those following this model in other parts of the world. In this paper, however, I prefer not to embark on a discussion of this commonality and focus on a 'British' model.

[2] I should like to thank Mark Hebblethwaite, who made the video, for allowing me to use it and for providing invaluable background information.

[3] I do not intend in this paper to give any value to, nor to look in any detail at, the issue of 'communicative language teaching', but to treat it simply as an artefact of the language teaching profession around which the discussion of Japanese students revolves.

[4] Of course this cultural reduction is not all one way. Many people, e.g. the Japanese, also make much of self-constructed images of themselves as culturally 'other',

sometimes to support cultural and national opposition to the West (Kubota, 1999, p. 9), or as a marketable image in international trade (Moeran, 1996).

[5] There is one specific area which this study does not address – the perceptions of Japanese students themselves. This is indeed beyond the scope of this very small scale study which does not allow investigation into every aspect of a social setting. (In this case I had no access to the student body.) On the other hand, it is for other researchers to follow this up by investigating the worlds of students. Hayagoshi's (1996) MA dissertation, cited in this paper, which involves interviews with Japanese students about what happens in their classes might be a good model here.

[6] Sharpe (1992, 1995, p. 8) contrasts the centralized nature of French education, as depicted by the similarity of school buildings and classrooms throughout the land, individualised corporate nature of schools in the less centralised British system.

[7] What is quoted in interviews 2a and 3 is my own notes, as in the case of the video sequences.

[8] What is quoted in interview 2b are the words of the Japanese teachers sent by email.

[9] The interviewees' own words within my notes for interview 2a are reported in single inverted commas.

[10] There can however be other more complex types of relationships between interaction and transaction. Chick (1996) argues that choral response in South African secondary schools is derived from teachers and students colluding to create the *appearance* of learning – therefore apparently transaction but in reality interaction pretending to be transaction.

[11] Examples of middle cultures can be seen in new cultures which are set up by 'traditional' communities to deal with the confrontation with tourists (Holliday & Hoose, 1996).

[12] Application of this principle in the fields of evaluation and research can be found in Holliday (1995) and (1997b) respectively.

References

Aoki, N., & Smith, R.C. (1996). *Learner autonomy in cultural contexts: The case in Japan.* Paper presented at AILA, Jyväskylä, Finland.

Chick, J.K. (1996). Safe-talk: Collusion in apartheid education. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cogan, D.W. (1995). Should foreign teachers of English adapt their methods to Japanese patterns of learning and classroom interaction. *The Language Teacher, 19*(1), 36-38.

Coleman, H. (1996). Interpreting classroom behaviour in its cultural context. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Collier, M. (1979). *A film study in classrooms in Western Alaska.* Fairbanks: Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska.

Cortazzi, M. (1990). Cultural and educational expectations in the language classroom. In B. Harrison (Ed.), *ELT documents 132: Culture and the language classroom* (pp. 54-65). London: Modern English Publications and The British Council.

Denzin, N.K. (1994). The art and politics of interpretation. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 500-515). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: Papers in the critical study of language.* London: Addison Wesley Longman.

Geertz, C. (1993). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* London: Fontana.

Guber, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (1997). *The new language of qualitative research.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Harris, R. (1996). In defence of chalk. In D. Hayes (Ed.), *Debating education: Issues for the new millennium?* (pp. 78-82). Canterbury: Department of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University College.

Hayagoshi, H. (1996). *British teachers' perceptions of Japanese students in contrast with Japanese students' perceptions of their own needs and*

wants. Unpublished MA dissertation, Department of Language Studies, Canterbury Christ Church University College.

Holliday, A.R. (1992). Tissue rejection and informal orders in ELT projects: Collecting the right information. *Applied Linguistics, 13*(4), 403-424.

Holliday, A.R. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holliday, A.R. (1995, March 26-28). Evaluation as cultural negotiation. Second PRODESS Colloquium: *Evaluation in Planning and Managing Language Education Projects* (pp. 6-11). Manchester: The British Council.

Holliday, A.R. (1996). Large and small class cultures in Egyptian university classrooms: A cultural justification for curriculum change. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holliday, A.R. (1997a). The politics of participation in international English language education. *System, 25*(3).

Holliday, A.R. (1997b). Knowing what is ethical requires "local knowledge". *Power, ethics and validity: Issues in the relationship between researchers and researched*. Centre for Research in Language Education, Lancaster University.

Holliday, A.R. (1999). Small cultures. *Applied Linguistics, 20*(2), 237-264.

Holliday, A.R. (2002). *Doing and writing qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Holliday, A.R., & Hoose, J. (1996). *Middle ground: Collaborative research and recognition of researcher-researched subcultures*. Unpublished paper, Canterbury Christ Church College.

Janesick, V.J. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 209-219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kubota, R. (1999). Japanese culture constructed by discourses: Implications for applied linguistics research and ELT. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(1), 9-35.

Law, G. (1995). Ideologies of English language education in Japan. *JALT Journal, 17*(2).

Littlewood, W. (2000). Do Asian students really want to listen and obey? *ELT Journal, 54*(1), 31-35.

LoCastro, V. (1996). English language education in Japan. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mebo, P. (1995). *Class size and student behaviour: A comparison of strategies employed in different size classes by students studying communication skills in the Kenyan state university.* Unpublished PhD thesis, School of Education, University of Leeds.

