

**RECONCILING INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION DESIRES WITH
SOCIETY'S NORMS. A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOW JAPANESE
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CARRY OUT DISCUSSIONS IN ENGLISH**

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ABSTRACT

There have been many assumptions about Japanese communication and it is often contrasted with western "norms". These concepts persist both within and outside Japanese culture and often lead to stereotyping of Japanese students. These findings include contrasts such as competition versus collaboration and rational logic versus intuitive and emotional responses. In addition it has often been assumed that Japanese students cannot reach a higher academic level in their communication in English. This study aimed to challenge both these views by providing an in-depth analysis of how Japanese university students communicated in small-group discussions in English over a full academic year.

The literature provided various perspectives to support the notion of cultural contrasts, both in general and through specific studies of educational contexts. However, other views suggested the necessity of restricting the limits of these and considering the contexts in which they applied. Closer studies of particular academic, ideational and intercultural factors provided more detailed indications of specific features of Japanese discussions. In addition, it was considered necessary to take a culture-sensitive approach to the research was considered in both setting up discussions and carrying out classroom activities. Communication strategies were to be taught to aid the process of discussion.

For the research, students' journals were used to ascertain their perceptions of carrying out discussions and small-group discussions were recorded and analysed in detail over an academic year. Previous studies had suggested that accessing the student voice was an appropriate way to understand their communication. The results of the journals revealed that the students were in many ways influenced by cultural features but individually they had different goals and attitudes to carrying out discussions. The recordings also revealed certain cultural tendencies but also showed that students were able to make changes to their discussion style through the practice of strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Japanese university students carry out discussions in English language classes. The focus was on both objective data of recorded discussions and student perceptions of this communication. Stereotypes about Japanese communication are widespread and often lead to assumptions about how students will communicate in English. Contrastive rhetoric studies often focus on the differences between Japanese and Western norms of behaviour (Hofstede, 1980; 1991, Barnlund, 1975). The Western norms cited often come from the Anglo-American cultural background and focus on the 'otherness' of Japanese cultural behaviour patterns. Such views are often found in anthropological studies that are not classroom-based. They often persist unquestioned over time without being reevaluated in the light of how the current generation of students communicates and are based on observing large groups rather than understanding individuals. The contrastive cultural position focuses on either exoticism or negative evaluation of what Japanese cannot do in communication, with terms such as 'non-confrontational' or 'non-expressive'. There is often recourse to views based on stereotypes and a focus on the passive nature of Japanese communication, which implies unwillingness to communicate opinions or ideas.

Previous classroom-based research was often based on lower-level and transactional communication, where outcomes are predictable and conclusions less revealing about students' wider abilities. It seems that less research is available into the more open ended higher-level skills found in academic discussion. There is therefore a gap to be filled in understanding the linguistic behaviour and communication patterns of Japanese students at this level. This study aims to fill that gap. It has come about due to a belief that Japanese students should aim higher than their expectations and those of their teachers in order to carry out more sophisticated academic discussions with greater confidence. In order to achieve this, it was first necessary to develop a detailed understanding of how Japanese

students discuss in English and their perceptions of this process.

The aim of this study was to reconsider the claims made about Japanese communication in the light of a specific classroom situation and determine how we can use this knowledge to help students achieve their potential. It should also result in making those who teach Japanese students more aware of their students' communicative patterns and the motivation behind these. The means to achieving this was therefore to investigate and analyse how Japanese university students communicate in English in academic classroom discussions through a detailed study of such discussions and students' perceptions of these. The findings from this research should help to give Japanese students and those who teach them a greater awareness of how to develop their discussion skills and powers of expression in English. This study centred on the English learning classroom in a particular department of one university. Its focus is a group of university students studying English in the Faculty of Education at a state university in order to become English teachers after graduation. They have little experience of academic discussion or explicit instruction in how to carry it out prior to the start of the course, and individual members of the group have different levels of exposure to spoken English.

1.1 Background to the study

Many years of living in Japan teaching English to Japanese students, mostly in universities, have made me familiar with images and realities of the communication patterns of groups and individuals as well as the gap between spoken words and behaviour and intended meaning. Working in various institutions has provided an awareness of the surface behaviour patterns that generally prevail across a range of classroom situations. At the same time, spending a lengthy period in one particular institution has allowed me greater insight into students' ways of thinking through their written work, their communication in their own language and in situations beyond the classroom environment. These situations include speeches made at formal events, participation in extra-curricular activities and communication between students in informal situations. These all reveal the range and variety of students' communicative abilities which may not be apparent in the classroom. An understanding of Japanese language and culture has helped me to combine the insight that

this familiarity entails with the greater objectivity of an observer who brings different cultural and communication norms and expectations to the classroom. Knowledge of the students' native language enables me to distinguish between linguistic transfer and wider cultural features. The observer's view includes expectations that students can achieve more than society and teachers expect of them. Insight into Japanese society and the educational system provides an awareness of the expectations that society and educational institutions have of students and the perceived barriers they might have to surmounting them. These include relatively low expectations of linguistic and academic achievement. These factors are often disguised by the fact that average standards of literacy and scholastic ability are high. Satisfaction with high literacy and graduation rates can lead to complacency with the system as a whole and a tendency to overlook weaknesses within it.

There is often a gap between group and individual expectations. Individual teachers may have high expectations for students' communication outside the classroom in a wider and potentially more demanding academic community. However, the belief that Japanese students cannot communicate at a higher level in English is often a self-fulfilling prophecy, perpetuated by the media and other teachers (McVeigh, 2002, Brown, 2004, Anderson, 1993). There is a gap between the often extensive, passive linguistic knowledge obtained by students and the ability to apply it in real situations. In the Faculty of Education where this study took place, academics who had visited other Asian countries and received visiting students from those countries were aware of the gap between the ability of these students and their own Japanese students.

It is not sufficient to assume that gaps are purely due to linguistic differences between Japanese and English or differences between Japanese and Western cultures. However, the view that most Japanese have difficulty communicating in English even at a basic level persists despite more than a decade of compulsory English communication courses in secondary schools. Personal experience has shown that, in reality, communication skills are often neglected in favour of examination training and are rarely formally tested at the secondary school level due to the rigours of the formal curriculum. Individual communication with each year's group of incoming students has confirmed this view. Many students claimed that although a native English teacher was present at their school, most of

their classes consisted of grammar and reading, taught by a Japanese teacher. Consequently, they admitted to far less experience and confidence in oral than in written skills. Where students had developed these skills, it was usually outside the formal education system through attending English conversation schools or spending time abroad. We cannot therefore assume that attention will be paid to these skills in mainstream education. Furthermore, traditionally, English communication skills were not a major requirement for secondary school English teachers. Overall this situation does not assume the presence of communicative or academic skills for higher-level communication in English in an era which, theoretically, should offer increasing opportunities for such communication in the virtual and actual world. The literature review will provide a broader perspective on and background to this issue.

If overall expectations of communicative ability are low, it is probable that the need for higher achievement will not be adequately valued. Consequently, students may not have the motivation to develop higher-level skills. In personal communication, many students claimed that they rarely had the opportunity to engage in higher-level discussions even in their own language. In a society that, as the literature will indicate, values conformity above individual achievement, students tend to follow convention and do what is expected of them by their teachers and their peers. This may include expectations of a certain structure and framework to classroom events. It is therefore preferable to teach communicative and academic skills within a framework that is familiar to the students. The literature review will consider what kind of framework and academic and communicative expectations are present in university English teaching classes and whether the existing framework provides students with the opportunity to develop higher cognitive, linguistic and interpersonal skills.

It will not be sufficient to assume that higher academic skills cannot be developed in an Asian academic context due to assumed “different” communication styles. Personal experience has shown that students from other Asian countries in Japanese university classes express themselves more articulately and with greater adherence to norms of academic discourse and expression of ideas than the Japanese students. This suggests that there are factors which influence Japanese communication that go beyond a simple contrast between Western and Asian values, a view which will be analysed further in the literature review. In

addition, Japanese students who had returned from studying abroad often claimed in personal communication that their learning experiences in Japan had not adequately prepared them for the communicative situations they faced in the classroom there. They had experienced difficulties in quick thinking, expressing and developing ideas and with the interactional features of, for example, how to take up and hold a turn and how to respond appropriately to others. It is therefore necessary to investigate the cultural and pedagogical background behind such difficulties, including the cultural communication norms that influence students. This view will be considered in more detail in the literature review. It will be important to analyse the reasons behind the cultural norms found in the classroom, for example, whether they are a result of intrinsic cultural features, are acquired behaviour to suit the classroom environment, or are due to the difficulties of expression in the foreign language.

In order to examine the precise nature of any difficulties which Japanese students may encounter with oral academic discourse, it is necessary to look more closely at particular aspects of classroom academic interaction. It is not sufficient to label their behaviour, for example, by arguing that reticence is endemic to the culture or that Japanese students never express opinions. These points can easily be refuted when we see students in animated conversation with their peers outside the classroom. They are actively involved in club and social activities and part-time jobs where they give opinions, organize ideas and make decisions. In contrast to this, the silence and passive behaviour that pervade many secondary school and university classrooms (Brown, 2004, Wadden, 1993, Guest, 2005) give credence to the notion that silence is not an absolute feature of the culture but subject to internalized norms regarding cultural rules of time, place and situation.

Institutional and cultural expectations may include the notion that the expressed and true self of other contexts is repressed in formal academic contexts where gaining knowledge rather than the expression of ideas is the norm. In such situations, students may be expected to take on the passive role of accumulator of knowledge without verbally questioning this knowledge or expressing views on it. It is natural for students to respond to the norms and expectations of their particular educational context. If then, the classroom has its own norms of communication grounded in cultural and institutional values and expectations, and these

limit the free and spontaneous expression of ideas, we need to look more closely at this cultural background and related theories in order to consider their influence on classroom expectations and performance.

As students' academic oral expression includes linguistic, cognitive and interpersonal features, which may be influenced by culture, it was important to investigate the role played by studies of culture and communication in defining and explaining this culture. The next chapter will consider these in more detail, so only a brief introduction is provided here. Many of these studies imply that Japan is an unchanging monolithic cultural entity (Nisbett, 2003, Scollon and Scollon, 1995, Maynard, 1997, Wong, 2003) with certain fixed inherent cultural characteristics. They focus on abstract concepts and polarized opposites between East and West as explanations for behaviour. Such views do not make sufficient allowances for changes over time or diversity within the culture. They may prevent us from objectively considering behaviour that deviates from such cultural frames of reference or viewing behaviour on its own terms.

In contrast to previous studies, this study aimed to move away from assuming cultural generalisations as all-embracing explanations for behaviour and will take an approach similar to that of Kubota (1999), who suggests that such ideologies prevent us from carrying out a closer analysis of a culture and motivations for behaviour. This study viewed ideas about culture as a reference point to be questioned and reconsidered in the light of actual behaviour and reflections of individuals. This will enable us to gain a deeper understanding of communicative features in a culture as exhibited in a particular educational context within that culture. As was suggested above, this includes the issue of understanding which behaviour is considered appropriate for particular contexts.

This thesis will move away from taking cultural generalisations and stereotypes as a starting point for how students will behave. The literature review will consider the actual context of the Japanese university classroom and how it has been described both by outside commentators and those involved in the system. In addition, a significant focus will be the often-neglected voice of the students themselves. Lee- Cunin (2005: 136) writes that the student experience should be an important component of research. However, she states that

this voice has been ignored in much of the literature. She suggests that this is because of “an underlying assumption that Japanese students have not achieved a level of critical consciousness that would enable them to give an informed opinion on the education they are receiving.” On investigation, she found they were, in fact, able to develop a critical self through other aspects of their lives and suggests that it is important for them to reflect on their status rather than allow a stereotype to justify the exclusion of their point of view. These views lead to a major focus of this research- going beyond the outsider’s view and moving closer to finding students’ actual voices in order to understand the motivations of individual students. In addition, it is important to consider students’ voices as having an important role to play in their own academic and linguistic development.

The focus of this study was a group of Japanese university students. It investigated how they communicate in academic discussions in English in order to reach a better understanding of performance, perception and motivation. The particular communicative event of the academic discussion was chosen, firstly because it covers an area rarely treated in detail in the research literature about Japan; other studies often focus on transactional features or the development of written skills. Secondly, this area covers the skills that go beyond everyday conversation to the higher skills that students often lack, with the aim of producing results that can help develop students’ communicative skills at a higher level.

Discussion activities also develop students’ cognitive, linguistic, and interactive skills. At the cognitive level, the focus is on developing and expressing ideas and arguments, at the linguistic level, it is on the language used to carry out these functions, in particular lexical strategies for smooth interaction and fluency. At the interaction level, it includes issues such as turn-taking, repair, and asking and responding to questions and arguments. These are all areas in which students in individual communication perceive weaknesses. They express a desire to develop their skills to a higher level. Given the range of skills involved, it was important to carry out a small-scale-study of a particular group of students and find methods that enabled simultaneous capturing of all these skills. The aim was to bring about a deeper understanding of the students and their communication.

In this section, some general contextual background regarding Japanese students and their

communicative abilities was given. Given the importance of institutional as well as general cultural context, it is also important to consider the specific institutional context and background of the students in the study. The next section will move from the general context of Japanese students to this institutional context.

1.2 The institutional context of the research

This section will consider the situation in national universities in general and then in the particular university department in which the research was carried out. This research took place in the English Department of the Faculty of Education of a national university near Tokyo. The literature review will discuss the university reforms and the changing demographics that have resulted in university entrance in general becoming less competitive. However, national universities (since the study was carried out these have been given more independence and their names changed to “national university corporations”) are still prestigious. Even at a time of falling birth rates and a general decline in the numbers of students seeking university admission, entrance to them remains competitive. Although university reforms have given the universities greater freedom to devise new and diverse styles of entrance examinations, the entrance examination typically used in such universities still includes traditional papers where factual knowledge is tested largely by multiple-choice and short answer questions. There is often little scope for individual flair or more open styles of examination due to the need for objectivity in selection of students and the large numbers of candidates.

The examination is taken in a range of academic subjects, and students seeking admission will have devoted their upper secondary school days to preparing for these examinations both at school and in evening and weekend cram school classes. Cram schools, which provide extra classes for students outside their regular schools, and focus on preparing for entrance examinations, play a major role in Japanese society. The students will have been expected to passively absorb vast amounts of knowledge. They will have studied English as a compulsory subject for six years. This educational background provides the cultural context to the way students absorb and manipulate knowledge, their expectations for the classroom and the roles they play there as learners as well as the academic standards they

have reached before entering university.

The students in the study have therefore demonstrated their academic ability through a demanding examination, albeit one that deals with knowledge in a specific way as discrete facts to be recalled and a certain amount of reasoning. In the next chapter I shall consider McVeigh's (2001; 2002) views on this attitude to learning. A result of preparing for and passing these general entrance exams will be, as a minimum, that the students have a large, passive base of general knowledge. As an additional examination to be accepted into the English Department of this university, the students were, at the time of this research, expected to pass a listening comprehension examination. From this it may be assumed that they have a large passive vocabulary and good understanding of spoken English. However, there was at that time no essay or interview required and no testing of students' ability to use or manipulate language to express their individual ideas, skills that would provide a useful basis for academic discussion. These skills will be considered further in the literature review. As active manipulation of general or linguistic knowledge was not tested at this stage, we can expect individual diversity in this respect based on personality and previous individual and academic experience. A minority of the students has spent time abroad or attended private English conversation schools. However, these factors will not in themselves guarantee a higher level of active use of English. In theory all the students will have experienced classes taught by native English speakers in secondary school, but there is still a gap between the official position and reality as indicated above.

The Faculty of Education's course of study for English teacher training is a four-year programme consisting of general and subject-specific courses including Education Theory and English Language, Literature and Linguistics. There is also a four-week teaching practice in secondary school and a graduation thesis in English with an oral presentation on this in Japanese. Most courses are taught by Japanese teachers in Japanese. Students have only a few classes per week taught entirely in English by a native speaker. It is not necessary for them to pass any internal standardized final examination or complete any residence abroad in order to graduate. As individual university teachers determine the syllabus and assessment criteria for each course, there is little coordination. This problem is not unique to one institution but seems to be a typical complaint in Japanese universities. Goodman

(2005:14) states that the curriculum reforms of the 1990s, of which more will be dealt with in the next chapter, were necessary because of this lack of co-ordination. He writes that until then the teaching of academics had been left largely to individuals. “They designed their own syllabi, taught own courses, set exams for their own students and marked their student papers all without reference to colleagues”. This, he claims, led to unimaginative teaching that was unchecked by others, resulting in disillusionment among students. His views indicate the difficulty of creating consistent approaches to learning across departments.

From the situation described above, we can infer that individual efforts of particular teachers may not have had any impact beyond their own classrooms. However, the reforms may change this as expertise is shared across departments. One consequence of the reforms was that ‘Faculty Development’ classes started. The university where this research took place implemented various reforms including making syllabus content more open and carrying out student evaluations of courses. The consequences of such developments for this research are that any changes that come about in teaching as a result of the research could potentially reach a larger audience. With more weight being given to the student voice through evaluations and more sharing of expertise at the faculty level, there is greater motivation for carrying out research that will lead to changes in students’ academic development. With a general focus on making students into more active and academic participants in their own learning as well as a moral and professional imperative on the Faculty of Education to train better teachers for a modern and more international society, there is generally a greater chance than in the past that a deeper understanding of students’ learning will be important and valued by all sectors.

Regarding the process of becoming a teacher, students are subject to a competitive external evaluation, held at a regional level, which is a requirement for employment in state secondary schools. Others find alternative employment in private secondary schools or cram schools. As most of them will eventually work in the education system in some capacity, higher-level academic and communicative skills will be useful for them not only in their personal and academic development but also professionally in terms of the influence they will have on the intellectual development of future generations beyond the classroom. All

these aspects made it important to carry out the study for the potential long-term benefits beyond the students immediately involved in it.

Intrinsic motivation for learning English as expressed by students in personal communication as well as extrinsic motivation in terms of their future careers helped to ensure students' interest in improving their skills and their positive participation in the course. In initial questionnaires where they wrote their reasons and aims for taking the course, these included the personal and academic ones of being able to discuss many topics in English at a higher level and to develop useful skills for their future careers. They expressed awareness of the limitations of their academic skills and a desire to develop these. Some expressed criticism of the education they had received at school and university and hoped for greater opportunities for more academic and active learning. However, the pressures of other activities including the general overload of compulsory, non-English related courses sometimes led to decreased motivation. This resulted in a general tendency for students to focus on doing the minimum necessary to pass the courses. In order for them to go beyond this and gain particular worthwhile and transferable skills from the class, they had to be made explicitly aware of its aims, objectives and potential benefits from the beginning. This also necessitated initial and ongoing teacher feedback.

1.3 Introduction to the study

I have explained the cultural and institutional context of the study and the general educational background of the students. The next section will consider the particular role of the discussion class within this educational context and a description of this class as the basis for this research.

As I suggested in the previous section, the lack of coordination in the university curriculum has resulted in the quality and quantity of both the students' learning experience and the standards and methods of evaluation being dependent on individual teachers. The students in this study had mostly studied English through the medium of Japanese but had also experienced basic level communication courses with a native English speaker. The class entitled 'Discussion' took place in the third year of their studies. Their English was likely to

have developed beyond the entrance exam level, but due to the factors mentioned above, their active study of English was not as intensive as they desired. By this stage their studies were becoming more specialized and they were preparing themselves intellectually for writing their graduation thesis by developing individual academic interests. They had also experienced teaching practice, and this contributed significantly to their confidence and attitudes to their future careers. It was therefore an appropriate time to focus on the development and oral expression of academic ideas.

The class met for ninety minutes each week and consisted initially of fourteen students with English as a major or minor subject. There was a range of ability within the class. One student left the class after only a few weeks due to an unwillingness to attend classes where she would have to participate actively; another left for temporary study abroad after one term. Such a small-scale study necessarily lacks the generalisability of a larger, quantitative study but it provides a closer, deeper analysis of a particular situation. This aims to provide useful insights which will benefit teachers of other Japanese students in similar situations.

The reason why this particular group of students was chosen was because this was the only class specifically for discussion in that particular academic year. Other classes were at a different level or focused on different skills. As access to and observation of another teacher's classes can be difficult in Japan, it was necessary to work with my own students. In addition, familiarity, access, trust and willing cooperation from the students over a full academic year were essential for this project, which made demands on the students outside of normal classroom time for the writing of journals. This required a pre-existing good relationship between teacher and students. The students were known to me through other classes at the beginning of the research but had not yet been in a situation where they developed discussion skills. Most of the students in the group wanted to be teachers after graduation.

Some knowledge of the students' thinking and attitudes had been gained through other courses. In a lecture course on "Intercultural Communication", where students were presented with outsiders' views of stereotypical Japanese behaviour, many wrote that the views given were outdated and no longer applied to their generation. This suggests a need to

reconsider such views as they relate to the current generation of students. The research investigated whether students' thinking and behaviour are influenced by general perceptions of Japanese behaviour at a conscious or subconscious level. Superficial observation suggests that young Japanese are less conservative than previous generations at least outside the classroom. It is important to consider whether this is reflective of actual changes in perceptions and behaviour or merely a superficial phenomenon. For this reason it was necessary to go beyond generalisations and established views and investigate students' behaviour in classroom discussions in detail. Although some views would suggest that we should simply accept the cultural factors that influence students' behaviour and not attempt to change this, this would not bring about the higher standards that should be a benefit of educational research. Aiming to develop higher standards in linguistic, academic and interactional terms involves developing awareness of the possibilities and range of communication outside the students' immediate experience. Students' potential should not be limited by their own cultural conditioning, and an aim of higher education should be to introduce them to new possibilities and help them to develop academic skills.

In order to investigate these issues further, it is first necessary to look in detail at any changes that have occurred in education and society in recent years. The changes which may have manifested themselves in schools and influenced young Japanese are changes in the curriculum, the content of textbooks, subtle changes in examinations and a desire for change expressed in the media and by the general public. Specific examples include the following:

(a) Although grammar translation has long been the dominant mode of instruction at the high school level, textbooks have become more communicative and a course of "Oral Communication" has been compulsory in high schools since 1994 with discussion and debate an option (Law, 1995). From 2006 a compulsory listening comprehension exercise was included in central university entrance examinations. Other reforms including those aimed at making teaching more communicative will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Such changes may have had some influence on English teaching at the secondary school level.

(b) The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme has been bringing native English

speakers in increasing numbers into Japanese schools since 1987. This will theoretically have made students familiar with native English speakers and may have influenced the English and ways of thinking of Japanese English teachers.

(c) Technology and the media may have brought more English into students' worlds and taken them beyond the encounters of their daily life. Television often features debates on controversial subjects. The Internet has enabled students to communicate anonymously outside their immediate social sphere. Although it is unclear to what extent individual students actually use this, it is reasonable to assume that they have become exposed to a wider range of ideas and opportunities for communication and expression in English than their predecessors. Their cultural and communicative concepts are no longer restricted to the limits of their own culture as they are exposed to worlds beyond their immediate experience. However, there are various reasons why previous studies of Japanese students and their communication in English were not sufficient and why further studies need to be carried out.

(a) There is often an assumption that Japanese students' English level will inevitably be low even at the university level. (Norris, 2004, Kelly, 1993) This will be discussed in the literature review. Focusing on lower-level skills has resulted in a lack of development of higher-level skills. More research is needed into higher-level discussion skills and into how students express their ideas about issues going beyond the basic communication and transactional skills.

(b) To improve on the development of the above-mentioned skills, it would be necessary for students to see their relevance across various courses in the curriculum. This would require some consistency and accountability between classes beyond what is currently the case in the university system due to the lack of consistency between teachers and courses mentioned in the previous section. Recent reforms offer greater hope in this respect. Providing an in-depth study of how students discuss in English helps to justify more academic approaches across classes

(c) With English as a language of international communication, students should not feel that any particular cultural norm is dominant. However, textbooks and teachers in Japan often

emphasize North American norms or a very direct approach to communication, which students are not always comfortable with. Understanding students' communication on its own terms will make it easier to improve their communicative ability rather than simply employing a contrastive approach with any assumed Western 'norms'.

1.4 Introduction to the literature and the purpose of the research

In the next chapter, literature will be reviewed in order to establish what can be known through previous studies. The first part of this is to consider traditional views of Japanese cultural behaviour mostly through general works. I have already suggested that these views, which often polarize Japanese and Western culture, while providing useful background material, can be a barrier to understanding the actual behaviour and motivation of individuals in a culture. The views considered will focus on aspects of communication which may influence how students communicate in class, particularly regarding directness, indirectness, expression of opinions, contrasts between logic and interpersonal communication, individuality and the group, silences and other features that are often given as reasons which account for the differences between Japanese and Western communication. After presenting such views, I will consider criticisms of the contrastive culture approach, which suggest that such views may be self-perpetuating and not representative of actual communication. It will therefore be important to consider the specific contexts in which Japanese communicate.

The next section of the literature review will consider the educational context in order to ascertain how such cultural features are expressed, their role in the educational context and whether they apply to the current generation. Recent educational reforms and their effectiveness will be discussed. Going beyond the general education system, I shall consider research papers that look in detail at the characteristics of Japanese students in English classes in universities. After this, specific features required for discussion will be considered in more detail. This includes a definition of academic English, interactional features such as turn-taking and the expression of opinions of agreement and disagreement. It will be important to consider to what extent the students can adopt unfamiliar practices in order to develop their discussion skills beyond initial expression of opinions. Previous research will

also be considered which investigates students' capacity to take on unfamiliar cultural practices such as critical thinking.

By this stage I will have established some of the typical Japanese features to be found in the classroom in general and discussion situations in particular and examined some established research in these areas. Finally, I shall consider some of the previous research that shows issues that were of concern to Japanese students regarding communication in English when they studied abroad. These will provide indications of areas in which students can be trained in order to bridge the gap between their actual and desired communication. This leads to an important issue of the research, bridging the gap in order to investigate how students develop in the course of their study. This is essential for justifying the research to colleagues and others.

Ways of bridging the gap included teaching communicative strategies to develop students' ability in the areas in which they are considered to be weak based on the findings of previous research. Activities were set up to bring about maximum participation based on what the research has established about students' communication. As this study included the students' individual voices, it was important to consider the best way to elicit students' individual responses to their learning based on the research of others, for example, through journals. This indicates a need for qualitative research into students' motivation and perceptions as well as their actual communication. To summarize, the literature review will move from general perceptions of cultural behaviour, particular manifestations in specific educational contexts and aspects of communication and consider areas where changes can be made. These will lead to a justification for particular research methods that will be discussed in the next section.

The educational background and the reviewed literature shape the direction of the results and point to the particular issues to be considered. Within a general framework of considering discussion we can narrow down the issues to be investigated. The general issue is to consider what features Japanese students use in discussions in English in university classes both as individuals and part of a group and how these can be improved through teaching and practice. Particular issues to be considered are: to what extent are students

influenced and shaped by cultural features in their discussions, how do they express opinions especially in cases where they need to express their individual identity over and above the considerations of deferring to the group or of adhering to culturally determined communicative patterns? Are they able to sustain their views over the course of several turns in a discussion? Are they able to maintain their identity and express different views from those of others, for example, expressing disagreement in controversial or confrontational discussions? Finally, to what extent can specific teaching of lexical strategies and practice in discussion improve these features over one academic year? These questions contain issues which cannot be judged by objective observation alone. In an attempt to go beyond previous studies and look more closely at what happens in discussions and how students perceive this, it was important to choose the most appropriate research methods for achieving these objectives. The next section will therefore introduce the research methods and the rationale behind choosing them.

1.5 Introduction to the methodology

A brief introduction to the methodology will be given here. If educational research is to be considered useful and applicable to students in current learning situations it needs to reflect real students in actual situations rather than being based on abstract and dated theories of expectations of cultural behaviour. It should reflect any changes in society including results of educational reforms. In this research it was important to avoid methodologies that would strictly categorize what we might expect to find in advance or reduce behaviour to generalised categories. This study deals with aspects of human behaviour which cannot easily be reduced to categories. It was essential to choose research methods that can take us beyond generalisations to the real lived experience of individual students. For this reason, qualitative methods were chosen. Quantitative research in language teaching studies often focuses on easily measurable behaviour and may polarize, stereotype and focus on cultural differences without revealing individual perceptions and motivation. As will be seen in the literature review, some studies emphasize the passive nature of Japanese students or their unwillingness to express opinions. In contrast, this study focused specifically on how students communicate and their perceptions of this, taking individuals rather than the group as a starting point. It did not start with assumptions about students' behaviour but

investigated the factors that influence their communication.

The research questions focus largely on “How” and “Why” as well as “What?” To summarize the research questions mentioned above, they are: to what extent are students influenced and shaped by cultural features in their discussions, how do they express opinions of agreement and disagreement, and how can their behaviour be changed through teaching, particularly of strategies for discussion? As the aim was to produce results that enable teachers to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of Japanese students when they discuss in English, research methods needed to be chosen that could develop this understanding.

Although the research is structured by research questions, these questions suggest that what is to be found cannot be reduced to measurable categories. It therefore necessitates an exploratory approach that develops theory rather than imposing theories or detailed questions in advance. The study aimed to both analyse students’ communication and consider their perceptions of it. Such issues cannot be easily categorized and they lend themselves more to a descriptive and analytical approach. In the case of qualitative data, analysis is essentially interpretive. In addition, the cultural nature of the topic and the fact that discussion is an open ended communicative event lead to using qualitative methods. Other case studies in the literature will show that a deeper knowledge of students’ perceptions helps us to understand them better, so this factor should be taken into consideration when choosing the appropriate methodology.

The small-scale study includes two specific kinds of data to be analysed in this way: written entries from students’ journals and oral recordings of actual classroom discussions in order to discover particular characteristics and any problematic areas in language, content and interaction. Journal studies were used so that the individual voices of students could be discovered. In this way they could reveal reflections and perceptions that the students would not reveal elsewhere. Recordings were used in order to gain an accurate record of what actually happens in classroom discussions, and they can provide evidence of what students say in student-centred situations in a small group. They can reveal the development and the impact of strategy teaching on students, so they are suited to the research question of

development over time. The combination of these methods and the fact of their being carried out in parallel lead to an understanding of a particular situation from different perspectives. This understanding was an aim of this research. A more detailed description of the rationale for and implementation of each method, backed up by literature as well as ethical considerations will given in the Methodology chapter as well as an account of how the research was carried out in this case.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This introduction has indicated the topic area, social and institutional background to the study and reasons for carrying it out. I have briefly considered the literature, main research questions and methodology to be followed. The structure of the thesis will be as follows: Chapter 2 will consider the research literature as indicated above, considering the main points raised and their relevance to this research. This will lead to a discussion of why the particular research issues were chosen. Chapter 3 will consider the methodology and the reasons why the chosen methodology is appropriate for the particular research questions in this study. It will then give a detailed account of how the research was actually carried out. Chapter 4 will describe a selection of the results from the students' journals with strategies and responses to them grouped by type and selections from the transcripts of recorded discussions. Chapter 5 will analyse the findings. Chapter 6, the conclusion and implications, will summarize the main findings and consider the implications of the research. It will suggest what can be learned from the research for Japanese students and those who teach them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will consider major literature in the areas relevant to the research. This will include both general background material and specific research related studies. The main areas to be considered are: general representations of culture, classroom studies, a detailed analysis of particular issues related to discussion and specific cultural manifestations of behaviour in previous research, and steps to bridging the gaps in students' communication skills. The latter will focus on situations where students faced academic challenges outside their own cultural environment. This will provide a general picture of the background to and expectations of the way in which Japanese students communicate in English in order to clarify the issues focused on in the research.

2.1. General representations of Asian and Western thought

In order to consider the research question of the cultural features that may influence students' classroom behaviour, I shall first investigate representations of Japanese thought and communicative behaviour through key concepts. These views should be considered in the light of the context of their creation and development in order to ascertain their relevance to the current research situation. A representative selection of such views and responses to them will be examined.

The term "culture" encompasses a wide range of behaviour. Researchers have often considered it appropriate and convenient to define cultural features in contrastive terms. This results in frequent use of general, abstract and contrastive labels; for example, Hofstede (1980) categorized cultures into areas such as individualistic/collective, uncertainty-avoidance, power/distance. He does, however, recognize variations within cultures. These studies are often rooted in a historical background whose relevance to actual behaviour should be questioned. There is often a focus on areas such as the individual and the group, harmony, confrontation, and logic and emotion. Examples can be found in Nisbett (2003), who distinguishes between Western thinking, originating from the Ancient Greeks, with logic, reason, debate and polarization of ideas, and Asian Confucianism with harmony, synthesis and the seeking of a middle way. He stresses (2003:76) that for Japanese, it is more

important to fit in with others (*awase*, a harmonious fitting-in style) adjusting oneself to the environment rather than imposing oneself on it. The concepts he discusses will be considered here separately.

