

# Emotional and Psychological Aspect of Cross-Cultural Communication with the Japanese<sup>1</sup>

Natalya V. Razdorskaya

MGIMO UNIVERSITY

**Abstract.** This article is devoted to the problem of developing communicative competencies to create an emotional atmosphere of communication with Japanese people based on an understanding of mentality and socio-psychological intelligence that corresponds to specific goals and situations. The purpose of the article is to systematize the intra-communicative features of communication in Japanese society, the consideration and study of which are important from the point of view of regulating inter-communication at the intercultural level. The novelty of the study lies in determining the influence of the emotional and psychological aspects of the extralinguistic component of communicative competence on the overall effectiveness of business communication with Japanese people. Changes in the socio-economic situation inside and outside Japan have a direct impact on the transformation of the system of relationships between Japanese people and representatives of other cultures, which is reflected in the linguistic sphere. The relevance of the material lies in the need to expand the knowledge base in the field of the Japanese language and culture (hard skill) through the ability to build adequate relationships in dialogue with a partner (soft skills), based on an understanding of the peculiarities of his or her mentality and making it possible to increase the effectiveness of contacts with representatives of the Japanese side. When working on the article, general scientific methods were used – analysis and synthesis of scientific and educational literature, as well as media resources on this topic; and synthesis and classification of the results obtained. The main objectives of the article were to highlight the emotional and psychological components of extralinguistic competence that influence positive communication with Japanese people; determine which factors may be regarded negatively and slow down the communication process; find out what Japanese people understand by communicative distancing and how important it is to observe it in Japanese society. As a result of working with the material, the main emotional and psychological fields of interaction during intra-communicative communication of the Japanese were identified and analysed, and conclusions were drawn about the spread of these fields in the conditions of a changing socio-economic situation to the inter-communicative sphere. The article concludes that for effective communication in Japanese, in addition to language skills, speech skills, and knowledge of cultural traditions, it is necessary to take into account the features of emotional

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and psychological concepts that influence the creation of positive intentions for dialogue: 共感 stimulating communication, 違和感 making communication difficult, 距離感 amenable to regulation for communicative purposes. The results and conclusions of this paper can be used as part of a classroom course, specifically, in the development of situation exercises and role-playing games based on textbooks and teaching aids on oral communication in Japanese.

**Keywords:** teaching the Japanese language, cross-cultural communication, emotional and psychological concepts, extralinguistic competence, sense of community, distancing, incongruence

Interethnic relations in Japan are developing against the backdrop of political transformations on the global stage and changes in the socioeconomic situation in the country, which can be seen in the gradual “penetration” of foreigners “inside” Japanese with the influx of contract workers from abroad and the growing tendency for foreigners to take up long-term residence in the country. Consequently, the process of expanding the framework of communication to the level of a cross-cultural act is also developing, one in which, in addition to gaining basic knowledge – knowledge of foreign languages, history, and cultural traditions (hard skills) – it is necessary to build relations with partners (soft skills) based on an understanding of their mentality, and with a special emotional and psychological intelligence adapted to specific goals and situations.

A survey conducted by the McKinsey consulting company in 2020 revealed that only 15% of an employee’s success depends on the level of hard skills (knowledge of foreign languages, software or specialized equipment, the ability to perform calculations, and so on), while the remaining 85% is determined by the level of soft skills – universal competencies that affect communication at work but cannot be measured.<sup>2</sup>

Changes in the socioeconomic situation in Japan and beyond its borders have a direct impact on the transformation of the system of relationships between Japanese people and representatives of other cultures, which is reflected in the linguistic sphere and is a subject that requires further study.

The worsening situation on the labour market at the beginning of the 21st century, caused by the declining birth rate and the growing elderly population, prompted the additional large-scale recruitment of specialists and labour from abroad over an extended period of time. Foreigners were now being invited to the country not only for short-term work in areas that had traditionally experienced staff shortages (caring for the elderly and construction, for example), but also to participate in large-scale projects to repair structures damaged in natural disasters, in the service sector, and in administrative work. This also led to a significant transformation in the views of Japanese

<sup>2</sup> Forbes.ru. URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya/481272-ne-vrema-dla-magkih-pocemu-ludam-s-hard-skills-sejcas-prose-najti-rabotu?utm> (accessed: 02.05.2020).

people on including representatives of different cultures into their society due to the need for closer and longer-term cooperation. The traditional perception of foreigners as “outsiders” by the Japanese community can be minimized by improving their proficiency in foreign languages, as well as by mastering the national consciousness in the process of cultural communication, which includes various aspects of social activity, including the emotional and psychological aspects.

The purpose of this article is to systematize the intra-communicative features of communication in Japanese society, which are of interest to researchers from the point of view of regulating inter-communication at the intercultural level. The novelty of the study lies in the fact that it describes the influence of the emotional and psychological aspect of the extralinguistic component of communicative competence on the overall effectiveness of business communication with Japanese partners. Its significance is explained by the need to expand the knowledge base on the Japanese language and Japanese culture (hard skills) through the ability to build adequate relationships in a dialogue with partners (soft skills), based on an understanding of their way of thinking, and with a view to increasing the effectiveness of contacts with representatives of the Japanese side.