Miller, S.M., Nelson, M.W., & Moore, M.T. (1998). Caught in the paradigm gap: Qualitative researchers' lived experience and the politics of epistemology. *American Educational Research Journal, 35*(3), 337-416.

Moeran, B. (1996). The Orient strikes back: Advertizing and imagining in Japan. *Theory, Culture and Society, 13*(3), 77-112.

Murphy, T., Ito, E., & Kiyotani, I. (1992). Listening to and learning from our students: Two Japanese students' impression of British summer school. *IATEFL Newsletter.*

Richards, T.J., & Richards, L. (1994). Using computers in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 445-462). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sakamoto, R. (1996). Japan, hybridity and the creation of colonialist discourse. *Theory, Culture and Society, 13*(3), 113-128.

Schutz, A. (1970). *On phenomenology and social relations.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shamim, F. (1996). In or out of the action zone: Location as a feature of interaction in large ESL classes in Pakistan. In K.M. Bailey & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Voices and viewpoints: Qualitative research in second language education.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sharpe, K. (1992). Educational homogeneity in French primary education: A double case study. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 13*(3), 329-348.

Sharpe, K. (1995). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of Catholicism: Ideological and institutional constraints on system change in English and French primary schooling.* European Conference on Educational Research, University of Bath.

Spack, R. (1997). The rhetorical construction of multilingual students. *TESOL Quarterly, 31*(4), 765-774.

Stapleton, P. (1995). The role of Confucianism in Japanese education. *The Language Teacher, 19*(4), 13-16.

Stenhouse, L. (1985a). The illuminative research tradition. In J. Ruddock & D. Hopkins (Eds.), *Research as a basis for teaching: Readings from the work of Lawrence Stenhouse* (pp. 31-32). Oxford: Heinemann.

Stenhouse, L. (1985b). The case-study tradition and how case studies apply to practice. In J. Ruddock & D. Hopkins (Eds.), *Research as a basis for teaching: Readings from the work of Lawrence Stenhouse* (pp. 52-55). Oxford: Heinemann.

White, R.V. (1992). Japanese management – myth or magic. *ELT Management 10. IATEFL Management Special Interest Group*, 2-3.

Widdowson, H.G. (1987). The roles of teacher and learner. *ELT Journal, 41*(2), 83-88.

Appendix: Summary of data

In all classroom sequences there are more than 40 students seated at individual desks in rows facing the blackboard – in a rectangular room with windows down one wall. The Japanese teachers are casually dressed. Where there is team teaching with an expatriate teacher, the two stand side by side at the front unless the lesson requires otherwise. In the features column I summarize the videos and report the orientation of the interviews.

Data Type	Event Type	Features
Video sequence 1	Lesson with Japanese teacher	Japanese teacher teaches entirely in L2. Relaxed teaching manner. Students copying from background, quiet studied choral work, considerable student personal talk.
Video sequence 2	Lesson with Japanese and expatriate teacher	Expatriate teacher asks questions. Students stand to answer supported by personal talk.
Video sequence 3	Lesson with Japanese teacher	Japanese teacher uses mainly L1. Blackboard work copied into books. Talkative atmosphere, considerable personal talk.
Video sequence 4	School playground and assembly	Large quadrangle with high fence in front of school building. Rectangular formality. Very noisy student crowd organized into lines by teachers and loud speaker. Address from platform. Students disperse laughing, smiling and waving.
Video sequence 5	Lesson with Japanese and expatriate teacher	Questions and answers about visas and immigration. Two students act out a dialogue at the front. Considerable personal talk. Japanese teacher walks around looking at work while expatriate teacher at front.
Video sequence 6	Lesson with Japanese teacher	Younger students with young Japanese teacher. Teacher reads phrases from book and class repeat chorally. Students stand to read

		aloud individually. Teacher uses L1. A lot of laughter.
Video sequence 7	School library	Librarian working at desk. Japanese teachers looking for a book. Talking in background.
Video sequence 8	Lesson with Japanese and expatriate teacher	Considerable noise and talking. Groups of students stand in different parts of the room to read out dialogue with choral repetition. Individual standing and reading. A lot of textbooks and dictionaries.
Video sequence 9	School playground	Rectangular school building with trees in front. Running track in front of the building with a single track-suited figure running.
Video sequence 10	Lesson with Japanese and expatriate teacher	Expatriate teacher writes on blackboard in L1 translation. All parties take turns in reading and repeating. Noisy end of lesson with students standing and talking.
Interview 1	British teacher who made the video	After scrutiny of video observation notes.
Interview 2a	(Group) two Japanese teachers	After scrutiny of video observation notes, followed by email comments from subjects.
Interview 2b	(Individually) two Japanese teachers	Email comments after scrutiny of notes from interview 2a.
Interview 3	(Group) five British teachers who worked in Japan	After scrutiny of video observation notes.

Commentary on Japanese Fragments: An Exploration in Cultural Perception and Duality – Making Art out of Fragments: An Accessible Vision?