Concepts of individuality and the group can have a strong influence on intercultural communication. In this area Nisbett takes a historical approach in order to account for these differences. He claims that whilst the Ancient Greeks had a concept of unique individual identity that was consistent across settings, the Chinese had no individual “me” in isolation but, instead, different role identity in different settings. Related to this he comments on the long-term nature of relationships. He suggests that for Asians communication does not exist in isolation for one particular occasion but has long-term consequences. They believe the self to be part of the whole and have a holistic view of events, taking into account the orientation of others. In this way, they see things in their broader context whereas Westerners ignore this context and see things in isolation. In this respect, he claims, Easterners are attuned to the feelings of others and strive for personal harmony. This suggests the need to consider the whole context in which an utterance occurs. The implications of his view for discussions are that Japanese students may not be able to separate the opinion from the person making it.

Harmony and lack of confrontation are other key cultural concepts. If they are central features in Japanese culture, they may influence the key research issue of how directly opinions are expressed and whether students can express disagreement or controversial views. The need for harmony may be a barrier to the expression of true opinions and make communication less direct. Ishii and Klopff (1984) describe Japanese communication as non-confrontational. Clyne (1994:186) defines key Asian cultural features as harmony, few complaints, little negotiation of meaning or conflict resolution, and tolerance of silence. He adds that uncertainty avoidance is one of the most important dimensions influencing communicative style.

The need for consistency in presenting arguments is another area where the literature claims that Westerners are different from Japanese. On this topic Nisbett (2003) adds that when faced with apparent contradiction, Asians are inclined to seek the middle way whereas

Westerners will insist on one particular point of view. He claims that Americans generate more counterarguments both because of greater experience in doing so and due to a belief that their views are guided by principles; they feel the need to be consistent and avoid contradiction. In contrast, Asians avoid conflict and express opinions that seem inherently contradictory. They make their points subtly and indirectly, and these are not always understood by Westerners. These views point to a significant difference between an apparent desire for absolutes and consistency in Western culture and for careful, considered fitting in at the expense of consistency in Asian culture.

Intuition and logic are further terms used to contrast Western and Asian culture. However, it is important to consider the context and limits of such views. Although it may be claimed that Western discussions include logic as an essential element to a greater extent than Japanese ones, which are more emotional, this contradicts a more general image of Japanese as talented in mathematics and science. Nisbett's explanation is that this Japanese logic is confined to the abstract academic realm of mathematical problem solving rather than personal interaction. He claims that Western logic involves stripping arguments of everything but their formal structure and taking away the meaning.

We don't actually find East Asians to have trouble with formal logic; we just find them to be less likely to use it in everyday situations where experience or desire conflicts with it. Westerners make universal judgments that are said to apply to people in all circumstances whereas Easterners think in terms of what applies to particular circumstances.

(Nisbett 2003:88)

He claims that Japanese are not comfortable with lively debate, discussion or the seeking of counter-arguments or "how" and "why" questions.

The contradictory position of mathematical logic and human relations in the culture can further be understood in a paper by Sekiguchi (2002), a mathematician. He quotes Barnlund's (1975) view that in Japanese personal relationships, differences of opinions can be seen as a threat to harmony; they do not even argue with each other in academic conferences; opposition is only indirectly or euphemistically expressed. However, he also provides examples of an opposite mode of behaviour through quoting Befu (1980), who

suggests that there is more spontaneous expression of opinions and true feelings (*ninjo/honne*) in informal occasions such as communication with close friends. He contrasts these Japanese behaviour patterns with Toulmin's (1958) Western model of argumentation, which consists of claim, grounds, warrant and backing. He claims that, whilst Japanese do use logic in certain circumstances, they consider it too harsh and superficial for situations where the main emphasis is on human relations. Davidson (1994:46) rejects any comparisons based on mathematical studies because he sees mathematics as a value free subject. He also rejects the view that logic is alien to the Japanese on the grounds that in the media people frequently point out logical inconsistencies. However, he notes that the term "too logical" is often used as a criticism and that Japanese generally want to put constraints on the use of logic. From these views we can infer that although logic is a universal concept, in Japanese culture the situations where it is used may be restricted to areas where it does not impinge on personal relationships. Furthermore, Japanese may be opposed to the concept of logic or argument for its own sake. This may be a barrier to carrying out effective discussions.

Specific characteristics of Japanese discussions (*hanashiai*) are also explained further by Sekiguchi. He suggests that key aspects of the discussions are as follows: direct confrontation is avoided; opinions are expressed ambiguously so that participants can change them later or withdraw them completely when they meet with opposition. This tradition, he suggests, starts in the schools, where children carry out small-group discussions to deepen their understanding of a topic. This involves offering solutions to problems with an emphasis on framing, reflection (*hansei*) and appreciating contributions uncritically from others as part of cooperation. The same methods, he says, are used in mathematics, where students are expected to discuss but not provide reasons for every step of their proof. He discusses the implications of all this for developing argumentation in Japanese classrooms: difficulties are caused by the fact that direct questions are considered impolite and fail to stimulate discussion. He considers the assumption that Western methods are better to be simply a matter of Western bias. Instead he suggests that young Japanese should learn about Western modes of communication and discussion styles in order to prepare themselves for communication with those from other cultures. His description of Japanese discussion culture implies that opinions would be presented ambiguously and seriously considered for a

longer period of time before any response to them is given.

Expression of individual identity in discussions is a key issue in this research. The views expressed above imply that if harmony and fitting in are key issues in Japanese communication, then the level of individual assertion and verbalization of viewpoints that is possible or even desirable might be restricted in discussions. De Bono (1985:36) looked at various different international styles of argument and claims that the Japanese never acquired the Western habit of argument. He suggests that Japanese place mutual respect and saving face above argument; Japanese culture is not ego-based and ego is necessary for argument. On this point, Maynard (1997:18) suggests that the Japanese concept of self starts in society whereas the American one lies with the individual. She presents Lebra's (1976) view that when Japanese represent individual experiences, they tend to be preoccupied with their relationship to some other person, a point also made by Tannen (1999). Barnlund (1989:38) gives the main reasons for cultural differences in communication styles as the group aspect and homogeneous nature of Japanese society. Nisbett (2003: 47) writes that Westerners want to be different and individual whereas Easterners are less concerned with personal goals and self-aggrandizement but prefer group goals, coordinated action and being in harmony with the group's wishes. It would seem then that verbal expression of an individual point of view may be less important for Japanese students.

The lack of explicit expression of argument and understanding without words have their origins in traditional cultural labels which contrast "direct" Western communication with "indirect" Japanese communication. Traditional views on this include Doi's (1973) concept of *amae* (dependency), which consists of a sense of oneness with and acceptance by others. It assumes mutual understanding without direct communication in words and places the group above the individual. Hall (1976) referred to Japan as a "high-context culture." This implies that meaning is usually understood by context rather than by direct, verbal means. Communication relies more on contextual clues that are understood by both sides due to a shared cultural background. Only essential, new information is verbalized. Assertion and categorical terms such as 'absolutely' are avoided and qualifiers such as 'maybe' are preferred. Questions are answered indirectly and open-ended questions disliked. Regarding this lack of explicitness, Nisbett (2003:61) adds that Westerners find Asians hard to read

because Asians are likely to assume that their point has been made indirectly; they will perceive Western discourse as rude. Davidson (1998) confirms that Japanese discourse is low risk taking; the main point is often left until the end, making it easier for students to drop their argument in the face of opposition.

Scollon and Scollon (1995) also commented that Japanese communication emphasizes the subtle and emotional aspects of a relationship rather than the communication of information. They make a distinction between inductive and deductive modes of communication. The Western deductive pattern gives the main point or topic first whereas the Asian inductive pattern introduces it later after facework to minimize any risk or embarrassment in the assertion. Asians tend to assess each other's mood before committing themselves to an utterance. These strategies can also be summed up as follows: deductive rhetorical strategies are face politeness strategies of involvement, which stress the speaker's right to advance an opinion, and inductive strategies are face politeness strategies of independence. Miscommunication occurs when speakers use different patterns and are not aware of the pattern the other speaker is using. This can be connected with the views expressed above that Japanese are unlikely to directly assert a point.

Nisbett (2003:157) attributes some cultural differences to direct or indirect use of language, suggesting that Asians set the context first through topic based patterns (topic prominent) whereas Westerners immediately launch into the subject (subject prominent). Asian languages do not always need to mention the subject after the topic. A further aspect of the Japanese language that may influence communication patterns is the Japanese system of honorific politeness known as *keigo*. This is described by Brown and Levinson (1987:179) as a grammatical coding of the social status between participants. Maynard (1997) also describes honorifics as a key point of Japanese language that influences communication. While the extent to which this aspect will influence the ways students communicate in English is questionable, it should also be considered as a possible influence on students' communication style.

Despite linguistic and cultural factors influencing directness of communication, any assumption that one language may be more direct than the other may, in fact, be based on

other, more complex issues. Rose (1996:67) describes the contrast between direct and indirect languages as oversimplification of a complex phenomenon; it lies more in the difference between English as a speaker-based language and Japanese as a listener-based language. In speaker-based languages, being explicit is more important. In listener-based languages, the listener should infer the point and silence is used more. Its meaning, he claims, may not always be understood by Westerners. The situations in which people choose to be direct or indirect depend to a great extent on their relative social status. So it would seem from these views that if Japanese use more listener-based strategies in communication, they would need to learn concrete strategies for developing the speaker-based aspects of communication such as those for making their points clearly if they are to carry out successful discussions in English. Any perceptions that they cannot make their points clearly or directly may be connected with this factor. Related to this are the emotional aspects of understanding in communication.

Empathy is an important emotional issue related to listener-based strategies, harmony and *awase*. If Japanese communication is high-context, inductive and listener-based, listeners need to be skilful enough to understand the point without reliance on explicit verbal explanation. Nakagawa (2002) points out that Japanese tend to have good listening skills and value empathy. They show outward harmony and express negative feelings by, for example, ignoring a person rather than explicitly expressing dislike. Okuzaki (1999) states that empathy training is an important part of Japanese children's literary education; they are taught to identify with the characters rather than give an objective viewpoint as American children would. These views offer further illustrations of the ideas that Japanese are likely to respect the views of others in discussions rather than stressing their own opinions. The next point to consider is the role of silence in this indirect, non-verbal communication style.

Silence may be misinterpreted as being a gap devoid of meaning, or an indication that people have nothing to say. However, it may have meaning in itself and can contribute to a strengthening of the empathy position. Wong (2003:126) contrasts Western verbalization with Asian non-verbal communication, claiming that Asians consider silence more persuasive than words and preferable to giving an inappropriate answer. The reasons he gives for Japanese silence include: gaining time to think, listening time (getting accustomed

to another speaker's ideas), wanting to be nominated to speak, a mixture of agreeing and disagreeing, not wanting to destroy the atmosphere or showing respect to seniors; it should not be evaluated negatively as it is rarely an indication of having no opinion. Through quantitative survey-based research on people of various nationalities and backed up by literature, he claims that Japanese use "positive silence" as a "tool for communication to promote, to solidify or to maintain the existing relationship." Many of his Japanese respondents commented that they would first try to guess what another person was thinking before giving an opinion. Ishii and Klopff (1984:45) also comment on the importance of silence as a positive virtue, claiming that Japanese talk less than Americans as they value silence more.

The role of silence in the delaying of offering a direct point seems to be a further aspect of the previously mentioned keywords of empathy, harmony and avoidance of direct confrontation. Delaying commitment to a point of view involves understanding and responding to the atmosphere of a group before commenting. Maynard (1997:53) also stresses this Japanese high tolerance for silence and the tendency to avoid offering an opinion too quickly or directly. She found this manifested in their turn-taking; they took long, evenly distributed turns, regardless of who started a topic, and did not disagree with each other. They carefully gauged their partner's response and delayed their conclusion to the end of an utterance, using collaborative strategies and back channels to signal emotional understanding of the content and support of the speaker's judgment. Comparing Japanese and English back channels, she found Japanese ones to be more frequent and varied than in English and often inserted at places after partial ideas where English speakers would listen in silence and wait to respond to the whole idea.

Collaboration strategies are an important part of the negotiation of opinions. Maynard found that these differed between Japanese and Americans. Japanese needed various stages for gauging the trustworthiness of the negotiators; this involved delaying reaching the point and engaging in much non-task related personal communication, gauging the partner's response, expressing abundant warning about forthcoming negative responses, seeking assurances of the partner's sympathy, and delaying conclusions. In contrast, Americans wanted to reach the point as soon as possible. She concludes that Japanese generally dislike arguing unless

the situation is one in which this is encouraged or expected, and they negatively evaluate those who go against this rule. However, she also warns against stereotyping based on these views; individual characteristics should also be considered. Given these indications of various strategies used for avoiding the expression of opinions, the next stage is to consider the extent to which expression of disagreement is possible under these circumstances.

Opposite opinions may be suppressed when fitting in with the group takes precedence. Barnlund (1989:429) suggests that Japanese speakers do not feel the same need to express an opposite opinion to the utterances of others as English native speakers; they have a different concept of the nature of knowledge and truth. "Truth is seen as more attainable from combining individual viewpoints than from compromising them. In personal relationships there is a reluctance to evaluate or change others, especially through confronting them directly". He adds that Japanese people listen for what is acceptable and agreeable about a remark whereas Americans listen for what is invalid and unacceptable; both styles serve their users and provoke different kinds of truths. He contrasts Western clarity with Japanese tolerance of ambiguity. In addition Japanese believe self-expression is only valuable if there is sufficient inner reflection. This issue of giving opinions will be considered in more detail later in this chapter.

Nakane (1970:36) commented on the lack of any dialectic style; conversation is guided from beginning to end by the relationship between the speakers and in most cases, a conversation is either a one-sided sermon, the "I completely agree" style, which does not allow for the statement of opposite views. Much of a conversation is taken up with descriptive accounts, the narration of personal experience or the statement of an attitude towards a person or event in definitive or subjective terms. She found Japanese conversations to be emotionally enjoyable but lacking in intellectual style. All these views suggest that students may not even perceive it necessary or desirable to assert individual views above the group, and therefore avoid confrontation. Instead it may seem that Japanese students would find it preferable to combine individual views to create a shared viewpoint. This indicates fundamentally different approaches to truth and argument,

The contrast between logical binary approaches on the one hand and deeper, more reflective

approaches on the other needs to be considered further in order to ascertain how Japanese students may approach discussion. In addition, it is important to consider views that are critical of Western approaches so that teaching discussion skills does not become a one-sided adoption of Western approaches. Tannen (1999) claims that the Western way of arguing, which emphasizes criticism and aggression for their own sakes, limits understanding. She claims, as did Sekiguchi (2002), that Asians see truth as consisting not of two opposing sides but of various angles. They integrate ideas rather than opposing them and use observation and experience rather than abstract truth for their arguments. She is critical of the Western approach because, she claims, people do not listen and understand but decide to win arguments by distorting their opponents' views. She proposes that, rather than insisting on two polarized sides to every argument, we should use other means such as exploring, expanding, discussing, investigating and exchanging ideas to acknowledge that there are various sides to every issue. She finds collaborative rather than competitive styles to be typical of Asian and female communication and suggests that these styles should also be respected in discussions. Opposition to rational Western styles is also found in Magee (2000), a contemporary British philosopher who criticizes the Western philosophical tradition with its overemphasis on analysis to the exclusion of all else; quickness and cleverness do not allow for depth or synthesis of ideas. He claims that we should not assume that the Western rational approach is superior to Asian intuitive styles; different communicative traditions bring about these different modes of communication. These views suggest that rational and logical approaches have both limits and benefits in discussion.

Generally, the views expressed above have suggested that Japanese communication and expression of opinions can be characterized with terms such as indirectness, ambiguity, low risk taking, harmony, collaboration and avoidance of confrontation. Based on these views we cannot ignore the influence of cultural differences at least at an abstract, theoretical level. However, as we might expect to find a range of behaviour in different cultures, it is important to look more closely at the actual communicative and educational contexts in which specific communicative patterns can be found. Situational and individual variation should be considered rather than reliance on cultural labels for the explanation of all behaviour. Scollon and Scollon (1995) warn against false dichotomies in describing cultural behaviour, referring instead to preferences for different strategies in different contexts; they

claim that both deductive and inductive patterns can be used in both cultures. They suggest, for example, that Asians use less facework and direct communication in close encounters and Westerners use inductive patterns in face-threatening situations. Their views indicate that there is variety in communication patterns depending on the context. This context refers not only to the educational context but also to the relationship between the interlocutors, their cultural background and the extent to which they are representatives of their culture. We should also consider the social and technological changes that may have led to students being influenced by patterns from other cultures. For these reasons it is also important to examine some critical approaches to cultural labels. Some of these are presented below:

Misunderstanding or cross-cultural conflict often occurs due to members of one culture not understanding or accepting the behaviour in another culture or using stereotypes to account for all behaviour of members of the different culture. This can lead to false assumptions and a mere superficial interpretation of cultural behaviour. Rosen's (2000) academic survey paper suggests that this often occurs because of one side trying to impose its cultural meanings on the other. As an example, he criticizes the assumption that Japanese cannot offer an opinion on any matters without consultation. He cites Said's "Orientalism" (1978) as stereotyping that sees culture through a veil of interpretations that are resistant to change. This view, which attaches labels to cultural behaviour, is known as essentialism. He claims that such interpretations, which are contained in various classical cultural labels, often carry an implicit assumption that the West is rational and superior and the East bound by ancient, impenetrable traditions; Japan is seen as a monolithic, hierarchical culture, exotic and over conformist. This research aims to question and challenge this view.

General cultural terms provide guidance but need to be considered critically. They should not be regarded as absolutes to account for all behaviour, but we should examine the limits and range of their application. They may reflect distant, dated views on Japanese culture, which focus on groups and do not consider individual behaviour. They also suggest a resistance to questioning, criticism, examining diversity within a culture or change over time. Their focus is often an abstract Japanese/American comparison, which does not consider cultural behaviour from a broader perspective. Rogers, Hart and Miike (2002) discuss the fact that there are more contrastive studies of Japan/US culture than other cross-

cultural studies. These studies, known as *Nihonjinron* (theories of Japaneseness) began in the 1970s, stressing the contrasts of such features as individualism/collectivism. They often focused on Japanese uniqueness by emphasizing differences and denying similarities with other cultures. This may prevent us from seeing behaviour on its own terms and hinder cross-cultural communication.

To examine the limits of cultural labelling further, specific examples of terminology can be found in Miike (2003). He uses the example of the term *amae* (as discussed above), which is often employed to explain Japanese communication and interpersonal relationships. He claims that such labelling can overemphasize dichotomies. In this case, he says, *amae* overemphasizes *we* over *I* and the fact of being understood without explicitly stating one's own opinions. It also suggests that opinions, even conflicting ones, can be expressed directly in close relationships. He comments that such claims have been exaggerated and seized upon as general interpretations of Japanese behaviour, for example fondness for ambiguity. He argues for acknowledging different communicative styles within Japanese culture, suggesting that *amae* can lead to an assertion-acceptance style rather than the *enryo-sasshi* style. This style will be explained below.

Enryo-sasshi was described by Ishii (1984) and was considered the predominant mode of Japanese communication. It refers to thoughtful consideration, self-restraint and holding back. (*enryo*) and imagining, guessing, empathizing with and making allowances for others, (*sasshi*). This style involves a perceptive understanding of messages from a minimum number of explicit clues. Miike (ibid) claims that there is a different kind of self-assertion in Japanese culture that is different from the European-American (male-centered) viewpoint on self-assertion. He suggests that *amae* is different depending on whether one is communicating with in-group or out-group members. He concludes that Japanese do in fact use explicit and direct, low context communication in *amae* relationships. His views indicate that even within Japanese culture there are different approaches depending on the relationship and situation.

A further criticism of cultural labelling comes from Hall (2002:42). She opposes the view of culture as monolithic, stable and homogeneous. Rather than all members of a culture sharing

equally in its norms, it is lived experience that creates diversity in the individuals of a culture, and these individuals take on various identities during discussions. Poole (2003:12) further illustrates this point by stressing that the *Nihonjinron* genre does not contain facts but value judgments dependent on the view of Japanese as homogeneous. He stresses the importance of considering the contexts in which these theories were created and of questioning the perspectives and experience of those who developed them.

Porcaro (2001:11), claims that uncritical passing on of *Nihonjinron* views in EFL literature creates its own “Orientalism” to present a distorted image of Japanese students; constant repetition and cross-citation of fixed ideas can invest them with an assumed intellectual authority that can obstruct our work as teachers. They suggest, he claims, for example, that passivity, shyness and suppression of individual thoughts and opinions are innate and universally manifest, as is preference for memorization over creativity. These views, he finds, are destructive as they cause teachers to assume that this behaviour is innate and that it is not possible to change their students’ behaviour. He therefore considers it essential to investigate which characteristics are acquired or innate. He found that views expressed in the literature did not match his children’s experience in elementary school, so he emphasizes the importance of understanding the real experience of students. We should therefore understand classroom behaviour beyond assumptions based on cultural labels and examine the behaviour found in actual educational contexts.

Othering of foreign cultures and artificially constructed discourses of identity which exaggerate differences are further consequences of *Nihonjinron* discourse. Kubota (1998) found that these views served the purposes of an ideology that sees culture as fixed and homogeneous. To understand culture, she proposes instead that we look more carefully at how cultural labels are produced. Instead of a destructive dominant cultural discourse, she refers to the diversity of different pedagogical contexts within the culture. In the school system, she found different expectations of communicative behaviour at different stages: elementary school classrooms emphasize thinking and self-expression and secondary schools stress memorization in the classroom but promote thinking and independence in extra-curricular activities and analysis in activities such as mathematics. She proposes a pluralist view that would teach students respect for different traditions whilst at the same

time allowing them to express their views in ways that preserve their cultural identity. In this way we can look at cultural differences critically rather than as objective truths. Susser (1998) expresses similar views. These views lead to the issue of maintaining the balance between accepting and maintaining students' cultural identity in discussions and providing them with the skills to communicate with others who may have different norms. An observation of actual communication will provide examples of how this can be done.

Suggestions of different approaches and emphasis in different educational contexts indicate that there cannot be an automatic correlation between contrastive cultural labelling and its implications for the classroom. Whilst we might expect from the views expressed in the literature that direct assertion of opinions, particularly disagreement, would be avoided and opinions expressed only after sufficient reflection and consideration of the feelings of others, there is still a gap between these general points and their manifestations in particular classroom contexts. It is therefore important to investigate the specific pedagogical and linguistic nature of classroom discussions. In this respect and in order to avoid stereotypical labelling, it is preferable to consider communication on its own terms rather than purely from a contrastive perspective.

Guest (2006) questioned the link between cultural theories and classroom practice. He wrote a critical analysis of the *Nihonjinron* views, describing their influence on Western views and the media. He suggests that the *Nihonjinron* thinkers had never actually intended their findings to be used in pedagogical situations and that many of them perpetuated the myth by using each others' findings uncritically to support their own views. He finds polarized cultural dichotomies dangerous as they do not allow for behaviour between two extremes, and he argues that all characteristics are found in all cultures. He found that in certain circumstances Japanese could be extremely direct. He suggests that this is actually a consequence of the myth of contrastive rhetoric that leads them to the assumption that they can be more direct in English, thus making it a self-fulfilling prophecy. He concludes that a more rigorous approach to these theories is needed and a move away from stereotyping, exoticizing and essentializing a culture, arguing that the researcher's job is to discover, not presume. This view was a basis for this research.

This section has considered both traditional terms for cultural behaviour and criticisms of relying on such approaches particularly in a pedagogical context. The cultural characteristics described so far suggest that we might find a careful approach to discussion in the classroom with many silences. Arguments might be built up collaboratively with consideration of the views of others rather than individual assertion of views. Conflicting opinions would rarely be expressed except in very close relationships. However, these views remain theoretical and speculative until we consider the extent to which they apply in particular classroom contexts. While students may be consciously or subconsciously aware of such characteristics, these may also be generalisations that do not reflect actual communication or learned characteristics of adult society that are not present in the classroom. In addition, the specific sub-culture of the foreign language-learning classroom may have its own norms of communication. It is therefore important to consider the extent to which these features are relevant to the language learning classroom, what communicative norms prevail in the classroom and whether individual students are willing or able to transcend such norms.

Regarding the ways in which particular cultural behaviour is manifested in the Japanese English learning classroom at the university level, the issues raised through the research questions lead to questions of “how” and “why.” As I stated in the introduction, it is important to reevaluate established views in the light of both particular contexts and any changes in society, technology and education. Rather than testing objective theories, it is more effective to investigate whether assumed characteristics are actually present in the classroom or whether they are just perpetuated by assumptions about expected behaviour. Such assumptions, on the part of both teacher and students, might prevent us from seeing behaviour objectively. This can be investigated more carefully on closer examination of writings about the pedagogical context in Japan. The next section will therefore go beyond general views to a closer examination of manifestation of cultural behaviour in the specific contexts of the educational setting.

2.2 Manifestations of culture in educational settings

In order to investigate the manifestation of cultural features in the specific context of English teaching in Japanese universities, this section will begin with a brief selection of

Western views of Japanese education from general works, moving from traditional views to more recent research papers.

Traditionally, Western writers have focused on Japanese primary and secondary education. They have portrayed the system as rigorous, conformist and maintaining high standards. Reichshauer (1977) mentions the overall tendency to act in groups, conform, maintain face and avoid confrontation in an egalitarian system with high standards. He found that it was the university years that lack intellectual rigour and specialization. However, he also considers that individuals are sensitive, creative and becoming less conformist, an aspect that is less often stressed in Western views of Japan, and which contradicts claims that Japanese students are passive and lack individuality. He considers their particular strengths and weaknesses, suggesting that the view that Japanese lack intellectual ability is simply a result of Western bias and misinterpretation. Rather than reason, theory and clarity of analysis, they tend towards intuition, pragmatism and subtlety of expression. Other writers provide indications that characteristics discussed in the previous section can also be found in schools. Christopher (1987) shares the view that Japanese students avoid confrontation and prefer consensus. White (1987) studied elementary schools and found harmony and cooperation, creativity and emphasis on emotional response. Rohlen (1983) carried out an extensive study in Japanese high schools and found that opinions were usually sacrificed to the harmony of the group. Woronoff (1996) claims English education and the university system to be a failure and the whole system mediocre, but this reflects his generally negative views about Japan.

This brief introduction to traditional Western views of education in Japan confirms the views found in the general cultural studies that there is an emphasis on consensus, intuition, harmony, conformity and avoidance of confrontation. Such views also stress the positive values of creativity and emotional responses. The suggestions of different behaviour in different educational contexts reinforce the need for consideration of these contexts beyond viewing cultural features as absolutes that would apply in all situations. Moreover, these views of classroom behaviour remain abstract and come from Western anthropologists who viewed Japanese society from outside. For a more detailed perspective it is important to consider the closer analysis of educators with long-term experience in the Japanese system.

In addition, further perspectives can be provided from critical voices within Japanese society in order to distinguish Western “bias” from needs perceived within Japanese society itself.

It was criticism from within Japanese society and dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the education system that provoked education reforms under Prime Minister Nakasone. These were seen as a potential catalyst for change within the classroom. Schoppa (1991) explains that a major aim of these reforms was to foster the creativity traditionally lacking in the curriculum. They were characterized by certain key words; they were aimed at the training of ‘sympathetic hearts’ (*omoiyari no kokoro*). Internationalization (*kokusaika*), flexibility (*junanka*) creativity (*taiyouka*) and liberalization (*jiyuka*) were other key aspects of the reforms. Okada (2005) described the 1980s reforms in more detail: in 1984, an advisory committee to Nakasone embarked on a discussion of long-term reforms. There was to be more emphasis on choice and individuality in education as well as diversification in improving admissions to the universities such as introducing new styles of examination and reform of the curriculum and generalist education.

In the 1990s, (Okada, 2005) the reforms were still being debated due to changes in expectations after the bubble economy burst and the decreases in student numbers resulting from the falling population. Some universities, particularly the two-year *tanki daigaku* (junior colleges), perceived to be of low status and mainly for women, were often forced to close. The reforms remain controversial. This background information suggests that there have been attempts at a national level to promote greater flexibility and individuality, indicating that such features are perceived to be desirable among Japanese themselves. The effects of the reforms on the realities of English education are considered below.

Reforms in university entrance exams and in the curriculum leading up to these examinations should be considered here because of their wash back effect on the rest of the system and the significance of these examinations in shaping students’ educational experience. If students are subject to a rigorous approach throughout the system, this influences the extent to which individuality can be expressed. Reform at the university level was seen as a move against rigorous conformity, and this spread to English education. The universities, traditionally seen as weak, were expected to develop their own strengths on

which to select students. Recent Ministry of Education dictated reforms (Ministry of Education, 1992 and 1994, quoted in Law, 1995) focused on the communicative aspects of English, introducing oral communication classes in schools and a listening comprehension exam on national university entrance exams.

Hatakenaka (2005) wrote that in 2001 Education Minister Toyama requested a competitive system of universities striving for excellence. Goodman (2005:1) writes of the “big bang” that higher education underwent in 2004. National universities were changed into independent institutions to be judged on a wider range of criteria than before such as research and teaching and quality of the students. Kinmouth (2005) refers to the change from selection to seduction with weaker universities having to woo students rather than using traditional entrance examinations. This led to a proliferation of different types of entry procedures and a wide gap between the truly selective institutions and those that accept all applicants.

A brief consideration of the detail of university entrance examinations will provide an indication of the types of academic skills that students are expected to acquire before university. Aspinall (2005:200) describes the examinations as very factual and detailed, demanding short answers. Students spend many years preparing for these at the expense of all else. While he acknowledges that the format of the examinations may be universal, he finds the overemphasis on small details to be a particularly Japanese feature, a method originally aimed at meritocracy and abolition of privilege by birth. He explains that students sit a generalized examination in five subjects as well as the extra examinations for the specific universities they apply for. There is little chance to show creativity or communicative skills in English. However, after the reforms, many universities changed to varied and flexible admissions systems including recommendation and personal interviews and more scope for individuality. At the same time high schools started to offer a wider variety of courses to prepare students for the diversity of courses and entrance routes.

There was much debate about the reforms and mixed views about the extent to which entrance examinations have changed. Locastro (1996:40) found that despite reforms the curriculum remains specifically grammar oriented, paying only lip service to communicative

skills. Leonard (1998) suggests that the exams focus too much on the passive skills of reading and listening rather than what students can actually do. Poole (2003) echoes this view, seeing them as a test of competence not performance. Brown (2000) claims that reforms have not produced the expected changes to the curriculum and textbooks. However, Guest (2000) claims that the exams have replaced discrete grammar questions with higher-level English skills. Mulvey (2001) also suggests that the exams now contain advanced, adult-level reading passages along with contextualized, task-based analysis. In addition some universities accept a percentage of their students under recommendation or by interview, so there is greater scope for individual expression. These views indicate both the traditional emphasis on memorization and recall of discrete facts as well as the introduction of more flexible and creative entrance systems. It seems that there is diversity both between institutions and in the way the entrance examinations are perceived by individuals.

As the styles of university entrance examinations are likely to influence secondary school English education, it is essential to consider whether the reforms have met their goal of promoting greater creativity and originality and communicative teaching. A selection of views from those who taught in the system provides various perspectives on this. Hood (2001) conducted detailed research based on experience teaching in Japanese schools. He found positive results with an indication of a move away from traditional approaches towards greater freedom with practical activities at secondary school, more elective subjects and greater emphasis on internationalization and student participation. He urges Western teachers to look more closely at the way we see the students; Western perceptions of Japanese students may be based on prejudice and fail to acknowledge that Japanese students just express themselves differently.

Other insider views of the post-reform era suggest a greater emphasis on communicative English in classrooms. Locastro (1996:40) concedes that new courses of study have moved towards emphasizing listening and speaking. However, on a practical level it has been difficult to implement the reforms because of the Japanese English teachers' lack of communicative skills and the unreal nature of classroom communication. Yashima (2002:54) makes a similar point, commenting on the difficulty of defining context for communication when there is little or no daily contact with native English speakers and any particular L2

group as the object of communication. Yoneoka (2000) found through surveys that despite the rhetoric of internationalization and the JET programme, students were still influenced by the myths of Japanese uniqueness and saw other cultures as superior or inferior.

Conclusions from the responses to the reforms are that the extent to which they were effective still depends on individual institutions and teachers. Factors that delay or prevent rapid change are related to teachers, the classroom situation and engrained cultural behaviour. It is probable that traditional methods still prevail in the more academic schools where students are prepared for traditional entrance examinations. It may be difficult to reconcile the rhetoric of internationalization, communication and liberalization with this factor. In addition, the comments on the reforms focus on a basic level of classroom communication. Even where more communicative teaching is successfully implemented, this does not guarantee that students will develop the skills necessary for more academic discussions. For this reason it is necessary to go beyond general works on education to a specific consideration of the particular institution of the university, which should be the place where more academic communication takes place. In order to meet the aims of looking more closely at a particular situation and gaining a closer perspective of the behaviour of the participants in it, I shall examine a range of views on the university classroom.

