Emic Understandings of Attentiveness and its Related Concepts among American Students:
A Comparison with Those among Japanese Students

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Abstract

Emic understandings of attentiveness (briefly defined as a demonstrator's pre-emptive response to a recipient's verbal/non-verbal cues or situations surrounding a recipient and a demonstrator, which takes the form of offering), and its related concepts, namely, empathy and anticipatory inference, among Japanese have been investigated cross-generationally (Fukushima 2016). Building on Fukushima (2016), American data is elicited in this study, and a cross-cultural comparison of emic understandings of attentiveness and its related concepts between American and Japanese participants is made. The data is drawn from metapragmatic interviews in which the participants were asked to outline their understandings of the three notions above. The results show that overall there were not many differences in terms of the understanding of the three notions between American and Japanese participants overall. That is, both groups see the three notions as important in general. This may suggest that moral order on which both groups evaluate im/politeness does not differ greatly.

Keywords:

Im/politeness, Metapragmatics, Attentiveness, Culture, Emic understandings

1. Introduction

The importance of emic understandings has come to the fore in recent im/politeness research, especially in discursive (or postmodern) politeness research. This derives from the distinction between emic understandings or lay understandings of politeness[1] ('first-order' politeness) and

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1　Although an emic perspective is often treated as synonymous with lay understandings of words, Haugh (2016: 52) proposes that emic concepts can in fact be understood from both a first-order (user) and second-order (observer) perspective.

politeness as a theoretical construct ('second-order' politeness) (see e.g., Eelen 2001; Watts et al. 2005 [1992]; Watts 2003, 2010). It has been argued that research should focus on lay people's understandings of im/politeness as they emerge in everyday interactions (e.g., Watts 2003; Mills 2003; Locher and Watts 2005: 16) (Sifianou 2015: 25). Although Haugh (2012: 114) contends that the first-second order distinction needs to be more carefully deconstructed with regards to both its epistemological and ontological loci (see also Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016: 79), he (2012: 128) states that first-order emic concepts across languages and cultures offer a rich wealth of new concepts from which to draw.

Not only emic understandings but also evaluation has become one of the central issues (see e.g., Eelen 2001) in recent im/politeness research. Indeed, one of the achievements of what has been termed the discursive approaches to politeness research was to draw attention to the negotiability of the emic understandings of evaluative concepts such as 'polite', 'impolite', 'rude', etc., according to Locher (2015: 6). Evaluations are based on the moral order,[2] that is, what members of a sociocultural group or relational network 'take for granted' (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 67) (see also Kádár 2017) or as ''seen but unnoticed', expected, background features of every day scenes' (Garfinkel 1967: 36). The moral order may differ among different groups (see Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016: 81). In this study, therefore, it is explored whether the moral orders between American and Japanese people differ or not through their emic understandings of attentiveness and its related concepts.

In Fukushima (2016), emic understandings of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference among Japanese were investigated cross-generationally. The main reason why the notions above was investigated is that not many studies have investigated interpersonal notions *per se* so widely yet, to the best of my knowledge (but see, e.g., Chang and Fukushima 2017; Fukushima 2004, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Fukushima and Haugh 2014), despite the importance of interpersonal pragmatics, which highlights the interpersonal aspect of communication (see e.g., Haugh et al. 2013; Locher 2012, 2015; Locher and Graham 2010). Attentiveness and empathy are interpersonal notions, and anticipatory inference is needed for attentiveness to arise (see Fukushima 2015b).

Building on Fukushima (2016), American data is elicited in this study and a cross-cultural comparison of emic understandings of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference between American and Japanese people is made. Although Fukushima (2016) compared the Japanese data cross-generationally, this study focuses on a cross-cultural comparison. More specifically, the data supplied by American university students and that by Japanese university students are compared. As it is often said that American and Japanese people belong to different cultures, namely, individualist and collectivist cultures, or positive and negative cultures

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2　A key claim in theorising im/politeness as social practice is that the moral order is what grounds our evaluations of social actions and meanings as "good" or "bad", "normal" or "exceptional", "appropriate" or "inappropriate" and so on, and of course, as "polite", "impolite", "over-polite" and so on (Haugh 2015: 173).

respectively (see section 2.1), it is also investigated how such cultural traits would influence evaluations of im/politeness.