### Research Methods and Materials Used

Work on this paper involved the use of general scientific **methods**: the analysis and generalization of scientific and educational literature in Russian and Japanese, as well as of media resources on this topic; and synthesis and classification of the results obtained. The selection and analysis of materials was informed by the theoretical conclusions of Russian researchers in the fields of psychology (I. A. Zimniaia; S. L. Rubinstein), cultural studies (S. G. Ter-Minasova; T. M. Gurevich; N. N. Izotova), linguistics (V. M. Alpatov), and pedagogy (L. T. Nechaeva; E. V. Semenova; O. E. Bogdanova), as well as Japanese sociolinguistics (D. Kawakita; R. Morita; R. Okimoto; N. Shiina; N. Fujita; N. Horikawa). Educational literature and media resources in Japanese and Russian were used for the study and systematization of the main emotional and psychological fields.

The main **objectives** of the study were: to identify the emotional and psychological components of extralinguistic competence that influence positive communication with Japanese people; to determine which factors negatively affect and slow down the communication process; and to learn what communicative distancing means to Japanese people and the importance of observing it in Japanese society.

The need to more actively involve representatives of other countries in solving various socioeconomic problems in Japan has led to the appearance of Japanese language schools all over the country, as well as to the emergence of distance programmes for teaching the language to foreigners already residing in the country, and for their preliminary training abroad. Knowledge of the language only proved insufficient for developing communicative skills, so the main focus started to shift to the immersive communicative teaching method (Azimov, Shchukin 2009: 104).

Almost all Japanese textbooks and video courses are based on dialogic texts that are designed to help representatives of other cultures adapt to Japanese society through the description of customs and behavioural norms. And in Japan itself it is becoming increasingly commonplace to introduce foreigners to the Japanese mind-set and way of thinking (Doi, et al. 1991; Higurashi 1990). The structure of the tasks on the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (Nihongo Nōryoku Shiken) was changed to include questions not related to the traditional skills of grammar, vocabulary, and the Japanese writing system, but also on choosing the most appropriate answer from a list of options for dealing with a given situation where knowledge of how Japanese people typically act in certain situations is crucial for providing the correct answer.

The effectiveness of business contacts both at the international level of inter-communication and at the level of intra-communication within certain groups depends directly on the competencies of the people who are communicating, their people skills, and their ability to work with others, which makes the competence-based approach (Bogdanova 2004; Zimniaia, et al. 2020; Zimniaia 2004; Semenova, Semenov, Rostova 2014) one of the most important in the teaching of foreign languages. It is during the educational process that communicative competence is formed, made up of linguistic (developing language skills and abilities) and sociolinguistic (studying categories of politeness, gender forms of speech, knowledge of cultural traditions and customs) aspects, which we will classify as basic knowledge, as well as extralinguistic (familiarity with the etiquette and norms of behaviour in Japanese society, knowledge of the social psychology of the country) factors, insufficient mastery of which can lead to an erroneous perception of the partner's reaction and thus hinder the establishment of effective business ties. The ability to build positive relationships with partners largely depends on the degree of understanding of the emotional and psychological component of communication. "Human feelings express, in the form of experience, the real relationship of a person as a social being with the world, primarily with other people" (Rubinstein 2007: 554).

In Japanese society, sensory concepts that determine the communicative background include the triad 共感 KYO:KAN – *a sense of community*, 距離感 KYORI-KAN – *a sense of distancing*, and 違和感 IWAKAN – *a sense of discrepancy or incompatibility*.

### A sense of community

The role of KYO:KAN as a special kind of condition for positive communication has been pointed out by Japanese researchers (Doi, et al. 1991; **Morita 2011; Horikawa 1977**), as well as by Russian Japanologists studying non-verbal communication and the culture of Japanese society (Gurevich 2023; Gurevich, Izotova 2018; Izotova 2021). Specifically, these scholars have focused on the relationships between Japanese people of different age groups, social standing, and genders reflected in word usage,

categories of politeness, and intonation (Alpatov 1988; Razdorskii 1981<sup>3</sup>). To consolidate sociolinguistic competence, text examples and dialogues illustrating the existence of socially conditioned linguistic phenomena have typically been included in Japanese language textbooks and manuals (Nechaeva 2000<sup>4</sup>; Razdorskaiia 2017; Razdorskaiia 2015). A largely ignored area of study, however, is the role of the national emotional and psychological atmosphere and its direct relation to the effectiveness of communication, being an internal prerogative of Japanese people.