Relatively little attention has been paid to the Japanese university sector in Western commentaries on Japanese education. Superficially, the university campus resembles a Western one and there are fewer grounds for obvious contrast than at the primary and secondary level; valid points can only be made upon deeper observation. Despite the scarcity of comment from outside Western commentators, criticism from within Japan has been abundant. The Japanese media have often described universities as “Leisure Land” (Hashizume, 1998, Kajita, 1996), playgrounds with no specific academic purpose in a system geared more to labelling individuals according to the institution attended than to the quality of teaching and learning within the institution. Norris, (2004:2) based on his own observations and experience as a teacher in Japan, suggests that Japanese only place emphasis on entering a famous university; after that university is a period of transition with an emphasis on growing up, club activities and social life, with little motivation for study or self-improvement. Similarly, Kelly, (1993:173), who also taught in Japanese universities,

describes university days as the one unchannelled segment in life where the main purpose is to mature and explore different lifestyles.

The role of English classes in such a system without clear purpose may be open to diverse interpretations; they may be seen as either just an extension of high school learning or they can provide an opportunity for students to take on new identities and develop the different communication styles that are necessary in academic discussions. If the education reforms have succeeded in their aims of liberalizing and individualizing universities, this should provide greater scope for more creative and academic activities there. In this respect, Hadley (1999) claims that the reforms gave universities freedom to determine the content of English courses towards projects, debates and discussions. Whether this actually results in engagement in higher-level discussion will depend on the preference, ability and expectations of individual students and teachers. In order to ascertain whether this is actually the case, it is necessary to consider the research of those who have taught in the system. However, the implications of the findings may be limited because they are often based on general observation of students in large groups over time rather than a specific detailed analysis of their communication.

Discovering and investigating the student voice was a key aim referred to in the introduction. It seems that we need to go beyond generalisations, bias and superficial observation. Various writers, such as Hood (2001) suggested that we should look beyond Western bias to understand the way that Japanese students communicate on their own terms. The student voice is an important factor in taking us beyond these labels to analyse communicative behaviour in the classroom. There are already indications in previous research carried out over longer periods that the student voice can reveal aspects of the students' intentions and thinking that are not revealed in other research. Metraux (2001) based his research on a collection of female university students' essays and found that they desired to move away from traditional attitudes and genuinely wished to expand their range of communication. He found that they expressed diverse opinions but lacked analytical skills, a deficiency they were aware of and attributed to the education system they had experienced; in high school they had been required to cram facts, and in university they were overwhelmed with compulsory classes which only demanded passive attendance and

no analytical response. Their free time was taken up with part-time jobs and club activities. This suggests that the problem students face is not so much lack of ideas but the absence of appropriate opportunities and frameworks in which to express them or the analytical skills to develop them.

Dissatisfaction with the student experience is also mentioned by Lee Cunin (2005:136), who quotes a Ministry of Education survey that found this to be largely the case. She stressed the importance of investigating the students' voice through the different roles they carried out in their university experience. Prior to her research, she found two stereotypes in the literature—the quiet, passive student, afraid of speaking out due to issues of face, and the academically lazy type who simply viewed university as a playground. Many also stayed silent in front of a higher status person such as a teacher as a sign of respect. Her extensive survey research in one Japanese university found students dissatisfied with their education and prioritizing the non-academic aspects of their lives such as friendships, club activities and part-time jobs. They were aware of carrying out various different roles through these activities. This confirms the views I expressed in the introduction that students' behaviour in other aspects of their life contrasts with their classroom behaviour.

Concerning the students' attitudes to their university experience, Lee Cunin wrote (p.161) that the students had clear critical awareness of and insights into the specific practical and realistic ways in which education policy affects them directly in the classroom. She found them more conscious of their educational environment than she had expected; they had probably developed such skills through other activities. Insights included the fact that they preferred smaller classes where they had the chance to discuss and were critical of bad teaching. This reveals that students do have a strong critical awareness of their own experience, but that other factors prevent them from expressing their ideas and opinions in the classroom. Her research used surveys. Her insights suggested that the students' voice is an important factor in research. An aim of this research was to examine the student voice in more depth than surveys could. Therefore it was essential to find appropriate methods for bringing this about.

The students' individual perspectives on their experience are very different from the

opinions of many Western teachers who teach English in Japanese universities. Many of them wrote of the difficulty of making students engage in genuine academic activities. Zeugner (1984), a visiting professor at four Japanese universities, wrote of problems at an institutional level including indifferent professors and lack of seriousness about grading and teaching. Wadden and McGovern (1991:113) found negative attitudes and disruptive behaviour. McVeigh (2002) carried out extensive research based on his experience, scholarly articles and interviews with individuals at various stages of the system and found university education superficial and shallow and students apathetic. Despite the rhetoric of internationalization, he claims that the discussions, critical thinking and intellectual development which had prevailed in Japanese education fifty years before were no longer found. McVeigh also urges teachers to look beyond the stereotypical terms mentioned above in examining the reasons for students' behaviour. He rejects explanations in the form of cultural differences and the alien nature of Western logic. Instead he attributes the behaviour to specific attitudes to knowledge and the fear of standing out. These points will be discussed next.

McVeigh (2002:96) found that reforms did not solve any of the fundamental issues related to education. He found the essential fault to lie with attitudes to knowledge developed in high school. This learning is focused on unconnected facts and discrete, fragmented knowledge, which does not provide an adequate basis for higher learning. He distinguishes between "Open" and "Closed" learning. The latter, found in Japanese high schools, reproduces rather than manipulates knowledge and includes no critical thinking; the goal is reproduction, memorization and listing and results in passive students who study for examinations but have difficulties with manipulating, summarizing and paraphrasing information, answering the question "Why?" and lack expressive and analytical skills. Instead they focus on subjective empathy training in schools.

Insights into the specific strengths and weaknesses of Japanese students provide a different perspective from the students' own perceptions as described above and their frustrations about not being able to achieve the level of expression they would like to in university classes. It would seem that this is not merely related to communication in a foreign language but is also due to a general educational culture that does not promote the development of

academic ideas. Students might be able to display knowledge but not use it to develop and sustain the arguments needed for discussion. This indicates that their behaviour in discussions will be influenced by interpersonal cultural issues and specific approaches to academic study and knowledge inherent in the education system. It is therefore important both to look more closely at particular aspects of academic communication and to consider the specific features that explain students' behaviour in the classroom.

The causes of students' behaviour may be influenced by expectations within the education system as well as innate cultural features. One aspect of this is the myth of Japanese uniqueness and fear of standing out as described in McVeigh (2001). He attributes this to the distinction between the spontaneous expressed self, which gives true opinions, and the performed self of Japanese classrooms where people adopt roles and say what they are expected to say rather than what they actually think. However, he does make a distinction between his experience, which was mainly in lower-level universities and his brief, more successful, acquaintance with students in higher-level institutions. Others, such as Sekiguchi (2002) have indicated the differences between the different requirements in different contexts requiring either a logical, mathematical approach or an emotional, empathy-based approach. This provides further support to a closer consideration of the inherent expectations that shape behaviour in particular educational contexts. If students' behaviour is indeed influenced by expectations inherent in the education system which may make reforms difficult to implement, it is important to consider carefully how they will respond to new ideas and unfamiliar approaches to discussion.

Imposing new and radically different ideas from outside can, as the responses to the reforms have indicated, be difficult and problematic when fundamental expectations for classroom behaviour are well established. It is more appropriate to understand and take these expectations as a starting point for understanding behaviour. As one research question is concerned with how we can improve students' discussion skills through teaching and introducing new strategies, it is a valid approach to consider examples of successful approaches to doing so by Western teachers in the Japanese university classroom. Wadden and McGovern (1991:118) suggest that much can be achieved through the efforts of dedicated, enthusiastic and motivating teachers with a combination of common sense and

cultural finesse. Anderson (1993:102) also claims that, to be successful, Western teachers need a better understanding of Japanese students including the motivation for their behaviour. It is not enough, he says, to say that the students prefer silence; this perception is simply the result of prejudice. Instead we need to consider the contexts in which they talk and the rules regarding silence, which may differ from those of the West, for example, a pause before an answer may indicate uncertainty rather than unwillingness to speak. Cogan (1995) made a similar point about silence being due to different cultural expectations and stressed the need for greater understanding in Western teachers. This suggests that we should look more carefully towards the reasons for students' behaviour rather than attaching labels to it.

More detailed explanations of Japanese classroom behaviour, such as the lack of risk-taking and of initiation, and suggestions for helping them develop different communicative styles can be found in current research literature. Poole (2003) criticizes the overgeneralisation of Asian learners as shy or lacking in individuality; overemphasizing differences in this way risks a simplistic, deterministic argumentation. He found that specific reasons for students' lack of communicative behaviour were universal: constraints imposed by the grammatical syllabus, needs for low-risk interaction and students' expectations. Brown (2004:15) suggested that students are low risk takers and tend to avoid classroom behaviour where they might be negatively evaluated, even though this was precisely the behaviour that they needed to practice. They therefore preferred traditional classes where passive and silent behaviour were expected. He suggested as a solution that we should refrain from making students perform in front of the whole class but instead have them perform in small groups.

Beyond understanding students' behaviour it is important to create classroom conditions that will encourage them to speak out and express their opinions even if they are not so comfortable in doing so. Anderson (1993:109) wrote, based on his experience teaching in Japanese universities, that we should build on students' learning styles and create situations where they feel comfortable talking, for example, by varying activities and assigning specific roles in discussion to decrease loss of face. Similarly, Guest (2005) suggests that we should understand Japanese communicative norms such as, for example, accepting that sudden, unplanned talk is not the norm in the classroom situation and that spontaneous

activities are potentially face threatening. He sees the classroom as a rehearsal for a communicative event rather than an actual one. He proposes allowing students to rehearse their performances first in the non-threatening situation of a small group; in this way there is more group responsibility for the end product and less pressure on individual students. In a whole-class situation we should warn students in advance that they will be called upon.

Regarding the lack of initiation, Norris (2004) found that students rarely initiate discussion, ask for clarification or volunteer answers. For him the solution could only be reached by both teachers and students making adjustments to each other's culture. Stebbins (1995) made the same point; He also found Japanese students unwilling to express their opinions and that they preferred empathy and conformity; learning different cultural behaviour should not be seen as a denial of students' culture but as a way of maximizing their learning and academic success, a view echoed by Johnson (1995:59). She adds that students and teachers sometimes misinterpret each other's communication norms, which are shaped by context. The norms of Japanese students included being silent until being asked to speak, using an indirect, context-dependent style, not wanting to stand out and being resistant to interactive methods of communication. She claims that if students learn to understand the teachers' communication norms, this can better prepare them for unplanned discourse outside the classroom. Teachers can provide scaffolding for them to try out new strategies so that they develop cognitive as well as linguistic knowledge and should assume that their silences do actually indicate willingness to speak.

Preferred Japanese learning styles also seemed to include reliance on traditional tasks with a clear progression and clear-cut answers. This view is found in Burden (1999) (through surveys) and Clenton (2004), who found that, for this reason, students found pair work meaningless and could not see the benefits of discussion. On this point, Clenton acknowledges that it is important to distinguish culturally driven behaviour from individually driven behaviour and check one's assumptions about how people actually behave.

This section has considered views on the Japanese education system in order to establish the implications of general cultural characteristics for educational contexts. While certain

general cultural characteristics were found, some behaviour can also be attributed to particular expectations inherent in different educational contexts. Education reforms were considered. This led to the question of how far reforms can have an impact on classroom behaviour when this behaviour is deeply rooted in cultural and institutional expectations. Analysis and understanding of this behaviour was partly influenced by different perceptions with some teachers failing to understand their students' motivation. However, access to the students' own opinions suggested that they were not only critically aware and reflective on their educational experience but also desired to develop their academic ability beyond the limitations of this. Whether Western teachers could introduce new methods effectively depended on their willingness to understand, accept and build on the behaviour of their students. Motivations and reasons for students' behaviour may be different from what is revealed through superficial observation and generalisations. In order to bridge this gap in perceptions, it is important to investigate the specific features found in the particular communicative event of discussion. The next section will therefore focus more closely on the particular academic, linguistic and interactional features that can be found in discussions.

2.3 Particular features of discussions

I have considered the general research questions of the typical cultural features we might expect to find in students' discussions. This section will deal with the more details aspects of academic features, expressing ideas and opinions and how students interact with each other

2.3.1 Academic skills

In the previous section I considered the problem of low academic expectations at the university level in Japan. Academic discussions should take students beyond displaying knowledge to developing and expressing and exchanging ideas at a higher level. In order to focus more specifically on the skills that are necessary, it is first useful to define the particular characteristics of the genre of academic English.

Academic English has its own structures and vocabulary. As it goes beyond what students will acquire in ordinary communication, they need direct exposure to it in the form of

written and oral stimuli and specific linguistic structures. Widdowson (2003:22) writes that natural learning is generally inefficient and slow and claims that we need to learn academic English through education and training in order to belong to a particular discourse community. Academic discussion and the language and functions necessary for it are a particular genre. Genre is defined by Swales (1990) as a class of communicative events with shared communicative purpose with similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. Bradford Watts (2003:7) writes that a genre-based course enables teachers to focus on both form and meaning, with an emphasis on the structures important to the genre. Teaching students this empowers them and gives them greater awareness of academic resources and the resources to participate in the cultures of power in the target language.

Regarding the details of academic English, Scarcella (2003:01) describes it as “The Variety of English used in academic settings”. She claims that it is necessary to teach it so that students can go beyond the plateau of intermediate level. They need explicit instruction that goes beyond relying on comprehensive input. (2003:10). This means exposing students to academic structures as well as the grammatical, lexical and rhetorical features in reading so that they might produce them and aim for higher standards.

Scarcella’s taxonomy of academic English includes a cognitive dimension, linguistic dimension, lexical dimension, (use of words) sociolinguistic component, and discourse element (cohesion and coherence): the unity and organization of ideas within a text, higher order of thinking component (interpreting, evaluating, synthesizing) metalinguistic awareness: (the ability to think about language). She claims that English teachers should value cultural conventions that ESL students bring with them, and maintains that it is more beneficial to provide students with the power that comes from learning academic English so that they can express themselves at a higher level. Although her focus was on writing, we can also apply these views to higher level speaking in terms of lexical and cognitive strategies. As the students do desire to go beyond the limits of their own educational experience and express themselves in more academic terms, knowledge of academic genre can be useful in providing them concrete guidance in this respect. The next section will deal with the thinking skills element of this through the expression of ideas and opinions.

2.3.2 Expressing ideas and opinions

The specific research question of how students express their identity through the expression of opinions will be considered here. There have been suggestions in previous sections of students' unwillingness or inability to express opinions. However, their written reflections revealed a desire to express opinions more. One aim of his research was to bridge this gap between perceptions and performance and take students beyond their normal communicative repertoire towards higher skills.

General conclusions about the expression of opinions gained through the literature so far suggest that fitting in with the group and understanding the views of others are more important to Japanese students than assertion of individual identity. They might find it difficult to be detached and logical and prefer a subjective, empathy-based approach. Filling in the gap might involve increasing awareness of these differences. However, the way students discuss may also be influenced by how they perceive an event, for example whether they view classroom discussions as genuinely communicative events or as an academic exercise. This difference in perceptions may have an influence on whether emotional or logical approaches take precedence. A closer analysis of their expression of opinions is therefore necessary. This section will consider some classroom-based research into the more detailed aspects of how Japanese students express opinions in English.

The first reason often given for Japanese students' unwillingness to express opinions is that they do not have any, as was suggested by Davidson (1995). He added that even if they did, they could not explain or justify them with reasons, a point also made by Oi (1997). However, Davidson also found them enthusiastic about being challenged academically. McVeigh (2001) as described above, suggested that students have extensive passive knowledge but cannot manipulate it in ways necessary for carrying out discussions. We can infer that the obstacles to expression of opinions are not just interpersonal features but lack of experience in the academic skill of developing knowledge into ideas.

The level of explicitness in the giving of opinions also needs to be considered. Scollon and

Scollon (1995) suggested that Japanese would be likely to express opinions cautiously, not explicitly; the listener should infer the main point. Barnlund (1989) claims that with Japanese listener-dependent strategies the point is absent from the surface and needs to be interpreted through contextualisation cues. Okazaki (1993) claims that Japanese state their opinions indirectly, preferring internal evaluation, where the point is not made explicit, to the external evaluation often found in Western discourse, where the speaker makes the point by stepping out of the story to comment on it. This norm, she claims, works among Japanese, but they may encounter different norms when they communicate with those from different cultural backgrounds. She found that Japanese presented the main point last after reasons and background information whereas Americans did the opposite. Japanese also gave examples of a point rather than directly stating opinions and used frequent sudden changes of subject. In addition they terminated difficult discussions before they reached their conclusion. Oi (1997) also commented that Americans moved from the general to the specific whilst Japanese moved from the specific to the general. All this suggests that the explicit expression of the main point may be suppressed or hidden among other extraneous material. This may make it difficult for the non-Japanese listener to understand the point.

The Japanese meeting is an example of a communicative event where we might find characteristic discussion patterns. De Bono (1985) contrasts Western business meetings, where ideas are tested to see if they face up to criticism, with Japanese style meetings, where the purpose is just to listen. Ready-made ideas are not offered; instead the information slowly organizes itself into ideas. He describes this style as “information-input” style. While Westerners believe that ideas should be hammered into shape by argument, the Japanese believe that they should be nurtured and grow into shape during meetings. De Bono suggests that this “white hat strategy”, can also be useful for those from other cultural backgrounds. His views provide an explanation for the gradual and careful presentation of ideas that seems to be found in Japanese communication.

The research question of how students express disagreement will be considered next. If, as the literature suggests, students are less explicit in the expression of opinions in general and prefer harmony and consensus, then even more difficulty will be found with the expression of disagreement. This factor in itself may not only be culture-specific but universal. Sacks

(1987), comments that universally, disagreement is usually made as weak as possible and often prefaced by delays, silence, a request for clarification, partial repetition, hesitation, back downs, hedging or minimal disagreement. Accepting this factor will enable us to be more cautious in attaching contrastive labels to the disagreement of Japanese students. However, beyond these universal factors, specific features of Japanese communication would lead to a cultural reluctance to disagree. A selection of research on how Japanese express ideas in different situations and to what extent they disagree will be presented here.

Reluctance to disagree may be connected with emotional concern for the feelings of other participants. Oi (1997) quotes various views on this, and refers to the emotional effect that direct disagreement causes. This involves disturbing harmony; even the word “no” may constitute a term of abuse in Japanese. She quotes Nishimura’s (1997) view that while English communication aims at argument, Japanese detest argument and prefer monologue to dialogue. Oi takes a similar position to Scarcella (2003) and Widdowson (2003) and argues for teaching students Western rhetoric to avoid misunderstandings when they communicate in a more international society. She argues for teaching more logical approaches to argumentation to fit in with the Western tradition that, she says, prevails worldwide.

Oi sees it as a necessary challenge to train Japanese college students in making counter-arguments because it is a new concept for them. She compared the types of written arguments made by Japanese and American college students. She found Japanese students’ arguments to be emotional; they lacked both counter-arguments and proper warrants for their claims. However, through raising awareness and teaching of different patterns of rhetoric and training over an academic year, she found that they were able to develop their writing and provide more support for the arguments they made. This supports Scarcella’s views that these aspects of the academic genre can be improved by teaching. Such approaches teach concrete strategies to fill the gap between actual and desired communication styles. Whilst such research deals mainly with writing, it still provides a useful indication as to students’ approaches to argumentation, and their general linguistic and cultural preferences that may also be manifested in their oral communication.

Japanese students' preference for emotional responses over logical argument may be due to the desire to maintain harmony, empathy and their lack of ego. In addition, particular expectations of communication of opinions have been built up through the education system. One of these, referred to by Ross (2004) is the *kansoubun* (reflective paper), used throughout the Japanese school system as a means of expressing opinions. It includes the idea of being emotionally transformed by an experience. He found evidence of this emotive style in university students' written work in English. In writing that was supposed to be objective, they expressed their hopes, wishes and desires. Similarly, Kamimura and Oi (1998) commented on Japanese students' preference for subjective, intuitive and empathy responses over factual or objective data or logic. The Japanese also used reservation, hesitation strategies and hedges to withhold judgment on agreement or disagreement or explicit expression of a pro or contra position whereas Americans used hyperbole and absolute positions. In essays, Japanese students often incorporated both sides of an argument rather than taking an either/or position. They often presented their main idea at the end. The differences were also reflected linguistically: Japanese used post-positioned *I think* as well as mitigating expressions such as *I wonder/ I can't say/ etc. or perhaps/maybe*.

A further aspect of the subjective, emotional response is the perspective from which an argument is made. Kamimura and Oi also referred to a distinction made by Connor and Lauer (1985) between rational appeals to logic and affective appeals to emotions. They found that Japanese students used emotionally oriented strategies and the empathy position to argue from the perspective of another person rather than making their point objectively. This included the tendency to use the conditional form to appeal to emotions, for example, "If I were that man..." or to view a situation from various perspectives. Reasons were supported by concrete examples rather than objective arguments; they attributed this to the Japanese tendency to avoid the rational and prefer the tangible. They connect this with Hall's (1976) high context culture where a message is embedded in shared assumptions and human relationships and contrast it with the clarity of American low-context culture. Whilst their research uses a strong version of Japanese/ American contrastive rhetoric, it also provides insight into specific ways in which Japanese students express opinions.

Disagreement has been described as difficult due to cultural features such as harmony and a

preference for emotional rather than logical approaches. However, we should not assume that it is an absolute characteristic or that Japanese never disagree. The discussion of *amae* and other views above imply that disagreement is sanctioned in certain contexts and relationships. Maynard writes (1997:156) that disagreement does occur in close (*amae*) relationships or where the conflict is officially sanctioned such as in debate. "Japanese communication strategies place importance on cooperation and collaboration, but this does not mean that Japanese people do not engage in conflict. The idea that Japanese people never disagree is as much of a myth as the notion that Americans always speak their minds." This is a further manifestation of the notion that cultural features are not absolutes and that we should look to the contexts in which they are sanctioned and the expectations these bring. In this research, it was important to investigate whether classroom discussions are in fact situations where students are willing or able to disagree or whether other factors prevent this.

Indirectness and non-committal expressions of opinion were also found by Mori (1999). She found contrasting strategies in the expression of opinions. On the one hand Japanese students tended to exaggerate a particular aspect of the issue, thus showing a fairly strong attitude to it. However, on the other hand they incorporated a self-qualification which admits a potential problem with the claim, for example, stating a custom and then saying that it is changing. This confirms the views that Japanese students would avoid total commitment to a point of view. They used repair to indicate forthcoming disagreements and mitigate them. Such sequences developed until participants acknowledged co-existing multiple perspectives, changed the topic or terminated the discussion. This indicates that they anticipated problems and could prevent explicit expression of disagreement. Self-repair helped to reduce the possibility of a negative response in a subsequent turn, and they often used quantifiers such as "Everyone" or "Every time". Self-qualification was used to modify the assertion in the case of disagreement. Sometimes the conversation faded out with points unstated but understood. Straight disagreement was preceded by a formulaic expression of disagreement, as a warning. This suggests that there are many strategies to avoid the expression of absolute disagreement.

These studies of disagreement suggest that Japanese perceive straight disagreement as

difficult and face threatening except in very close relationships. It is generally avoided, qualified, delayed or mitigated by some linguistic or communicative strategies. The frequent use of these strategies provides further evidence that Japanese communication is listener-based, with a focus on not only how the listener will understand comments from a semantic point of view but also on emotional responses to opinions.

I have examined viewpoints on the style and strategies Japanese students use in expressing opinions of agreement and disagreement. There has been evidence of vagueness, subjectivity and indirectness in written arguments, indicating that these are underlying cultural features. If we are to provide students with methods for filling the gap between what they currently achieve and the aim of communicating at a higher level, it is important to find culture-sensitive methods that can bring this about. However, there are also views that suggest that we should accept students' natural tendencies and not attempt to introduce unfamiliar Western practices.

Guest (2005) is critical of the direct, aggressive strategies often taught by Western teachers in Japan, many of which would not even be appropriate in many Western situations; he suggests that it is not necessary for students to give an opinion on every topic and that we should value the positive aspects students bring to discussions. He argues that their silence should not be associated with apathy and ignorance but with their preference for developing well thought out opinions before speaking. Discussion, he says, is not just about expressing controversial ideas and attacking those of others but about considering a topic from many angles. He argues for teaching students hedges and qualifying language rather than aggressive disagreement strategies. Miller (1995:46) mentions the problems of self-disclosure, group consciousness and not wanting to stand out, the restrained role of the listener and orderly turn-taking. He also stressed the importance of the instructor having a good understanding of and empathy with Japanese cultural features. He proposed accommodating Japanese styles in early lessons and gradually assimilating Western styles in later ones, such as moving from a more predictable speaking order initially to more open ones later.

Whatever strategies we teach students, their ability to successfully participate in discussions

will depend on their ability to sustain an argument even in the face of opposition. We can infer from Mcveigh's (2001) views on closed learning that they will not have developed this skill in their school days and that they would list ideas rather than develop them. As Oi (1997) has suggested, it can be beneficial to teach students strategies for reasoning in written work to extend their communicative range. As it has been suggested that logical and critical thinking are neither valued in interaction nor taught in the education system, it is important to consider how and why such skills should be introduced.

There are different opinions on the necessity and effectiveness of teaching different rhetorical patterns and means of argumentation to extend students' communicative range. Atkinson (1997) opposes the teaching of critical thinking to Japanese students because it is a social practice rather than a teachable strategy; the logical skills it teaches do not transfer easily to other cultures, particularly those such as Japan where disputes, conflicts and the notion of the individual are not a reality. He believes this concept to be absent from Japan because language is used a tool of group rather than individual expression or intellectual discussion.

Opposition to Atkinson's views can be seen in examples of successful implementation of critical thinking skills in Japanese university classes. Davidson (1998) claims that we should not reject critical thinking on cultural grounds as it could also be suited to group thinking and because of the necessity of preparing students for interaction with people from other cultures. He found that the flexibility of Japanese students and their willingness to be challenged intellectually made them amenable to critical thinking. They exceeded his expectations in showing insight and evaluation. Day (2003) also found that he could successfully teach Japanese students the difference between fact and opinion and use flexibility and open-mindedness to look for explanations, causes and solutions to problems. Stapleton (2002) found through survey and interview research into the written form that Japanese university students were able to express a range of opinions in an open-ended critical style. He attributes such changes to the influence of the Internet and the media and refutes stereotypes about Asian students as being based on mere superficial observation. Gettings (1999) successfully integrated thinking skills into Japanese university classes and rejects the notion that it belongs to one particular culture. He comments (p.148) that

adapting foreign practices which are in conflict with local values has always been part of Japanese culture since the Meiji era. However, he also warns against taking on Western practices wholesale, and advocates that teachers should work with, not against different cultural practices. He emphasizes the importance of finding appropriate methods, framework and aspects of Japanese classroom culture that support critical thinking pedagogy.

The specific characteristics of Japanese students offer both an encouraging and inhibiting environment for critical thinking. Davidson (1995) acknowledges that despite his students' initial uncritical acceptance of the ideas of others, lack of logical thinking and reluctance to express ideas clearly, and preference for silence, they were not satisfied with the way they had been taught. They wanted to express opinions more clearly. He found that they had a tendency to drop opinions in the face of opposition and not express opposites. He attributed this to the education system in which they had no time for discussion, questioning, probing and integrating academic ideas. He suggests that the positive aspects that Japanese students bring to discussions are the submissiveness to authority that makes them flexible and amenable to new approaches; they were willing to listen to new ideas and genuinely reflect on them. He found that their empathy position makes them positively enter into the viewpoint of those they initially disagreed with. He attributes their desire for superficial harmony to common sense rationality with the Japanese mode of leaving things unsaid requiring a lot of thinking on the part of the listener.

Regarding the way of teaching thinking skills, Davidson (1996) also emphasized building on Japanese cultural preferences to teach concept-formation skills including summarizing and paraphrasing; their role in listening and speaking is often neglected. He achieved success by having students write down their arguments in advance and evaluate the validity of various sources in order to synthesize them. He built on traditional activities such as idea generating and journal keeping so that students could add critical thinking to their academic skills repertoire. His students were also able to participate eagerly in critical thinking and find weaknesses in arguments.

This section has shown both the difficulties students face in expressing and developing opinions as well as the ways in which their own cultural characteristics such as being good

listeners and empathy-focused made them amenable to new approaches. It seems that they can develop new skills through training and practice if these are introduced in a culturally sensitive way. One effective way to carry this out may be to separate the skills into smaller sub skills as Scarcella (2003) and Davidson (2006) suggested. This provides greater clarity in teaching skills that add to students' repertoire rather than introducing new academic skills and communication patterns as absolutes to be adhered to. As there has been more evidence so far that such methods can be effective in the written form, it is still necessary to consider the interpersonal features that influence spoken communication. These may necessitate the teaching of particular strategies. The next section will briefly consider some of the features found in interaction in order to ascertain the appropriate ways for preparing students for discussions.

2.3.3 Features of interaction

Interactional features are relevant to the carrying out of discussions in general and expressions of opinions and responses to others in particular. These include both the linguistic features that may influence the listener's response such as discourse particles, and issues such as repair and turn-taking.

Interactional particles are an example of frequently found Japanese strategies that may influence the listener's response. Okazaki (1993) described them as having an interpersonal function, similar to English tags but used more frequently to create a supportive atmosphere and rapport and involvement. This point is also made by Nishimura (1995). Minegishi Cook (1990) also sees them as a tool for cooperation, adding pragmatic meaning and marking intimacy or a new topic. Okazaki lists many examples of which only a few can be given here. One frequent utterance is *ne*- a request for confirmation or a show of agreement. *Yo* adds moderate emphasis and presents information shared by the listener with the expectation of agreement. She finds these strategies to be a more frequent part of Japanese communication than their English equivalents. This indicates that Japanese students have specific linguistic features that will influence the response they expect rather than stating their attitude directly. Such features cannot be so easily transferred into English and may therefore be a feature that makes students' communication in English appear to be less

explicit.

Turn-taking is the means by which students initiate participation, and it influences the extent to which they are able to pursue a point. From the literature and personal observation in whole class situations it would seem that the norm in Japanese discussions is for pre-allocated turns of equal length and allocation. Before considering specific features of Japanese turn-taking, it is useful to summarize some universal conventions of turn-taking. Bygate (1987:39) sees turns as a process where speakers explore their thoughts as they think, using abbreviation, ellipsis and incomplete sentences, fixed phrases, formulaic expressions or chunks to facilitate production. Repetitions, fillers, pauses and hesitations are also used. Communication is also influenced by issues such as deciding who speaks, who selects the next topic and how speakers take control, interrupt, add information, ask for clarification, negotiate meaning, give examples or clarify meaning and signify that they want to speak. Hughes (2002:135) reiterates those points and adds that time processing is important so the speaker cannot afford to spend too much time making lexical choices.

Difficulties and misunderstandings in turn-taking may occur regardless of cultural background. Bygate as well as Brown and Yule (1983:35) comment that because these occur even between speakers of the same language, it is all the more appropriate for second language learners to learn appropriate strategies for turn-taking such as achievement strategies (guessing, paraphrase and cooperation) and reduction strategies (avoidance of difficult situations). Halliday (1989) adds that there may be many mistakes, hesitations and silences even in spontaneous speech, and students need to learn how to add a new point, restate, exemplify or add a qualification. In addition, the foreign language-learning classroom may have its own particular norms influenced by cultural and institutional expectations of teacher-student communication. Van Lier (1988:98) claims that these may include the tacit norm of one speaker at a time and no overlap, which is different from other turn-taking. The teacher may call on a particular student (personal solicit) or throw a question open (general solicit) and speakers can be indicated verbally or non-verbally. Giving up occurs when a speaker does not bring the turn to its predictable conclusion; the turn is either unfinished or completed by another person.

Regarding Japanese students' turn-taking, Johnson (1995) found that Asian students take few self-selected turns and are not dominant; they are collaborative rather than competitive. Hayashi (1999:475) in a research paper which focused on recordings of naturally occurring conversations between adult peers, found anticipatory completion. Participants tended to complete turn-construction units initiated by other co-participants especially when there was silence in the middle. Carrol (2006) studied Japanese university students' turn-taking and found that it was necessary to set up activities that would sensitize them to on-time speaker transitions.

These general perceptions of turn-taking indicate that expressing opinions in discussion depends not only on language and ideas but also on timing, confidence and various other factors. However, much of the research seems to be based on teacher-centred whole-class situations rather than small-group, student-centred discussions. It is therefore necessary to consider how students carry out turn-taking in small groups, for example, how they initiate and allocate turns.