In the subsequent section, theoretical background relevant to this study is reviewed, and data and methodology are explained in section 3. Results and discussion are presented in section 4, and the conclusion follows.

2. Theoretical background

2. 1. Culture

As has been shown in previous research (see among others, Barros García and Terkourafi 2014; Kádár and Mills 2011; Sifianou and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2017), im/politeness and culture are closely linked. Taxonomies of cultures such as positive and negative politeness cultures (Brown and Levinson 1978/1987), or collectivist and individualistic cultures (see e.g., Hofstede 1980, 1991; Schwartz 1990, 1994; Triandis 1994; Triandis and Gelfand 2012) have often been discussed.

Very briefly, an importance is placed on power and distance in negative politeness cultures, and deference and respect characterise interaction, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). Negative politeness and off-record politeness strategies are preferred in negative politeness cultures. Negative politeness is 'avoidance-based' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). On the other hand, in positive politeness cultures, solidarity is important and positive politeness strategies are preferred. Positive politeness is 'approach-based' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). Japanese culture is categorised as a negative politeness culture, and American culture as a positive politeness culture, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). The distinction between positive and negative politeness cultures proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) has received some criticisms on the grounds that it is impossible to categorise whole social groups according to the politeness strategies they prefer (Sifianou and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2017: 575). No society is completely uniform in its politeness orientation (e.g., Sifianou 1992: 39-40, 47-48, 81). For example, Fukushima (2000: 192-195) acknowledged that Japanese culture was not always characterised by negative politeness culture, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). In Japanese culture, not only are negative politeness strategies and off-record strategies used, as claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987), but also bald-on-record strategies are employed to show solidarity (Fukushima 2000: 194-195). In a similar vein, American culture (western U.S.A.) is characterised as positive politeness culture by Brown and Levinson (1987: 245), but it is a distancing one (or negative politeness culture in Brown and Levinson's terms) when compared to Spanish culture as described in Barros García and Terkourafi (2014). Moreover, Sifianou and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2017: 576) point out the different orientation of culture, depending on the social class to which one belongs, that is, upper classes having a negative politeness ethos and lower classes a positive politeness ethos (see also Mills 2004). Different orientation of culture may also depend on urban or rural areas. The former may have more

negative politeness orientation than the latter. These arguments may be, in part, in accord with Grainger and Mills' (2016: 27) statement, namely that cultures cannot be categorised as simply positive or negative politeness cultures, and with Mills and Kádár's (2011: 27) argument, namely that each group does in fact make use of both types of politeness (positive and negative politeness) to a greater or lesser extent.

Another major taxonomy of culture is that of individualism and collectivism, which Hofstede (1991: 51) defines as follows: "Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty". According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), in collectivistic cultures, where the self is interdependent within its various social groups as opposed to in individualistic cultures, the self is independent of groups. Markus and Kitayama (1991: 246) argue that "[t]he sense of individuality that accompanies an interdependent self includes an *attentiveness* and responsiveness to others that one either explicitly or implicitly assumes will be reciprocated by these others, as well as the willful management of one's other-focused feelings and desires so as to maintain and further the reciprocal interpersonal relationship" (emphasis added), and that "[w]ith an independent construal of the self, others are less centrally implicated in one's current self-definition or identity".