Greta J. Gorsuch
Texas Tech University

Reading Adrian Holliday's "Japanese fragments: An exploration in cultural perception and duality", reminded me of Browning's poem, *My Last Duchess*, in which the poet enters the mind of a husband ruminating upon a painting of his wife. The sight of the painting makes the man assign many attributes and intentions to his wife, and in the process of doing so, he arrives at what seem to be coherent, compelling truths about her. His own vision makes the painting art. However, the painting which the husband sees is at best a fragment of her, a piece of canvas painted by a stranger. The vision of the man is much larger and more complex than the fragments it is based on, and his vision may not be easily accessible to others for reasons which are clear to people who are familiar with *My Last Duchess*. I think what Dr. Holliday does in his article is something like this: He sees fragments, and with his careful, subtle reasoning and writing makes art out of them. In this case, his art is a series of hypotheses concerning the behavior of Japanese students in TESOL classes in Britain. The problems I have accessing Dr. Holliday's vision, and thus accepting his hypotheses, are three: ambiguity concerning the real focus of the article, a lack of grounding for the data and the hypotheses, and methodological issues concerning the interpretation of the data.

What is this article about? Dr. Holliday's article does not seem to be about Japanese education, or even about the videotapes of Japanese schools that he highlights. Rather, the article seems to be about the formation of a "middle culture" in language classrooms which TESOL professionals ought to be aware of (Holliday, 2002, p. 20). TESOL teachers are adjured to "deconstruct the culture of her or his own classroom regime" (p. 20) in order to understand the contribution of their own classroom culture to this middle culture. Indeed, Dr. Holliday is careful to explain early on that his interpretations of the data are grounded not in Japanese education or society (p. 2), but in an "international TESOL society" and undefined forums for "discussions of Japanese national culture" (p. 2). Four out of the five hypotheses in the paper deal with British classrooms, not the videotapes taken in Japanese schools (p. 20). I wholeheartedly agree with this particular purpose: Educational cultures are fascinating, and teachers should know their own role in constructing them, and the ways in which they are influenced by

them. But I am puzzled as to why so much of the article is taken up in discussion of the Japanese videotape episodes and the research process used to investigate them: Why the tapes need not be "set against a broader experience of Japanese society" (p. 2), how "standard" and "non-standard" views of Japanese talkativeness and silence (p. 3) may be applied to unconnected and largely undescribed videotape episodes, how a research procedure which is "unfinished and detached" (p. 10) is sufficient to interpret "fragments" of data, and why it is not necessary for the researcher to know where and what the schools in the videotape are, nor who the students or teachers are (p. 10). The attention paid to the videotape episodes far exceeds what is needed to suggest hypotheses about the behavior of Japanese students in TESOL classes in Britain. The real purpose of the article seems to be promotion of one orientation towards qualitative research. That is, a view of qualitative research that appears to reject "positivist criteria of validity and reliability", refutability (a "core element of classical science") (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 28), and "a post-positivist, naturalistic paradigm" requiring "representative sampling" (Holliday, 2002, p. 3).

Grounding. Whether or not one wants to accept the investigation of the Japanese high school videotape episodes as a primary function of Dr. Holliday's article, I believe that grounding them in the context of Japanese educational culture would have uncovered a number of additional variables to consider. One would be the language the students are speaking. If in Japanese, then yes, it seems likely that young high school students, often assigned to classes numbering around 40 (Gorsuch, 1998, 1999) would talk amongst themselves, comment on a classmate's answer to a question (Anderson, 1993) or doodle, or daydream, or do whatever it is teenagers do, regardless of the kind of interaction (social or transactional) the class is engaged in. If in a foreign language, then no, any talk would likely be constrained, again, regardless of the classroom pedagogy or interaction. Japanese high school students are in a difficult place in their foreign language study as they participate in an educational system preparing them to take high stakes, form focused, discrete point college entrance exams for English (Gorsuch, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). When high school students produce foreign language utterances, both they, and their teachers, want no errors to be made. The instrumental desire for accuracy even penetrates the theorizing of teachers as to how foreign languages are most efficiently learned (Gorsuch, 1998). Perhaps this aspect of Japanese educational culture, more than anything, accounts for the hesitancy of Japanese students who are asked to speak a foreign language in domestic or overseas classes. TESOL instructors in Japanese high schools and universities spend a good deal of energy in

changing students' instrumental orientations about accuracy towards more fluent talking and writing (e.g., Helgesen, 1993; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1994; Wachs, 1993).

Another variable would be the topic the teacher was speaking on, and whether the students were interested. I observed one class where the Japanese teacher spoke in English, first giving background on the textbook selection for the lesson of that day (furious background chatter), then about the quiz they would have at the end of the lesson (chatter dying down quickly), and then at the end of the lesson about his sister's wedding, which had taken place the weekend before (complete attention with no chatter). Silence in this class may have been a function of attention, rather than tension. This points out the importance of knowing what is being said, rather than focusing solely on student behavior (Holliday, 2002, p. 10). A third variable would be the types of schools depicted in the videotape episodes. Some high schools in Japan are non-academic (26% in 1997) (Statistics Bureau, 1997) and more often than not are attended by youths who failed to get into better schools (DeCoker, 2002; Dore & Sako, 1998; James & Benjamin, 1988; Okano, 1993). Yet the national curricula for high schools remain the same for students of all ability levels (Dore & Sako, 1998; James & Benjamin, 1988). The students that Dr. Holliday observed in some of the episodes may have been chatting, or acting up, because they were responding to coursework that was too demanding and thus not engaging. Again, this may occur regardless of the type of interaction taking place. A fourth variable would be the type of course being observed. Japanese high schools traditionally offer a number of English courses, including intensive reading and oral communication skills (Kawakami, 1993; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1992), and optional English clubs and study sessions. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the pedagogy and interaction within these courses might vary, with the intensive reading classes representing the highly teacher centered interaction Dr. Holliday observed, and the oral communication skills courses or English clubs or study sessions representing the more social, less teacher centered interaction he reports. While two of his observations (one transactional and one social) take place within the same videotape episode, the others do not. There is no way to know whether, in these other episodes, he was seeing different aspects of the same course (which would support his argument of how "talk" is mutually constructed), or whether he was seeing two different courses (which would weaken his argument).