This brief analysis of interactional features has indicated that both the expression of ideas and interaction are influenced by cultural features. Through consideration of aspects of both content and interaction, this section has highlighted some specific manifestations of cultural behaviour in discussions, students' desires to transcend the limitations of their cultural and educational background and the importance of sensitive attitudes and appropriate understanding on the part of teachers who aim to bring this about. It is therefore essential to find appropriate methods and strategies to set up discussion activities in such a way that this gap can be bridged effectively. The final section of the literature review will consider ways of achieving this.

2.4 Bridging the gap: procedure and strategies for the discussion classroom

As previous sections have suggested, the essential point in bridging the gap between actual and desired behaviour in discussions is to increase students' awareness of different communication patterns without losing sight of their cultural and individual identity. While there has been some evidence that they can achieve this in writing, not enough research is

available into discussions. This may be due to beliefs that students are unwilling or unable to carry out discussions in the classroom. The factors that need to be considered in carrying out research on discussions are the material taught, the setting up of groups and activities in the classroom and the best way to gain access to the students' voice, which is the key to understanding how they perceive the process of discussion. The literature reviewed so far has considered the particular research questions of the general cultural features present in society and the classroom as well as the limits of using these terms to describe behaviour. The final research question of to what extent it is possible and desirable to improve these features through teaching will be considered here. This section will consider the factors necessary for setting up discussions, teaching lexical strategies for bridging the gap and accessing students' impressions. Finally, some case studies will be considered that illustrate students' needs and attitudes in discussion when they are in international discussion situations outside their own familiar environment.

I have suggested that a culture-sensitive approach is necessary for introducing students to unfamiliar practices. First, it is necessary to consider the appropriate setting up of groups for discussion. In order to compensate for the communicative difficulties that students may have in speaking out in larger groups, it is preferable to set up smaller groups for discussion. This should maximize participation. Mori (2002:33), argued for the use of small groups. She used conversation analysis to study small group activity in a Japanese language classroom. She aimed to fill the gap left by previous studies, which had dealt mainly with the earlier stages of language learning. She considered the conversation analysis method to be an appropriate research method because only limited results could be obtained through observation alone. One of her key findings was that although her Japanese students rarely participated in initial or follow-up turns in teacher-fronted sessions in communication with native English speakers, they were more active in small group interaction. This implies that we would find different communication norms and dynamics in small group situations. The groups should be set up in such a way that they achieve the best possible results and prepare students for different roles in discussion.

Setting up group activities for maximum participation requires consideration of various factors. Even if small groups promote greater participation than larger ones, care must be

taken about how to achieve this. Dörnyei and Murphy (2003) considered classroom groups including those in Japan and suggested that, although group-based communication is normal in Japan, groups can only function well if participants are given time to establish themselves appropriately, lose awkwardness and anxiety and establish norms of participation as well as openness and inter-member trust, cooperation and commitment to task; we should therefore assign roles in the group and close events appropriately.

Norris (1997) used group work with Japanese university students and found that success in discussions was dependent on clearly setting out the early stages of the discussions. The necessary steps he used included: introducing appropriate expressions, short cued dialogues for practicing the expressions and exchanges of opinion, agreement and disagreement, and longer cued dialogues that lead students to weighing up both sides of an argument. Flowerdew (1998) found that in the Chinese university context students in small groups were more cooperative, open to discussion and less concerned about face than in larger groups. They also focused on empathy and social relationships. These views emphasize the importance of setting up groups in such a way that maximum benefit can be achieved.

In order to bridge the gap between general classroom interaction and more academic discussion, it is important to introduce concrete communication strategies gradually and find specific, context-based ways of developing them. As a key research question is the issue of to what extent students' discussion practices can be improved by teaching, the introduction of strategies would seem to be a means to achieving this. Scattergood (2003:3) concluded, based on literature and small-scale experimental research, that strategies are appropriate scaffolding to make Japanese students more comfortable in English. She claims that because Japanese communication is empathy and listener-based, with the listener being expected to understand rather than ask for clarification, it is important to teach students speaker-based habits such as voluntary speech production and strategies for asking for clarification or checking meaning.

Strategies can also provide security and offer a chance for students to think while seeking meaning (Dörnyei and Thurrel, 1991). Dörnyei (1995) claims that such strategies are not transferable between languages and should be taught as linguistic devices with opportunities

for practice provided, for example, strategies such as the use of pause, fillers and hesitation gambits to help speakers gain time and keep the communication channel open and deal with turn-taking. Other important strategies he recommends teaching are, for example, culturally acceptable ways of gaining and holding the floor, softening strong statements and strengthening weak statements. He adds that such strategies, which can be taught in the form of linguistic devices, help students to take risks by providing models of use. From these cases, we can infer that strategies, in particular speaker-based ones, are an important way to fill the gaps and play a major role in preparing students for fluency in discussion. In order to gain a more concrete idea of which particular strategies are useful, I shall now consider concrete case studies of Japanese students who studied abroad and were expected to deal with the conventions of academic discourse outside Japan.

Examples of the academic socialization of Japanese students abroad will help to provide a better needs analysis of the specific skills and strategies they need to develop further. Turner and Hiraga (2003:160) found through case studies that Japanese students in Britain needed academic socialization because they lacked the skills necessary for participation, interaction and elaboration of content in the tutorial situation; they were not able to clarify and extend their points of view to the extent to which British tutors expected. Morita (2000:304) carried out an ethnographic study on Japanese graduate students in Canada and found difficulties in oral participation in, for example seminars and giving presentations. She attributed this to socialization issues related to unplanned classroom discourse and lack of familiarity with the subtle, complex skills of classroom interaction, challenging the teacher and interrupting each other. She found that they also needed more reflective time for response to a question because they did not want to give responses that were too superficial. She concluded that we need more insight into how students actually conduct themselves in discussions.

Other case studies reveal other kinds of skills that students lack. Ferris (1998) found through survey research that ESL students lacked the necessary skills for class discussion and interaction. Clennel (1999) suggests that the cause lies in the fact that many ESP programmes focus on transactional rather than interactional skills. Pragmatic meaning, ranging from understanding sarcastic remarks to turn-taking conventions, is more difficult. These views confirm the idea that students need better training in speaker-oriented skills,

particularly in presenting their ideas clearly and defending their point of view. A closer investigation of their needs will help us to understand the particular aspects of pragmatic meaning which they lack and to teach strategies to bridge the gap.

One particular case study provides a research methodology that served as a partial model for this research. In a study that used qualitative methods to discover students' perceptions of the academic discourse socialization, Morita (2004) analysed the ways in which Japanese postgraduate students in Canada negotiated participation, membership and socialization into a new academic discourse community. She took both a product-based approach in order to ascertain what learners need in order to participate in a given academic community and a process-oriented approach to see how students are socialized into this community. She interviewed students over a period of time. She was motivated by the fact that while much research had been carried out into written academic discourse, relatively little had been written about socialization through oral activities such as discussions and presentations. Where this research existed, it had not reflected learners' inner voices. In addition, previously existing classroom interaction analysis had focused on observable classroom behaviour according to predefined categories whilst neglecting non-observable behaviour such as participants' views and intentions.

What can be gained from Morita's case study is a sense of students' individual perceptions of the processes they go through. She found that newcomers, including L2 learners, learn socialization through oral academic discussion. In particular she focused on the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the more silent Japanese students and how they changed over time. She observed how they constructed identities for themselves based on their personal histories, values and goals. These identities were largely connected with the way they saw themselves in relation to other members of the group. She used her research to help students develop confidence by using strategies, scaffolding, practicing speaking in non-threatening situations in small groups and outside the classroom. She suggests that instructors can take students' individual personalities and needs into account in setting up effective activities in the classroom; they can also intervene in turn-taking processes to create more egalitarian turn-taking. She found that her learners, all female, deviated from the passive or timid stereotypes of Japanese students. In reality, they were often creative, proactive and critical

about dealing with the challenges they found in the classroom even if this was not voiced explicitly.

Morita's research provides an appropriate framework to the issues to be considered here in terms of understanding the perceptions and motivation of individuals in the group. She emphasizes sensitivity to the needs of Japanese students through an investigation of their perceptions, mental processes and the way they actively negotiated identities. In this way she finds a contrast between stereotypes and reality. She emphasized the role of the teacher in helping this process by giving legitimacy to the various modes of interaction and values of cultural groups through summarizing or scaffolding contributions from time to time. This view is shared by Matsumura (2001) who used surveys of Japanese students studying abroad and those in Japan. He opposes using a taken for granted view of culture as the basis for interpretation of behaviour as we need to look more at the variations within a culture and at changes over time.

As a key focus of this research was on understanding students' views on the process of discussing, it was essential to find an appropriate mode and framework for the expression of these views. Morita's study used interviews. Others have indicated that students can be expressive in their written work where they can pay less attention to the feelings of others. As the literature has suggested that Japanese students' strength is in reflective rather than analytical writing, it is best to access their thoughts and perceptions through a framework that is familiar to them. Roby (1999) found that students' previous experience with the "seikatsu diary" (a journal where they were supposed to write their reflections on daily life) was useful in enabling them to write their reflections in English. This reflective process improved students' learning and autonomy and increased student-teacher interaction and insight for teachers as to how their classes are perceived.

Use of journals in university English discussion classes was carried out by Fedderholdt (1998) in an English Education Faculty similar to that used in this research. She aimed to gain access to students' thoughts and bridge the gap between the perceptions of the students and the teacher. A further goal was to develop students' learning of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Initially, she found these were limited and students had difficulty

articulating their aims. However, she discovered that the process of reflection brought about changes of consciousness in their understanding of pragmatics and, in particular, strategies for interrupting, clarification and repetition. This was aided by a clearer and regular setting of goals.

Pearson Casanave (1995) found journals beneficial for Japanese university students' personal growth; they also expanded the teacher's focus beyond language to critical thinking. She set out useful conditions for the success of the method: students need to have something to say, to write in a risk free environment and receive substantive comments back. From her research we can see that building on the familiar activity of reflective methods can improve student-teacher interaction and help students understand their own learning process. This provides essential insights that go beyond teacher intuitions. Such journal methods serve the purpose of both adopting culture-sensitive methods and gaining access to the reflective mode of the student voice. Further rationale for using this will be considered in the methodology section.

To summarize the necessary stages for carrying out research, which have been clarified by the case studies above: first we should understand how cultural expectations of behaviour in particular contexts influence students' classroom behaviour. Next, we need to investigate students' perceptions of their individual and group identities in discussion beyond superficial observation. Finally, strategies should be taught that fill the gap between student performance and teacher expectations. Students' responses to these play an important role. Similar to Morita's and Fedderholdt's research, this study aimed to go beyond what others have found by understanding cultural behaviour through the perceptions of individuals.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, first I considered general representations of culture and questioned the validity of using labels to explain all behaviour. Next, I considered the manifestations of these cultural features in the education system in general and in university English classes in particular. This included an analysis of educational reforms and resulting changes. Subsequently, I considered the specific skills necessary for discussion including academic

skills, the expression and development of opinions through critical thinking and interactional features. I suggested that while cultural characteristics should not be considered absolutes, we cannot ignore the influence they have on the way students communicate in the classroom. In addition, there are different expectations present in different contexts of the education system. The discrepancies between outsiders' stereotypical views of Japanese students and the students' own voice indicate that students' perceptions and motivations could not be understood simply by observing their external behaviour and verbal expression. Greater access to their perceptions is necessary. It is necessary to understand students' starting points and the cultural and educational expectations they bring to the classroom.

Next, I considered the issues to be taken into account when we set up classroom discussions, including setting up groups and teaching communicative strategies. Finally I reviewed examples of research studies into Japanese students' communication in genuine academic discussions with a particular focus on one case study that successfully revealed students' perceptions of the process of participating in an unfamiliar academic discourse community. From these studies it became clear that the internal processes that students go through are just as valid in our understanding of them as their external expression. This was illustrated in the case of journal research that revealed more about students' perceptions and helped to bridge this gap. From these results it would seem appropriate to use qualitative, interpretive methods to investigate the motivation of individuals within a culture.

The general literature and classroom-based research have given rise to various issues which need to be addressed. In general terms, it has suggested that, for example, Japanese students are collaborative, non-confrontational, listener-based, subjective and emotional. In their written and oral communication they placed more emphasis on experience, reflection and empathy rather than on objective facts and logical analysis. They preferred to consider an opinion carefully before expressing their own view or commenting on that of others. This was seen in their orderly turn-taking, delayed disagreement and use of particles to indicate what kind of response was expected. As individuals, they were also concerned with fitting in with the group. However, despite these cultural expectations, they did show flexibility in adapting new approaches. It seems essential to find the most appropriate way to access their thoughts.

The major issues and challenges that come from the literature are: how students can reconcile individual desires to improve their communicative ability in expressing academic ideas with the institutional and cultural expectations of how to behave. There seems to be evidence of a gap between their perceptions as individuals and the way they behave in a group. Another issue is how they can learn to communicate in more international situations without losing their own cultural identity including the strengths of their own particular modes of communication. It is therefore important to provide them with awareness of their own communicative behaviour, how this might be perceived by others outside their culture and provide them with strategies such as, for example, those for making their points clearer.

Previous research has shown that strategy teaching can be beneficial. However, this remains speculative until a closer analysis of how the students use them in discussions is carried out. In addition it is necessary to consider how these features develop over time. Previous studies have not addressed these issues in sufficient depth. Furthermore, if students have difficulties with the speaker-based aspects of communication, it is important to isolate the specific communicative functions in which they need further practice and work out an appropriate plan for teaching them at the same time as focusing on the content of discussions. It is also important to consider how the post-reform university, with greater flexibility and freedom can be a place where the students can develop and express academic ideas.

The literature has described the characteristics of subjective emotion-based and objective reason-based approaches to discussion. This research will also consider the process of making students aware of these different features and find the best ways to develop their discussion skills and make the transition between their actual approaches and higher aims. The challenge of this research is to successfully combine features that may only have been treated in isolation in previous research and develop a detailed understanding of both the features and development of students' discussions and the student perspective on these. The next chapter will provide a description and analysis of the appropriate methodology for dealing with these issues and achieving these aims.

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to the methodology

This chapter will focus on the main research methods to be used, the rationale behind choosing them based on literature and previous studies, and an account of how the research was carried out and how data was analysed. It will show how different methods were combined to reach reliable and comprehensive results which go beyond what was revealed in the literature. The research aimed to consider both how students carry out discussions and their perceptions of this. Such aims require methods appropriate to close observation, discovery of individual perspectives and deeper analysis.

To reiterate the key research questions: what general cultural features do Japanese students display in discussion in English, in particular, how do they express opinions of agreement and disagreement and to what extent can these be improved by teaching discussion strategies and regular practice over one year? Particular issues within these are: to what extent are students influenced and shaped by cultural features in their discussions? How assertive can they be in expressing their views as individuals over and above the considerations of deferring to the group? How do they work together with other group members to develop an argument? Are they able to express disagreement with others in controversial discussions?

The aim of making new discoveries about issues of personal identity and students' perceptions of their communication is best carried out using qualitative methods. While quantitative methods provide information about surface features such as frequency of response, the aim of this research was to develop an understanding of the experience and perceptions of students. The essence of qualitative research (Cohen and Manion, 2002:22) is that theories and hypotheses are not tested but emerge through the research. The literature review has provided general views of culture and classroom expectations such as indirect, subjective and collaborative discussion styles. However, it is necessary to show concrete examples of how students actually carry out discussions, the language they use and their perceptions of this. Morita's (2004) example gave an illustration of how individual students develop or perceive their role in the group and their concepts of appropriate behaviour.

The literature has suggested that cultural norms for classroom behaviour may be implicit and not necessarily revealed through superficial observation, so it was necessary to find methodology that went beyond this. This research did not aim to test theory against observed behaviour but to understand individual manifestations and perceptions of behaviour and to determine how far these can provide evidence for and understanding of general trends. The interpretative nature of this makes qualitative methods appropriate. Secondly, the process of language learning is complex and consists of interpersonal, cognitive and affective factors, the essence of which cannot easily be recorded quantitatively. Thirdly, open-ended events such as academic discussions may develop in directions not necessarily predicted by the participants; it is difficult to measure a direct relation between intention and outcome. To consider “how” and “why” it seems appropriate to use qualitative methods.

The cultural context is a further reason for the use of qualitative methods. I have suggested that culture should not only be described in terms of absolutes with objective features such as silence and indirectness but also in terms of particular implicit and often subtle manifestations through the behaviour of individuals in particular contexts. We can best investigate this by looking at these manifestations rather than assuming the influence of culture in pre-determined categories. Such views are also asserted by Holliday (2002:12), who claims that in qualitative research the defining characteristics of a group are discovered, not presumed as the researcher sets aside cultural bias and discovers culture as an ongoing process. He also claims (1994) that while a culture sensitive approach in methodology is necessary for interpreting classroom behaviour; we should work with what we find, not impose theories from outside or attribute every occurrence to culture. Classroom behaviour is influenced by the wider society, and the researched phenomena should not be reducible to surface phenomena of what is observable in communication between teachers and students.

As one research issue is how individuals assert their individual identity within the group, and the literature suggested that there is often a gap between students’ and teachers’ perceptions, it is important to use methods similar to Morita (2004) that take individuals as a starting point for understanding perceptions and motivation. Cultural generalisations may provide some indication as to what we might expect to find, but qualitative research can reveal more concrete manifestations of this. We can then establish the range and relevance of

these cultural representations concerning both how students communicate in a group and how they perceive this as individuals beyond superficial observation. For this reason, the methods chosen were journal studies to consider students' perceptions of discussions and recordings of small group discussions. The following sections will consider in detail the reasons for choosing these methods and other issues related to the practicalities of carrying out the research.

3.2. Journal studies: rationale and implementation

The literature has suggested that students are more open and likely to reveal the “expressed self” mentioned by McVeigh (2001) in their written work than in spontaneous whole-class, teacher-fronted oral work. As McVeigh and Guest (2005) suggested, the public arena of the classroom is more likely to give voice to the “performed” self. This lack of openness in oral communication may be related to face. In contrast, the openness in the private sphere of the written word as shown by Oi (1997), Stapleton (2002) as well as the supposed dominance of subjective reflection rather than objective analysis throughout the education system have indicated that written reflective journals are a forum where students are willing to express their opinions openly. However, it is also necessary to consider the possibility of sensitive cultural issues regarding how we elicit and treat private information.

The essence of a journal is that it encourages free and personal expression without compulsion regarding the revealing of any specific information. It is less intrusive than surveys or interviews and contains what students want to reveal rather than what the researcher specifically elicits. This leads to issues of confidentiality and trust in the handling of information that would not necessarily be revealed elsewhere. However, even if the subject matter is not as sensitive as that given in certain social studies fields, privacy is still important. In this study, students were assured of anonymity and that no information would be included that would identify them. This enabled maximum benefit to be gained from the method.

A further ethical point to consider is the balance between what students give to and gain from the experience in terms of both time and self-disclosure. Given the necessary demands

on students' time, it is important that they learn from the experience. As was suggested in the literature, the reflective rather than analytical genre is firmly rooted in students' previous learning experience. They have experienced the self-reflective activities of the "hanseibun" or "seikatsu diary" and are therefore accustomed to giving personal comments on the learning experience in a reflective frame. Journals in English enable them to reflect on new experiences through a partly familiar framework. Considering the research question of how far students are able to express individual opinions, the concept of the reflective inner voice as dominant in certain frameworks already throws doubt on the notion that adherence to group opinion is the single motivating force for Japanese students. However, such research is based on writing and leaves open the question of students' preferences in the more complex process of interaction. The method and the familiar format combined with the potential for individual voice enabled a deeper consideration of the issue of the relationship between individual identity and participation in the group. However, given that journals are not usually the preferred research method for the language teaching classroom, it is important to consider general views on the rationale for using them.

One reason why less attention is paid to journal research is the subjectivity of the personal voice and the lack of generalisability of the data. Therefore we need to clarify reasons for using it and why it is particularly useful for finding out how students perceive themselves as individuals and as members of a group. The reasons are as follows: journals are a record of opinions and perceptions important to learners which cannot be tapped in other ways (Van Lier, 1988, Bray and Harsch, 1996), they add depth to the understanding of teaching and learning and provide another window to the understanding of students' perceptions of their experiences, and can lead to changes in our teaching. However, clear guidelines must be set, as writing may be limited by the selective memory of after-class reflection. Journals recreate the immediate subjective experience of individuals and provide significant comments on key events, providing reflection and insight into affective and psychological factors. The data are open-ended, qualitatively rich and can capture changes over time, shedding light on the whole context of an event.

There are, however, certain problems associated with the journal method. Because themes emerge through a process of discovery, analysis can be problematic. Therefore this method

should be combined with others in a larger study (McDonough and McDonough, 2002). Robson (2002) and Nunan (1992) share this view, seeing journals as valid preliminaries to other research and important for documenting and reflecting the psychological aspects of language learning. They also help students learn autonomously by creating student-teacher interaction outside the classroom. To summarize these views, the journal method is best for investigating the psychological and affective aspects of language learning. However, its results cannot be considered objective or necessarily generalisable and it is most effective when combined with other methods to provide a broader picture. We can consider it effective for investigating students' perceptions whilst acknowledging that these alone will not provide an objective picture. There are also other issues to consider in carrying out the methods.

Administrative practicalities include how structured the writing is and the guidelines the teacher gives for this (Robson 2002). Another issue is honesty, whether the students are writing what they really think or what the teacher wants to hear as with any method that depends on the students' perspective. Bell (2002) finds that the method generates a wealth of information but can be time-consuming, particularly if students are not compliant with the nature of the task. It is less intrusive than other methods as students have freedom in what they write. She adds that permission must be given to quote from the journals and writers need to know how the information is to be used. In this research students were made aware from the beginning that the journals would also be used for research purposes that would benefit the next generation of students. Participating in classroom research was a regular occurrence for them in the Faculty of Education.

I have summarized the advantages and limitations of the method. In this research the aim is to understand the research questions partly through students' perceptions, which can be obtained through journals. However, the data should be combined with that obtained through other methods to provide a more accurate and objective analysis.

3.2.1 feasibility study

I have discussed the main issues concerning journal studies and examples of their successful

implementation to provide insight into students' motivation and development in the Japanese university context. It seems then that this method was appropriate in terms of the insights it potentially generates. However, in order to ascertain further how amenable the students would be to it and whether it would produce results not found elsewhere, it was necessary to briefly test the method with other students in the year prior to the research. They were of similar ability to those in the main investigation. However, as they followed a content, not process-based course, their comments were less likely to be influenced by teacher input or bias.

Only a few examples of the results are provided here. However, they seem to confirm the view that students were more willing and able to articulate their perceptions and difficulties here than in the oral framework of the whole class situation. Examples of particular concerns that emerged were the difficulty of joining a conversation: *We Japanese tend to listen silently without interrupting* or (another student) *It is easier to ask a question rather than interrupt*. Many commented on the difficulties of disagreeing with others and their general lack of confidence at expressing opinions in English. Their comments on the difficulty of carrying out these functions in front of their peers and worries about the acceptability of their comments to others showed their strong awareness of role and identity within the group.

One student wrote: *Sometimes we have to be honest to give our friends an unfavourable response. Of course it is very hard so we soften our responses in order not to hurt friends' feelings*. At the same time there was a genuine interest in hearing different opinions, for example, *I could recognize the feelings of others through knowing their opinions*. This all seems to match the views from the literature about concern with reception of ideas by one's peers. In addition the students were aware of the gap between what was expected or possible in the private written word and in group interaction, or the differences, indicated above, between speaking and writing, for example, in the comment: *When I write, I often use "I strongly believe" or "I'm absolutely sure" in order to enhance my opinions. But if I use such strong opinions in the discussion, sometimes my opinions will be regarded as selfish because they give others the impression as if I made no concessions at all*. This illustrates the importance of investigating the particular features of interaction.

The brief feasibility study suggested that the format was appropriate for revealing students' perceptions and motivation. However, certain alterations would have to be made to the method if it was to be used over a longer period of time to measure longitudinal development as well as initial impressions. This would involve providing guidance to focus students' attention on particular strategies and aspects of the discussion and asking them to write their responses to them. At the same time, guidance should not be too prescriptive so that the journals would still represent the students' individual voices and capture spontaneous responses to their experience. Resolution of this conflict was potentially difficult and was solved by regular monitoring of students' notebooks and raising their awareness of different aspects of the discussion through strategies training. A further concern was continued motivation to write over this longer period when students were faced with assessed tasks for various courses. As a solution, feedback could be provided to increase motivation and enable the journals to be used for students' pedagogical development as in Fedderholdt's (1998) example. Realistically, extrinsic motivation is required for students to undertake extra non-assessed work however motivated they may initially be. If this is carried out successfully, there is sufficient gain from the method for us to pursue it over a long period of time.

Despite familiarity with the genre of journal writing, students needed guidance with the structure and content. Initially, their responses were subjective, impressionistic and based on the content rather than the process of the discussions or their own development, roles and identity. Particular areas of this related to the general research questions of how they conduct themselves in discussions including which aspects they found easy or difficult, their perceptions of themselves as individuals and members of groups and issues related to the expression of opinions and disagreement.

Regarding authenticity of response, it was important to time the writing so that the responses represented genuine responses to the event, undistorted by memory. This had to be balanced with the need to maximize interaction time during the class. Thus students were asked to start writing at the end of each class and continue at home. To encourage their involvement in their self-development, they were expected to write each week and their books were

checked once a month. Oral and written feedback was provided. As the course progressed, they were able to do this with minimum prompting and guidance, and reflect and comment on these issues.

Journals should be combined with other methods in order to counter the subjectivity of the method. It was therefore necessary to find a method that gives an accurate impression of what students actually do. Recording students' discussions was the most appropriate method. The next section will examine the viability of this method.

3.3 Observation and recording: rationale and implementation

3.3.1 rationale

In order to investigate the detailed and often hidden features of discussions such as their structure and the interactive features of turn-taking, a more detailed and accurate record was necessary than perceptions and memory of observations can provide. Silverman (2003) wrote that tapes and transcripts are a public record in a way that field notes cannot be, and memory only allows us to summarize, not capture detail of such issues as the organization of talk and how participants take on different roles and identities. Van Lier (1989) claims that it is necessary and desirable to obtain data in this way because of our limited knowledge of what goes on in real classrooms as opposed to those observed for evaluation purposes. These data are more objective and enable us to understand classroom communication in the linguistic, cognitive and social context of its occurrence, as well as turn-taking. These views are significant for this investigation, where linguistic, interactive and ideational features are captured simultaneously. However, given the complexity of the issues involved, it is important to consider practical, ethical and technical issues.

Despite objectivity at the time of carrying out recordings, the researcher's judgment is important in considering objectivity in presenting data. Wajnryb (1992) claims that this involves complex skills including selecting, identifying and prioritizing experiences, to understand and to analyse them. Intuition alone can lead to the researcher selecting only what fits our own beliefs. Observation could either be structured with fixed categories or

unstructured. However, Nunan (2002) and Cohen and Manion (2002) and Van Lier (1989) find that formal categories for classification ignore what participants actually do and do not fit the actual situation being observed. In this exploratory research, which aimed to make new discoveries, it was important that the categories were not too rigid but were shaped by the general areas of the research questions.

Secondly, we should consider issues of authenticity of data in a situation where students know they are being recorded as well as ethical issues such as privacy. Regarding authenticity, Labov's (1972) observer's paradox (cited in Wajnryb, 1992) and the vulnerability of participants are relevant. It is essential to minimize any intrusive effects of this and account for the effects of this when we draw conclusions. Robson (2002) and Allwright and Bailey (1991) also refer to this and the reactivity factor, which changes the behaviour of the students under investigation. They suggest that this can be minimized with practice and familiarity with the subjects and openness toward them. However, they also found improved performance due to increased motivation.

While there are some disadvantages of the recording method, we have to minimize the effects to bring the discussions as close as possible to a genuinely communicative event. In this research this was achieved in the following ways: firstly, students were always aware of being recorded and that this was for research purposes rather than assessment. In addition, the recording part of each class always took place at the same time so that students came to expect it. It was hoped that familiarity would lessen any observer's paradox effects and make students less likely to self-censor. In addition, the small group situation where students made the recording away from the teacher was a potentially less face-threatening situation than a teacher-controlled whole group situation. The machines were smaller and therefore more discrete than video and controlled by the students. It is also important to consider internal validity, which can be threatened by changes in the participants' environment such as maturation, change and growth. However, development over time was part of what was being measured, so familiarity with the instrument of measurement was part of this process

Ethical issues were similar to those in the case of journals. Any personal information that was revealed through the recordings was given freely. In addition, the students gave oral

permission for the data to be used, knowing that anonymity would be guaranteed as they were not identified by name and that selection of data would omit anything that contained sensitive personal issues. They were also assured that the recordings would not be used to form evaluative judgments of individuals. As the students were sensitive about their language production, focusing on this might impede production of content at a time when it was important for them to focus more on the development and expression of ideas and arguments and on strategies for smoother and more natural communication.

3.3.2 analysis of data/ reliability and validity

As qualitative research methods may contain subjective or impressionistic data, it is important to be selective. McDonough and McDonough (2002) suggest that we should consider not only how generalisable the data might be but also discrepant cases. With small-scale research, we should avoid making unwarranted leaps from the particular situation to the general. In this research, the claims made are limited to the particular Japanese situation and ask: to what extent can we suggest that research on students of similar ability in similar situations and circumstances would produce similar results, and which of the findings can be generally useful to teachers of Japanese students? This makes it important to suspend initial assumptions based on cultural generalisations and probe deeper to find what the actual data reveal.

Beyond selection and understanding of data, we need to consider how to present them in writing. This was aided by regular access to the participants so that they could be asked about unclear points and familiarity with the students' voices. Thick description was used, but limited space meant that only some representative samples could be included in the writing up. Judgment was necessary in selection and in considering which were typical responses and those which enhance our understanding of and provide new discoveries about Japanese students, in particular those which suggest reasons for their behaviour. This means that despite the essentially qualitative nature of the research, there is some level of quantification at this stage insofar as typicality is considered.

3.3.3 feasibility study

A brief feasibility study was carried out in the previous academic year. As the literature has indicated that students were likely to give a better performance in student-centred small groups than whole class interactions, the next step was to find out whether this would still be the case when they were recorded or whether recording would hinder their performance.

In the feasibility study students were initially nervous and expressed worries about the recordings being used for assessment. However, they adapted to the recording and it raised issues that could be developed further in the main research. One example was their greater readiness to ask for clarification about points they did not understand in small group than whole-class interactions. This contradicts suggestions made in the literature (Scollon and Scollon 1995, Barnlund 1989, Okazaki 1993, and others) that students lack speaker-based strategies and suggests instead that the strategies they used may be dependent on or limited by the particular structure or context of the interaction; the contexts in which they use these strategies may exclude teacher-fronted or large-group interaction. This finding is significant for defining the contexts and limits of cultural expectation, justifies using strategy studies in the research and indicates that we can learn from recordings of small-group interaction. As one research question is concerned with finding out how students express disagreement, another useful finding that went against intuitions was that disagreement did sometimes occur in peer-to-peer interaction. These brief examples suggest that this method can enable us to make discoveries that go beyond intuition and superficial observation and show the importance of looking at data objectively to find unexpected features.

As a result of the feasibility study, the method was adjusted to make the recordings a regular feature of each class. This increased from ten minutes in the first class to thirty in the last. Students increased the recording time naturally with increased familiarity with the process. Warming up time was also allowed for, as, for some students, this was the only time to use English in the week. Preliminary activities were carried out before the main activities that were recorded. The small groups carried out the discussion in separate rooms both to improve the quality of the recording and so that they would not be disturbed and influenced by other groups, as initial attempts at recording all the groups in the same room had shown

poor results.

These sections have established the rationale for choosing each research method and explained the benefits and limitations of each one as well as testing their feasibility on a small scale. In the next section I shall describe how these methods were actually carried out.

3.4 Overall implementation of the research

In the previous section, I considered the effectiveness of the two research methods for investigating students' communication, their perception of this and how such research can narrow the gap between intuition and reality and between teachers' and students' perceptions. This section will describe the actual process of the discussion class including a description of the participants in the study and how and why different types of discussion were used.

Information about the students

All students are third year students in the training course to be English teachers in the Faculty of Education. They are aged between 20 and 22. They have passed a specific entrance examination in order to be accepted to train as English teachers. They are divided into English majors, who will teach English as their main subject in secondary schools and English minors, who will teach it as a minor subject in primary or secondary school (taking only half as many English-based courses as the English majors). All have had six years of English study in secondary school prior to starting at university but little opportunity to participate in oral or thinking-based activities (based on their own admission). In their university days they have taken various English courses mostly taught by Japanese teachers in Japanese. In the transcripts they will be identified by a letter of the alphabet.