As mentioned above, independence and interdependence are the key concepts in individualistic cultures and in collectivistic cultures respectively. Gudykunst et al. (1996) explain this further. As members of individualistic cultures are socialised into their culture, they learn the major values of their culture (e.g., independence, achievement) and acquire preferred ways for how members of the culture are expected to view themselves (e.g., as unique persons) (Gudykunst et al. 1996: 512). Members of collectivistic cultures learn different major values (e.g., harmony, solidarity) and acquire different preferred ways to conceive of themselves (e.g., as interconnected with others) (Gudykunst et al. 1996: 512-513). It is worth noting Gudykunst et al.'s (1996: 513) further contention that members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures do not just learn one set of values or just one way to conceive of themselves. As individualism and collectivism exist in all cultures, members of individualistic cultures learn some collectivistic values and acquire views of themselves as interconnected with others, and members of collectivistic cultures learn some individualistic values and acquire views of themselves as unique persons (Gudykunst et al. 1996: 513).

The United States and Japan have often been compared from the aspect of culture and communication styles (see e.g., Brown et al. 2012; Gudykunst 1993; Ogawa and Gudykunst 1999-2000; Yamada 1997). Most scholars agree that the United States is an individualistic culture and Japan is a collectivistic culture (Gudykunst and San Antonio 1993). American society has been claimed to be an individualistic society and an individual's dignity is highly valued (Uchida 2011). Independence dominates over dependence in the United States,

whereas interdependence is stronger than individuality in Japan (e.g., Markus and Kitayama 1991; Yamada 1997). These cultural values and assumptions have been claimed to influence communication styles (see e.g., Fukushima 2000: 116-121) and politeness norms (see e.g., Ogiermann 2009: 25). According to Triandis and Gelfand (2012: 509), language and communication in individualistic cultures is direct and emphasises the individual whereas it is more indirect and de-emphasises the individual in collectivistic cultures. Similarly, Ting-Toomey (1999) argues that in individualistic cultures, people tend to encounter more situations that emphasise the preferential use of direct talk, person-oriented verbal interaction, verbal self-enhancement, and talkativeness. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, people tend to encounter more situations that emphasise the preferential use of indirect talk, status-oriented verbal interaction, verbal self-effacement, and silence (Ting-Toomey 1999). According to Clancy (1986), it is widely recognised that the communicative style of the Japanese is intuitive and indirect,[3] especially compared with that of Americans. Explicit communication is assumed to be necessary in the United States, whereas implicit communication is preferred in Japan (see e.g., Gudykunst 1983; Okabe 1983; Yamada 1997). These are sometimes referred to as low-context and high-context communication (Hall 1976) respectively[4] (see also Hofstede 1991; Lempert 2012; Scollon et al. 2012). This means that Japanese is heavily dependent on context whereas English is not as dependent on it (Akasu and Asano 1993).

In this study, it is investigated how American people, who have been said to come from an individualist culture and a positive politeness culture in general, understand attentiveness and its related concepts, namely empathy and anticipatory inference, and their emic understandings of these three notions above are compared with those among Japanese people, who have often been said to come from a collectivist culture and a negative politeness culture.

2.2. Attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference

Attentiveness is a pre-emptive response, which takes the form of offering. A demonstrator of attentiveness pays attention to others by the work of *ki* ('spirit') reads the atmosphere in a situation and anticipates or infers the other party's feelings, state, needs and wants through a potential recipient's verbal and non-verbal cues. Taking these into account, a demonstrator of attentiveness considers what kinds of attentiveness would be suitable in the given situation, and then decides on a suitable kind of attentiveness. Attentiveness is manifested linguistically and/or non-linguistically through a pre-emptive response which offers help to the other party. It can be said that one of the major characteristics of attentiveness is the nature of pre-empting. That is, one demonstrates attentiveness without or before being asked by a potential recipient. (Fukushima 2020). Although attentiveness is not unique to Japanese culture (Fukushima 2015b,

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3 The basis of this style is a set of cultural values that emphasise *omoiyari* 'empathy' over explicit verbal communication (Clancy 1986: 213-214).

4 United States is classified into low context communication frameworks and Japan into high context communication frameworks (Ting-Toomey 1999: 100-111) (see also Okabe 1983: 35).