As noted above, most of Dr. Holliday's hypotheses have to do with student behavior in British TESOL classes. If Dr. Holliday wishes to claim

that a middle culture is formed between students' and teachers' expectations and backgrounds, this suggests that data on British TESOL classrooms should also be gathered, and grounded in a broad-based knowledge of these private language schools: Who attends them (ages, backgrounds, purposes), what courses and course levels are offered, and what pedagogies and interactions are likely to be present. Just writing this short list reminds me that I know very little about such schools. I assume that my lack of knowledge may prevent me from exploring all the relevant variables and seeking out alternative interpretations of my data (see any issue of *TESOL Quarterly* for qualitative research guidelines which comment on grounding data in specific contexts).

Methodology. I applaud Dr. Holliday's assertion that openness about research orientation, methodology, and procedures is necessary (p. 2). Others in educational research agree (e.g., Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is rare that an author devotes so much space and apparent thought to these issues as Dr. Holliday does. But his description of his research procedure and analyses lack precision at a number of critical points, which makes me question his interpretations and raises further questions about the confirmability of the research – the degree to which the reader can follow the sequences of how data were collected, processed, and displayed for drawing specific conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 277). The current description of the research, however extensive and open it appears, cannot inoculate the study against significant problems with confirmability, dependability (reliability), and credibility (validity).

First, it is not clear what is being identified in the videotape episodes. While Dr. Holliday states he focuses on student behavior (p. 10), it is not plain to see what behaviors he is making note of. Mention of "personal talk" and levels of noise are made, but these descriptions are not specific. It is not evident how the behaviors are being categorized. Dr. Holliday also states that four themes emerge from the data: formality, informality, personal talk, and duality (p. 11). These themes are defined but the examples used to illustrate them seem disjointed, and to this reader, seem to lack a clear correspondence to the general descriptions of student behaviors. Further, there is ambiguity as to how these themes are being applied to the observations of student behavior. Are specific episodes of student behavior being held up to these categories? Which episodes? Why those episodes and not others? Or is the procedure more impressionistic? The lack of sufficiently clear categories (a credibility

issue) would make it impossible to check the dependability of Dr. Holliday's categorizations through peer review (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 277).

Second, it is not readily apparent how Dr. Holliday is related to his Japanese and British informants. He describes his choice of informants as motivated by their standing as "research initiates", who could avoid taking sides in the controversy over silent Japanese students (p. 10). How did Dr. Holliday judge whether the informants were research initiates, and how did he know they would "have spent time assessing different views and considering the role of research in such controversies" (p. 10)? Are the informants his students? Or do they have another relationship with him? Is he in a position of power over them, whether real, or emotional? Interviews may be more reflective of the social relationship between interviewer and informant, than they are of any personal reality the informant may try to express (Block, 2000, p. 760). This speaks to concerns over the dependability of the informants' comments on Dr. Holliday's conclusions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Third, apart from the teacher who took the videos, none of the Japanese or British teachers who were interviewed saw the videos. They cannot have had an opportunity, therefore, to see for themselves the behaviors Dr. Holliday is concerned with, nor could they match Dr. Holliday's interpretations to these behaviors or events. This also means that they may not have been able to offer Dr. Holliday rival explanations against which his interpretations could be refuted and tested (a credibility issue). Dr. Holliday asserts that it was not a problem for the informants not to see the video episodes because his perceptions "went beyond the video itself" (p. 10). I ask then, where did his perceptions come from to begin with, if not from the videotape episodes? How can the informants be expected to comment on his perceptions, as responsible fellow researchers, without seeing the data which helped him form those perceptions? How can they evaluate his conclusions?

Fourth, it is not clear what transpired in the interviews with the teachers, beyond Dr. Holliday's comment that he showed the informants his observation notes. What were his notes comprised of? How were they displayed, and how long did each informant have to peruse them? What questions did he ask? Did he ask for rival explanations, or suggest one himself? What did the informants say that led Dr. Holliday to believe that his, and their, interpretations were convergent? Further, has Dr. Holliday taken into account the possible effects of interviewing the informants in groups? In other words, did each informant have equal input, and were their judgments independent (see Dushku, 2000 for comments on individual and group

interviews)? Finally, it is not apparent whether the informants considered Dr. Holliday's interpretations to be accurate. He states that the informants were sent his interview notes for checking, but does not offer information on whether they agreed with his conclusions, or offered alternative explanations. I note that Dr. Holliday reports that he essentially brushed off dissenting comments from one of the British informants after a seminar presentation of his ideas. While Dr. Holliday explained his reason for doing so, this made me wonder whether other informants' comments had been discounted, and what reasons Dr. Holliday may have had for doing so. I wonder also if any informants, particularly the Japanese ones, were asked to read and comment on the current article. Their commentary would surely have been relevant, and may have generated alternative interpretations of the data.