Summary of student information.

letter of alphabet	gender	major minor	other information
A	female	major	went to study abroad after the first semester
B	female	minor	
C	female	major	
D	male	major	member of debating team
E	male	major	

F	male	major	
G	female	minor	
H	male	minor	
I	male	major	
J	male	minor	initially appeared to lack confidence in speaking
K	male	major	has many English speaking friends
L	male	major	
M	male	major	

Open-ended discussion was beyond the students' usual classroom expectations and experience. The literature (Clenton, 2004, Brown, 2004) suggested a preference for semi-structured, low-risk teacher-fronted tasks with a clearer progression, fixed answers and guidelines and turns allocated in advance. Previous experience showed that in whole-class situations, students rarely expressed opinions unsolicited. When they were specifically called upon, they responded with subjective expression of likes or dislikes or token agreement with the previous speaker without expansion. Regular practice and training in strategies aimed to take them beyond this.

As a purpose of the research was to perceive how far students were influenced by cultural features and how they could develop and improve on these, training in strategies, taught as lexical phrases, was an important part of the discussion class. The literature (Dörnyei, 1995, Scattergood, 2003) has emphasized that these could provide short cuts to filling gaps in students' fluency to make them communicate more naturally and away from the concept of one right answer. Findings from the literature had an influence on the types of strategies that were taught. These included both general communication strategies and those particularly useful in discussions. As the literature has suggested a tendency towards long pauses and silences, strategies taught included those for filling lexical gaps and gaining time while processing arguments and thinking of a response.

I taught the strategies in the first thirty minutes of each ninety-minute period over the first twenty weeks. They were taught as lexical phrases as part of a handout (see Appendix 1). Explanation was given orally as to the connotations and directness of each expression and situations in which they could be used and some brief class discussion carried out on these.

The handouts also included short, role-play style exercises practicing related activities in small groups (see Appendix 2). The strategies were taught as a series of phrases of varying directness for different functions such as clearing up misunderstandings, disagreeing, expressing strong agreement, emphasizing the main point, or interrupting. After a teacher-led introduction to the strategies, the students carried out short activities in small groups. They had to use these expressions in various role-plays or other activities for fifteen to twenty minutes in order that they might practice them in a non face-threatening environment. These involved choosing and using appropriate expressions from the strategies. Sometimes they subsequently performed these in front of the class so that others might comment on the effectiveness of their use. The students were asked to comment on their perceptions of using these strategies in their journals.

At the end of the academic year, the strategy phase was replaced with a “spontaneous discussion” where students were expected to use internalized strategies. The purpose was development of fluency, argument and reduction of silences. These warm-up activities served to focus students’ attention on the process of discussion before they moved to the new content of the main discussion. Main discussions were topic-based with source materials provided a week in advance and carried out in small groups after whole-class introductory activities which served to familiarize students with the topic.

The literature (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003) suggested that the formation of groups and the nature of the materials chosen are key preparatory stages in carrying out class discussions. As another purpose was to investigate how students expressed their opinions of agreement and disagreement, it was important to provide appropriate material for this. Regarding authenticity and inspiration of materials for higher-level discussion, on practical, linguistic and academic grounds, it was important to go beyond traditional pedagogical texts or lengthy media articles. Textbook material was often too artificial with oversimplified linguistic strategies for arguing. Individual newspaper articles were authentic but did not necessarily provide a range of views on a topic. It was necessary to provide shortcuts to ease students’ entry into oral academic discourse. Therefore for the criteria of being accessible, authentic and offering a range of views in various registers, the medium of choice was examples of easily digestible genuine opinions. These were taken from websites with reader

contributions and presented in largely unedited form. This authenticity was aimed at increasing motivation and at enabling the students to build up a range of expressions that could be used in academic discussions.

While strategy practice focused on fluency training, the material trained students in the academic skills useful for the understanding and construction of arguments. These were mentioned in the previous chapter (Scarcella, 2003) and included linguistic analysis (explaining the vocabulary and useful expressions), argument analysis (paraphrasing and commenting on the argument effectiveness) and content analysis (giving opinions). These various discussion phases built up to the main discussion activity. In the final weeks of the academic year, students were given autonomy over the class and acted as discussion leaders.

3.5 Approaches to analysis of data

In analysis of the journal data, there was a vast range of data as most of the students produced comments on the process of discussion in general as well as to the strategies covered each week. Copies were kept of the journal entries. All comments were listed and areas of particular interest highlighted. This involved some quantification. Some of the strategies did not provoke many comments, so comments on these were omitted. Comments that were not related to strategies or to the process of discussion were not presented. The entries in the “results” chapter referring to the strategies were grouped according to the different strategies they referred to, such as interrupting or disagreeing.

Clear patterns emerged from the journal entries on areas or points of view that were common to various students. Due to limitations of space, selection of the comments was based on frequency. Only a few comments could be selected for each area so this necessitated a quantitative approach to analysis. Choosing comments based on frequency and typicality involved dividing comments into two main areas: those that revealed individual students’ attitudes, thus shedding light on their motivation and those that revealed views on general cultural trends as well as those related to the major issue of the relationship of the individual to the group. Within this selection there was a particular focus on comments that would reveal aspects that could not be seen through direct observation and would therefore be of use to teachers trying to understand the ways of thinking of Japanese

students. This fits the exploratory purpose of the research and provides an insight into closer interpretations of students' behaviour. As I have suggested above, although some quantification is necessary, a purely quantitative approach cannot highlight individual differences sufficiently. Sometimes more than one comment is presented to illustrate a particular point of view in order to reveal different nuances. In addition comments are sometimes presented which went against expectations and cultural trends. Such comments serve the purpose of highlighting individual differences related to the key question of the relationship of the individual to the group. As an aim of the method was to find the students' voices, cases where they have a clear concept of the reasons for their behaviour are of particular interest.

The analysis of the discussion data was carried out using methods taken mainly from the conversation analysis tradition. As the research was qualitative, categories for analysis were not determined or imposed in advance. The emphasis was on finding patterns of behaviour in the data and relating these to students' perceptions of their communication as expressed in the journals. These were also considered in the light of comments on the sequential features of turn taking as well as views on the features of argument and communication that were in the literature. In addition, the literature had provided background to issues such as turn taking and features of argument and communication. I shall next consider the theoretical background that influenced the method.

The theoretical background to the analysis of discussions can be considered as follows: the conversation analysis method is essentially a practical exercise and not dependent on abstract theory or defining categories in advance. According to Levinson (1983), the distinction between conversation analysis and discourse analysis is that while discourse analysis attempts to isolate a basic set of categories, conversation analysis adopts a more empirical approach, which does not construct theories or categories in advance. This fits the goals of exploration and discovery that are essential to qualitative research, and in this case was important for the purpose of discovering the relationship between individual perceptions and cultural features of communication. The method then uses intuition for searching for recurring patterns in naturally occurring data. In this case the data occurred naturally within an activity that normally took place in small groups in a "Discussion" classroom.

According to Psathas (1995) and Ten Have (1999) the purpose of conversation analysis is to make what was said and how it was said available. There is an underlying assumption that order is produced by the participants in the conversation and that this order is repeatable and recurrent as well as understood by the participants. This assumption of order and regular patterns is based on the views of Schlegoff and Sacks (1973). The researcher's job is to discover, describe and analyse the structures, practices and the way in which order is produced. It is not to consider how frequently particular phenomena occur nor to make assumptions regarding participants' motivations or make abstract generalizations. They claim that meaning is found in the original data, for example, the meaning of a question can be seen in the way the participants respond to it. In this respect, regarding this research, it was important to look carefully at the different stages of the discussions and how the students responded to utterances such as requests for opinions. There was also emphasis on the different phases in responding to partners' questions through looking at various examples of this.

The stages of the typical conversation analysis patterns are: make recordings of natural interaction, transcribe them in whole or part, analyze selected episodes, and report the research. There is variation in the extent to which researchers consider that it makes sense to use additional data such as background information to make sense of the recordings. In the conversation analysis tradition, noticing is considered more important than having specific predetermined goals. It is essential to discover the patterns and relate them patterns to other patterns within the data. In this case the patterns found were considered alongside similar patterns in other discussions and typical examples presented in the thesis.

Considering the issue of "noticing" in more detail, the suggested approach was to start by noticing the features in each sequence and characterize the actions in it, seeing that there are different ways in which something could be done, including how the actions were completed and the different roles, identities and relationships in this with turn taking as a key point. In this research individual identity, relationships to the group as well as to the larger cultural group were aspects to be considered. Part of the analysis was concerned with finding commonalities that existed across several cases with the aim being to formulate some

hypotheses. A way to achieve this is to analyse single cases and compare them with other instances, also considering deviant case analysis. A further rule of conversation analysis was for relatively few cases to be looked at in detail rather than the analysis of large amounts of data being quantified. This occurred here as once the discussions in general had been considered, particular extracts were chosen for a closer and more detailed line by line analysis. In the writing up, significant and revealing parts of the analysis were included.

Analysing the patterns then necessitates finding and understanding their logic even when there are no prespecified goals. According to Ten Have (1999:103) this may be carried out in different ways and one should not ignore general perspectives on conversational data. He suggests an open ended approach, which involves considering turn taking and systematically working through the data guided by concepts. Intuitions are important but need to be disciplined. The next stage in the analysis is to move from observation to hypothesis. In the case of this research, the hypotheses made were speculative and considered various possible interpretations of students' behaviour. The "Analysis" chapter discusses these interpretations in more detail without claiming that anything is definitely the case.

The analysis of the discussion data here includes the content of arguments in the discussion as well as traditional features of conversation analysis such as turn-taking, sequences and repair, which can reveal key issues about the interaction between participants that are essential in discussion. In the analysis of the earlier discussions, the focus was explorative, finding general features without establishing categories in advance. For this purpose, initial short discussions were chosen at random for analysis in their entirety in order to examine content on its own terms. The discussions were worked line by line to consider what the participants did and how they responded to each other in order that the internal logic of each discussion might be understood. In the presentation of the final discussions, extracts were presented in order to ascertain whether improvements had been made.

Between the first and last discussions, in the analysis and presentation of the discussions throughout the year, it was necessary to look more carefully at particular areas. These were the general areas of the strategies the students had learned and their related functions. In keeping with the conversation analysis tradition, although there were categories, the aim was

to notice and interpret general patterns within these categories. From this point of view, extracts were chosen that illustrated the points under consideration such repair, empathy, giving opinions and disagreement.

Patterns were looked at such as the stages the students went through between the expression of an opinion and the response to it. They were considered in conjunction with findings from the research literature and the students' journals, sometimes in order to consider the range and limitations of views expressed in the literature and reevaluate such views. Reasons for patterns in the discussions were often found in the journal entries. The discussions were presented step by step, with a focus on the patterns and how students responded to functions such as request for opinion.

As discussions were recorded over a full academic year, they provided a wide range of data. As with the journals, selection of extracts was necessary in order to illustrate the features under consideration. Although the conversation analysis method prefers discovery to quantifying results, it does allow for comparison of similar patterns. In order to examine the internal logic of patterns of students' communication in this case, and given that the findings were to be useful to other teachers of Japanese students, it was necessary to select patterns based on frequency and typicality. In general and more particularly in the case of functions such as repair and giving opinions, which were found throughout all the discussion types, there were many examples that could possibly be presented in the thesis, so typical examples of different types are shown, limited to one or two illustrations of each point.

The method of analysis can be summarized as follows: it involved working through a general corpus of data, not preselected with any particular notion or hypothesis in mind beyond. It was later necessary to focus on particular features, particularly as improvement and development over time were being considered. Transcripts were made of all the recordings, and these were worked through line by line in order to find common features. This included both content and structures such as turn taking and repair. As a result general observations were formulated and speculative theories were made based on these. Similar patterns were sought in other examples of data. They were combined with observations from the journals and considered in the light of findings from the literature. Sequences and the

organization of the discussions were discovered, interpreted and presented. The final analysis chapter will present these views.

This chapter has considered the background to the methodology and an evaluation of the methods, the way the research was carried out and the way the data were analysed. The next chapter will present the findings.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the results of student journals and recordings. The research aimed to establish the extent to which students were influenced by cultural features, how far they were able to express opinions as individuals in the group even when faced with opposite views and to examine how far these aspects could be improved by the teaching of strategies. In order to answer the first question, I shall first consider the features that the students revealed in early discussions and responses to particular strategies. The strategies and responses to them will be presented in groups according to general communicative areas related to the cultural terminology described in the literature section. Analysis of individual discussions will be presented so that comments will be kept close to the presented data. A more general analysis will be in the next chapter. Next, I shall consider the specific aspects such as empathy perspective, repair and paraphrase, opinion giving and disagreement in more detail considering both the journals and the recordings of students' performance.

Although the students wrote comments regularly and discussions were recorded according to the criteria described in the "Methodology" chapter, limited space necessitates selection of journal entries and recordings; in the case of journal entries, some will be directly quoted and others summarized or paraphrased. Directly quoted extracts are placed in italics with a gap between the comments of different students.

Extracts from the recordings will be presented with each student identified by a letter. Recording students over a whole academic year enabled a documentation of progress as the students became more familiar with the process of discussion. It was hoped that the students would reveal more of the process of discussion in small-groups than they would in the whole-class situation and in the completed product of rehearsed performances. The literature indicated a preference for reflective and collaborative rather than logical and analytical discussions. The recordings documented the extent to which these particular styles were present. In order to ascertain students' discussion styles prior to any strategy training, the presentation of the results will start with a presentation of some initial discussions. In these

discussions, there was not any focus on a particular features. Instead the focus was on finding general features of the discussions. Later recordings will focus on more specific aspects of discussions.

Extracts from the recordings will be presented using transcription symbols based on those presented in Ten Have (1999) (see Appendix 4). The symbols serve to reveal not only what was said but how it was said. The main aim of the transcriptions is to show the content of the students' discussions as well as features relating to turn taking, fluency and speed of response as well as pauses within an utterance. They also show students' rising intonation to reveal students' doubts and particular stress of words through underlining. There was very little overlap or interruption in the discussions, but where these occur they are indicated by symbols. Examples of latching are also clearly indicated. Italics indicate Japanese words.

4.2 General cultural features found in initial discussions

For the initial recorded small group discussions, the students chose their own topics. They were free to choose any topic of interest so that natural preferences could be ascertained. After that the topics for each week were allocated in advance and based on negotiation between students and teacher. This gave the students time to prepare by reading and researching on the Internet for background information. The education-based topics were often topics with which students were familiar from their studies. They were able to draw on resources from other classes as well as personal experience. The handouts the students were given in advance included quoted opinions on the topics from websites such as the BBC. (see Appendix 2). After whole-class activities, the students divided into smaller groups for the recorded discussions. Some selected initial findings are presented here with discussion extracts taken from different groups.

extract 1: (female students discussing the best methodology for studying English)

1 A: I think it's good for children to start learning English.(4.1)

2 B: When?

3 A: Like before (2) elementary school (11)

4 All: Mmmmmmmmmmmmm (.)

5 A: Mmm (2.1) maybe I will start from listening. (all: listening?), talking (5) and (2) after
6 that little by little (1) start writing (all:mmmm) reading. (2.4)

7 B: Did you start learning English (2) at elementary school?

8 A: Err, no. I went to the English class like school near my house when I was twelve?
9 years old but it was just once a week so I don't think it was very useful for me, but (1)
10 it was good chance (all:mmm) (.)

11 C: I think so too. In fact (3) I started to study English when I was a little child errr
12 (2) because my parents wanted me to (2) speak English fluently (2) and I (4.1) thanks
13 to it I (3) am interested in English (.)

14 A: So, were your teachers British or Americans?

15 C: Aah at first Japanese teachers and (2.2) two years later when I started to study English
16 maybe American (.)

17 All: (mmmmmm) (.)

18 A: So how about you? When was your first time to study English? (.)

19 B: Errr I started learning English at junior high school but my sister started learning
20 English at about five years old? and now she can speak English fluently and her ability
21 of English is very high. So I wish I had started English earlier. (4) Early learning
22 is better I think. (10)

23 All: Mmm

At the beginning of the discussion, A offers a direct opinion on the issue without elaborating on reasons. The discussion then moves on to the details of how English should be taught. Specific issues can be inferred from the discussion, which are often embedded in narration of personal experience rather than being presented explicitly as issues with objective reasons.

Looking specifically at the beginning of the discussion, instead of the direct soliciting of opinion, there is a request first for factual details regarding the first speaker's opinion (1.2), and second for personal experience (1.7, 14,18). Points are not framed in terms of issues with arguments but within narration of personal experience. Each person's experience is elicited in terms of age, place of learning English and the nationality of their teachers. The focus is

on the listener to infer points or arguments made from this experience. Specific details are as follows:

In line 1, although A's original opinion is clear, she makes it more tentative with "maybe" when she adds further details later. After this initial expression of opinion, others give listener responses rather than immediately offering opinions. In 1.7 further details are requested. The students delay offering arguments or opinions until more details have been given. This early collaborative phase consists of the establishing of background details and listening to other members of the group. It consists of two phases: first, each person's background experience is established through narration. Next, further details about this are established through specific questions (1.7, 1.14) accompanied by listener responses that suggest that other participants are absorbing and reflecting on these experiences. The early stage of the discussion therefore focuses more on establishing and understanding each person's background rather than arguing a point.

Listener-based strategies are present in this discussion. One example is C's general argument (1.21) that early learning is better. It is an explicit point that follows personal anecdotes; listeners have to infer that these are the reasons for the point. This implicit norm seems understood by the group; the other participants do not ask for further clarification or further reasons for the stance. The discussion also reveals examples of the point made in the literature (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003) that establishing familiarity and building good relations among the group members is a precondition of successful discussions to make students feel comfortable without losing face.

The literature established the view that different contexts brought about different modes of behaviour, and students took on different identities in different roles depending whether the situations were perceived to require logic or greater emphasis on interpersonal relations. This first discussion revealed examples of two contrasting modes- direct and precise versus indirect and vague. The contrasts were present within and outside the narration of personal experience. When the students asked for exact details about the others' English learning experience, they were precise and direct. However, when a personal comment on the experience or opinion was involved, they preferred vagueness and ambiguity.

This first discussion revealed collaborative features of eliciting as much background detail as possible to gain individual perspectives rather than offering explicit reasons for opinions. The students seemed to listen to each member of the group and gather different perspectives on the issue. This suggests a need to consider an issue from several angles rather than immediately decide for or against it. From this point of view, apparent contradictions within a statement may serve to highlight the issues inherent in it rather than invalidating a point. The frequent listener responses in this discussion may indicate the necessity of a period of reflection and consideration of various individual experiences prior to reaching a conclusion.

This first discussion consisted of three female students discussing a topic of which they had personal experience. The second extract is from an all-male group discussing the causes and consequences of a recent train accident. Although a recent incident may bring about a strong emotional response, their distance from the incident suggests greater potential for objective analysis including disagreement and less scope for personal anecdote.

extract 2: (train crash)

- 1 D: What do you think about the train accident in Kobe? (.)
- 2 E: It's terrible. I don't want to ride a train anymore. How about you? (.)
- 3 F: I think so too. And I think that that accident was the driver's fault. (1)
- 4 E: But driver died maybe maybe we can't attack him (2)
- 5 D: Every day I come to school by train but recently a lot of people don't like trains
- 6 but cars but car yes, maybe? err they are afraid of train accident (.)
- 7 F: I think that train company is bad because they try to hide their mistakes any time so
- 8 they have to change their attitude (.)
- 9 E: I think so. (1.5) Oh, by the way, if you lived in that apartment what do you think? (1)
- 10 F: Err I can't live any more (2)
- 11 E: I think many people moved to another place but the people want the company to
- 12 help us to some money or some=
- 13 F: =Yes I think they should offer their help (.)
- 14 D: I think so too. On that day I went to Osaka so err my mother worried about me and
- 15 many times she called she called me by cell phone (1.5)

- 16 F: I have a friend in Osaka and I called her about five days ago and she said I lost my
17 friend at that accident so it was very shocking accident for me (.)
- 18 E: If it happened in Nishi Chiba it is more dangerous because Sobu Line is very
19 crowded (2)
- 20 D: Err yes, what do you think if such thing happened in my town, maybe I lost my
21 friend so I think train company has responsibility.(1)
- 22 E: If some train delayed the schedule, what do you think, what should they do? (1)
- 23 F: I think that human life is more important than time. They should take care about
24 their driving=
- 25 E: = I think so too

The topic of this discussion provides greater potential for argument than the first discussion because it focuses on a clear issue of blame. However, the students achieve this collaboratively. They consider the topic from various angles rather than deepening argument about any particular aspect. Patterns include explicitly expressed agreement plus comment (1.3, 1.9, 1.20) and agreement plus shift of perspective (1.9, 1.12). However, it also provides many examples of concrete arguments. One example is that F gives clear reasons for blaming the train company (1.7). These are presented from an emotional perspective of those involved in the situation rather than an objective outsider's perspective, for example, that E would not blame the train driver because he died in the accident. This is an example of the empathy perspective and appeals to emotion as indicated by Oi (1997).

Extract 2 reveals many examples of collaborative features. It starts with a clear question (1.1) to clarify the topic. In this way the first speaker raises the topic without commitment to a particular opinion. After this, the group members shift the perspective to considering the situation from the perspective of those involved in it. A further aspect of this empathy perspective is the creation of hypothetical situations. An example of this (1.18) is the move to considering how the students would have felt if the accident had happened in their local area. This leads students to relate personal experiences and subsequently, as in the first discussion, offer a general opinion as a result of individual anecdotes. An example of this is when D argues (1.21) that the train company is responsible because his friend might have been injured had the accident occurred in his local area. This hypothetical "if" position gives

arguments based on imagined consequences of hypothetical situations. It seems that while competitive or analytical discussions may be past-oriented, analyzing actual events; collaborative empathy-based discussions seem to be conditional future-oriented, arguing from potential and imagined consequences of a situation.

Regarding the extent to which ideas could be developed in discussions, there were suggestions in the literature that Japanese discussions are a forum for using up pre-established ideas rather than developing new ones, that knowledge is displayed rather than developed. In this discussion, different perspectives were given on the situation rather than new ideas developed. This is seen in the cases of agreement or acknowledgement without expansion. Specific examples of this are in line 3 where F offers token agreement without stating reasons. In line 9, E adds a simple agreement and then changes to the empathy-based, hypothetical perspective marking this shift with “By the way.” He then relates personal experience that is indirectly connected with the topic. The literature (Mori, 1999) had suggested that such casual markers were often used to preface an unexpected and inexplicable change of direction.

The end of the discussion reveals a shift towards a general point. The final hypothetical question of what to do if a train is delayed (1.22) is not answered directly but responded to with a general abstract statement that *Human life is more important than time*. The abstract statement stands out in the discussion due to its contrast with other types of statement in the discussion. This is an example of Okazaki’s (1993) point that main points are made after background information is given and that Japanese discussions tend to move from the specific to the general (Oi, 1997). The beginning of the discussion was marked by lack of commitment to a position in the form of a general question that states the topic of the discussion. The general statement of opinion is given after expressions of individual and hypothetical experience were shared and considered. Following the statement, the other members express token agreement with the statement rather than arguing with it or adding to it. This suggests that the purpose of such general statements is not to provoke comment or argument but to function as a summary and natural conclusion of previous comments. The timing of the statement further indicates low-risk behaviour as it is made after the perspectives of others have been listened to and understood.

In these first two discussions, the main patterns were anecdotal and hypothetical and the empathy-based position was used with a sometimes abrupt transition from one mode to another. A short extract from the third group (discussing health) will provide a further example of this.

extract 3 (health)

- 1 G: Putting putting on weight caused causes stress (.)
- 2 H: Yes it is not so good (.)
- 3 G: Aah yes. (4)
- 4 H: What do you do to stay healthy?(.)
- 5 G: Ah. I (3) I won't skip meals. Every time I eat healthy food. How about you?

This brief extract provides an example of the transition of different modes, from a general expression of opinion (l.1) to a request for information about personal experience. H gives token agreement (l.2), and this is acknowledged (l.3) without expansion on the reasons. After a brief acknowledgment that the speakers share the same point of view related to the topic, H shifts to the personal, subjective mode of relating experience. While this discussion did start with a general statement, one reason is likely to be that the nature of the topic ensured that the statement was a low-risk one likely to be agreed upon by others.

These early discussions revealed some general features. The students clearly had individual opinions, but there was variation in the way they were expressed and the position of general statements. There was some evidence of the features of collaboration, listener responses, empathy and hypothetical positions. Features of a listener-based style included the perspective-gathering phases of understanding background in order to gain a general picture of a situation before commenting on it. In accordance with Scollon and Scollon's (1995) comments on inductive strategies, the students did not always step out of the narration of anecdote or perspective to make their point explicit. There is also an indication of Maynard's (1997) views that Japanese students would delay reaching the point by engaging in non-task-related communication. However, as different patterns of directness and indirectness were found in different phases of the discussions, we cannot claim these

features to be absolutes but instead they should be seen as some of the features that can be found in discussions. In addition, the background information can be seen as a necessary step to deepening understanding of the issue.

These short early discussions were carried out before the students studied strategies. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggested that Japanese students would be weak in speaker-based strategies and that they might have difficulty with the spontaneous turn-taking necessary for joining a discussion. Initial discussions had revealed that arguments were often made implicitly rather than explicitly. However, it is necessary to study the students' journals in order to consider the relationship between the two types of data and how the students perceived this issue. As they seemed, according to the literature and initial recordings, to have a preference for an empathy approach, this aspect will be considered in more detail in the next section.

4.3 The empathy position

4.3.1 background

The literature and results gained from earlier discussions suggested that the students would express their views better through an empathy or hypothetical position than an objective or rational position. Early in the course, case-study discussions (see Appendix 2) were carried out with related strategies in order to investigate how students discussed issues with no fixed solutions and of which they had no personal experience. Such tasks also revealed the process and stages of argument.

Based on the literature, it was possible that this style might be easy for the students because of their preference for empathy and hypothesis creation, reflection and discussions with a concrete and human element. However, it might also be difficult because of the suggestion (Burden, 1999, Clenton, 2004) that they prefer clear-cut tasks with fixed answers. Previous classroom experience had suggested that they would decline to comment on topics outside their experience, often curtailing a discussion with acknowledgment of difficulty of problems.

4.3.2 results from the journals

These strategies brought about a range of responses. Some students wrote that it was difficult to express opinions on topics outside their experience. More students wrote that they preferred these discussions to more abstract ones. They commented on the similarity of these tasks to the empathy exercises of their previous educational experience. One typical response was as follows:

It is easier for Japanese to make a deep comment about someone's position than to have one's own comments, so this strategy was easy to use for Japanese.

4.3.3 recordings on the case studies

Case studies enabled the students to discuss exactly the kinds of situations where their personal experience was limited. This section will consider in more detail exactly how they carried out such discussions.

In the following extracts the students discuss a hypothetical family dilemma which involves a father being offered a job in a region away from his family (see Appendix). The recordings reveal how the students articulate their thoughts in looking at the problem from various angles.

extract 4a (case study)

1 I: If I were him (8), I would err (8) I would choose err (2) I would accept this (3)

2 situation so (.)

3 K: ACCEPT? (A: accept), errr YOU accept? (.)

4 J: So, but (.)

5 K: [What to do?]

6 J: [What to do?]

7 I: Err I want to=

8 K: =Give up? Go to the city?=
=

9 I: =Go to the city. Want to go North go to the North of England but. Errr=

10 J: = By alone or with your family?

extract 4b

1 I: In this situation, I would contact with my family every day or=

2 J: =By telephone? (.)

3 I: Yes, telephone, by telephone or email or in a day when I have leave from my job I

4 want to go to my family.

The discussions reveal the process of formulating opinions. As in earlier discussions, the students build up a picture of what other participants would do in this hypothetical position through carefully checking details. They echo the details of other participants' opinions and add further points without directly criticizing the views of others although indirect disagreement is indicated through emphatic questioning. This is a further illustration of the gradual building up of details as a necessary stage in collaborative discussions. It is also part of the process of moving from the specific to the general and understanding the position of the other group members. Sometimes individuals admit that a problem is difficult and that there is no immediate or easy solution. Mori (1999) described this as a self-qualification to avoid commitment. However, it may also be seen as a more universal feature of honest acknowledgment of the difficulty of a problem. An example can be seen in the extract below. The discussion is still within the hypothetical mode of the situation of moving apart from family.

extract 4c

1 K: I want to ask you IF your wife rejects your opinion what what are you going to do?(4)

2 [If your wife says]

3 I: [If my wife rejects] my opinion err it's very difficult err (7) How about you, M in such

4 situation? (.)

5 M: Err in a case like this I would err, I would give up the give up the promotion, tenured

6 promotion. (.)

7 I: You give up?

In line 3, I acknowledges the difficulty of the problem and passes on his turn. The phases of this can be categorized as: acknowledge difficulty of question or situation and shift to another topic or speaker. This may also be a further illustration of the view that in the case of complex issues, direct opinion can only be offered after sufficient reflection.

These case study discussions provided further illustrations of the features found in earlier discussions; there was a focus on small details that appeared to delay commitment to a point of view. A further aspect of this was the claiming of lack of qualification to comment. The frequency of questions to ask others in the group to comment could indicate listener-based approaches in which the students absorbed and understood the viewpoints of others rather than asserting their own opinions. However, this view is not conclusive, and various interpretations of it will be discussed in the analysis chapter. To access a broader range of the students' communicative features, it is necessary to balance this with comments regarding behaviour in discussions of a different, less collaborative type, where explicit speaker-based strategies such as assertion of opinions are called for. Part of the strategies training involved learning strategies for making points explicit. The next section will provide some examples of these:

4.4 Speaker-based strategies 1

4.4.1 background

Speaker-based strategies were studied in order to develop the students' skills in areas related to making their points explicit. The literature had suggested that they preferred a listener-based, inductive implicit style as indicated by Scollon and Scollon (1995), Barnlund (1989), Okazaki (1993), and Mori (2002). In such a style they would not step out of narration to make their point clear but would expect their partner to understand it. They learned explicit expressions such as "The point is" and expressions for summarizing or paraphrasing comments made in the course of the discussion with expressions such as "So what you're

saying is...” Teaching them the latter group of strategies was aimed at helping students to understand others’ comments before making a point. It also aimed at helping them to develop their communicative possibilities beyond using only the person and empathy oriented discussion preference that Stebbins (1995), Scattergood (2003) and others claimed to be dominant. In addition, given the added difficulty they were likely to experience in formulating their ideas in a foreign language, a further purpose was to provide more thinking time to enable them to join a discussion even when they could not immediately formulate a point. The comments on turn-taking (Bygate, 1987, Hughes, 2002) had stressed the importance of learning such skills due to the difficulty of making lexical choices. Furthermore, speaker-based strategies included ways of smoothly making the transition from one topic to a related one or adding extra information to a discussion.

Regarding turn-taking, the literature (Johnson, 1995, Anderson, 1993, Guest, 2005) suggested that students prefer preallocated to spontaneous turn-taking and long turns with little overlap and long pauses between turns. As turn-taking is the means by which students can participate in discussions, it was important for them to understand that turn-taking styles outside their own culture would be different and that others would not necessarily allocate them a turn. They were therefore taught strategies for breaking into a discussion when turns were not allocated to them specifically, for example by making their point directly or announcing it or asking a question.

4.4. 2 speaker-based strategies in journals

Many students wrote that they found speaker-based strategies useful because of a perceived need to make their point more explicit in English. The comments included the following:

I have often heard such expressions in English, so I am glad to know how to use them.

I know I have to be more logical in English, so it is important to be able to make my point clearly.

Others commented that these strategies, particularly paraphrase and summary strategies, provided them with useful ways of joining a discussion and checking their comprehension of

previous points. Regarding shifting topic strategies, they wrote comments such as:

It is difficult to connect one topic smoothly to another, so I am glad to learn these strategies.

These issues will be considered in more detail in the comments on the particular speaker-based strategies of giving clear opinions and reasons.

Regarding turn-taking, most students wrote that initially this was not difficult because, for example:

Usually, somebody starts the discussion with a question and somebody answers.

There is a connection here between the comments in the journals and the initial discussions. In some of the earlier discussions, the first comment took the form of a general question to the group rather than a direct statement of opinion. This appeared to be non-committal and low risk-taking. Related to this, comments by other students suggested that they preferred to gauge the opinions of others before offering a comment, particularly at the beginning of a discussion where there was not yet any indication of the opinions of others. An example comment was:

It is difficult to know what others are thinking, so it is easier to start by asking a question to everyone.

Interrupting a speaker mid-turn or making a point without being asked individually seemed to be a difficult function for many students. Most of them expressed a desire to wait politely for the other person to give them a chance to speak even if this meant losing the chance. The reasons they gave for this referred not only to timing and language but also to cultural features, which suggested that this would not be possible in Japanese discussions.

This is difficult for Japanese because we do not want to stop the others' conversations. We often listen to someone's speech through to the end and then we have some comments on the speech.

As many students think it is difficult for Japanese to use interrupting, I couldn't use that strategy well.

We have to wait until silence comes when a speaker has finished speaking what he/she wanted to say. I am not used to breaking in.

Where students did interrupt, they preferred to announce their participation in advance using expressions such as "May I ask a question?" or "May I add something here?"