2020), those who can demonstrate attentiveness as expected are evaluated positively in Japanese culture, being called *kigakiku* ('attentive') (Fukushima 2011).

Certain conditions are needed for attentiveness to arise, such as anticipatory inference (see further discussion below), a potential demonstrator's ability, availability and her/his willingness to demonstrate attentiveness (see Fukushima 2015b, 2020). Willingness may be motivated by empathy for a potential recipient (see Fukushima 2015b, 2020). It can be said that attentiveness is not demonstrated without empathy, except for the case of reflexive attentiveness, namely, attentiveness demonstrated for the benefit of a demonstrator (see Fukushima 2011).

After attentiveness is demonstrated, it is evaluated by a recipient. Evaluation can be positive (when a recipient appreciates attentiveness) or negative (when attentiveness did not match a recipient's expectations) (see Fukushima 2015b). Negative evaluation can be also made when a recipient feels that it was imposing, intrusive, hurting the other party's dignity, criticising the recipient (incapability), or a burden (see e.g., Fukushima 2009, 2013; Uchida 2011), for example.

Empathy is widely translated as *omoiyari* in Japanese (e.g., Burdelski 2013; Lebra 1976; Takada 2013; Travis 1998). According to Lebra (1976, 38), *omoiyari* is "the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, to vicariously experience the pleasure or pain that they are undergoing, and to help them satisfy their wishes." The most direct expression for empathy is to "become another's *mi*," (*aite no mi ni naru*) (Lebra 1993: 72), which means to stand in someone else's shoes. Empathy is considered to be important in Japanese culture (e.g., Clancy 1986, 1990; Fukushima 2016; Lebra 1976; Uchida 2011; Wierzbicka 1997). I could offer a personal anecdote on this. When the author visited a junior high school in Yamanashi, Japan, some educational aims were displayed at the front of a classroom. One of the aims was to become a pupil who has empathy (*omoiyari no aru seito*). The educational board or the teachers probably thought that empathy was lacking among the pupils, or simply that empathy is an important value in Japanese society. Similarly, Nakatsugawa (1992 in Travis 1998: 56) cites the educational guidelines for teachers in Japan, put out by the Japanese Ministry of education (which is now called Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), where the first item is "Let's treasure the mind of *omoiyari*". Moreover, empathy ranked first in Japan among what parents desire for their children (Soumucho 1995). Not only for children and pupils, empathy is considered to be important also for adults in Japanese culture. The following excerpt by a trainer in a Japanese company in Dunn (2013) lends support to this.

> *Dakara, yasashiku ano <u>omoiyari</u> o motte aite ni tsumari ee jibun ga wakatteiru kedo aite wa wakaranai deshoo to omou koto kara sutaato shite.* (underscore added)
> ('So speak kindly with consideration, and start with the idea that even if you understand what you mean, the addressee may not.')[5]
> (Dunn 2013: 236)

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5 Dunn (2013: 236) translates *omoiyari* as "consideration" here. Consideration is sometimes used as a translation of *hairyo* (see e.g., Fukushima 2019)

The importance of empathy, however, is not restricted to Japanese culture, but is also evident in some other cultures (e.g., Ran 2016). This may resonate with Lebra's (2004) following contention, at least in part: Self is more prone to "become the other" when the latter is perceived as someone who is suffering, a victim, for example, of some stressful or painful condition. This type of surrogacy is the most psychological inner-oriented, empathy-driven (*omoiyari*), and perhaps most universal (Lebra 2004: 205).

Anticipatory inference may be analogous to *sasshi* (see e.g., Yamada 1997) in Japanese[6] ('sharp guess-work') (Ishii 1984). Nishida (1977) defines *sasshi* as meaning conjecture, surmise, or guessing what someone means (Gudykunst and Nishida 1993: 151). Anticipatory inference is related to empathy. For example, a person with *omoiyari* thinks s/he can know what the other wants, thus not requiring the latter to be explicit about their wishes, according to Wierzbicka (1997: 276). These functions are possible through anticipatory inference. Moreover, anticipatory inference is definitely needed in implicit and indirect communication,[7] and for attentiveness to arise, as a potential demonstrator anticipates or infers the other party's needs, wants and sometimes also their feelings (Fukushima 2015b).