Conclusion

I was honored to be asked to read and respond to this article. Dr. Holliday is a writer of some stature in the TESOL field, and despite my misgivings described above, I find his hypotheses intriguing. But I would have found them intriguing without the *tatemae* (surface) discussion about the videotape episodes and the *honne* (deep) discussion of what amounts to Dr. Holliday's embracing of unacceptable subjectivity in research. And this discussion, without even appearing to aim for it, drives deep into considerations on what constitutes data, credible conclusions, and compelling research in TESOL and in education. Perhaps this is the true artistry of the article.

Thanks to Dale T. Griffee for his insight.

References

Anderson, F. (1993). The enigma of the college classroom. In P. Wadden (Ed.), *A handbook for teaching English at Japanese colleges and universities* (pp. 101-110). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anfara, V., Brown, K., & Mangione, T. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Eduational Researcher, 31*(7), 28-38.

Block, D. (2000). Problematizing interview data: Voices in the mind's machine? *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(4), 757-763.

DeCoker, G. (2002). Deregulating Japan's high school curriculum: The unintended consequences of educational reform. In G. DeCoker (Ed.), *National standards and school reform in Japan and the United States* (pp. 141-157). New York: Teacher's College Press.

Dore, R., & Sako, M. (1998). *How the Japanese learn to work* (2nd ed London: Routledge.

Dushku, S. (2000). Conducting individual and focus group interviews in research in Albania. *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(4), 763-768.

Gorsuch, G.J. (1998). *Yakudoku* EFL instruction in two Japanese high school classrooms: An exploratory study. *The JALT Journal, 20*(1), 6-32.

Gorsuch, G.J. (1999a). Exploring the relationship between educational policy and instruction in Japanese high school EFL classrooms. *UMI Dissertation Services*, 0225.

Gorsuch, G.J. (1999b). *Monbusho* approved textbooks in Japanese high school EFL classes: An aid or hindrance to educational policy innovations? *The Language Teacher, 23*(10), 5, 7, 8-9, 11-15.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Helgesen, M. (1993). Dismantling the wall of silence: The "English conversation" class. In P. Wadden (Ed.), *A handbook for teaching English at Japanese colleges and universities* (pp. 37-49). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holliday, A. (2002). Japanese fragments: An exploration in cultural perception and duality. *Asia Pacific Journal of Language in Education, 5*(1), 1-28.

James, E., & Benjamin, G. (1988). *Public policy and private education in Japan.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Kawakami, H. (1993). *Factors influencing English education in Japanese high schools: A survey of teacher perceptions.* Unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (1992). *The course of study for senior high school: Foreign languages (English)*. Tokyo: Author.

Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (1994). *Handbook for team-teaching*. Tokyo: Author.

Okano, K. (1993). *School to work transition in Japan*. Clevedon, U.K. Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Statistics Bureau (1997). *Japan statistical yearbook 1997*. Tokyo: Government and Coordination Agency, Government of Japan.

Wachs, S. (1993). Breaking the writing barrier: Approaches to the composition class. In P. Wadden (Ed.), *A handbook for teaching English at Japanese colleges and universities* (pp. 73-90). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Commentary on Japanese Fragments: An Exploration in Cultural Perception and Duality

Ryuko Kubota
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Adrian Holliday's article, "Japanese fragments: An exploration in cultural perception and duality" provides counter evidence and arguments against the dominant image that depicts Japanese students as reticent in classrooms. Video data of Japanese high school scenes and interviews with Japanese and British teachers with teaching experiences in Japan are analyzed according to four thematic foci – i.e., formality, informality, personal talk, and duality – which demystify the belief that Japanese students' silence and passivity in British ESL classrooms are a direct reflection of their cultural background.

Having worked as an EFL teacher in junior and senior high schools in Japan in the 1980s, many of the descriptions of Japanese students' behaviors in the video sound familiar to me. In fact, at one high school, it was so difficult to control students' "personal talk" and other defiant and disruptive behaviors that one would scarcely recognize the image of the "quiet and obedient Japanese student". This image completely contradicts Holliday's quote from Stapleton (1995) which refers to Confucian moral principles. While my experiences are merely anecdotal, Holliday's study provides empirical evidence that sheds light on how students actually participate in various activities inside a Japanese high school. Efforts to explore characteristics of teaching and learning in Japanese classrooms have recently been made by a number of US-based researchers who conducted observational studies in schools in Japan (see LeTendre, 1999). This body of literature concludes that contrary to the stereotype, teaching in Japan, particularly in elementary schools, promotes critical thinking and active inquiry among students, although such tendencies seem to diminish as students proceed to higher grade levels, perhaps due to the examination systems.