Other reasons given for not interrupting focussed on the issue of respect for another person's point of view. As one student commented, that it would be particularly unfair to interrupt a partner's idea if that person strongly believed their opinion to be true.

I thought it was very hard to interrupt the partner's idea because they really think it is true.

Some students commented on the need to place respect for the other person's idea above that of expressing their own idea when interrupting. If they interrupted someone, they tended to choose breaking in by asking a question as the most suitable way:

The discussion would be more natural if I could break in naturally, but I only feel comfortable to do this if I ask a question so that I can show respect for the other person's opinion.

Most students found breaking in to be impolite and claimed that they never did it in Japanese.

However, one student articulated the conflict between what was she perceived as a necessity for a more regular pattern of listen and talk and the difficulty of breaking in. A similar conflict was articulated by another student, who commented on the conflict between desiring to add his point at the right moment when he strongly agreed with the other person's comment and the fear of interrupting others that prevented him from doing so. He tended to set high standards for himself and reflect on the strategies beyond learning them. About a

month after this, after a class where students were expected to practice expressing strong views, he wrote:

These days I feel really strongly about the difficulty of interrupting. Whenever others continue, I am unwilling to say my opinion. It's really one of the Japanese stereotypes but I wanted to overcome it to say much in discussion.

Another student claimed that she would only assert her own opinion into another person's turn in a case of urgency where true opinions were absolutely necessary.

It is also useful to consider deviant views, for example, in this case, there was one student who claimed that she did often interrupt, writing

Although I find it natural to interrupt and often do so, I must be careful not to do it. I am told by other Japanese I am too aggressive, so I should not do it so often.

To summarize the reasons for not interrupting, they included: difficulty of the timing, respect for the other person's feelings and therefore listening to the whole idea before replying, and the general cultural taboo against interrupting. Such views help to illustrate the behaviour found in the recordings such as listening to a whole idea before responding.

4.4.3 speaker-based strategies in the recordings

The following example from a case study discussion after the students had learned some speaker-based strategies reveals the extent to which they used such strategies to make their points clear.

extract 5 (a case-study on international marriage)

- 1 I: Err I think in this case the point is (2) how Eriko loves errr her boyfriend Bill=
- 2 M: =Ahaha=
- 3 I: =So if if she feels (3) about him err very (others: strong) strong he's only one for

- 4 him her=
5 M: =[Uhhuh]=
6 K: [So they married]
7 L: Yeah, they married (.)
8 K: Eriko [loves]
9 I: [Yes, yes Eriko loves very much] (.)
10 M: Yes, it's clear I think=
11 J: =[The problem is her father]
12 M: [So, her father]=
13 K: =And the work=
14 M: Her father, work (.)
14 J: Work? (.)
15 I: Job

The journals had indicated that the students found it useful to learn speaker-based strategies for making their points clear. There were many examples where these strategies were used in the students' discussions. In the example above, in 1.1, 1.3, 1.8, 1.11, 1.13 the students made their points unambiguously. In this phase of establishing the facts of the case and stating the essential points, the discussion situation is low risk. The students add different viewpoints to the discussion. It seems that these are not presented as alternatives from which one must be chosen; instead they are added as possibilities that may coexist. This extract demonstrated that the students could isolate and establish the main points of the issue.

A further aspect revealed by the extract is the way in which students integrate different views. It seems that they are more able to be explicit about the point of the issue when they are not expected to offer a personal stance on it or consistency of viewpoint. They offered explicit, speaker-based comments and worked cooperatively to confirm and add to others' points without contradicting them. This seems to be the style referred to by De Bono (1985). In this way each person can add their idea to a discussion without risk that it might be rejected. Explicitness seems to be possible when the idea is presented as a possibility rather than an absolute position. In addition explicit statements can be made when the students are describing a problem rather than offering arguments.

4.5 Speaker-based strategies 2- repair, paraphrase and correcting misunderstandings

4.5.1 background

Earlier discussions revealed the tendency to ask for more precise details about background information in order to build up a discussion collaboratively and present comments in a risk-free situation. If the students were to go beyond focusing on small details and to move the discussion forward, then it was important for them to emphasize the main points and clear up misunderstandings. They were given strategies for rephrasing and summarising or paraphrasing their contributions and ideas so that they could make the main points more explicit (“What I want to say is” or “What I mean is”) and for repair of self and others. While the literature (Clyne, 1986) suggested a tendency not to seek clarification of meaning, this view already appeared to be questionable in the feasibility study. It revealed that students did seek clarification in small-group peer- to- peer interaction. This implies that patterns of behaviour are not absolutes but different modes of behaviour are considered appropriate in small-group student-student interaction and large group interaction.

4.5.2 results from journals

The students found these strategies useful. Some claimed that they provided them with reassurance and confidence to express their own opinions while others found that they helped the discussion to develop. In general they helped in the aim of being understood by others. An example was:

Thanks to this lesson I can tell my opinion even if my partner gets my words wrong.

4.5.3 recordings on repair and misunderstandings

After the students had learned the strategies, they demonstrated many examples of repair, paraphrase and summarizing contributions in the discussions. There are too many examples to be presented here, but there were many cases of self and other repair of both individual lexical items and syntactical repair as well as strategies for paraphrase, summary and

reformulation of ideas.

extract 6 (about work)

- 1 G: I experienced an internship last summer (1.5) and err that's its err as M. said when I
- 2 (1) get home I only sleep. If I were a (1.5) mother or wife, what should I do=
- 3 K: =Can't you can't you have holidays?=
4 G: Errr, no. it's only five days=
- 5 K: =Err I know, I didn't mean that. What I meant was err if you work for err the company
err can you take a rest a day or two days off?

In this example, G states clearly that others have misunderstood her and uses a strategy to clear up the misunderstanding unambiguously.

extract 7 (problems in schools)

- 1 I: We can't can't erase all of the bullying but err (2) teachers should care (5)
- 2 K: Should care what, care what? Should care what=
- 3 I: =Should care err (1.5) – don't err bullying carefully=
- 4 K: Carefully, so what do you mean?(.)
- 5 I: Teachers should be sensitive to students attitude or students' communication and errr
- 6 they errr try to effort (2) being conscious of some kind of signs of bullying.

In this extract, K asked I directly (1.2 and 1.4) to clarify the meaning of his statement. This marks a development from simply confirming the point by echoing towards summarizing the main points.

extract 8 (education issues)

1. G: The students had thought that they can take classes about culture but I could take
2. culture's class in err English department class, as a minor but other students cannot
3. take the class (2.2)
4. C: So you mean you didn't have err much information about your course before

5. entering university?

This example also revealed how the students were able to understand and clarify the main point of a previous speaker's statement.

These extracts provided examples of how the students used strategies for paraphrase, rephrasing and clarifying what another person wants to say. They cleared up misunderstandings verbally and directly in peer-to-peer interaction to a greater extent than in whole-class interaction. The strategies serve both to delay the expression of opinion and help the students to engage in an important process of clarification of viewpoints through establishing small details. As was the case in earlier discussions, clarity, precision and directness are elicited and produced when being understood by other participants is of paramount importance. Repair can therefore be seen as a further collaboration strategy to help other students and to share responsibility for the building up of a discussion as a group. All of this is further evidence that behaviour deemed to be cultural may be dependent on the structure and size of the group as well as the type of communicative function within a discussion.

4.6 Identity and the expression of opinions

4.6.1 background

A key research question was how students expressed their individual identity through the expression of opinions. Earlier discussions revealed that when opinions were expressed, they were often expressed indirectly or implicitly or without concrete reasons or as a conclusion after background information had been given. The literature had suggested that although students expressed opinions clearly in their written work (Stapleton, 2002), albeit often subjectively (Oi, 1997), this was less likely in oral discussion (Brown, 2004, Stebbins, 1995, McVeigh, 2001) due to concern about how opinions might be perceived by others. They were taught strategies for expressing opinions with various levels of certainty and to give reasons for these.

4.6.2 results of journals concerning giving opinions

The students universally found giving opinions to be difficult from the perspective of participation, content, language, structure and sustaining of arguments, and declared it to be their weakest point. As others such as Morita (2004) and Guest (2004) indicated, there are complex reasons for not expressing an opinion immediately such as needing time to think and formulate an opinion. However, many students' comments here indicated a gap between their performance in the group and what they aimed to achieve as individuals. Some examples are given below.

The first reasons given were connected with low risk taking and uncertainty avoidance as mentioned by Brown (2004). Some students commented on the need to know others' opinions before offering their own so that their opinions could fit in with those of others (*awase*, Nisbett, 2003), particularly in the case of unfamiliar topics outside their personal experience. Such views were frequent and included the following:

I did not know others' common sense

It is difficult to express my opinion if I do not know others' opinions first.

Related to this was the desire to keep harmony, which prevented students from being persuasive.

I want to keep harmony, so I'm poor at persuading someone

The following comment was more explicit about the need to know others' opinions even before starting a discussion so that there was more certainty and avoidance of spontaneous expression of opinions.

It was fun (to discuss) but I think we should have had both groups, for and against. I think we can think of a good opinion if we are first decided for and against.

The next factor often mentioned was the lack of experience in discussing, particularly in offering opposite opinions. This sometimes resulted in a tendency to translate from Japanese without thinking rather than developing ideas through English rhetorical patterns:

I did not have the chance to discuss in English before university. That's why I tended to be silent. I tended to translate sentences from Japanese in my mind, as this was the way I learnt in high school.

I do not have many chances to give opposite opinions in Japanese in my daily life.

In order to soften their opinions, the students seemed to prefer strategies that indicated the personal nature of their opinions with such expressions as “I personally think.” Various students wrote that they preferred this to a direct statement of opinion. One particular comment clarified the reasons for this:

When the topic is indecisive, it is good to add “personally” Using the word “personally” enables us to say answers more confidently because we need not care whether the other person agrees or disagrees about what we said. I think Japanese people tend to dislike to be given negative answers and sometimes they think carefully before they say personal opinions or avoid saying what seems different from others' opinion.

In general, while individual students desired to express opinions logically, they were mostly only able to do so in a risk-free way, which prepared listeners for differences of opinion in advance. It is therefore also important to consider the more complex issues involved in sustaining argument development beyond initial turns.

The literature (McVeigh, 2001, Metraux, 2001, Atkinson, 1997) suggested that development of opinions and the giving of reasons might be difficult because of different approaches to knowledge. If the students use up all their ideas in initial turns or delay them until the conclusion, it is possible that they will not be able to develop arguments or respond appropriately to others in ways that are necessary in discussion. Some students expressed awareness of this issue:

It is difficult to know what to say after others have given their opinions.

Japanese students tend to express opinions in the form of a monologue starting with “I think” without connecting this with opinions that went before.

As many students were aware of the problems of argument development and requested guidance, they were taught strategies for arguing the opposite point, challenging their partner’s view and giving more objective reasons.

4.6.3 results for strategies for giving reasons

As was the case with other speaker-based strategies for making points clearer, the students responded positively to those for giving reasons and connecting arguments. They believed that these would improve their discussion skills. This seemed to fit their goals of reaching the perceived Western ideal of more logical discussions, which they saw as a contrast with their own emotional and subjective approaches. An example comment was:

I think giving reasons is the most important strategy in discussion. It makes my speech logical or rational. Moreover, even in all conversations in English it is important.

A further reason for the inability to give reasons was the tendency to construct sentences in their minds before speaking, which often meant that they lost their chance to take up a turn. Such views were expressed in the literature (Barnlund, 1989, Guest, 2005) with the suggestion that Japanese only expressed an opinion after sufficient inner reflection on the ideas and perfect linguistic formation of the utterance. However, some students commented on the weaknesses of their Japanese approach and were aware of the need to take on a different mindset when communicating in English:

I couldn't tell my opinion because I was making sentences in my mind.

I should not translate Japanese sentences in my mind because the way of thinking is different.

The issue of developing discussions beyond the initial starting point provoked a wider range of responses. Some students reflected on how they would deal with discussions that did not develop, for example:

Sometimes when I thought the discussion was not active, I asked a question or I asked silent students "What do you think?"

Some wrote that they could not respond to comments made to the whole group but only to those made to them individually, for example:

I'm a typical Japanese so I feel embarrassed to answer those kinds of questions. It is hard for me to answer in a whole group.

As well as the personal difficulties related to linguistic and social confidence and how their opinions would be received by their peers, some students also focused on their cultural identity as Japanese. This was often given as a reason for the lack of clear opinions. One example was:

Japanese people, I think, can't assert a clear opinion; I also can't assert my opinion.

However, some students wrote that they would express their opinions more openly and directly than they would in Japanese. Others found expressing opinions difficult in either language, often due to complex factors.

The literature (Morita 2004) suggested that it is worth investigating the views of those who do not speak. Others views in the literature (Guest, 2005, Davidson,1995, Maynard,1997) had also suggested that there were many reasons for silence other than unwillingness to participate. One particular student, otherwise good at English, was negative about his own performance and critical of the fact that others did not give him the chance to speak. He found difficulty with offering his opinion voluntarily and felt only able to do so when asked directly. He claimed that he was rarely asked to give his opinion in Japanese and would need to develop his opinions and communication skills more to participate in discussion.

4.6.4 recordings on giving opinions

Recordings of earlier discussions had revealed that while opinions were given, they were not always made explicit. There was sometimes a lack of explicit objective opinions or reasons except where they were expressed as a conclusive statement at the end of a discussion. Instead there was more evidence of empathy perspectives and collaboration. Directness was more often found in the areas outside the giving of opinions. The literature and journals indicated various reasons for the difficulty of giving opinions with the journals providing examples of the particular conflict between individual desire to express clearer and more logical opinions and expectations of behaviour in the group. Dörnyei (1995) gave examples of how training in strategies could help students make their points more explicitly. As the students moved from familiar topics to discussions on more controversial issues outside their own experience, they did sometimes express their opinions more explicitly. The first example of this type is from a controversial discussion on the death penalty carried out in the latter half of the course after they had studied expressions for making their opinions more explicit.

extract 9: (on the death penalty)

- 1 G: I think no-one has the right to be deprived his or her own life so the murderer should
2 (0.5)be punished in the proper way.(4) [What do you think?]
- 3 F: [What is proper way? What do you mean?]=
- 4 G: =Aaah (3) if if the person *eto okasu te nandake* a commit committed a murder
5 the person should be (2) killed (.)
- 6 J: By any situation? Any?=
- 7 G: =Not any situation. Um if the murder murderer murder was deliberate (3) deliberate
8 not accidental the murderer err (4) umm (3) to be killed. I think it's reasonable=
- 9 B: Umm, that means what you think is err proper way to punish the murderer is to kill
10 the murderer, right? (5)
- 11 G: Yes (6)
- 12 B: In my opinion I don't think it's err it is the best way to kill the murderer because

- 13 umm killing the murderer also be a crime I think because (0.5) I believe humans um
14 humans must not kill humans (1) so I don't think it's a proper way to punish. (7)
15 What do you think, F?

In this discussion two opposite views are expressed. G and B hold opposing views for and against the death penalty. In a pattern similar to that of earlier discussions, several turns pass between the expression of the first opinion and the opposite view. In such a topic, outside the students' personal experience, there is little scope for personal anecdote. Instead there are many examples of checking points through questions so that the scope of a person's view may be clarified. This may either be from a desire to understand the opinions of the rest of the group or a delaying technique.

The discussion shows evidence of clear, explicit expression of opinion. The directness of the first statement in 1.1 may be based on the assumption that the view would be shared by others. An alternative interpretation could be that the speaker felt she could express her opinion clearly due to feeling comfortable with the other members of the group. In addition, the fact that the topic was remote from the students' lives may have enabled them to take a more academic approach.

The first explicit statement in 1.1 is followed by a response from other members of the group. However, expression of direct agreement or disagreement is not clear until 1.12. There is much questioning and checking of the scope of the opinion so that a clearer understanding can be obtained. This suggests that the students can use strategies to clarify points and clear up misunderstandings. It also provides further evidence of the characteristics found in earlier discussions of a demand for precision in understanding others through a series of factual questions. These questions enable the students to clarify and define the limits of the original statement and avoid potential misunderstanding. In this way, any disagreement appears less sudden and less spontaneous. The exact way that this occurs is as follows: in 1.3 and 1.6, F. asks G. to define the terms of the original statement. In 1.9, B asks G by means of a rephrasing strategy to define the limits of her statement. The response to this reveals the original statement to be not as extreme as it first seemed; it did allow for exceptions. This pattern was also frequently found in other discussions, but space prevents

their mention here.

This discussion reveals a development in terms of defining and clarifying points. In earlier discussions this was carried out at the level of the word, but later this develops to the level of ideas. This suggests a more analytical approach that goes beyond listening in an attempt to understand the point. Later in the discussion, others offer alternative views without rejecting any views outright. B. explicitly opposes G. and she supports it with clear reasons. However, she delays this until after the exact meaning and limits of the original opinion have been established. She paraphrases the opposite view to hers in the form of a question. This seems to indicate that even in controversial discussions where there is stronger argument, the students emphasize their understanding of another speaker's viewpoint before offering an opposite view. They are also careful to incorporate the opinions of other speakers.

General points from this discussion are that even in controversial discussions, the students try to involve all members of the group, listening to and understanding various opinions before expressing judgments. There is some direct statement of opinion. The students use speaker-based strategies of further requests for clarification to define the exact meaning and limits of these statements. Nobody verbally rejects the original viewpoint prior to understanding it.

4.7 Developing more controversial discussions

4.7.1 background

The previous section considered how students expressed their points when they discussed controversial issues. This section will consider further developments in more controversial discussions. One focus of this was considering how the students could present a consistent point of view by developing an argument over time. As the topics moved to more academic and controversial ones, there was greater potential for generalisation and abstraction and for moving beyond a subjective, personal style.

4.7.2 journal results on controversial discussions

Many students wrote that they felt unable to express controversial opinions. One student wrote that he was unable to speak out because he felt his view to be a minority view in the group. Others wrote that they lacked confidence in their English ability to persuade others of their opinions but believed they could achieve this with further practice. However, despite lacking confidence in their ability to persuade, they were willing to be persuaded by others and claimed that they would sometimes change their minds as a result of hearing other views. This suggests that their listening was not just perfunctory but that they genuinely reflected on others' comments.

As a preferred style, some students felt that collaborative discussions were deeper than controversial ones:

It is difficult to build up a discussion if the other members have opposite views. It is deeper to build up arguments together with group members rather than attacking others' arguments.

This student added that there was a clear distinction between what she perceived as role-playing in the debate style of discussion and the deeper collaborative expression of genuine opinions. Others articulated similar comments.

4.7.3 recordings on controversial discussions

extract 10a

- 1.C: I think that broadcasting violence on TV shouldn't be permitted (0.5) and also also most
2. people think that watching violent scenes on TV is not comfortable (.)
- 3.F: Um basically I think violence on TV is not good so I see M and N and C's point but
4. errr...the idea that to show children those programmes is completely wrong is wrong
5. because in my opinion to tell the truth I err played very violent TV game and but I
6. watched very violent movies when I was young boy but but err I knew that to hurt
7. people and to hit or to shoot other people is wrong because err I was told by my

8. parents and I knew about that so the most important thing is that parents think that is
9. wrong and you shouldn't do that thing so in some sense to watch violent programmes
10. it depends on parents I think.

This discussion, which was carried out later in the academic year, shows clarity in the expression of arguments. C's opinion is expressed directly in line 1. Fitting in with the views expressed in the literature and journals, C acknowledges and accepts the ideas of others before offering an alternative view, which is expressed indirectly. Whilst F's disagreement with the other students can be inferred (1.4), he first acknowledges and accepts their ideas using strategies of partial disagreement. He justifies his opinion through his own subjective personal experience. A general point is made at the end by F that watching violent programmes is wrong. He also softens his opinion by saying that it depends on the parents.

The discussion then continues as follows.

extract 10b

- 1 G: Err, absolutely. Parents should (2) should tell children that's not reality. (15) F, do you
- 2 think if your parents (2) if your parents don't didn't tell tell you (2)that the violence is
- 3 not good do (4) do you think you are affected by (2) that thing? (3)
- 4 F: I can't imagine that situation but I hope (3) that uh I didn't do that thing. (15)
- 5 G: Why, why some people (3) imitate that thing? It's very very rare but some persons
- 6 imitate it.

“Absolutely” expresses a strong direct opinion. This reflects the views expressed in the journals that strong opinions are expressed when the students feel that they are likely to be part of a majority view in the group. However, as in the earlier discussions, a clearly expressed opinion does not lead to analysis of reasons for an opinion or issue. Instead there is a shift in focus (1.2) to a hypothetical, future-oriented “What would you do if...” However, in this case, (1.4) the listener chooses to reject the request to respond to a hypothetical situation, opting out by claiming lack of qualification to respond on the grounds that he could not imagine being in the situation. This abdication of responsibility through giving up a turn and claiming lack of qualification or experience to comment delays the offering of opinion, as in the examples by Mori (1999).

4.8 Expressing disagreement

4.8.1 background

Related to the expression of opinions, a further research question is expression of disagreement and how the students maintain identity in the face of this. The discussions in the previous sections have provided some indication of how this is carried out. The literature indicated both that universally, disagreement is often made as weak as possible (Sacks, 1987) and the fact that it is particularly difficult in a non-confrontational harmony-based culture. It is likely to be softened or expressed indirectly. It may also be the case, that using anecdotes or asking questions as a form of disagreement is a universal feature. This was found to be the case in the Greek data of Geogakopolupu (2001).

The earlier discussions presented here revealed little overt disagreement. Where it existed it was expressed carefully and indirectly. However, in accordance with Maynard's (1997) view, we should not assume that Japanese never disagree. Instead, the possibility of disagreement may depend on the relationship and the context, for example, whether the discussion is perceived to be an academic exercise or genuine interaction. In this case the students have become increasingly familiar with each other throughout the course, so they may feel more comfortable in expressing disagreement directly. The students learned strategies to soften disagreement, for example, for partial disagreement ("I see your point, but...").

4.8.2 results of disagreement strategies

Many students wrote that disagreement was the most problematic aspect of discussion. As they felt unable to express it directly, they were glad to learn strategies for softening it. One student expressed discomfort at having to participate in activities which involved disagreeing with others and questioned the necessity of this.

One example comment referred to the use of the expression "Actually".

Because these are just what I worry about, hurting your feeling or being rude, I can show my politeness in advance so I get a little relief.

This was part of a general concern about how others would respond to their disagreement. An example was:

We (Japanese) feel a little bit rude when someone disagrees with our idea.

Many students wrote that if they disagreed, they would first appear to acknowledge or agree with another person's opinion before moving on to express a different point of view. As was the case with other strategies, some students wrote only from a personal point of view whereas others seemed to add a cultural explanation of their behaviour. One example was:

The interesting point is we pretend to admit someone's reservation by saying "That may be so" or "That's probably so"

Students expressed the distinction between understanding what might be appropriate to say and actually saying it. This implies that there were psychological aspects to using the strategies beyond learning them linguistically. The example below is an indication of this.

I learned good expressions to object. Still I hesitate to object to someone. I'm not good at objecting strongly so the expressions would help me to object softly.

There were also indications of a gap between opinions held and opinions expressed. Many students wrote that interactional and cultural features prevented them from directly disagreeing with a point of view. They were aware of the effect their expressions of disagreement might have on others:

When Japanese hear the expression 'I don't think so' they are shocked because they think their idea was dismissed. Even if they have an opposite opinion they do not insist on their opinion.

On this topic, one student made clear comparisons with Japanese:

When we use phrases such as “I don’t want to hurt you but...” the speaker’s insistence comes following the ‘but’. On the contrary, Japanese people tend not to say the contents clearly. If someone feels “I don’t think so” they tell the other by words like un or chotto hen ka na (it’s a bit strange).

This view fits with that suggested in the literature (Mori, 1999), that in Japanese the negative view following the “but” may not necessarily be verbalized but assumed.

Others wrote that they found such strategies easier to carry out in English because they did not have to consider politeness forms in the same way as in Japanese.

Another student wrote that if he disagreed, he would ask a question to find out more about the speaker’s opinion rather than expressing disagreement, thus using delaying techniques or suspension. Examples of this were seen in the transcripts presented above.

Whilst the comments revealed a general acknowledgment of the difficulty of expressing disagreement, most students considered it useful to learn such expressions, precisely because they found them difficult. An example was:

I learned some useful expressions for telling our opinions directly to a crazy idea. I thought it is difficult for Japanese people to say like that. Although it is hard for me, it is important to say directly...Although I almost cannot use these expressions, I enjoyed telling my opinion directly.

A further reason for lack of disagreement is related to the lack of commitment to one side of an issue and ambiguity. These students agreed with various points of view and saw both sides of an issue. An example was:

As for today’s topic, single-sex learning, it was difficult because I can’t deny it. In my opinion, single-sex learning has some advantages compared with mixed sex so it can be one

of the options.

Similarly, another student wrote:

Listening to others' opinions made me confused because I felt they were true too.

This supports views in the literature (Nisbett, 2003, Tannen, 1999) that Japanese do not see the truth as black and white. It also indicates acknowledgment and tolerance of ambiguity and the tendency to consider all arguments seriously rather than oppose them. This pattern was found in most of the examples considered so far.

Lack of elaboration was a further point related to this. Some students wrote that in Japanese they would find it normal and acceptable to acknowledge a view or express understanding without elaborating on whether they agreed or disagreed or adding further comments.

Other particular reasons for difficulties in expressing disagreement include unwillingness to persuade someone who had already made up their mind about an issue. An example was:

It was very difficult for me to change someone's idea. If someone has determined, this makes it harder for me to change, so I tried to use today's strategies.

Sometimes students revealed awareness of not only the Japanese/ foreigners distinction but also of issues relating to the group versus the individual. An example was:

I think many Japanese are weak of will, so if we are persuaded by using counter argument strategy, we tend to agree with the plan, rather than foreigners. In this case we put high priority on a group rather than individual. We've believed that it's the virtue to contain ourselves to be a part of a group. So it's difficult to reject a plan even if only once.

A related strategy, practiced so that students would develop their skills in speaker-based strategies for making the point clear and providing opposite arguments, was that of making generalisations and giving exceptions (example: Generally speaking X is true. However,

there are cases where Y is true). It involved expressing views that went against conventional wisdom. The students commented that such expressions were easy to use because they were part of normal conversation routines in Japanese.

We Japanese like to make comments standing on the position of the general way of thinking, that is to say, Japanese do not like to be in the minority so they often use "In general" or "Generally speaking." and do not insist on their own opinion.

Thus the students showed further signs of not wanting to express opinions that made them stand out or be different from others; they preferred to state a general view in ways made them identify with it. However, one individual perspective by a student who was very concerned with developing his skill of argumentation was:

Generalizing was useful but we cannot easily use it to persuade others.

Many reasons were given for lack of disagreement. Although the students do hold opposite opinions from others, they may perceive expressing them to be difficult or unwise. However, it is not the case that Japanese never disagree. They often hold and would like to express opposite opinions but perceive this to be difficult or unwise in authentic situations due to sensitivity and awareness of the feelings of others. There were, however, indications that the circumstances under which disagreement occurred would be sanctioned, as the following comment reveals:

I think the difficulty of giving an unfavourable response depends on the situation. If your friend is really in danger to make some serious mistakes, you have to be honest to protect him or her.

It seems therefore that while disagreement was generally perceived as difficult, the extent to which it is can be expressed depends on the circumstances and context. An example of where students did find it acceptable to disagree was situations where they had to counter a partner's pessimistic view with an optimistic one. They also commented that these strategies were useful and easily used by Japanese. A reason given was that they could serve to build

up hope in their partner. An example was:

I think this phrase will build up the listener's hope that I'll say the most positive thing or idea.

As a summary of the comments on disagreement, it seems that beyond universal reasons for disagreement, there were linguistic, personal and cultural reasons, which are also related to concern about the views of others and the desire to keep face and harmony.

4.8.3 recordings on disagreement

The literature and the journals have indicated the difficulty of outright disagreement which would go against the cultural norms of harmony, collaboration and non-assertiveness. It was likely to be mitigated in some way or only sanctioned under certain circumstances. In the recordings so far, several turns often passed between the expression of a view and opposition to it. Disagreement was often marked by marked by qualifying statements which limited the range and circumstances of the statement. The following extracts will show the extent to which the students disagreed after they had learned strategies for doing so.

extract 11 (English teaching methods)

- 1 B: Umm, it may be so but in my experience err (0.5) in my high school err high school
- 2 time I err I went to English *juku* ?and err the juku's teacher (0.5) teaches English taught
- 3 English in communicative approach and err they err she didn't use a grammar word
- 4 like *kankeishi* or *buntaiichi bunkei* but I err learned many things from her sooooo err
- 5 it's err it's possible to teach English grammar in errr a not traditional approach but in
- 6 the communicative approach=
- 7 K: =Mmmmm=
- 8 I: =The teacher should err taught you err grammatical, did the teacher teach you grammar
- 9 in English or=
- 10 B: =Err no sometimes in English and sometimes in Japanese=
- 11 I: =I see your point err we don't we always don't need to use such word err *kankei*

- 12 *daimeshi* or Japanese traditional word but (3) err... (laughs) but *nandakke gomen*=
- 13 B: =Aaaah (4)
- 14 K: Umm I think umm *kankei daimeshi* or some difficult words is good because
- 15 ummm it sounds like err theory of mathematics=
- 16 B: =Aaaah=
- 17 K: =It is accustomed to students the theory. If umm we can label about any err some any
- 18 *nani?* Err speaking way or in English. (8)
- 19 B: I agree with the point but I think that learning English with only grammar is not good way because like that the students can understand English but they can't use English.

In this discussion, the students were able to show explicitly which point they agreed or disagreed with and there is clear evidence of two different points of view. However, they still used personal experience rather than objective reasons to justify a point (1.4-5) and avoided total disagreement. While delaying patterns in the form of asking questions were still present, there was a more explicit link by this stage between describing personal experience and eliciting the point from it. This may suggest that the students have benefitted from learning speaker-based strategies or that they have improved based on familiarity with the process of discussion. It may also be that the topic is more conducive to expression of disagreement than other topics. The pattern seen here seems to be: anecdote, followed by lessons learned from the experience, finally general point extracted. Thus there is evidence of a move from the specific to the general.

Disagreement is expressed in this discussion (1.11, 1.14, 1.19). The clearest disagreement is offered by I (1.11). However, he delays this expression of disagreement by using clarifying strategies to ask for further details before offering his point of view. His disagreement is delayed by a turn and then marked with "I see your point but...", thus avoiding sudden and outright disagreement. K then makes a different point by offering an alternative point of view. There is a focus on understanding and accommodating alternative points of view. This can be illustrated in another extract on a discussion on the same topic by another group.

extract 12 (English teaching methods)

- 1 H: I see your point, but how do you how do you think about think about communication
2 with foreigners? (2)
- 3 K: Errr (1) tell me more for example? (3)
- 4 H: If students only study grammar (2) maybe they can't communicate with foreigners
5 so it's not Ok=
- 6 K: =But they don't have much chance, many chances=
- 7 H: =Yes (3) so in Japan you know errr (.)
- 8 K: In Japan reading and writing is more important than speaking and listening

In this case, (1.1) H opposes a view that has been previously expressed, not through outright rejection but through mentioning an aspect of the topic that K has previously overlooked. K. suspends offering an opinion by asking further questions. He then shifts the focus of the discussion to an argument from actuality. He argues from what is the case in Japan (1.7) rather than any abstract or general ideal of what should be the case.

extract 13: (bullying)

- 1 K: What do you think about bullying? (1.5)
- 2 J: Bullying?=
- 3 K: =Yes (.)
- 4 J: It's a bad thing um and I think it is totally bad(2.5)
- 5 K: Some teachers said that bullying is bad thing but err victim has err many reasons (.)
- 6 J: Err, I see (.)
- 7 K: Err, how about you...?

In this case, a strong, direct and absolute opinion is expressed. One reason for this may be that J assumed the opinion to be a general truth understood and agreed with by the whole group. In 1.1 the topic is thrown open to the floor. Next, there follows a reconfirmation of the topic in 1.2. The pattern is: state the topic as a general question, reconfirm the topic, give strong opinion on the topic, which seems to be absolute and not allow for any exceptions.

Next, (1.5) this comment is incorporated in a view by K that suggests that there may be exceptions. This implies indirect disagreement with the original statement. J's subsequent listener response (1.6) suggests that he is reflecting on the response rather than directly opposing it. This indicates that a period of reflection may be viewed as necessary for considering a point of view for some of the reasons that were suggested in the journals. The students then pass the turn onto another student so that the topic can be considered from other perspective (1.7). This seems to be an indirect variation of the empathy perspective and perspective-gathering phase: the issue is considered from the perspective of those involved and from various angles. An opinion may be incorporated into a previously established view to indicate that there might be exceptions to the view. In this way, adding different opinions can offer multiple perspectives on an issue. Even in controversial topics, the groups often appear to reach a conclusion that is a synthesis of various views contributed by the group members.