3. Data and methodology

The aim of this paper is to examine emic understandings of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference among American people in comparison to those among Japanese people. Accordingly, ten female American university students (AS)[8] (age range: 20-22) served as the participants so that their data could be compared with that of the female Japanese university students (age range: 20-22), who participated in Fukushima (2016), which compared emic understandings of Japanese people across two generations with regard to the three concepts above. There are several variables, which may influence emic understandings of the notions investigated in this study, for example, gender, generation and social background. Considering these variables, the participants were confined to females, and they were all university students in their early twenties. In this way, the American participants in this study are considered to be comparable to Japanese participants in Fukushima (2016). Metapragmatic interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the participants, namely English. The participants were asked to use their metalanguage, commenting on their understanding of anticipatory inference, empathy and attentiveness. The participants were also asked to give some examples of the three notions above. Each interview lasted approximately 13–20 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

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6 *Sasshi* is one of the implicit traditional interpersonal norms in Japanese interpersonal communication, according to Ishii (1987: 127) (see also Miyake 2011: iv, viii, 16-17, 188).

7 The Japanese style of communication can work only in a rather homogeneous society in which people actually can *anticipate* each other's needs, wants and reactions (Clancy 1986: 216).

8 They are undergraduates of University of California and are all native speakers of English.

4. Results and discussion

In the analysis of the metapragmatic interview data, some interesting cross-cultural differences and similarities emerged. One of the cross-cultural differences emerged as salient in the perspective on empathy by the participants. Compared to the Japanese counterparts, fewer American participants valued empathy. One American participant stated that it was not important because of individualism (see extract 2). Some other American participants stated that empathy was underappreciated in American culture, but they stated that it was important personally (see extract 3) or in close relationships. It is interesting to note that there was such subtle variability within American culture.

The importance of attentiveness could be regarded as a cross-cultural similarity between American and Japanese participants. Another similarity was that all the participants stated that good human relationships were established through empathy and attentiveness. In what follows, some excerpts from the interview data are presented and cross-cultural differences and similarities on the three concepts investigated in this study are further exemplified.

4. 1. Anticipatory inference

Most of the participants stated that they would infer the other party's wishes or needs, and they simply answered, saying "Yes" to the question, "Do you often infer the wishes/needs of the other party?". This tendency was found in the Japanese data, too (Fukushima 2016). Only one American student (AS4) gave further comments, saying that she tried to be polite by inferring the other party's needs (see extract 1).

Extract (1)

AS4: I was said by my close friend I do so. I try to. If they seem sad or something like that, then I try to think to make them feel better but maybe I won't know what's wrong, or I don't know. I try to be polite. Think of what other person wants me to do or like, yes.

Extract (1) may suggest that inferring others' needs can be one of the constituents of politeness, although further scrutiny is needed to investigate the relationship between anticipatory inference and politeness. All the American participants answered that they would infer the other party's needs, which shows that anticipatory inference is thought to be important by American participants. As implicit communication is preferred in Japan, as shown in previous research, and anticipatory inference is one of the traditional norms in Japanese interpersonal communication (see section 2.2), it could be anticipated that Japanese participants would value anticipatory inference more highly than American participants. However, the results show that anticipatory inference is important also for American participants in this study. And this may relate to the practice of attentiveness, as anticipatory inference is necessary for attentiveness to arise.

4.2. Empathy

Most of the younger Japanese participants in Fukushima (2016) stated that empathy was important, although some of them stated that showing empathy could be meddling sometimes. However, this does not mean that Japanese students evaluate empathy negatively, as they acknowledged its importance (Fukushima 2016: 193). On the other hand, empathy was not that important for some American participants because of individualism (see extract 2).