Holliday's exploration of the reason for Japanese students' silence in British classrooms rejects the simplistic and essentialist explanation of cultural difference and instead provides an explanation based on the observed complexity of interactions that take place in Japanese school settings. Yet his article manifests some of the predicaments of pursuing explanations for students' behaviors in cross-cultural contexts. My intent in this response is to raise some issues for future exploration.

One major difficulty has to do with seeking generalizations about students' expected behaviors in the three cultures represented as three circles in Figure 1 (p. 20): i.e., Japanese students' culture in Japanese classrooms, Japanese students' culture in British classrooms, and the culture expected in British classrooms. To take the center circle first; i.e., "new student culture" in British classrooms, Holliday's argument is built upon the assumption that Japanese students are generally quiet in British classrooms, contrary to the informal sociable behaviors observed in Japanese school settings. However, this assumption needs to be scrutinized. While the stereotype of the quiet Japanese student may indeed persist in the ELT community, it is important not to take this perception as fact but rather to investigate how Japanese students actually behave in various ways in ESL classrooms. One might ask the following questions: Are Japanese students always quiet, whether in a self-contained class (i.e., an ESL class just for Japanese students) or in a mixed class? Does Japanese students' reticence prevail across various learner factors, such as proficiency in English, age, gender, personality, attitudes, motivation, and educational background? Is the reticence influenced by other factors, such as students' relationship with their peers and teacher, the content or topic of learning, or class size? Are Japanese students quiet regardless of the teacher's gender, race, age, personality, teaching style, and other personal factors?

Many of the questions listed above suggest that reticence in second language classrooms may not be so much a cultural phenomenon as a general tendency that pervades second language learning regardless of the learner's cultural background. Research on language anxiety, for instance, has revealed that even English-speaking learners of foreign languages feel a great deal of anxiety in speaking in the target language in front of their peers (e.g., Loughrin-Sacco, 1992; Price, 1991; Young, 1990), which implies that being reticent in a second language classroom may not particularly be unique to Japanese students. Other factors that are related to perceived reticence among students include low English proficiency, fear of making mistakes or being laughed at, teachers' intolerance of silence, allocation of turns only to students who are capable of answering the teacher's question (thus making other students less willing to participate), and incomprehensible input (Tsui, 1996). Furthermore, a study by Littlewood (2000) comparing Asian and European learners of English in terms of their perceptions of teacher authority, found little evidence that Asian students show any greater tendency to listen to and obey the teacher than do other students.

In addition to the above learner and social factors that may influence students' behaviors, students' perceptions of their own behaviors need to be

uncovered. Learners engage in learning with specific agencies and identities. Thus, investigating their perceptions of why they behave the way they do provides insight into their perceived behaviors. Interviews with Asian international students in graduate programs in an American university conducted by Liu (2001) revealed that various factors positively or negatively affect students' perceptions of their own degree of oral participation in their content classes. Liu categorized these factors into the following five areas: cognitive (learning styles and strategies, etc.), pedagogical (educational experiences), affective (personality, motivation, attitudes, anxiety, etc.), sociocultural (cultural beliefs, values, and moral judgment), and linguistic (language ability and communicative competence). Although Liu's analysis emphasizes an essentialist view of cultural difference and is thus rather problematic, one can argue that discourses of cultural difference heavily influence the ways Asian students understand their own experiences.

It is also difficult to speculate about the reasons for Japanese students' reticence in British classrooms based on a generalization derived from only one set of data fragments. The data come from only one or a few high schools in Japan with unspecified information on the background of the students, teachers, school(s), and community. Although many observations parallel my past professional experiences, the video fragments and interviews only tap very specific social situations in Japanese schools. Holliday indeed acknowledges this and states that his intention is not to investigate Japanese classrooms or Japanese society per se but rather to arrive at thick description of a specific social location. However, the findings of his study generate a tentative explanation of Japanese behavior in British classrooms in general, which indicates that the author regards the findings as offering certain generalizability. Yet this study can only throw doubt on the assumption that Japanese students are silent in the classroom due to cultural expectations. To suggest any explanation of Japanese behavior in British classrooms seems to go far beyond what the data can offer. Alternatively, it would be meaningful to investigate the social behaviors of the same or similar groups of students in both Japanese and British contexts. Such an investigation would illuminate various factors that can affect oral participation of Japanese students at a micro level in cross-cultural settings.

Another assumption in Holliday's study is the existence of a certain characteristic of British classrooms. Although Holliday states that the way talk is constructed in British classrooms is not only a reflection of British cultural values such as individualism and democratic self-expression but an institutionalized form of practice, a certain expectation for student behaviors

in the British classroom is presupposed: i.e., students are not permitted to engage in "personal talk" but are encouraged to participate in formal information exchange for learning. This assumption, however, needs to be verified or scrutinized through future research.

Holliday's explanation of Japanese students' reticence using the model of the interface of cultural encounter (i.e., the new student culture positioned between the British classroom culture and the arriving student culture) is intriguing. However, the issues raised in this response suggest that future research is necessary to understand the three cultural groups in more depth. Furthermore, future research needs to avoid essentializing the characteristics of each group. As Holliday (1999) argues, focusing on "large cultures" tends to lead to homogenization and essentialization of a particular nation or ethnic group, whereas cultural reductionism and essentialism can be avoided by focusing on "small cultures" presented by various social groupings and specific activities within each grouping. Thus, rather than seeking homogeneous characteristics of Japanese students' culture or British classroom culture, exploring how a certain group of Japanese students encounters and negotiates a particular classroom culture in Britain would yield a non-essentialist and more situated understanding of cross-cultural experiences among Japanese learners, their peers, and their British teachers.