The literature and journals indicated that there were situations where disagreement could be given where a view is considered to be too extreme to be taken seriously. One such example is given below.

extract 14 (smoking):

1 D: I think cigarette is energy (4)

2 F: Energy?

3 K: That's too much=

4 F: =That's too much

5 D: But anyway, I=

6 K: =Prohibit everywhere is too much=

7 F: = Err I agree with you. Of course I also think smoking area should be limited but I

8 don't think err prohibit it everywhere.

4.9 Reflections at the end of the course.

How useful was it for students to learn strategies?

4.9.1 results from journals

At the end of the course the students wrote freely on their development. In general they expressed satisfaction with their progress, claiming that the course had been both academic and communicative. They found the strategies useful, particularly those for interrupting a discussion, making the topic explicit, giving reasons and disagreeing politely. However, they admitted that they did not always find it easy to use all of these strategies. Most wrote of progress and increased confidence in giving their opinions throughout the year, for example:

Honestly I felt nervous about taking this class because I'm poor at speaking English and discussing with somebody but finally it became easier to discuss and speak with others. I believe my skill of discussion has improved.

Those who articulated their difficulties attributed them to reasons such as lack of vocabulary or confidence as well as points related to structuring and developing a discussion. There were fewer references to cultural limitations and more comments concerning individual developments and goals. Some wrote of a stronger sense that the discussions were genuine communication. They wrote of involvement with the topics and their attempts to make the discussions more fluent.

I think we discuss quite seriously, so the classroom was a real situation for me.

Learning strategies had made them more aware of the differences between more subjective anecdotal discussions and more objective, academic discussions that were backed up with reasons. One example was an animated discussion where one student noticed that the discussion had moved away from the ideal of an objective discussion. He wrote:

However, our discussion became too subjective although I tried to make it objective.

The reasons he gave for this were that when the students had no concept of an issue as a social problem, they tended to discuss it naturally and subjectively as if they were talking with friends.

4.9.2 recordings from the final stages

Finally, some examples will be given of discussions at the end of the course, when the students were more familiar with the process and strategies of discussion. These will reveal the developments that the students made after practicing over one year and integrating various strategies.

The next example on the topic of drinking is a more argument-based and objective one about whether the minimum drinking age should be changed from twenty to eighteen.

extract 15 (drinking)

1G: I think 18 is OK because when when we enter the university or other school we
2 often drink (8)

3B: I think so too because I I don't think errr twenty or eighteen err this two year is
4 has soo many difference and err many high school students enter university
5 and err they begin to drink so it is reasonable (?) is it right reasonable *rikutsu*
6 reasonable to err (2) change to 18 (.)

7 C: I agree with your point (2) but I think we have to think about their attitude when
8 you drink alcohol, for example um at first when we drink alcohol for the first time
9 (3) in my opinion people will not know how much degree we can drink alcohol or
10 not so if they don't know their limit sometimes it cause the big problem such as
11 their life so (2) so before we start drinking we should know the err danger of the
12 drinking alcohol (.)

13 B: I see your point but I think how can you say the age of 20 is enough age to know how to
14 drink mmm and (5) eh *nandaro* so I if there is no exact reason that the law
15 decides the age of 20, I think 18 is more proper age to start drinking. (1) I think
16 there is many 20 years people who don't know how to drink and but I know
17 there's more *nandaro* adult mature person who is 18 so (3)

18 H: Then is it very right errr why errr why should it err decide change to 18 years old.
19 I think when we change the err age age to drink alcohol I think we can we can
20 define the minimum age more more younger. (4) I think there is you said as you

21 said there are many child who drink under under 18 err it's it's what is important,
22 what's important thing is to know how to drink when they drink not when they
23 drink but to know what to drink I think so err what's the most important thing is
24 we should (1) um learn teach them more about drinking in school or in public.
25 Can do can you understand?(.)

In this discussion there are several places where the students isolate issues and give arguments with reasons. Sometimes they argue on the basis of personal experience or arguing from the concrete situations of what actually is the case (1.1, 1.4, 1.16). However, within these points there are also objective arguments. There is a closer connection between expression of personal experience and objective, general statements than in earlier discussions. The students use strategies for articulating essential points such as "What is important..." (1.19). The gap is also shorter between the expression of one opinion and another. The students start their turns by stating clearly if they agree or disagree with the previous speaker and support their point with reasons. Disagreement is made clear, for example, in 1.7 and 1.13. However, it is preceded by partial agreement markers. This is an illustration of the views expressed in the journals that the students were more comfortable with disagreement that they could soften with such expressions.

The final extract, also from the end of the course, reveals a more explicit example of a student remaining consistent to his own point of view when it goes against the views of the rest of the group. He argues in the face of opposition from others that if he had enough money, he would not work.

extract 16 (meaning of work)

1 H: If I have enough money I can read a lot of books (4) to improve myself then its=
2 E. =You mean study or research or something?=
3 H: = OK you can do study (.)
4 F: You study at your house?
5 H: Even house but we we go we can go anywhere if you have money (2) so go abroad
6 and (6) look at many cultural things is very (4) good for me I think. I I don't think
7 I have to work (.)

8 F: I see your point but if you are going to work, you can know many things about
9 this world more than books because if you become a teacher=
10 I: =Yes?=
11 F: You can know about teachers' world and what teachers are=
12 H: =Yes? But only about teachers you can know. That's a very narrow? side. If you
13 err become a teacher (.) you know only teachers' side. I think it's very=
14 J: =So you what you mean is you want to take many experiences in your life?
15 H: Yeah(.)
16 J: Not only, sorry=
17 H: =I think it's related to identity err work relate to identity so so you all think working
18 is is important I think. Isn't it? Don't you think so (.)
19 F: I think so.

Initially (prior to the extract), the students were surprised by the unusual point of view. Most of them had argued previously that work should be one of the most important things in their lives. The response to H's view is to ask for more details to understand his position better before making any judgment on his view. From 1.8 there is a challenge to this point of view. In 1.14 paraphrase is used to extract the general point that was made. There is also an indirect challenge to the original point of view. The point about identity frames the issues in general terms.

These later discussions reveal some evidence that the students can extract a general point from a personal anecdote. They use strategies to emphasize points and clear up misunderstandings.

4.10 Conclusion

The findings have revealed some development in student discussions from the descriptive and personal approaches of earlier discussions to steps towards more analytical approaches of later discussions. While the students did reveal some cultural features, they were aware of and aimed at using other styles in discussions. The journals provided illustrations of their awareness of and explanations for their behaviour. They expressed concern in their journals

about various issues related to discussions and the difficulties they perceived in carrying out discussions. This involved both academic and interpersonal reasons. The recordings revealed that the students did sometimes use speaker-based strategies for clarifying their point, paraphrasing, summarizing and correcting misunderstandings. There was sometimes a clearer distinction between personal anecdote and the points made from it. The next chapter will provide a more general analysis of the features found.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented a description and analysis of features of individual discussions and journal comments. These provided indications of certain patterns of behaviour as well as offering clearer explanations for this behaviour. They also contained many examples related to the specific research questions of how students express opinions of agreement and disagreement as well as improvements in the discussions over time after the students learned strategies. Development in these areas may be related to the process of becoming familiar with the task and as well as to the specific content of what is learned. The two research methods aimed to go beyond what could be revealed in observation and approached the situation from different angles. The recordings revealed the structure, language, and content of the discussions whilst the journals provided more subjective and individual perspectives on behaviour. They also revealed the changing attitudes of individuals towards their performance in discussions. Only a small representative sample of the findings was presented, but it was hoped that these could provide an understanding of the behaviour and attitudes of Japanese students that could be applied beyond the immediate students in this research.

This chapter will analyse the general issues emerging from the findings and consider how they relate to the particular research questions. In order to fully investigate the usefulness of the research, it is necessary to consider how effective the methods were in developing a deeper understanding of the students and the motivation for their behaviour. The literature provided examples of a gap between the students' public self as observed in larger groups and their individual personalities revealed through their reflective voices. These both had their place in the education system through expectations inherent in different activities, but the situations where the individual self could be expressed were often restricted to those outside the classroom (Metraux, 2001, McVeigh, 2001, Lee-Cunin, 2005). This research aimed to provide a deeper understanding of this issue so that teachers might understand their students better and draw more realistic conclusions about their classroom behaviour. It aimed to move away from the stereotypes of passive and silent students that were found in large groups through an analysis of how they behaved in small group interaction.

5.1 Analysis of general cultural features

Understanding the behaviour and motivations of the students was an aim of this research. Some views in the literature (Anderson, 2003, Guest, 2005, Morita, 2004, Cogan, 2004) focused on the importance of Western teachers of Japanese students understanding the expectations inherent in the Japanese education system. These expectations influence the classroom behaviour of students but are not always explicitly expressed by students nor instinctively understood by teachers. Japanese teachers may also have low expectations of students that are not always grounded in the realities of students' needs. The writers above stressed the importance of teachers using methods and approaches that would fit students' expectations as a starting point before gradually introducing different approaches. One example of this is that the methods teachers use to elicit opinions from students may be flawed if they are based on incomplete or biased views of students' expectations. It may, for example, not be effective to ask a student to give a sudden and direct opinion on a topic in a whole class situation. It is important to understand how the students usually carry out these functions if we are to develop their skills appropriately.

As there was a gap between the outsiders' perceptions of the students and the way they saw themselves, it seemed appropriate to go beyond outsider assumptions about the students' thoughts and investigate their behaviour and reasons from their own perspective. In this respect, other views in the literature (Lee-Cunin, 2005, Metraux, 2001, Fedderholdt, 1998) suggested that gaining access to the students' voice was an appropriate way to fill this gap. This also serves to understand the other major issue in the research of the conflict between the students' roles as members of a group and as individuals with their own aims. The students' journal comments revealed that both aspects influenced the way they communicated. An aim of the journal method was to answer the question of whether their behaviour was influenced more by innate cultural characteristics, norms acquired through the education system or individual personality.

Many comments in the journals expressed similar views to those found in the literature. General cultural tendencies revealed included the desire to fit in with the group rather than assert individual opinions. Other findings were the tendency to use listener-based strategies

and other features that indicated that the students would listen to a whole utterance without interrupting and would carefully reflect on the views of others. Specific details were highlighted as well as individual reasons for these. One example of a function that was perceived as difficult for cultural reasons was interrupting. As most students had strong opinions about that issue, it seems that it was a cultural taboo. This suggests that there are certain cultural features that can be attributed to Japanese students in general. This may be connected with the desire to fit in rather than stand out and to show respect for other students' opinions. The detailed reasons given for this are evidence for the view that Japanese students do have a strong critical awareness of their behaviour both from a Japanese cultural point of view and as individuals.

Other cultural features from the literature that were revealed in the discussions and journals were listener-based approaches and empathy. Empathy applied not only towards those in the group the students were discussing with but also towards the participants in the situations they were describing such as the victims of a train crash (extract 2). The need to understand others' views was also revealed in the focus on asking for small details. The way of carrying this out differed depending on the discussion type. In discussions based on personal experience or case studies, it took the form of asking for details about actual experience or imagined behaviour. In the case of more controversial topics, further details were elicited about the extent of a person's opinion. These questions took the form of "How" or "What". "Why" was rare. Many examples of these features were found in the recordings, and the journal entries revealed an emphasis on considering the feelings of others when offering an opinion.

The emphasis on small details can be interpreted in various ways: a cultural tendency towards empathy, a preference for establishing specific details before reaching the general point or delaying strategies used in order to avoid making a commitment to an issue. One aspect of this was that the students could be seen to be active participants in discussions by asking detailed questions of others while avoiding committing themselves to an opinion. In addition, there is the more universal concept of focusing on the less academic parts in order to avoid intellectual engagement with an issue. Many of these points were mentioned as possibilities in the literature. However, the research aimed to go beyond what the literature

revealed and look for the causes and processes of this behaviour. The literature had suggested that there was a gap between some teachers' perceptions of students and the students' own reflections on and aims for their educational experience. One aspect of these reflections that needs closer consideration was the question of whether they considered their behaviour to be culturally driven and preferred their own communication styles or whether they aimed to change it and adopt Western norms in their communication in English.

Various views in the literature, for example, Metraux, 2001, suggested that the students wanted their education to be more academic and that they hoped to be able to express opinions more. However, it seems from the findings that the extent to which they were able and willing to do this depended not only on individual motivation and ability but on how strong a taboo certain cultural features were. I have already given the example of interrupting. According to the journals, direct disagreement or any other behaviour that seemed to show lack of respect for the speaker's point of view was also perceived to be culturally unacceptable. Thus most students found it difficult to carry out these functions. Even if they had strong opinions that they wanted to express, they felt unable to do so if it meant interrupting or disagreeing unless the issue was urgent. Respecting the opinions of others and their right to express them often took precedence over asserting their own. This indicated that they were strongly influenced by views on how to behave in a group of Japanese. However, this conflicted with their desires expressed in the journals to express their individual opinions more clearly. Whilst the literature had indicated that the students were, in theory, open and flexible to new patterns of behaviour such as critical thinking and stronger expression of ideas, their journals suggested that actually carrying out these aims in a group was influenced by Japanese norms of communication. Lexical strategies were one way for them to reconcile this conflict.

The journal comments initially revealed many references to the students' perceptions of themselves as members of the larger group of Japanese and the smaller group of students in the class. Later in the year they were able to focus more on their progress as individuals with particular goals. Their initial comments should also be considered in the context of the reflective framework. They may have been an indication of the students' lack of familiarity with the practice of discussion and their need to defend their perceived lack of success in it.

If the reflective journal is seen in the style of Japanese *hansei* (reflection), which consists in finding what one has done wrong and attempting to improve on this, then the students may perceive a cultural need for self criticism. This may reflect a perceived essential stage of finding reasons for weaknesses as a step towards improving on these features. Beyond this initial stage, in later journal entries there were more comments related to the pleasures of discussion and its positive challenges as well as reflections by individuals as to how they could improve.

The findings revealed that students had a critical sense and were aware of their strengths and weaknesses and were able to articulate these and give reasons for their behaviour. It is also possible, as Fedderholdt (1998) suggested, that the process of articulating their perceptions helped them to develop their understanding of their behaviour. Studying strategies made them more aware of this. This indicates the importance of using the familiar framework of the written reflective voice to provide opportunities for students to express their perceptions. It also provides support to the notion stressed in the literature that in order to bring about improvements in students' communication skills, we should work from patterns they are familiar with as a step to introducing new possibilities.

As a purpose of the research was to discover individual students' perceptions of cultural behaviour in discussions and reasons for their behaviour, one part of this was providing particular illustrations of the gap between individual desires and group expectations that could not be found in more superficial observation of whole class situations. The journal comments revealed that the students' perceptions of their own behaviour and identity within the group were strongly influenced by their perceptions of how others might respond to their comments. Examples were given in the journals, for example of a student who liked to interrupt but felt that others would perceive her negatively and another student who worried that his poor discussion ability would trouble others in the group.

The attitudes expressed above indicate that, as Nisbett (2003) and Maynard (1997) suggested, the Japanese sense of self may be strongly connected with the group they belong to and communicate in. Therefore they do not value standing out with original views. However, their perceptions expressed in the journals revealed that they also had a sense of

individual identity and held views that went beyond what they felt able to express in a group. Individual differences in these perceptions seemed to influence the extent to which individuals were prepared to transcend cultural norms and express their opinions. This is a further indication that the gap between the spontaneous and performed self may be wider among Japanese students than in some other cultures, and this may lead to their being misunderstood when they communicate with people from speaker-based and low-context cultures, who are likely to be more direct and explicit in the expressions of opinions.

General cultural features and expectations in the education system do seem to have an influence on how the students communicate. Regarding expectations inherent in the education system, the comments in the journals suggested that despite the education reforms that provided greater scope and freedom for activities involving the individual expression of ideas, the students still had not had enough opportunities to discuss or express individual opinions in classroom settings. They often claimed that the discussion class was the only opportunity they had to discuss issues. Even in Japanese they rarely had such opportunities. However, the fact that they were able to communicate differently in small groups from the way they communicated in large classes, in behaviour such as seeking clarification and clearing up misunderstandings, suggests that the stereotypes of passive, silent students with no opinions were a reflection of expectations in the general classroom culture rather than inherent cultural features.

The tendency in the journals to give general Japanese features as reasons for behaviour could be interpreted as an expression of internalized cultural communicative norms for behaviour. This indicates that the students were strongly influenced by how to behave as Japanese even when communicating in English. However, some students were able to go beyond this by stating that they would express themselves differently in English. This points to the need to teach different rhetorical norms to students in order to raise their awareness of these.

The references to culturally driven behaviour may be part of a need to criticize behaviour as I suggested above. Another interpretation is that it may also be a form of self “orientalising” of a collective identity, prompted by a need to attach labels to their culture and explain and

defend it to the teacher/researcher, who is an outsider. This is indicated by comments of the type, “Japanese do x therefore I do x.” This seemed to be true in the case of speaker centered strategies in which they were weaker such as self-selecting and offering a clear opinion. This behaviour may be a direct consequence of the rhetoric of contrastive culture that makes the students feel conscious that their Japanese behaviour does not live up to “superior” or unattainable Western idealized norms of communication. Such views may even have been prompted by greater exposure to other communication patterns. It is therefore important to make the students aware through studying examples of genuine discussions from other cultures that discussions do not always work perfectly even between native speakers of the same language; there may be faulty arguments, inarticulately expressed ideas and misunderstandings. This is also an argument for making students aware of pluralist discourse (Kubota, 1998) and a sense of valuing the diversity of different cultural behaviour patterns.

Using cultural labels to polarize behaviour can be illustrated through the particular example of logic, which was often mentioned by the students to be an ideal or key feature of discussions, implying a contrast with feeling and consensus-based Japanese discussions. The strong awareness of this concept indicates that the students were influenced by ideas outside their own culture, perhaps through general knowledge, the media and Internet and non-Japanese teachers. In general their comments revealed two separate and conflicting norms and a gap between their ideals and the realities of discussion. They indicated both a strong sense that consideration of interpersonal features such as fitting in with others’ views was important in discussion and that logic, with its focus on arguments that involved individual assertion of opinions and risk of disagreement, was a means to carrying out successful discussions.

The example of logic is a further indication of a theme implicit in the journal comments of the gap between the need for individually assertive styles and a strong awareness of the need for good interpersonal communication in the group. The literature had suggested that students were aware of the need to play different roles in different situations, as was indicated by their different behaviour inside and outside the classroom, in outward behaviour and in personal reflection, in role-play and in genuine discussions. This can be illustrated further in the gap between logical and interpersonal communication. Although the

literature (Sekiguchi, 2002, Nisbett, 2003) had claimed that logic was not valued in Japanese interpersonal communication, other views had suggested that the students desired and valued approaches that would enable them to express their ideas in a clearer and more logical way. Previous research and the comments on critical thinking implied that this worked well in writing classes and that the students were flexible in adopting different approaches; historically, the Japanese had always inherited new ideas from other cultures and adapted them to their existing practices. However, the extent to which it was likely to be successful in discussions would depend on whether they felt able to focus on the ideas rather than the interpersonal aspects and whether the communication was perceived to be an academic exercise or genuine interaction. In addition, the issue of timing in the developing of opinions also needs to be considered. This is a further illustration of the importance of considering the roles and expectations inherent in particular contexts rather than assuming general cultural terms to be applicable in all situations. The students were aware of and articulated in their journals the view that to achieve their personal goals in discussions, they sometimes had to go against cultural norms.

Presenting cultural labels in abstract terms, as the example of logic reveals, may ignore the individual aims of students or the different behavioural patterns that are associated with different roles. Another problem with cultural labelling akin to the contrastive rhetoric and *Nihonjinron* theories is that students might also attach these labels to all behaviour in the foreign language and assume that in order to be successful in discussions in English they have to behave in a way opposite to their cultural norms. This is a further argument for pluralist discourse approaches and raising students' awareness of the strengths and weakness of different approaches rather than presenting apparent Western norms as ideals that should always be adhered to. It is important for the students to realize that their ideal of logic is not the only important feature in discussion. Instead we should consider Tannen's (1999) and Guest's (2005) view that aggressive approaches to discussion are not always desirable; approaching a topic from various angles and exploring it can be equally valid. This can help the students to gain a more realistic idea of what is possible and desirable in different kinds of discussions.

Practical implications of the conflict between ideals and reality were revealed in the

recordings. Although the students aimed to discuss logically, in reality, they used various tactics to delay the expression of direct opinions and did not give explicit reasons for their point of view until later discussions. Sometimes the reasons were implied in anecdotes. However, it should not be assumed that the students were never direct. Instead it was important, as the literature (Guest, 2006, Rose, 1996) suggested, to consider the situations in which particular behaviour applies. In this respect, the recordings revealed that manifestations of cultural behaviour depended on different topics and phases of the discussions. This also applies to the issues of explicitness and implicitness or elaboration or non-elaboration of points. The recordings revealed that the students asked direct questions and elicited precise details quickly in issues related to personal experience, setting a context for a problem and creating hypothetical situations. In contrast they were indirect and less explicit in higher risk activities such as offering opinions or making general statements in the early stages of discussions. This can be interpreted in terms of the cultural point of preferences for low-risk interaction and ambiguity. Another reason for this may have been the lack of opportunities in the education system to give opinions outside of a subjective, reflective framework. Later, after practicing strategies, and with greater experience of discussions, they were sometimes able to make their points more explicit and distinguish between extra details and the essential point, moving from the specific to the general.

All this implies that despite the existence of certain cultural tendencies, actual manifestations of behaviour in discussions depend on contexts. These contexts refer not only to the general factors of participants, topic and situation, but also to aspects of the particular phase of the discussion or the level of risk in the statement. The level of risk depends on whether the point being made involves taking an absolute stance on an issue or just offering an opinion as a suggestion that may add to rather than contradict other views. This is an indication of the low-risk tendencies in the classroom indicated by Brown (2004). In addition, the ability to be explicit will also depend on the universal point, not restricted to the Japanese context, of whether the point elicited required intellectual and analytical skills or just narration of experience. These comments on cultural labels should lead to a reevaluation of other cultural labels in the light of actual contexts.

As I illustrated in the “Findings chapter”, the samples from the recordings provided

examples of different behaviour in different phases of the discussions. The recordings enabled a reevaluation of cultural labels to provide examples of the particular circumstances in which students reveal different cultural features. The journals provided an indication of individual perception and desires and specific reasons for behaviour that could not be found elsewhere. In the next section I shall analyse how these points could be highlighted in the specific research question of how students expressed opinions.

5.2 Analysis of opinions and individual identity issues

The literature indicated that the students used subjective approaches; they did not step outside narration to make a point explicit as they were expected to understand the point from the anecdote. In addition, they did not give clear reasons for their opinions. The recordings illustrated that initially, the students gave opinions implicitly, as a result of narrating experience or through the empathy perspective. When they did offer direct opinions with reasons, these were often emotion-based reasons. Alternatively, they sometimes shifted quickly from offering an opinion without reasons to requesting narration of personal experience from other group members. I have suggested that this could be due to issues of face and risk or to discomfort with intellectual analysis, the former related to specific cultural factors and the latter to lack of training in this in the education system. These features were frequent in earlier discussions. However, after strategy training, the students were sometimes more able to distinguish between subjective and objective points, between experience narrated and the point learned from it. This indicates the importance of focusing on skills for achieving these aims in classes through role play or other exercises.

Although the students had expressed in the journals a preference for concrete situations grounded in experience, abstract statements, independent of experience did sometimes occur. However, their position in the discussions was significant. They were not usually given as an introductory statement from which arguments could be developed but as a conclusive statement that was assumed to be shared after various perspectives on the issue had been given. Discussions often began with a general question, which delayed the process of speakers having to commit themselves too early to one side of an issue. In the journals, the students had expressed awareness of this. However, this does not mean that they have no

ability to express general or abstract statements. Instead it seems that the students only offer such statements when they appear to be a natural conclusion of what has previously been said. This is an example of the view (Davidson, 1998) that the main point is left to the end. This suggests that comments about whether Japanese students express abstract or general statements should be reevaluated with the claim that the students can make general statements given the conditions that there is a low-risk environment where they will be accepted, when they seem to form a natural conclusion of what has been said before and based on understanding experiences that have been expressed, when they are perceived to be part of an understood general truth or common sense view shared by the group. While the students might prefer concrete and experience-based comments, working from the specific to the general, there are circumstances in which they can make abstract or general statements. These tendencies may be a result of experiences in the education system as much as general cultural features.

Arguing from the empathy perspective of a person in a situation is a further aspect of concrete, experience-based approaches. Oi (1997) had commented on this and the preference for emotional, person and situation-based arguments over the objective, analytical and abstract. This preference seems to be based partly on expectations built up through activities carried out during the students' previous educational experience. They had been trained to give impressions in the subjective and reflective mode and had had fewer opportunities for expression of analytical ideas. Oi's research and that of others indicate a need to make students aware of other approaches. The recordings illustrated that even in the case of controversial topics, the students often argued from the perspectives of those involved.

Empathy-based features can also be interpreted in other ways, for example as a further aspect of risk-avoidance behaviour where the students focus on understanding a situation through another person's perspective rather than analyzing it objectively. It may also be part of the desire to consider a situation from various viewpoints without commitment to one side of an issue. In the journals, some students referred to the reason, suggested by Nisbett (2003), that Asians prefer to consider a situation from various perspectives rather than seeing it as an either/or issue. This is one explanation for the avoidance of taking absolute positions. If it is considered desirable to consider a situation from various perspectives, then

absolute positions might be considered too aggressive. In the recordings the students often argued from what was actually the case or from a hypothetical situation of what might possibly happen and were less likely to argue from moral absolutes of what should be the case. Empathy or hypothetical positions can be seen as having a similar function to role-play in that the students can separate themselves from the argument and argue from the point of view of another person. They also enabled the students to discuss a situation by offering tentative or implicit points of view on it without committing themselves to a definite, absolute view that might be rejected by others. It seems that this was part of an overall preference for avoiding making a standpoint on one side of an issue. This is also related to the idea of not separating the idea from the person. It is possible that the students believed, as was indicated by Nisbett (2003), that rejection of their point of view would be a rejection of their identity. In the journals they had claimed that they would find it rude to do this to another person.

Reasons for avoidance of or difficulty in giving an absolute point of view on a topic were expressed in the journals. They included lack of experience in giving opinions or in the subject being discussed, the need to reflect carefully before giving an opinion and the need for that opinion to fit in with the opinions of others, the ideal of logical thinking and the need to know others' opinions first. These culturally driven features should also be considered in conjunction with the more universal reasons of lack of vocabulary and ideas. Although the students individually wrote of their desires to express opinions clearly and considered assertiveness to be desirable, the desire to fit in with others and not cause offence seemed to be a stronger force in interaction with others in a group.

Collaboration was another way to carry out low-risk discussions. The literature (Maynard, 1997) referred to this. It suggests synthesis and combining ideas to reach a common goal or shared conclusion contributed to by all members of the group rather than opposing them or strongly asserting individual differences. The students were less concerned with the independence strategies of asserting differences that would make them stand out from the group. They preferred to make their opinions acceptable to the group, and this is one reason for the shifts of position that were found part way through some of the discussions. The literature (Tannen, 1999) had suggested that Japanese students seemed to

support each other and build up a consensus, focusing on the points they agreed with rather than attacking arguments. The journal comments provided some analysis of this, suggesting that they found it important to show that they listened to and respected the views of others. This indicates another contradiction that, whilst they are flexible enough to adopt different roles and new practices, they also find it hard to give opinions for opinions' sake or without careful consideration if they perceive the discussion to be genuine.

To summarize the points above, it seems that while the students individually wanted to express their points clearly, they were also strongly concerned with collaboration as members of a group and the interpersonal aspects of how their views would be perceived by others. It seems that it was difficult for them to separate the idea of an opinion from their perceptions of how others would perceive it. This is one reason why the process of expressing an opinion was often long and complex and why sometimes several turns passed between the request for an opinion and offering it. This was another way in which opinions could be offered in a low-risk environment.

The timing and way of expressing opinions was important. Some views in the literature had suggested that there would not be consistency in the expression of opinions because the students would drop their opinions in the face of opposition rather than pursue them. In addition the students' comments in the journals also suggested that they were careful not to express their views in an inappropriate fashion, for example, too quickly, too persistently, or by interrupting. They also wanted their opinions to be sincere. This would confirm the view expressed by others, in particular, Barnlund (1989) and Guest (2005), that inner reflection is necessary before a view is expressed. This is also connected with the fact that some students admitted to being more persuaded than persuasive and to changing their point of view after listening to the viewpoints of others. These factors suggest that the students do listen to and respect the opinions of other members of the group to find the positive points in others' opinions. However, this desire may come into conflict with the need to express logical opinions; a quicker, logic-based discussion is unlikely to allow them the necessary time to reflect on all aspects of other students' opinions. This indicates that different discussion types such a for/against, problem/solution may demand different attitudes, one more purely academic and akin to debate, the other slower and more reflective and moving towards

understanding a situation and finding a solution. It is therefore important to understand the function of different kinds of discussion and acknowledge that these might require different communication styles.

In the light of the comments on sincerity, McVeigh's (2001) performed/ expressive-self distinctions can be reconsidered. Although he claims that only the performed self is present in the classroom because of the roles and expectations inherent in the situation, it does seem that at a higher level, the students' goals include being able to express their true personalities in English. This is an indication of their desire to go beyond cultural and academic limitations, which are, to some extent imposed upon them by their experiences in the education system. As I suggested in the introduction, teachers sometimes have low expectations of their students, even at the university level. It is important for them to understand how to make activities more academically demanding for students from an earlier stage. Given their freedom to determine the content of their courses, they should be able to introduce activities that fit the students' needs, developing their strengths and improving on their weaknesses.

Related to the issue of identity and sincerity in expressing opinions was the view expressed in the literature and journals that a negative response to another's opinion was a denial of that person's identity. This was given (Sekiguchi, 2003) as a reason why Japanese had difficulty with logical debate; they were unable to separate the person from the arguments. This suggested that even in academic discussions, the interpersonal was a stronger force than the actual ideas. This distinction can be related to the concepts of different behaviour for different situations, logical or interpersonal. This explains why some students commented that they were better at arguing opposite points in role play. In such situations they were absolved of personal responsibility for the points they made. Although most students preferred discussions that they perceived to be genuine communication rather than role plays, the points made here have implications for the types of activities that are best for making students prepare for discussions and suggest that some initial scaffolding in the form of role-plays may be desirable so that they might first practice expressing opinions in a low-risk environment.

Despite the many difficulties in giving opinions, the students seemed to benefit from the learning of strategies such as those for giving reasons even if they were not always able to use these effectively. This suggests, as was indicated in the literature and was the case with various other strategies they had learned, that they appreciated and benefitted from learning any concrete measures that would help them to transcend their natural tendencies in communication and extend their range of communicative possibilities.

The journal comments also gave indications of the situations where the students would offer their opinions more directly, for example when a matter of urgency was involved or when the risk was low enough for them to be able to express their opinions. As I suggested above, these are often situations where the topic, participants or situation involve no loss of face, where the views of other members of the group have been understood and/or are assumed to be shared and when the opinion is considered to be a common sense opinion. In some topics such as 'bullying' the students were able to make a strong statement. This is a further indication that we should not claim that cultural generalisations about behaviour are absolutes, but instead they are dependent on the particular factors that make up the context and situation. In some later discussions, it seemed that where the students felt comfortable with the other group members, they were more likely to risk a direct opinion.

To summarize, the recordings provided a clearer indication of aspects of giving opinions in discussions in groups and developments towards more explicit expression of opinions. The journals provided indications of the mental processes the students went through regarding the expression of these opinions as individuals. There was often a gap between having and expressing opinions due to the various factors mentioned in the journals. There was no single isolated reason for this gap, but it depended on timing, linguistic issues, general cultural features, their relationship to the other members of the group and the need for inner reflection.

5.3 Analysis of disagreement

Regarding this question, many issues are similar to those of expressing opinions in general; so briefer comments will be made. The research question of whether the students were able

to express disagreement revealed various comments in the journals. They confirmed the points in the literature that disagreement was difficult but could occur when it was part of a role, in a close relationship, accompanied by a qualification that limited it or by partial disagreement strategies. These views were also apparent in the recordings. When disagreement did occur, it was often suspended over several turns or expressed when it was assumed to be shared and supported by other members of the group. Sometimes the students were able to express an opposite point of view strongly. In such cases, the topic was either one that was unlikely to cause offence or the speaker was offering a different viewpoint that could be added to those expressed by others in order to contribute to an overall understanding of the subject, thus mitigating loss of face.

Reasons given in the journals for lack of disagreement included the cultural features of feeling this to be impolite, the need for harmony, showing respect for others and individual features of not considering it necessary to disagree because they were able to see an argument from various perspectives or felt that it was unfair to disagree with someone who had already made up their mind on a point or held a strong opinion. Some also attributed it to weakness of will in not pursuing a point. Some students admitted that they did hold opposite views but did not necessarily consider it necessary or desirable to express them. However, despite the difficulty of disagreement, they were glad to learn strategies for expressing partial disagreement. Here as with other strategies they were flexible to learn new methods and strategies as they perceived a gap between their current discussion style and what they perceived as an ideal style.