Extract (2)

AS8: Umm. I think American culture is not really. Ah, it's a lot of individualism.

Extract (2) suggests that showing empathy is not seen as compatible with individualism. Another American participant (AS2) pointed out that showing empathy to others was underappreciated in American culture. However, she stated that it was important for her personally (see extract 3).[9]

Extract (3)

AS2: It's definitely important to me. Ah, I think it's sort of underappreciated in American culture.

This can be regarded as an example of coexistence of individualism and collectivism. These results suggest that there may be some cultural differences in the manifestation and importance of empathy, although empathy can be found elsewhere (see Lebra 2004; section 2.2). Further scrutiny is needed on this issue.

Another American student (AS1) pointed out a gender difference in valuing empathy, namely that women are more empathetic (see extract 4).

Extract (4)

AS1: Yes, especially in the case of women. Women in America tend to be very empathetic each other. Just stereotypically women are more so.

This statement on gender differences regarding empathy in extract (4) illustrates the heterogeneity in one culture (see further discussion in section 4.4), and indicates that cross-cultural differences do not necessarily mean those between different nations. This kind of statement on gender differences was not found at all in the Japanese data (Fukushima 2016). Although gender differences on the three notions were not investigated in this study (all the participants were females), gender is an important variable in politeness research (see e.g., Mills 2003), especially in cross-cultural research on politeness (see e.g., Kádár and Bargiela-Chiappini 2011). An investigation of the three concepts taking the gender perspectives into account would broaden the scope of cross-cultural differences (or similarities) in future

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9 In Japanese data, there were no such statements.

research.

4.3. Attentiveness

All the Japanese participants stated that attentiveness was important in Japanese culture (Fukushima 2016). According to one participant, demonstrating attentiveness is in a way taken for granted, as she grew up in an environment where attentiveness was demonstrated (Fukushima 2016: 195-196). This is, in part at least, in accord with Markus and Kitayama's (1991) contention that the sense of individuality that accompanies an interdependent self includes an attentiveness and responsiveness to others, as noted in section 2.1. In contrast, an individual's dignity is highly valued in American culture, as noted in section 2.1, and attentiveness may be sometimes evaluated negatively, for example, when hurting the other's dignity, as noted in section 2.2. This might suggest that attentiveness would be negatively evaluated by American participants. However, an American student (AS5) in this study stated that attentiveness was important (see extract 5), which does not necessarily coincide with the results of previous research. In extract 5, the term, attentiveness, is not used, but what AS5 means may be similar to the concept of attentiveness. In extract 5, 'to pay attention' is in relation to people, which is similar to the observation of other people, and this would lead to anticipatory inference, that is, inferring the other's needs. 'You wanna help' in extract 5 indicates willingness to help others, which is one of the conditions for attentiveness to arise (see Fukushima 2015b, 2020).

Extract (5)

AS5: Yes, definitely important. You should always, you know, pay attention and always have
　　　interest that you wanna help.

　　　　Although an American student (AS1) stated that attentiveness was not particularly important (see extract 6), AS1 admitted that attentiveness was very important in close relationships such as romantic relationships or in the family (see extract 7). It may be argued that some influence of individualism emerges in extract 6, but not in extract 7.

Extract (6)

AS1: Not particularly. I feel like in America, you are taught to think mostly about yourself. And
　　　your own needs, like they teach you making yourself the best way you are is better for
　　　everybody else. So, they tend to be a lot of self-focused.

Extract (7)

AS1: But, um, definitely in romantic relationships or in family, like parent-child relationships,
　　　attentiveness is very important. And in romantic relationships, you wanna be attentive to
　　　your partner's needs, because if you're not, the relationship won't work out.

According to AS1, attentiveness is not particularly important in general, which may be the

result of the upbringing or education ('you are taught to think mostly about yourself'), but it is important in close relationships. Such a statement, differentiating the demonstration of attentiveness depending on the relationship, was not found among the data of Japanese participants (Fukushima 2016).