Persistent cultural stereotypes may be demystified not only by investigating Japanese students' behaviors but also by exploring how ELT and other discourses on cultural difference construct these essentialist views and how British teachers and Japanese students position themselves in these discourses. In other words, it would be worth investigating how the perception of the quiet Japanese student is constructed and reinforced in the discourses of teaching ESL or in the discourses of cultural difference in general and how teachers and students accept, negotiate, or resist these discourses.

Holliday's study uses unconventional data to challenge the stereotype that views the perceived reticence of Japanese students in English classrooms as simply the transfer of static and homogeneous cultural traits. It is necessary to continue the effort to demystify this widespread belief. As discussed in this response, investigating situated learner behaviors in specific social settings in relation to a wide range of factors and discourses would contribute to such an effort. Above all, it is necessary to further investigate and analyze a constellation of factors and discourses in non-essentialist ways.

References

Holliday, A. (1999). Small cultures. *Applied Linguistics, 20,* 237-264.

LeTendre, G.K. (1999). The problem of Japan: Qualitative studies and international educational comparisons. *Educational Researcher, 28*(2), 38-45.

Littlewood, W. (2000). Do Asian students really want to listen and obey? *ELT Journal, 54,* 31-36.

Liu, J. (2001). *Asian students' classroom communication patterns in U.S. universities.* Westport, CT: Ablex.

Loughrin-Sacco, S. (1992) More than meets the eye: An ethnography of an elementary French class. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 49,* 80-101.

Price, M. (1991). The subjective experience of foreign language anxiety: Interviews with highly anxious students. In E. Horwitz & D. Young (Eds.), *Language anxiety* (pp. 101-108). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Tsui, A.B.M (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning. In K.M. Bailey & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Voices from the language classroom* (pp. 145-167). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Young, D. (1990). An investigation of students' perspectives on anxiety and speaking. *Foreign Language Annals, 23,* 539-553.

Commentary on Japanese Fragments: An Exploration in Cultural Perception and Duality

Minoru Wada
Meikai University, Japan

I started to read this article with great interest. The phrase 'Japanese issue' made me grin. However, frankly speaking, I finished reading it with the impression that the conclusion he has reached is not so illuminating as I expected. The aim of this article is to address the 'Japanese issue' by applying critical discourse analysis. The way of analysis was so new for me that I started to read with great expectation. However, it seems to me that the (tentative) explanation and the new model he has proposed are 'clouded' by the professionalism he draws on in his analysis of the 'Japanese issue'.

What has motivated Holliday to write this article is the 'Japanese issue', which those British people who teach English to 'quiet' Japanese students confront in British language classrooms. Another motivation is the fact that there are completely conflicting views of the issue – the 'standard view' and the 'non-standard' view.

By the 'standard view' of the 'Japanese issue', Holliday means 'the more, established, dominant discourse about Japanese students with TESOL'. The view says that 'Japanese students fail to interact orally' in English language classes not only in Britain and Japan and 'this behaviour is connected with Japanese national culture and education system'. This implies that 'silent', 'passive' Japanese students are locked into a cultural state which makes them like this. He cites some examples of 'the standard view', most of which are opinions of the native speakers of English working in Japanese society. I do not like their opinions because they sound condescending to Japanese learners of English. Therefore, I share Holliday's doubt of 'the standard view', but, at the same time, I think there is some truth in their opinions. So it is not clear enough for me why he wants to 'bracket' the 'standard view'.

After bracketing 'the standard view', Holliday proceeds to discuss the alternative, non-standard discourse. He cites a few discourses which exemplify the 'non-standard view' of the 'Japanese issue'. What interests me about the citations is that they are all written by the younger generation who are actively doing academic research in Britain and other Western countries. This means that the writers of the citations are those who are successful in

acquiring 'non-problematic' behaviour required of Japanese students of English in Britain and other Western countries. They are 'talkative' enough to be able to challenge the 'stereotypical' 'standard' view of Japanese students. They are competent communicators of English who can write in English about such a sophisticated issue as 'the Japanese issue'. It seems to me that the 'non-standard view' as exemplified in the citations are also 'clouded' by their 'non- standard', successful experience in international TESOL society.

Another interesting thing about this short article is that Holliday uses so many pages in explaining his research orientation and research procedure. In his explanation about his research orientation he tries very hard to verify his qualitative research and in his research procedure he takes very cautious steps in his analysis of ten sequences of video-taped behaviour of Japanese High school students in their classes, in the library, in the playground assembly, and the playground scene. This research procedure is very unique and interesting to me, but I think ten sequences of video-tapes are still 'fragmentary', although he elaborates on effectiveness of his research orientation and research procedure.