If etiquette and the norms of behaviour based on traditions and cultural codes can be defined and subsequently studied (Ter-Minasova 2000), then the emotional and psychological component of extralinguistic competence, associated with social psychology at a purely intuitive level, depending on the conditions of a specific situation, can surely be identified too. As Sergey Rubinstein noted, “Real relationships are extremely diverse and contradictory. The contradictory nature – sometimes positive, adaptive and stimulating, sometimes negative and disorganizing – of the dynamic effect that often manifest itself stems, in particular, from the diversity of emotions and the stereotypical nature of the peripheral physiological mechanism of emotionality (Rubinstein 2007: 564). Unlike Europeans, Japanese society adheres not only to generally accepted norms of behaviour that involve as little emotional display as possible, but also to the ethics of special relationships with the interlocutor that is manifested in the desire 面 顔を失わない MENGAO-O USHINAWANAI – *to not lose face* and not put the other person in an awkward position; to hide the demonstration of feelings behind a polite smile; to not finish a thought, confident that the interlocutor has understood it adequately through the mechanism of 暗黙了解 AMMOKU RYO:KAI – *silent understanding*, and so on. In such conditions, even a foreigner familiar with the traditions and customs of the Japanese may find it difficult to “read” the true intentions and communicative intent of the speaker, to understand the emotional climate of communication and respond to it in an appropriate manner. Japanese language textbooks do not contain detailed descriptions of the emotional characteristics of communication with Japanese people and possible reactions from the conversation partner.

Every Japanese person is familiar with the emotional and psychological concepts of 共感 KYO:KAN – *a sense of community*, 違和感 or 異和感 IWAKAN – *a sense of incompatibility*, and 距離感 KYORIKAN – *a sense of distancing*, considering them a natural part of their existence in society. This way of thinking is learned on a non-verbal (sensory) level from childhood, and, in the past, foreigners were not expected to conform to them. What is more, in many situations, Japanese would try “not to notice” any mistakes on the part of foreigners, putting it down to the inability of representa-

<sup>3</sup> Razdorskii A. I. 1981. *Natsional'no-kul'turnye osobennosti kommunikatsii v iaponskom ustnom dialoge: Dis. kand.filol.nauk.* [National and cultural features of communication in Japanese oral dialogue]. [Synopsis of Doctoral Dissertation]. Moscow.

<sup>4</sup> Nechaeva L. T. 2000. *Nauchno-metodicheskie osnovy struktury i soderzhaniia uchebnikov iaponskogo iazyka dlia russkogo-vorashchikh (vysshaia shkola): Dis. dok.ped.nauk* [Scientific and methodological foundations of the structure and content of Japanese language textbooks for Russian speakers (higher school)]. [Doctoral Dissertation]. Moscow.

tives of another culture to fully comprehend the depth of relationships in Japanese society. Such concepts, united by the concept of “sensation/feeling,” are aimed at creating and maintaining a certain spiritual atmosphere between the people involved in a communicative situation, and sometimes even create a kind of “dome” separating “us” from “them” (**Morita 2011**: 12–16).

In terms of establishing friendly partnerships, the prerogative remains with the concept of KYO:KAN, which finds practical application in communication with foreigners. However, in communication among Japanese people, the feeling of mutual understanding and community is manifested not only at the verbal, but also at the non-verbal level. As Taichi Sakaiya, a researcher of sociopolitical problems in Japan, notes, “The Japanese early on developed a long-term perspective and came to understand one another very well in any kind of dealing. They came to discern qualities of character by watching behavior over long periods of time rather than analyzing a person’s words and actions of the moment” (Taiti 1992 : 196). And this has to be done quickly, for example, during the first meeting. And judging starts with how punctual a person is<sup>5</sup>.

The sociolinguist Naoyoshi Horikawa pointed out in his research (**Horikawa 1977**: 144–148) that effective communication relies on verbal and non-verbal elements that contribute to the formation of 共感 KYO:KAN. The first step to creating a communicative intention is to refuse to demonstrate one’s obvious superiority in terms of style of dress and behaviour, and to adhere to generally accepted etiquette that regulates the sequence and form of interactions. KYO:KAN often arises when such “trivialities” of etiquette as the ability to introduce oneself, the manner in which a person hands over his or her business card, the depth of a bow, and the display of politeness during a conversation by repeating the words of the interlocutor, are observed (ibid.: 83–84). When entering into a communicative situation, writes Horikawa, it is important to avoid categorical statements and to find a general topic of conversation, which is typically discussed before the main issue is brought up. This is done to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. General topics of discussion may include the weather, the time of year, climate change, sports, etc. Polite words about the office décor, the range of products manufactured, and so on, are often used to ease the tension that arises during a first meeting and to create a favourable atmosphere for communication. Thus, in the business world, when visiting a partner company for the first time, after the exchange business cards, the participants do not get down to business right away, but rather devote several minutes to so-called “conversation on everyday topics” while avoiding politics and religion, which could provoke an unwanted reaction from the interlocutor (Razdorskaya 2015: 84). In this way, areas of common interest or positions are identified that can help the parties establish trusting relationships and develop joint projects.

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5 Tedzuka K. 2016. Sovety menedzhera: Kak effektivno vesti peregovory s iaponskimi partnerami [Manager tips: How to effectively negotiate with Japanese partners]. *Vedomosti*. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/archive/2016/12/07>. (accessed: 26.06.2018).



The ability to correctly understand the atmosphere in a conversation – 空気を読む KU:KI-O YOMU – *to read the air* – is valued highly in Japanese society and is positioned as an important social concept in numerous scientific works (Ito 2000).