The reason why attentiveness was seen as important by American participants did not differ greatly from that provided by Japanese participants in Fukushima (2016). One Japanese student stated that it would be troublesome to establish good human relationships without attentiveness (Fukushima 2016: 196). Some American participants also stated that attentiveness was important from the perspective of human relationships (see extracts 8 and 9).

Extract (8)

AS7: Yeah. I think personally to me, it's very important. Because if you're rushing and not paying attention to what's going on how other people are feeling, you can hurt someone's feeling and making them upset. I think it's important to observe the situation and see (other's feelings, trying to see)[10] and if we can help everybody and keep things all right.

Extract (9)

AS10: I think it's important for humans to have sort of an attentive nature towards one another, because if we didn't pay attention to anyone else, we couldn't really have good relationships, I think.

To attend to other people's feelings and not to hurt them are considered to be important practices (see extract 8). These may lead to a good human relationship. Most of the participants in this study thought that a good human relationship could be established through attentiveness. The statement by AS7 (extract 8) showed not only the importance of attentiveness from the perspective of human relationships, especially caring about the other's feelings, but AS7 also mentioned the first stage of demonstration of attentiveness, namely, the observation of situations and the consideration of verbal cues/nonverbal cues and the ability to read the atmosphere of a situation (see Fukushima 2015b: 277-280). These results tell us that most of the American participants thought that attentiveness was important, which can be regarded as a similarity between American and Japanese participants.

4.4. The three concepts and cultural aspects

Japanese communication style has been claimed to be indirect and implicit in contrast to American explicit style, as noted in section 2.1. Empathy and anticipatory inference are needed in implicit communication, and it has been argued that they are highly valued in Japanese culture in previous research, as noted in section 2.1. In American culture, individuals seek to maintain their independence from others by attending to the self, in contrast to the priority

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10 Words in parentheses indicate transcriber's 'best guess' utterance.

in many Asian culture of attending to others (Markus and Kitayama 1991). In Japanese culture, people who can demonstrate attentiveness as expected are evaluated positively (see e.g., Fukushima 2011). Based on these observations, it could be anticipated that the Japanese participants would value the three notions investigated in this study more highly than their American counterparts. Or, the Japanese participants would possess a motive for being attentive in accordance with the high value placed upon it within their society.

　　The results of this study indicate this to be only partly true. On the one hand, empathy was said to be more highly valued by the Japanese participants than by the American participants. On the other hand, it appears that both the Japanese and American participants tend to infer the other party's needs and value attentiveness[11] in general. This may be partly related to the cosmopolitan picture of culture in which the world is not neatly divided into national categories, due to the advance of globalisation and the movement of people (Holliday 2009: 146). Moreover, Sifianou and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2017: 589) point out that cultures and even subcultures are not only heterogeneous but also unbounded entities since they "diffuse and flow into each other" (Coupland 2010: 6), especially nowadays when globalisation entails mobility for various reasons and an increasing variety of interactions, both traditional and novel, particularly given the development of technologically mediated means of communication.[12]

　　Furthermore, the results in this study may partly support Brown et al.'s (2012: 257) observation, namely that the identification of Japan with collectivism and the United States with individualism has come under attack recently (see also Takano and Osaka 1999). This may be related to Yamaguchi's (1994: 184) view on Japanese culture, namely that it has become more individualistic due to economic growth. Similarly, it is sometimes said that Japanese culture is a moderately individualistic culture (Gudykunst et al. 1987: 295) as well as moderately collectivistic (Gudykunst et al. 1987: 297).[13] Likewise, Hofstede (1991: 77) points out that Japan has experienced a shift towards individualism because of economic development, although he acknowledges that Japan still retains distinctive collectivist elements in its family, school, and workspheres. This may, at least in part, resonate with Matsumoto's (2002) contention that the culture itself is changing. Okabe's (1983: 22) remark on the cultural values and assumptions found in Japan and the United States, arguing that contrasting assumptions should be viewed as differing in degree or in emphasis rather than as strictly dichotomous in substance, may be, in part, helpful in accounting for the results in this study.