After analyzing the ten video-taped behaviour of Japanese students, Holliday concludes that Japanese students are far from quiet in Japanese classrooms. This outcome of his analysis is analogous to the observations taken by the 'non-standard' views. On the basis of this conclusion, he proposes his (tentative) explanation: (1) 'students in Japanese classes talk a great deal in the social interaction part of the lesson, and much less so, in the transaction part of the lesson', and 'in contrast, in the British class students are expected to be quiet in social interaction part – to be silent while the teacher is talking – and to talk only in interaction part'. It seems that this conclusion is too dichotomous. Even in Japanese classrooms the teacher expects her or his students to be quiet while she or he is talking and to talk when she or he encourages response or to talk in group activities.

I wonder why he makes too sharp a contrast.

On the basis of his analysis of the video-taped behaviour of Japanese students in Japanese classrooms, he offers his hypothetical model of 'a new culture which Japanese students need to form when they deal with the technologized classroom culture in Britain'. Then he proposes that 'to understand her or his Japanese students, the British teacher needs to deconstruct the culture of her or his own classroom regime with which they have to deal with'. By 'the culture of her or his own classroom' he means the

highly technologized discourse of EFL professionalism. This is a good piece of advice to those people who teach English to 'quiet', 'passive' Japanese students, but it does not constitute any practical answers to 'the Japanese issue' itself, which I expected when I started to read this article. It seems to me that the reason Japanese students in British language classrooms are 'quiet' is quite simple: they are not competent enough in their use of English to express their opinions and feelings in the English language classes. With progress in their English language ability, I am sure, they will become 'talkative' in their English language classes. I expected to find a clue to make a breakthrough into 'the Japanese issue', but Holliday does not give any practical answers, although he proposes a new model of 'new student culture' which Japanese students need to form when they encounter the 'technologized' classroom culture in English language classes in Britain.

Response to the Commentaries on Japanese Fragments: An Exploration in Cultural Perception and Duality

Adrian Holliday
Department of Language Studies
Canterbury Christ Church University College

The points made by the three commentators on my article, "Japanese fragments", fall into two main categories: those which appreciate that the article presents important issues for further discussion and research, and those which question the degree to which the claims I make are valid. As the first is more positive, I shall deal with this first.

I agree absolutely with Kubota's comment that there are dangers in the way in which I characterize the interaction of new and old cultures within the British classroom. If I am talking about something cultural which the students bring with them, am I not falling into the trap of once again essentializing some sort of Japaneseness by suggesting that the way in which the Japanese students respond to the strange regime of the British classroom might in fact be Japanese? This is certainly a conundrum with which I continue to struggle. I feel that culture is something fluid and uncountable which springs up, as it were, whenever there is a group of people (I suppose two or more) who are engaging in cohesive behaviour. In my 'small cultures' article, which Kubota cites, I say that in the process of this 'culture formation' there is a drawing on a multiplicity of residues from one's own society and elsewhere. Modern societies are constructed in such a way, some more than others, in terms of institutions, the media, education, political forces and so on, that people from one will inevitably share more of a cultural nature with each other than with others. There may therefore be subtly different kinds of cultural resources for a Japanese person to draw from than for a British person to draw from, meaning that the way in which a British person will respond to the regime of the classroom may be different to the way in which a Japanese person will respond - perhaps. But I think that this is far from the essentialist picture which binds us to regional cultures. For both Japanese and British people the variety of cultural resources will be immense, and we may well all respond culturally in different ways. I agree with Kubota that this needs to be investigated further as does the cultural nature of the British TESOL classroom.

Taking the issue of the validity of the claims in my article, my main defence is that I am not claiming to do the things which both Wada and

Gorsuch say that I am not doing. Gorsuch does seem to realize this but does not really seem to understand why I am not doing the things I do not intend to be doing. I like her reference to the painter and the picture where the art creates 'truths' which are far in excess of the fragments of data at his disposal. I feel that both Wada and Gorsuch are operating in a post-positivist paradigm which expects that qualitative research will produce objective knowledge about social settings of certain types based upon extensive and exhaustive investigation and experience. I strongly reject this view, as I think many other more critical researchers now also do. If I had spent 20 years in Japan arduously collecting data about Japanese classrooms all the time, I would still not be able to do what they expect – because the researcher, because of the intense subjectivity of her position as an ideological actor within the research setting, or her imagination of the setting, will always invent pictures beyond the fragments at her disposal. There will always be a lack of grounding. Of course I may know more with more exposure; but do I have to keep quiet until I know more, when the little bit that I can see tells me that, even with this little bit, there is enough to suggest that a dominant view of Japanese language learners, as held by people like me, may be entirely wrong? I am very happy for people to see my study as very preliminary, unfinished and inconclusive, as long as it raises questions and makes them think again. I see this as being a basic aim of this type of qualitative research. I see my qualitative research as part of a quest to undo unjustified, culturist and perhaps even racist (to cite Kubota's recent work) ways of thinking about the foreign 'other'. All the things that Wada and Gorsuch suggest do indeed need to be considered and investigated further; and I see my article as contributing to the awareness that these things need further investigation.

There is a third issue raised by Gorsuch about the amount of detail I provide concerning my research procedure. Qualitative research needs to spell out a great deal about its procedures, especially as it cannot avoid subjectivity, and needs to show the workings of how this subjectivity is managed. My only excuse is that the number of words at my disposal were few. If I was writing a doctoral thesis, all the details would need to be there. In an article of this length there is not the space.