The cultural anthropologist and ethnographer Jiro Kawakita (**Kawakita 1964**) notes that belonging to a specific group (delegation, department, company) is not the only factor in the formation of a “sense of community” or 一体感 ITTAIKAN – *a sense of unity*, as a jointly experienced or shared event, or the joint efforts of people to achieve a common goal, are also important. The preeminent Russian psychologist Sergey Rubinstein observed in his analysis of team activity “social forms of cooperation emerging from cooperative work, specifically the human feelings of one person to another person and to other people, the real basis of which lies in cooperation and the community of interests arising from it” (Rubinstein 2007: 556). The results obtained through the efforts of several people in any given situation become an important unifying factor in themselves. In his analysis of interpersonal relationships in Japanese society, Jiro Kawakita wrote that “in collective work (in a group), deep psychological connections arise in just a few days, similar to those formed after many years of acquaintance” (**Kawakita 1964**). And, conversely, even when two people have a clear understanding of the issue at hand, if they have never communicated before, there is no way to be one hundred percent sure that they will understand each other properly.

The feeling of “community,” notes Shiina Norio, the founder of the School of Communication and author of numerous works and audio courses on the communicative approach to language teaching, means a relationship of trust where people can share their thoughts and be heard and correctly understood by the interlocutor. Essentially, a kind of spiritual unity and mutual understanding is formed, even at the non-verbal level (**Shiina 2011**). In other words, 共感 is a broader concept than simply expressing agreement 同感 or sympathy 同情. It is a unity of perception at the level of the same sensations. The author believes that the formation of relationships based on shared experience is a necessary condition for building effective communication with friends, colleagues, subordinates, and partners. This is why the management at Japanese companies organize joint out-of-work activities for their employees – groups tours, excursions, outings, etc.

To understand the Japanese on an emotional and psychological level, someone from another culture must, in addition to having language skills and the ability to communicate effectively, take into account how representatives of that country perceive each other during intra-communication. According to Okimoto Ruriko, who studies communication practices in work teams at Japanese enterprises and firms, the art of creating a sense of empathy and community KYO:KAN can be learned by mastering the basic principles and rules, the essence of which boils down to observing the following guidelines. First, avoid making any assessment of the interlocutor’s actions during communication. Second, try to show that you are actively taking part in the conversation and show respect for the person you are talking to by repeating the main

phrase that they said. These principles are reflected in unspoken rules that assure the person you are talking to that you are taking his or her actions, thoughts, and emotions into account as a matter of priority.

Rule 1. 相手の「行動」を汲み取る *Understand the other person's "behaviour/actions."* This rule is illustrated by the example of a situation where a participant in a conversation complains about being extremely busy at work:

昨日、先輩から頼まれた資料をつくっていたら、夕方に別の仕事が入ってしまい、夜遅くまで残業になったんですよ。

*"Yesterday, after I finished preparing the materials that my boss asked me for, I had to accomplish another task in the evening, so I worked late into the night."*

In terms of commonality of views, it would be a mistake to react by giving a negative assessment of the information and expressing psychological support by remarking: 大変だった！ – *That's horrible!* Since the listener does not know what the speaker thinks of their own actions and what meaning they attach to this statement, such a reaction may be unpleasant to them. Maybe he or she views what happened from a positive perspective, as a demonstration of their importance to the company, or that they took on extra work in order to further their career. The most typical way to express psychological support in this case is to repeat the speaker's last words: 夜遅くまで残業になったんだね。 – *You worked late into the night...* This way, the speaker knows that the person they are talking to is listening, empathizes with them, and this helps create and maintain a sense of community among the participants in the conversation.

Rule 2. 相手の「思考」を汲み取る *Understand the "thinking" of the other person.* Respect for the person speaking is demonstrated by the absence of attempts to "impose" your opinion on how best to act in a particular situation. If it is not clear from the conversation how and from what position the speaker evaluates the situation, you should first repeat the opinion expressed by them, and then voice your own.

Take the following example of a conversation about work, where a colleague suggests, 今は忙しい 時期だから、締め切りは来月末でいいと思う。 – *There's a lot of work right now, so I think we can move the deadline to the end of next month.*

In this case, the most appropriate response would be one that does not assess the proposal directly. The proper response would be to show respect for the speaker, repeat what they just said, and then express your point of view: 来月末でいいという考えですね！僕の場合は、来月の10日がよいと思います。 – *You think we can move the deadline to the end of next month. I think we can move it to the 10th.* Thus, without giving a positive or negative assessment of the proposal, you can express your point of view and, even if opinions differ, maintain a "sense of community."

It should be noted here that, outside communication with foreigners, Japanese people avoid offering their point of view with the words 私の考えでは – *in my opinion*, to my mind, which are often heard in the speech of partners, preferring to use forms with verbs 思う、考える – *I think, I consider*, placing them at the end of a phrase or sentence, which is perceived as an expression of politeness. This psychological technique is most effective in a team with mostly males, where respect for the



priority of the partner's point of view is an important condition for further communication. This goes a long way to explaining the negative attitude of the Japanese towards sudden proposals outside the plan, or towards premature assessments of a plan, which is often a source of bewilderment among foreign partners.