　　The results of this study partly suggest that all societies display both collectivism and

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11　These results differ slightly from those in Fukushima (2013) where evaluation of attentiveness among Japanese and American participants was investigated. In Fukushima (2013), attentiveness was more negatively evaluated by American participants than by Japanese participants in two situations out of six.

12　These are in line with the influence of globalisation and internal variation, which can be against that the culture concept is often complicit with nationalisms (see Lempert 2012: 194).

13　The contention that one culture has both individualistic and collectivistic elements may relate to Fukushima's (2000: 194-195) proposal. That is, Japanese culture also entails an element of positive politeness culture, that is, to show/strengthen solidarity, although Brown and Levinson (1987) categorised Japanese culture as negative culture, in which power and distance prevail.

individualism, as Mills (2015: 134) notes (see also Gudykunst et al. 1996: 513), and that all cultures should be characterised as exhibiting both tendencies, with certain cultures tending to foreground the individual, or foreground the social group (Mills 2015: 136). It is also worth noting that Grainger and Mills' (2016: 25) argument, namely that all societies display both collectivism and individualism (see also Triandis 1994: 42). Even in collectivist cultures (e.g., Arab cultures), individuals strive for their individual rights and necessarily act as autonomous beings, whereas in individualist cultures (e.g., British culture) individuals recognise the importance of their allegiance to social groups such as the family and adjust their behaviour and values to those groups (Grainger and Mills 2016: 25). I side with Grainger and Mills' (2016: 25) following contention: "[h]umans are social beings in essence, and therefore they will always orient both to their own individual needs and those of the group to which they belong". Lim and Ahn (2015: 70) also argue that a culture is a field in which different attributes coexist and dialectically interact with each other to reach an optimal relationship for the society at a given time. The statement on empathy by one of the American participants, whose personal views differ from those of the others (see extract 3), may suggest the coexistence of collectivism and individualism, or the heterogeneity of a culture.

5. Summary and conclusion

In this paper, emic understandings of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference among American university students were investigated, and they were compared to those among Japanese counterparts. The data was drawn from the metapragmatic interviews. In the analysis of the data, both contrast and convergence emerged. The major difference lay in how empathy was envisaged. Empathy was less important for some American participants than for the Japanese participants. The cross-cultural differences between the American and Japanese participants may partly stem from the cultural traits in Japanese and American cultures, which were reviewed in 2.1, although the coexistence of collectivism and individualism, or the heterogeneity of a culture could be found in the data.

It should be noted that similarities also emerged between two groups (American and Japanese), who have been repeatedly claimed to have different communication styles and cultural values in previous research, as noted in section 2.1. Most participants would infer the other party's wishes or needs, and regard attentiveness as important, although there was a subtle difference in the degree of its importance. Most of them stated that good human relationships were established through attentiveness. While acknowledging the limitations of the current study in terms of sample size, these results suggest that the moral orders, on which American and Japanese people evaluate im/politeness, may not differ very much. Naturally, further scrutiny is needed before these suggestions are confirmed.

It is argued by some researchers (see e.g., Mills and Kádár 2011: 22; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016: 74) that norms of politeness vary across many dimensions: across (and within)

cultures, communities of practice, social classes, regions, genders and age groups, to name but a few. What we have examined in this study is confined to emic understandings of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference among young female American university students in comparison to those among young female Japanese university students. The reason why similarities were found between the data of the American participants and that of the Japanese participants may lie in the fact that the participants were all female university students (taking the comparability of the participants into account, as noted in section 3). That is, American and Japanese participants share the same gender, age group, and educational and social backgrounds (or social class). Thus, further studies on emic understandings of the three notions above, incorporating other elements, such as different gender, age groups and social backgrounds, are definitely needed. It is hoped that such research will help people of different cultural backgrounds better understand each other and that it will benefit interpersonal relationships.

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