Rule 3. 相手の「感情」を汲み取る *Understand the feelings of the person you are talking to*. At joyful or sombre events, it is important to share the feelings of the person you are talking to first of all, and then to offer congratulations or express sympathy. Accordingly, if someone shares the happy news with you that they passed their exam, simply offering “congratulations” is not enough to create a feeling of KYO:KAN. 資格試験に合格して、すごくうれしい。 – *I’m so happy you passed your exam!* You must first share the speaker’s feelings by repeating the last phrase they uttered, thus showing that you understand their emotional state, and then congratulate them: うれしいね！おめでとう。 – *Oh, you are so happy! Congratulations!*<sup>6</sup>.

**Takeaway:** To create a sense of empathy and community, Japanese people are careful to:

- not wear eye-catching clothes or act in a way that would make them stand out, following the generally accepted rules of etiquette in the group;
- stick to neutral topics, avoiding discussions on politics and religion;
- gain as much experience as possible in participating in group events, which is of particular importance to everyone else in the group;
- put the actions, thoughts, and emotions of the interlocutor first, and reacting accordingly during the conversation.

### A sense of distancing

The long-term presence of foreigners in Japan as members of work teams has increased the need not only to remove the language barrier and learn basic survival phrases, but also to have a deeper understanding of the psychological features of Japanese communication etiquette in order to create harmonious relationships in mixed groups and prevent antipathy towards foreigners. For example, respect for KYORI-KAN, or the *sense of distancing*, is noted in a textbook on the Shadowing method that includes example dialogues of a foreigner at an interview at a Japanese company, as a positive aspect of communication in Japanese society (**The Repetition...**: 118). Sensing and maintaining distance in relationships between individual members of a team are important features of the emotional and psychological communication of the Japanese and the key to establishing a healthy atmosphere in the team. Unlike the KYO:KAN – *sense of community*, which is studied in Japan for establishing contacts in an effective manner, including with foreigners, the sense of distancing has not yet

<sup>6</sup> 沖本 るり子「相手が気持ちよく動いてくれる、共感を得やすい話し方」。[Okimoto Ruriko. A Way of Speaking That Allows Your Partner to Feel Comfortable and Easily Creates a Sense of Mutual Understanding]. URL: [https://www.lifehacker.jp/article/empathy\\_communication/](https://www.lifehacker.jp/article/empathy_communication/) (accessed: 11.03.2024).

become an object of scientific research and can be formulated on the basis of materials published in online magazines and blogs on social networks. Okimoto Ruriko, a consultant on interpersonal relations in Japanese companies, stresses the importance of adhering to the following basic principles when communicating in order to create a “feeling of optimal distance”<sup>7</sup>:

1. 長時間、同じ人と過ごさないようにする Do not spend too much time with one person, reserving their personal time. Even a close friend or a positive person will feel uncomfortable constantly communicating with the same person.
2. 自分のことを全てさらけ出さない Refrain from talking about your personal life. Don't share all your problems with people, otherwise they will feel a part of them, which can make them feel awkward.
3. 同調的な会話をしない Maintain a balance between the “feeling of community” of KYO:KAN, which is necessary for a cordial relationship, and the desire to evoke sympathy from the person you are talking to. Avoid conversations that require the other person to express solidarity, as they may feel caught up in your life or even be hostage to it, which violates their personal freedom.
4. 活動拠点を3点以上に分散させる Spread your main bases of communication activity over three or more points. Adding other areas to family and school, family and work, and so on, allows you to expand your contacts and thus not stress about interpersonal relationships in any one group. Such areas could include volunteering, social clubs, etc.

As for maintaining “distance” outside of work, the following recommendations have been offered on internet sites:<sup>8</sup>

- The sense of distance in relationships with neighbours is determined by the selection of topics for communication. In the place where you live, it is better to avoid talking about your family and personal problems, since this kind of information spreads quickly among those who live nearby. Do not get close to anyone. Maintain a polite distance and limit your interactions to conversations about such topics as shopping, clothes, the weather, etc.
- Maintaining close ties with childhood friends who have their own families and children is not always advisable. The optimal distance here is neutral, with polite bows and greetings.
- A clear line of distancing must be drawn with colleagues in line with the principle of keeping personal and business relationships separate, as doing otherwise may affect one's work.

<sup>7</sup> 沖本 るり子「相手が気持ちよく動いてくれる、共感を得やすい話し方」。[Okimoto Ruriko. A Way of Speaking That Allows Your Partner to Feel Comfortable and Easily Creates a Sense of Mutual Understanding]. URL: [https://www.lifehacker.jp/article/empathy\\_communication/](https://www.lifehacker.jp/article/empathy_communication/) (accessed: 11.03.2024).

<sup>8</sup> Magazine website. URL: <https://kinarino.jp/cat6-ライフスタイル/40163-人との距離感ってどのくらい？> (accessed: 11.03.2024).

- A line must also be drawn in relationships with friends and loved ones, and this line should not be crossed. Remember the saying 親しい中にも礼儀あり – *Etiquette is important even among close friends*. Do not abandon good manners when communicating. This is especially true when it comes to money. Avoid situations involving borrowing or lending money, as this will alienate the friend or loved one or create additional problems. Being too close in a relationship can lead to unwanted complications, so the best indicator of a relationship is to not be a burden to anyone. If a friend has helped you out, repay him or her twofold, and be sure to remind them that the problem could not have been solved without them.
- Try not to get involved in other people's problems and feelings of dependence.
- It is better not to get close to someone who gives off negative emotions.

Blogs where younger Japanese people share their thoughts on the optimal distance from others echo these sentiments:<sup>9</sup>

- Strive to maintain personal space and avoid dependence on anyone.
- In relationships, do not rely on one person only. It is better to have a wide circle of acquaintances. Do not limit yourself in the choice of contacts, hobbies, travel destinations, etc.
- Distance with other can be regulated by using neutral topics in conversation. By noting the positive or negative aspects of communication, you can find "common ground" that allows you to establish the appropriate distance.
- When there are several neutral topics for conversation, open the exchange with phrases containing a question or a wish, for example:

1) 今日はいいお天気ですね、お洗濯干してきましたか？

*It's nice weather today. Have you already hung your washing out?*

2) ○さんっていつもお肌がきれいですが、何か対策をされているんですか？

*You always have such beautiful skin. Do you use anything for that?*

3) 熱中症になりそうなくらい暑いんですよね。どうぞお気をつけくださいね。

*It's so hot outside, one could get heat stroke. Take care of yourself!*

As a marker of sorts of relations among people, categories of politeness also regulate the distance between them. For example, addressing a person by their nickname indicates the closest kind of relationship, while observing polite forms of speech is a way to maintain distance. On the one hand, politeness is an expression of respect for the interlocutor, and of modesty on the part of the speaker. But it also serves to demonstrate a certain reluctance to reduce the communication distance. In addition, words have an impact on a person's psyche and judgement, and excessive unmotivated

<sup>9</sup> Website of a magazine targeted at the younger generation. URL: <https://kinarino.jp/cat6/40163#index-5fg975dx9ulf> (accessed: 11.03.2024).

politeness can have the opposite effect and cause mistrust in the person you are talking to. A sense of distance in communication (especially among young people) can arise from inconsistencies in the use of styles and categories of politeness. This causes difficulties for Japanese people communicating in mono-ethnic groups and in work teams that include foreign employees. For example, some young people who are accustomed to communicating with their seniors using the polite forms of speech (*keigo*) and then use the same forms in the company of friends who speak in simple and familiar forms, feel uncomfortable, like outsiders. It is not unknown for these people to be excluded from the group<sup>10</sup>. These people are advised to use “*yawarakai keigo*”<sup>11</sup> (softened polite forms) and alter their speaking style accordingly, much like a person wears different clothes depending on the level of formality of an event.

Hosei University professor Fujita Naomi, who studies the impact of categories of politeness on interpersonal relationships, recommends that new employees at a company strengthen their ties by gradually getting closer to their colleagues. At the initial stage (the first three years or so at a company), they should adhere to the traditional form of politeness, and then, maintaining a sense of respect, gradually “demolish” the established forms of communication, thus closing the distance between them and their colleagues. It is important to maintain a balance between respect and close relationships. There are rules for moving away from established traditional forms of politeness in communication without coming off badly in the eyes of others.

1. Use polite forms of speech at the right time, in the right place, and for the right reason. For example, at formal events or in large groups, even when you are talking to someone with whom more familiar communication is usually allowed. You can only move away from polite forms during personal communication: during meals, in the smoking room, or on the way home. If you do this gradually, the relationship will become closer naturally.
2. Add polite words and expressions to parts of statements that do not contain polite grammatical constructions. According to Fujita, this is extremely important, because the use of polite forms of speech is one way to show respect from the very beginning, and a direct transition to simple (familiar) forms can be perceived negatively. Good relationships can be built if, under certain conditions, you emphasize the positive aspects of your partner and use polite prefixes and transformational substitutions exclusively.
3. At the beginning reduce the distance gradually, starting with *aizuchi* – nodding along – during conversations. Before *aizuchi*, insert a neutral phrase in simple forms, followed by modest and polite expressions. This will keep the person

<sup>10</sup> 藤田 尚弓 敬語の距離感を縮める「砕けた敬語」とは？ [Fujita Naomi. What is "Modified Politeness" that Reduces the Sense of Distance Created by Polite Language?] URL: <https://allabout.co.jp/gm/gc/375107/> (accessed: 14.08.2020).

<sup>11</sup> Website of a magazine for young employees of Japanese firms. URL: <https://diamond.jp/articles/-/251475> (accessed: 07.04.2019)

you are talking to from perceiving the conversation in a negative light. You cannot switch to simple forms of speech immediately just because you want to get closer to a person and reduce the “distance” in your relationship with them.

This is how, for example, a manager of a company acts when they need to convey some kind of information while at the same time winning over the person they are talking to. They are masters of the art of mixing keigo and ordinary words. Having a good command of polite forms of speech, they are able to strike a balance between polite forms and the desire to reduce the distance in communication, which in turn strengthens the power of persuasion by creating an atmosphere of friendly relations with the client.

Another way to reduce the distance is to introduce a personal detail into an otherwise ordinary conversation, which prompts his interlocutor to open up and reduce the interpersonal distance. Keigo transformation is not essential to this method, as long as it is done at the right time, for example, on the way home or while waiting for a train.

For example: 最近、雨が多いですね。週末は娘の運動会なので心配です。  
*There's been more rain than usual of late. My daughter has a sports competition at the end of the week, so I'm worried about her.*

うちは来週、運動会なんです。お子様はおいくつなんですか？ *I've got a sports competition next week. How old is your daughter?*

**Takeaway:** To establish an optimal distance and then gradually reduce it, people from other cultures must be extremely careful to not violate the personal space of a Japanese person, impose their opinion on them, or make decisions without first listening to the other person's opinion, refraining from attempts to garner sympathy by talking about personal problems. A gift for no apparent reason can also put Japanese people in an awkward situation, since they feel obliged to make a reciprocal gesture (regardless of whether or not they want to), and one that is of at least the same magnitude. It is, however, possible to gradually reduce the distance through the active use of both linguistic and extralinguistic tools. One indicator of the intention to reduce distance is the expansion of the scope of conversations from purely neutral topics to include personal information, as well as the gradual transition to simple forms of speech.

### A sense of incompatibility

Another emotional and psychological concept in spoken Japanese is the “feeling of unacceptability, inadequacy, or incongruence” 違和感 IWAKAN, which is used to describe negative relationships. This word can be written in two ways, using different initial Kanji, and, although the pronunciation is exactly the same, the semantic nuances differ for this very reason: 異和感 means “not in harmony, different from usual,” while 違和感 means “erroneous, different” (usually associated with discomfort caused by colour, smell, sensation, pain, anxiety, etc.). Several dictionaries (for example, *Nihongo Daijiten* and *Kotoba no sakuho jiten*) list 違和感 as the only correct variant,

while the *Shimmeikai* considers both to be perfectly acceptable<sup>12</sup>. The Kokugu Kanwa Jiten dictionary defines the lexeme 異和 as “different, alien, suspicious, unusual, out of the ordinary,” while 異人 (*ijin*) means “foreigner”<sup>13</sup>. These nuances are illustrated in the following examples:

いつもと違う彼女の言葉に異和を感じ、浮気を疑った。 *I could sense something strange in her words, which were different than usual, and I suspected that she was cheating.*

違和感に耐え切れず、私は部屋を飛び出した。 *I couldn't stand the discomfort and ran out of the room.*

膝に違和感を感じる私は、登山に行くことを断念した。 *I stopped mountain climbing because my knees couldn't take it any longer*<sup>14</sup>.

When describing the feeling of alienation, the word IWAKAN, represented graphically by the Kanji 違和感, is used most often. The term is used to describe not only feelings, but also a physical discrepancy with what is expected, or opposing positions, perceived with a tinge of regret in the following cases.

- 1) When there is a sense of psychological or physical incompatibility, for example:
  - この状況に違和感を覚える。 *I don't feel comfortable in that situation.*
  - オンライン会議に参加したが、自分ひとりだけカジュアルな服装だったため、参加者に違和感を与えてしまったようだ。 *I took part in the online meeting, but was the only person wearing casual clothes, which seemed to make everyone else feel awkward.*
  - かなり目に違和感がある。 *A rather unpleasant sensation in the eyes.*
- 2) An unexpected result, or when a negative atmosphere is created:
  - 私はそのような社会に違和感を感じる。 *I feel uncomfortable in this group of people.*
  - この翻訳は、少し違和感があるが大きくは違わない。 *This translation seems a little strange, but it's nothing major.*
- 3) When something differs from the generally accepted norm:
  - 感覚的にそれに違和感を感じるが、一体それが何なのかわからなかった。 *There was something strange about it, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it.*
  - それはいつもの方法とは違うため違和感を感じた。 *It was odd because it was different from the usual way of doing things.*
- 4) In an unnatural situation or event:
  - 宇宙船から降りた後、野口さんは「首を振ると違和感がある。」と話した。 *When he got out of the space ship, Noguchi said, "It feels weird when I shake my head."*

<sup>12</sup> Reference website. URL: <https://dic.nicovideo.jp/a/違和感> (accessed: 07.04.2019)

<sup>13</sup> Kanji dictionary. 国語漢和辞典、東京、集英社、1977. P. 857.

<sup>14</sup> Reference website. URL: <https://chigai-hikaku.com/?p=30914> (accessed: 07.04.2019)



- 何だか違和感がありませんか？ *Something's not right. Can you feel it?*

The term is used to refer both to feelings and to a physical discrepancy with what is expected, or opposing views, perceived with a tinge of regret<sup>15</sup>.

Given the need to understand people of other (non-Japanese) cultures living in Japanese society, the concept of IWAKAN (incongruence) has become a subject of research for Japanese scholars. For example, Mihoko Baba, an expert in communication studies, conducted a series of experiments to determine the degree to which Japanese people are susceptible to this emotional state when communicating with foreigners (Baba 2020). During the experiment, three pairs of participants – native Japanese speakers and foreigners living in Japan with a good command of the language who had never met each other before – were asked to talk for 30 minutes and then, separately from their conversation partner, answer interview questions about what they felt was incongruent and why. Eighteen of the twenty points covered caused some degree of IWAKAN, while discrepancies that arose in the remaining two were not perceived negatively did not derail the conversation. The experiment showed that discrepancies in perception often did not give rise to a negative feeling of incongruity, although multiple misunderstandings did negatively affect the communication process. These negative feelings arose from the way the conversation was conducted (incorrect intonation, distortion of the length of sounds), the content of what was being said, the other person's appearance and behaviour, deviations from the stylistic norm, etc.

An analysis of the causes of mental discomfort reveals five communicative deviations (jure) that can cause this feeling of incongruity (iwakan) to appear: 1) the manner in which the person opens/joins the conversation, their intonation; 2) differences in what the participants consider the main topic of the conversation; 3) inconsistencies in the use and perception of personal (自分、自身) and demonstrative (これ、それ) pronouns and phrases; 4) different established stereotypes and realities; and 5) discrepancies between the thoughts expressed by the speaker and their interpretation of the interlocutor's reaction.

Objective reasons for this, according to the author, are the traditional desire of Japanese people not to put foreigners in an awkward situation because they do not know or fully understand all the nuances of Japanese communication, and the fact that parties may perceive the subjects of the conversation differently. At the same time, the author identified possible ways to overcome the emerging sense of incongruence by correcting the mistakes made during communication. It was noted that during conversation:

- the speaker did not pay attention to what exactly in his or her speech was unclear to the listener;
- the misunderstanding was not expressed verbally in any way; the listener made no attempt to talk about it or seek clarification;

<sup>15</sup> Reference website. URL: <https://dic.nicovideo.jp/a/違和感> (accessed: 13.03.2024)

- when there was no reaction from the listener, the speaker did not do anything to confirm that the listener had understood what he or she had said, so as not to make the listener feel uncomfortable.

**Takeaway:** The feeling of discomfort that arises due to difficulties in communication can be reduced, and even eliminated, if you immediately let the person you are talking to know that you have not understood something. This can be done without interrupting the conversation by repeating a question or rephrasing what the speaker has said to ensure that you have understood them correctly. The speaker should pay attention to the reasons why he has not been understood. Focusing their attention on the main expressions used and their semantic import could give positive results.

## Results

In the course of our research, we identified and analysed the main emotional and psychological fields of interaction in the intra-communicative communication of Japanese people and drew some conclusions about the spread of these fields in the conditions of a changing socio-economic situation to the inter-communicative sphere.

Given the above, we can conclude that effective cross-cultural communication in multinational teams requires a high degree of sensitivity to the emotional and psychological component, which is a key element in the creation of the atmosphere of communication. This confirms the assertion that “knowledge of linguistic means is still not sufficient for mastery of the method of forming and formulating thoughts that are acceptable in a foreign-language community, and that this method should be the focus of special training” (Zimniaia 1985: 31). For effective communication in Japanese, in addition to language skills, speech skills, and knowledge of cultural traditions, it is necessary to take into account the features of emotional and psychological concepts that influence the creation of positive intentions for dialogue: those that create a sense of community, make communication difficult, and are amenable to regulation for communicative purposes. Sensitivity to these emotional and psychological concepts opens up new opportunities for in-depth study and developing the relevant competencies in order to avoid mistakes in communication.

## Discussion

Many of the emotional components that are characteristic of Japanese society and which influence relationships within it can be misinterpreted, and even lead to miscommunication, if the person is not familiar with Japanese society. For example, Russians sometimes cannot understand why colleagues who communicate with them in a friendly manner on work issues limit themselves to a polite bow and try to avoid conversation outside of working hours (unless they are both attending events organized by the company management, including visits to drinking establishments). Russians do not appreciate this kind of behaviour, as they are accustomed to constantly look-

ing after guests in their country, while Japanese people view it as respect for “personal freedom.” It is considered improper in Japan for people to share their personal problems with colleagues, which is quite different from how Russians see it, namely, as a manifestation of sincerity and good feelings. In Japan, attempts to “bear one’s soul” are associated with the desire to reduce the distance with the interlocutor, not to look for a shoulder to cry on or a solution to their problems, which is often the case in Russia. The desire of Russian business partners to make what they believe to be interesting additional proposals to approved plans is frowned upon by the Japanese, as this is a clear violation of the subordination of actions. In direct communication, repeating the speaker’s phrase before you make your own remark is regarded by the Japanese as a demonstration of respect for their actions, thoughts, and emotions, and joint participation in projects and events contributes to the establishment of closer relationships.

**The results and conclusions** of this paper can be used as part of a classroom course, specifically, in the development of situation exercises and role-playing games based on textbooks and teaching aids on oral communication in Japanese.

#### About the Author:

**Natalya V. Razdorskaya** – Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, an Associate Professor in the Department of Japanese, Korean, Indonesian and Mongolian Languages at MGIMO. Russia, Moscow. Sphere of scientific and professional interests: methods of teaching the Japanese language, linguistic and cultural studies, socio-political translation, linguistic and cultural studies.

E-mail: nrazdorskaya@mail.ru; ORCID: 0009-0001-7463-575X.

#### Conflicts of interest.

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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