5.4 Analysis of the effectiveness of learning strategies

Regarding the research question of how far the students could improve their discussion through instruction in strategies, the detailed results in the previous chapter indicate that these were useful not only in terms of the particular language the students learned but also for increasing awareness of general communicative functions and of the different approaches to and possibilities in discussion.

The journal comments generally focused on the usefulness of learning the strategies to

bridge the gap between the weaknesses the students perceived in their own communication and idealized Western norms which were seen as more natural and logical. However, they did admit to a gap between learning the strategies and using them appropriately and spontaneously. While this can be partly attributed to linguistic issues such as the gap between learning and using new language, which would be improved with practice and greater exposure, there were also other issues related to the interpersonal issues of keeping harmony and fear of causing offence to others.

Awareness raising of different rhetorical patterns and strategies was also improved by the writing of journals. A major area where some success was achieved was in helping the students move from only using collaborative, group-influenced empathy-based features towards integrating assertive, more individual analytical speaker-based strategies that would bring a discussion forward towards solutions and conclusions. This approach was essential in order for students to maintain their cultural identity while learning different communication styles. Learning to discuss involves not only developing one's own communication strategies but also understanding the features that people from other cultural backgrounds bring to discussions. Even where the students had difficulties in using them actively, raising awareness of them helped them to understand the features they would find in communication with people from other cultures with other norms of communication. Rather than directly imposing new approaches, teaching the students strategies gradually as various others (Guest, 2005, Scarcella, 2003, Davidson, 2006) had suggested, was the way to achieve this.

Strategies provided students with opportunities to change their behaviour whilst maintaining their strengths. They were most successful in areas where they consciously wanted to improve and saw no cultural barriers to doing so. However, as the journals suggested, as long as a function, such as, for example, interrupting, was perceived as culturally taboo, then success was less obvious. In such a case the students used what they perceived to be a mild form of the strategy such as breaking in by asking questions rather than making a direct statement or by using softening expressions with expressions of disagreement. In this way they tended to find a middle path between one cultural approach and another. This is illustrated further in the literature, for example, related to introducing critical thinking.

Making students aware of different cultural patterns should increase their awareness of the features they may need to change when they discuss with people from different cultural backgrounds. This was important for the issue of preserving their own cultural identity that consisted of understanding and accepting others through listener-based strategies, and the necessity of developing speaker-based strategies for asserting this individual identity through clarity and consistency of point of view.

One group of strategies which the students made frequent use of was strategies for repair and paraphrase. The frequency of repair suggests that, unlike in a whole class situation, direct correction of mistakes in peer-to-peer interaction was considered acceptable and did not seem to involve loss of face. This may be a reflection of the students' sense of collaborating as a group to make points more clearly. Another interpretation is that the listener-based focus on being understood makes it culturally acceptable for the students to correct each other in these situations. This also illustrates the point that success in using strategies depended less on linguistic issues than on the students' perception of the necessity for and cultural acceptability of using the functions associated with these strategies.

In general, the students did aim to improve their discussion skills by making changes to their communicative behaviour and found the learning of strategies an appropriate way to achieve this. Their journals also revealed individual variation in the approach to different strategies. However, success also depended on willingness and ability to take risks and try out different communicative behaviour when discussing in English. They did learn to express their opinions more assertively, but their preference was for doing so in a low-risk, collaborative and supportive environment.

5.5 Evaluation of the methods

When we consider the success of the methods in achieving the goals for the research, the validity of the journal method can be judged on two levels. For the students, it succeeded in making them express their views articulately and develop their discussion ability. For the teacher, it provided access to the student voice and increased understanding of what the students perceived as their strengths and weaknesses and the differences between their

individual views and how they behaved in a group. Writing in the journals was a contributory factor in shaping students' perceptions and articulating their different behaviour in English and Japanese and considering their group and individual identity. These identities were influenced by expectations in society, including awareness of how Japanese should behave, ideas of how they would be perceived by their peers as well as an idealized view of how native-speakers of English might communicate. A disadvantage of the method was that it was time-consuming for the students, so it was important to reward their efforts in writing in terms of more individual feedback.

While the journals provided valid insights into students' perceptions of discussion and greater access to a previously unavailable student voice, there was still a gap between perceptions and actual behaviour. The perceptions may have been subjective and influenced by the cultural trait of modesty. They are best understood in the light of what the students actually did in the different phases of the discussions.

The recordings were also successful in illustrating the process of the discussions. They documented progress over a whole year. Particular areas were those such as how the students used repair, the process of giving opinions and the different stages of the discussions. It is, however, also necessary to consider the fact that the students' communication was influenced by the fact of being recorded. Although they knew that they were not being assessed, the fact of being recorded implied that they would be listened to. The communication may therefore have appeared more permanent than other discussions. Although this may have had a positive effect on the discussions, it does not necessarily indicate that the students will discuss in this way when they are not being recorded. The results can therefore be seen as indicative of students' potential rather than of how they would always discuss. However, they do seem to reveal that students behave differently in small groups from in whole-class situations in terms of such features as repair, correcting misunderstandings, asking questions and expressing opinions. It is important to find ways to motivate them to discuss even when they are not being recorded.

5.6 Conclusion

To summarize what has been learnt from the literature, the journals and the recordings, expression of personal identity through the revealing of consistent opinions may be less important for Japanese students than collaborating with the group. The students did have diverse opinions, but they were careful about when and how they expressed them. They often delayed or avoided committing themselves to an opinion. Strategies enabled the students to take steps towards expressing their opinions more objectively and increase their awareness of other ways of carrying out a discussion whilst maintaining their own identity. The findings also demonstrate that cultural features are not absolutes but dependent on the context, topic and communication mode as well as individual personality. However, they can be useful, in conjunction with a study of practices in the education system, for understanding communication patterns that students bring to the classroom. Both research methods were important for revealing different aspects of these and developments in both discussions and perceptions of them.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1: General conclusions

This thesis started from a perceived need for greater research into oral academic discourse in classroom discussions. In Chapter 2, I discussed general cultural characteristics and their manifestation in the classroom. In contrast to general contrastive cultural characteristics between Japanese and Western culture, it seemed that the current generation of students might be less influenced by traditional culture than previous generations and more open to developing and expressing opinions and academic ideas. However, some of the research revealed a contrast between the students' individual desires for greater opportunities for academic expression in their university experience and the institutional, cultural and personal factors that prevented them from doing this.

Major issues that emerged from the literature were the need for a greater understanding of this gap between individual aspirations and group expectations and how to find appropriate ways to help students develop awareness and use of different cultural features whilst not losing sight of their own cultural identity. A further issue was whether the post-reform university could be the appropriate academic setting for this. Understanding students' actual behaviour and perceptions was the key to achieving these goals. It was necessary to find research methods that enabled a detailed analysis of how students discussed in English and their perceptions of this rather than generalizing from abstractions.

The literature suggested a lack of logic in interpersonal communication, a preference for ambiguity, indirectness, harmony, empathy, reflection, collaboration and fitting in. There was an avoidance of controversy, analysis and abstraction. It suggested that the students could not express opinions without considering their relationship to the group. However, it also indicated that there was variety in different contexts within the culture, that education reforms were gradually making new approaches possible, and that the students desired more opportunities for academic expression. An understanding of and sensitivity to the students' cultural background on the part of teachers and willingness to improve on the part of the students were necessary. However, much of the previous research focused on written work and did not take into account the group-based features of interaction.

The students kept journals related to the process of discussion and responses to strategies. Recordings were made of discussions throughout the year. The journals revealed examples of many of the cultural and individual tendencies that had been revealed in the literature. The students also expressed awareness of cultural influences on their behaviour that prevented them from carrying out particular functions. However, on an individual level, they had strong ideas of behaviour that was desirable in other cultures, such as logical thinking.

Particular weaknesses revealed by both research methods were in the expression of clear and direct opinions, especially disagreement, interrupting another speaker, and making absolute or abstract statements suddenly or spontaneously without first offering concrete experience on an issue. All this may be related to a general avoidance of risk and potential loss of face as well as a preference for accepting and considering various ideas without immediately rejecting them. As I explained in the previous chapter, the results revealed that while clear cultural preferences and tendencies are revealed in students' behaviour, we should not view these as absolutes but in terms of their different manifestations in different situations. The recordings gave examples of the contexts in which different types of cultural behaviour were manifested and the journals revealed individual perceptions that included examples of the different reasons for the behaviour. They suggested that the students did have original ideas and views. However, there were various individual and cultural reasons why they could not always express them.

The recordings also revealed more than the literature could about the various stages the students went through in expressing opinions. Initially they could only express tentative opinions and this was only after detailed background information had been given in situations based on experience. In discussions related to more controversial issues, less personal background was given, but the students seemed to prefer to consider the situation from various angles such as from the perspective of empathy towards those involved in the situation. Abstract or absolute statements were often avoided unless these could be reasonably assumed to be either a common sense position or to follow naturally from what had been already said in the discussion. This suggested a cultural preference for points of view that were grounded in actual, concrete experience. Further aspects of this were a tendency to sometimes opt out of responding to a hypothetical question or avoid giving an

opinion due to lack of qualification or experience or admitting openly that an issue was too difficult. The avoidance of absolute positions was also revealed in the tendency to add on points of view to those of others in a form of synthesis rather than presenting opposite points.

Developments were seen in the discussions throughout the year as the topics moved to more social and academic issues. The students learned to use strategies to make their points more explicit and objective and clarify their understanding of others' comments. Anecdotes and background details were still present but were used more as a means to making a point rather than ends in themselves. However, consistency of viewpoint was not always maintained. The students also seemed to value the information that is revealed on the way to making a point as much as the point itself. In this way their discussions seem to be process rather than product based with exploration and development of initially incomplete ideas occurring within the discussion rather than strong assertion of absolute points.

6.2 What we can learn and further recommendations

The journals and recordings indicated adherence to various aspects of the typical Japanese behaviour that had been mentioned in both the general literature and previous research. At the same time, they revealed the process of discussions and perceptions on them in greater depth and detail. They also provided explanations for the reasons behind this behaviour and indicated that cultural features should not be seen as absolutes. At an individual level, the students were aware of other cultural norms that they believed to be necessary ideals for carrying out a successful discussion and the gap between the two.

An issue that emerged from the research is that we should not assume a direct relationship between the way the students behave in a group and the thoughts, intentions and attitudes of individual students. However, as students are likely to be judged by their outward behaviour, particularly in intercultural communication, it is necessary for them to develop approaches towards clearer communication that can make others aware of the point they are making. At the same time, teachers can use the resources available such as reflective journals to gain a closer idea of students' individual motivation and reasons for behaviour. In this way an

understanding of particular difficulties can help teachers design activities that help students build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses.

Considering the specific issue of expression of opinions, these play a central role in discussions regardless of whether they are perceived as academic exercises or genuine communicative events. However, the research has indicated that there are distinct functions of the expression of opinions- they may contribute ideas to a topic or they may offer an assertive standpoint for or against a particular issue. The students seemed to be more comfortable with the former type. Instead of claiming as an absolute that students cannot express opinions well, it is preferable to establish their strengths and weakness in offering particular types of ideas in particular situations. If discussions which place opinions at their centre are product based, those which focus more on interaction in the process of offering opinions may be seen as process based. Process-based suggests a gradual working together towards understanding an issue. It is this interpersonal aspect that is difficult to plan in advance, makes discussion different from written communication and accounts for a wider gap between the learning of new approaches and carrying them out.

It seems that advances in technology and greater exposure to Western ideas and teachers have influenced students' ideals of discussion at a conceptual level, but they need more experience in the practicalities of carrying this out. In addition, their concepts of generic Western norms of communication were sometimes equated to a purely logical and rational norm of communication. It is important that they do not lose sight of their own cultural norms and strengths in discussions. It is likely that they will not only communicate with English native-speakers but with others who have different norms of communication. The literature and the research have indicated that as part of their process based discussions, the students tend to work through careful consideration of peripheral details to reach the essential point. This may result in different opinions being combined to find a better solution to a problem than if opinions were rejected immediately. Together with the listener-based aspects such as empathy, these can be regarded as strengths of Japanese discussions. They may lead participants to consider new or previously overlooked aspects of an issue and the consequences of related hypothetical situations. However, this focus on the process and the peripheral may delay the expression of opinions and the reaching of a solution.

Classroom discussions have validity in themselves for developing the academic, linguistic and communication skills that could be transferable to other aspects of students' lives and contribute to their overall academic development that is transferable across their educational experience. However, the students also aimed to be able to discuss more effectively with those from other cultural backgrounds. In this respect it is important for them to be aware that their own style of providing so much peripheral information and delaying the expression of a clear point of view may be problematic for others who expect a faster pace of discussion. For this reason it was essential for them to learn speaker-based strategies for being succinct. Greater familiarity with both academic ideas and the language and structures of academic discourse should help them to develop even further in this respect. It is therefore important to increase their awareness of the difference between general and specific approaches and how to make the transition from one to the other. In order to achieve this, they need to take greater risks in discussion.

As was suggested in the literature, Japanese students are often misunderstood by Westerners because they often stay silent when asked for an opinion, do not give a direct or explicit opinion immediately on being asked and do not commit themselves to being for or against an issue. These characteristics of vagueness and ambiguity are sometimes perceived as weaknesses or as a lack of thinking skills. However, they may reflect a different approach to knowledge and ideas and the way of presenting opinions. The students in this research revealed themselves to be flexible and amenable to different approaches as well as sensitive to their own cultural needs. Their journal comments revealed that they are active participants in their own learning process, who are prepared to engage sincerely with ideas and consider their roles and behaviour beyond what they express verbally. They consider that because there are many sides to an issue, the process of giving an opinion is complex and can only be carried out after sufficient reflection. The Japanese students' approach to discussion therefore works best in situations where they have to work collaboratively towards giving a solution to a problem, but is less successful in quicker, more controversial discussion types.

An aim of this research was to benefit both Japanese students, including those they influence as future teachers, and those who teach or discuss with them. Regarding how the students themselves will benefit, teachers can highlight Japanese strengths as well as weaknesses

including the advantages of collaborative, reflective and perspective-based discussion styles. This can make the students aware of other patterns of communication. This should take them away from an idealized concept of Western discourse towards a greater sense of the impact of particular communicative features on particular discussion types. From speaker-based strategies they learned to be more explicit and make a clearer distinction between fact, opinion, anecdote and reason. In addition, learning how to enter a discussion appropriately is important when they encounter speakers from other cultures who will be less aware of and compliant with their own turn-taking norms. They also need to be aware that, in arguments others from different cultures may not require as much background detail as they do before expressing an opinion and may express opinions more quickly.

There are various ways in which teachers can help their students develop their discussion skills further. The small group situation seems an appropriate way, and the research demonstrated that they are better at clearing up misunderstandings in these situations than in a whole-class situation. The learning of strategies was effective but these were not always immediately put into practice. It is therefore important to increase students' exposure to these in order to increase familiarity of use. One way to achieve this would be for the students to carry out investigative activities of studying the strategies and language used in discussions outside their own culture through media-based resources.

Training in critical thinking can add to developing arguments with greater clarity with argument construction so that the students develop consistency of views and can more confidently distinguish between strong and weak arguments. In this way they will gain confidence to present their views more clearly without so much avoidance and delaying techniques. Such skills can also be developed in other classes. Consistency in expressing their points of view is likely to enable the students to communicate with those from more speaker-based, low-context and high-risk cultures.

To summarize, a combination of features is needed when we teach discussion: a list of strategies grouped into areas of various functions, examples of real life arguments in interaction and opportunities for making students express arguments more spontaneously. Transcripts of actual discussions could be used in class to point out strengths and

weaknesses in strategies and arguments. Any such awareness raising exercises, which start with students' familiar practices and move gradually towards other patterns, can help to lead them to higher levels of discussion. In this research, with the next group of students in the academic year following the research, explicit points were made concerning the typical characteristics of Japanese students in discussions that had been gained from the research. Understanding culture can go beyond abstract theory to the behaviour of individuals within particular contexts in that culture. In this respect this study enabled a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese students and awareness of the applications and limits of the views expressed in the literature.

I have suggested that Japanese students need to learn speaker-based strategies for making their points more clearly and succinctly. At the same time, it can be useful for those who communicate with them, either as fellow participants in the discussion or as teachers, to be aware of the use of listener-based strategies to check on the speaker's true intention as well as asking direct questions of those who do not take a turn of their own accord. In addition, it is also useful for them to develop their skills in listening to and focusing on the positive points of another person's argument.

We cannot explain all differences of communicative styles. As long as there is not one international dominant discussion pattern, accommodation can be made on both sides when people from different cultures carry out discussions. However, mutual awareness of different styles can help prevent participants in discussion from interpreting other communication patterns purely on their own cultural terms. Further research into the different discussion patterns of people from different cultures can enhance international communication. A limit of this research was that it focused on communication between people from the same cultural and educational group. Better research could be carried out on discussions between participants from different cultural backgrounds. However, an advantage of this research was that it should enable individual teachers in Japan to develop a better understanding of their students' motivations and perceptions and extend this knowledge to the teaching of other groups of students. This research has illustrated what can be learned from accessing students' thoughts through methods that are familiar to them and culturally acceptable. In future research, interviews could be carried out with individual students to consider the

particular features that they display in the recordings and their perceptions on these.

As a conclusion, while it is not always accurate to adhere to absolute views about how all Japanese students will communicate in discussions, certain cultural tendencies have emerged through the research. These patterns come from general cultural factors as well as expectations for behaviour in the classroom. However, the combination of the students' desire to transcend cultural barriers whilst not losing their cultural identity as well as the teaching of appropriate strategies to assist them in this process can help the students to improve their skills. When these skills are developed further through joint responsibility and mutual understanding on the part of both teachers and students, the students should, with ongoing practice, be able to pursue academic discussions successfully beyond the immediate sphere of the Japanese classroom. In this way, the university could be a forum for the development of academic communication skills which the students would then carry through into other aspects of their lives.

Appendix 1

Journal Extracts

Student J

20/4

I learned the timing to interrupt the conversation. At the beginning of the class, I couldn't interrupt the conversation, but by the end of the class I felt I could get the timing and use the words when I wanted to interrupt. I felt I couldn't say what I wanted to say. This is very impatient for me. So I want to say what I feel. I felt the phrase: "Can I ask a question?" is very useful for me. I think I used this phrase many times. Finally, I felt that I must speak as much as possible and I mustn't be a shy boy.

27/4

I'm sorry to be absent from this class. I must go to Tokyo to meet my parents.

11/5

I'm very sorry I caught a cold. I'm sorry to be absent from this class two days on end.

5/10

Today I enjoyed class and today's topic. Today's strategies are "Taking things into consideration". Today's topic is really enjoyable for me but I felt a small difficulty. To tell the truth, I used only one. "Considering..." It's because I couldn't understand the meaning of the others. I couldn't imagine the situation where other phrases are spoken. But now I could understand the others a little. When I talked about strategies, I learned the meaning of "Congratulations!" This is used when someone achieves something.

By the way, today we had non-prepared discussion. It was difficult for me, but I could enjoy talking. Today I hardly spoke with my friends, but I could listen to my friends' opinions. That's why I enjoyed today's class.

12/10

Today's first topic was mine. When I chose this topic, I thought this is very fun. But when I discussed this, I felt it was a very difficult one. It's because I felt it was a very vague topic to discuss. It was very difficult for us to discuss about a vague topic. Therefore it seemed that every group couldn't enjoy discussion. I felt very sorry for everyone.

Today's strategies are "generalizing". These strategies are very useful and there are many times to use these phrases. Although today's task was easy, today's task was very enjoyable for me. How could I persuade my partner using today's strategies? It was a little difficult to persuade my partner but I enjoyed talking with my partner. I think today's talk is interesting.

Today's topic was "Is it necessary for primary students to study English?" Before the discussion we gave 10-15 minutes to prepare our opinions and changed our opinions to persuade the opposite position. By the way, I think it isn't necessary for them. It's because I think it isn't necessary for them. It's because I think there are many differences between

those who took English department and those who don't take. I learned students can get only pronunciation during primary school if they learn English. If this hypothesis is right, we need the teachers who can pronounce English perfectly. Therefore, when the discussion began, I told my opinion. Today I could tell my own idea for a long time. I was very happy my friends could catch what I said and meant. It brought me big confidence. I could discuss! I could tell what I wanted to say. Very exciting time I had! Therefore I realized that I must have more confidence and must not have negative feeling. Today's class made me grow.

19/10

Today's topic is about work. I don't work hard. In my opinion, if I get married, it's important for me to rest from my work. It's important for me to go any place or play something with my wife or children, so I don't work without holiday. My friend, however, said opposite opinion. He said that money is most important thing in his life. He said that he wants to work only for himself. I enjoyed talking about this topic for there was a friend who had the opposite opinion.

26/10

Today's first topic is about Prime Minister Koizumi. I think he is a man who has strong will to change Japan. He doesn't change his mind whatever his opponent denies his policy. Therefore I support him. Although I support him, of course there is a friend who has opposite idea. His opinions made me notice about Koizumi's other aspects.

Today's strategies are "Correcting yourself". Today's strategies are enjoyable. I could discuss with my partner using today's strategies. Today I like the phrase "Don't get me wrong" because I felt this phrase was easy to say. I used this phrase a lot of times. "What I mean is..." or "What I meant was..." are also very easy to learn by heart, I think. Thanks to today's lesson, maybe I can come to tell my opinion if my partner gets my word wrong.

Discussion

Today's topic is "live to work" or "work to live". In my opinion, I want to work to live. It's because there are many things better than work in this world. Living in the earth gives me a lot of new things, interesting things or sad things. Although there are many attractive things, I don't have enough money to do that. For example, I need much money to go abroad, to buy new clothes or move to any other places. Therefore I have to earn money. In other words, I want to earn money to make my life wonderful. Everyone in my group had the same opinion; everyone wants to work to live. After talking, we wanted to find some bad aspects of our position, but before finding solutions to our bad aspects, time was over. I could enjoy talking.

16/11

Today's topic is "language". Today's topic was difficult for me to tell my opinion. I couldn't have my own idea or opinion, so it was hard for me to discuss with my friends. Moreover, the contents of the discussion went to a difficult side. Therefore I had to listen to members' opinion very carefully, so I had no time to make own idea. For me it was difficult to join discussion. I couldn't almost tell my opinion. What's more, I couldn't understand the contents of discussion. Unfortunately, I couldn't enjoy talking. I could not enjoy discussion.

These days, I noticed one thing. If I felt good impression to topic, I could talk more using poor English. However, I couldn't tell my opinion if the topic is tough one. I felt I have to try to speak if the topic is tough. This is my own issue on this class.

30/11

Today's spontaneous topic was very easy to discuss for me. We discussed about figure or "character". My position was "figure is necessary for women". Its because today's topic was easy to tell my opinion. I could enjoy spontaneous discussion.

Strategies

Today's strategies are "what you really mean". Today's strategies are hesitation and restating. I noticed that I often use hesitations. I always use "well, um..." or "Mmm" So I noticed I have to use other strategies as possible as I can.

Role-playing

Today we did role-playing discussion for the first time. We divided into two groups. We discussed school discipline. I became a parent. I asked, "How do you think about today's teachers who can't note to students?" Mr. O. answered to my question. His answer could reject my anxiety. Role-playing was a little exciting type of discussion, I think. Although it was very difficult for me to tell my opinions, I could enjoy listening to other members' statements.

Today's discussion topic was "school discipline" Maybe I could tell my opinion to other members. Today's discussion made me exciting. It's because not only could I speak my opinions, but also everyone had a good opinion I was happy to hear their opinion. I was happy to hear their opinion.

7/12

Today's spontaneous topic was "what can school do for crime prevention". These days there were many crimes of murdering pupils, so we have to think about what can school do. In my group's opinion, it is impossible for us to stop murdering. Then what can we do? We thought we have to make strong relationship between school and parents. It will be the most precaution for these days' problems.

Role-playing

Today's topic was related with spontaneous discussion. My role was managerial staff. Our side was very tough. Opposite side questioned to us difficult problem. Although they threw difficult questions or denying our solutions, they always abandon responsibilities. They always push us responsibilities. This is, maybe, some event happened in today's relationship of school and parents. This is, maybe, today's treasure I could get in the class.

Final paper (January): What I have learned from this class.

Discussion class was a very difficult class. It's because I don't have enough vocabulary to speak my opinion. Even if there is some good opinion in my head, I couldn't speak fluently in first semester. Although I couldn't speak fluently in first semester, I came to speak with bad pronunciation at second semester. It's because I felt that "Don't speak own idea is worst", even if I use ungrammatical English, it is important insist my idea. This idea gave

me some courage to speak in English. Therefore I could improve the attitude towards speaking English. Although I could a little improvement of English skill, I felt improvement of attitude is most valuable improvement. But I don't like role-play game so much. It's because I could hardly insist or argue. It was very difficult discussion type. I must change or think about the role I am playing. It is also difficult. Finally, through this class I could understand my English skill. I want to improve my pronunciation. This class gave me many good points. So, I mostly enjoyed this class.

Student A

20/4

Today I learned about breaking in and talking about problems. I am not good at breaking in, so it was a good chance to practice. I tend to use the phrase, "Can I ask a question?" I would like to become to use more expressions. I learned some useful expressions like "Can I add here that..." or "Can I make a point?" I talked about staying healthy with Maiko and Masatoshi. We were able to keep talking, but it seemed like just a casual conversation. We could not discuss difficult topics such as "paying into the pension fund".

I would like to learn more strategies and be able to discuss more difficult topics.

14/6

Changing the Subject

It was difficult for me to change the subject naturally. I need a few seconds to find a way of moving on to the next topic. "Talking of..." "That reminds me of..." "Oh, before I forget..." are useful expressions. I would like to be able to think quickly to find a connection point and change the subject using such words. I also learned that we can't use such expressions in formal situations. I have to be careful about that point. I wonder how I should change the subject in formal situations.

Giving an unfavourable response

I learned how to give an unpleasant response. It is hard for me to do that because I usually do not do so in Japanese. I learned to add "Actually..." and to make the response soft. I did not know that "Frankly..." is a direct expression and I have to be careful when I use it. I also learned that I can use the expression "I don't want to hurt your feelings but..." In a personal situation, it is useful. I will use those strategies when I want to be honest with a friend and give an unpleasant response.

22/6

Guessing, personal opinions and correcting misunderstandings

I often use "I think..." but I am not used to expressions like "I suppose" "I suspect that..." "I'm fairly certain that..." and "I'm convinced that..." I sometimes confuse "suspect" with "doubt".

"I wonder if...." is a familiar expression to me. I like to give an opinion without making it too strong, but sometimes I need to say my opinion clearly. I would like to get used to giving a strong opinion using expressions such as "I honestly believe that." "I strongly believe that..."

and “I’m absolutely certain that...”

It was a good practice for me to discuss using strategies of personal opinions. I think it is useful to add “personally”, for example, “I personally believe that...” and “I personally think (feel)...” It was difficult for me to explain why after I said “It depends” but I think it is quite a useful expression.

In addition, I learned how to correct misunderstandings. I tried to say, “Where did you get that idea from” “Look, let’s get this straight...” and so on because they were unfamiliar expressions for me and I thought they were very useful. I tried to be careful which word I should put stress on. For example, I noticed Miss Horne put stress on the word “that” in the dialogue “I hear you have a new car” I don’t know where you got that idea from.” Thus I tried to be careful about stress to make a sentence sound more natural.

Student I

20/4

As many students think it is difficult for Japanese to use interrupting, I couldn’t use this strategy well. Although it is a difficult strategy, it is important and useful to make what people are saying clear or have serious discussions. On the other hand, talking about problems is not so difficult if I am always conscious of what I want to say the most.

25/5

It is interesting for me to study the strategy of negative responses because some expressions are unknown to me. The phrases (or sounds) in themselves are interesting too. In today’s class I used some of them in our discussion, but I couldn’t continue any words (phrases) after that. So I thought it is difficult to talk logically. The topic of cloning was difficult to discuss because most of us disagree to it. I chose affirmative position in discussion but I couldn’t say persuadable things. Moreover, I had to discuss with many suggestions, so it was really hard.

14/6

It was interesting for me to practice giving an unfavourable response because my friends said something strange or fantastic when we were playing each role. Some strategies are known for me such as “Actually” “To tell the truth...” but others, such as “I don’t want to hurt your feelings but...” are unknown. In such expressions, there seems to be similarity between English and Japanese, so it is interesting for me. Another strategy, changing the subject was also interesting because I have only used the expression “By the way...” I want to use others in my conversation (discussion). My speech tends to be illogical or redundant, so I hope that using such strategies makes my speech easy to understand.

22/6

When I learn the strategy “personal opinions”, I was able to practice it many times in a short sentence. I think it is good to practice naturally in a long sentence or discussion, but it is also good to practice like that. Such expressions, I think, I believe, I suppose, I have many chances to use them but I tend to use only I think...” so I want to use them correctly in many

situations. Talking about correcting misunderstandings”, it was interesting to practice it because the topics are interesting and it seems to have similarity with what I learned in this class.

9/11

Today’s strategies are important for us because most of us only use “I don’t know” or stay silent. That’s why I think we should learn these strategies. I’m afraid that such Japanese reactions make English speakers’ feelings bad.

Today we discussed about “Drinking alcohol”. My group was excited about talking about it because we university students like drinking with friends. I think it’s better to be excited to discuss. However, our discussion became too subjective although I tried to make it objective. That’s partly because drinking alcohol isn’t such a problem in Japan as in Britain. I wanted to talk seriously about the problem which happens to those who are weak in alcohol. but the others blamed me out of my way of drinking.

22/11

“Is TOEFL score necessary for graduation?” First of all, today’s discussion class is a little harder than usual because it started in the morning. I had some things I wanted to say, but it was difficult to say properly because my brain didn’t work well. Today I wonder what I should do if I have to discuss difficult topic which has many difficult words. In my opinion I need to practice in such situations.

Today’s topic “Should smoking be banned in public places? Is maybe popular as a discussion topic, so we have more ideas than others. In such topics, we can discuss even if our position is replaced with the opposite. I think it was also interesting to discuss popular topics which have conflicting positions. That’s because it’s easier to say our opinions considering the opposite position. About this topic, I wanted to admit smokers’ rights or have sympathy with them, but it was difficult to reach an accommodation.

30/11

When we are asked difficult questions, we often become silent without a word. We may be needed to show our hesitation before such silence. About restating, I have used these phrases about myself. So I want to use them in debate and so on.

I was very surprised at the “hot seat”. Although it was very shameful to discuss with you at the hot seat, I managed to talk about smoking because it was a familiar topic. It is maybe also interesting and enjoyable to discuss among us like hot seat. Besides that, we had a new style discussion like some kind of press conference. It seems to be easy to say our opinions because we can decide our roles. On the other hand, it also seems to be difficult to control the discussion, timing, equal chance to say for each person.

7/12 (thinking skills/ fallacies in argument)

Among these thinking skills, I think what I tend to do are “sweeping generalization” appeal to common belief and appeal to authority. Most of us don’t tend to use the others because we, at least, try not to be polemic or emotional in our discussions. On the other hand, instead of that we want to give examples, quotation and rely on such (above) thinking skills. Today we learned these, if I find these types of thing in our discussion, I want to try to argue

against them.

Role playing discussion

Same as last week, we discussed in a certain each position. I was glad hearing the discussion because it was enjoyable itself. However, sometimes it didn't seem that all of us had equal chances to say. Of course it's natural that someone's chances increase, but including the number of people, it seems to me a little redundant. If we are good at instant objection or interrupting, it will become more exciting and our chances to speak will increase. I found that we discussed not spontaneously and simultaneously but one to one separately.

Final Comments (in January)

I have learned many useful strategies, but I forgot most of them. I should be more conscious about them when I discuss. This class was very precious for me because there are no other speaking classes. This class made me positive about speaking English, at least during this class. About the classes in January, I think we had time to discuss in English. Each topic was interesting and the way of discussing different. However, students leading classes has some difficulties. Of course, it is difficult to say what we want to say fluently, so discussion class needs more attention to have students discuss without any difficulties. Of course most of them depend on our competence in English. Otherwise, we tend to hesitate speaking, so, choice of topic is also important.

Student B (no dates)

Strategy "taking things into consideration"

In the practice of the strategy, I could easily use those expressions. But in the real discussion, I wonder when I should use these expressions. I felt they are difficult to use in the discussion. In today's discussion, I couldn't do my best; I was negative today. I couldn't feel like trying to join the discussions somehow. That was not good. But I tried to be aggressive to the other students' opinions even though I'm not sure if I could use suitable expressions that I learned before. As for the expressions I've learned, I can't use them because they don't come into my mind quickly. Maybe what I have to do, first of all, is to memorize the expressions and to make them my own expressions.

Strategy: generalizing

In the practice of today's strategy, it was difficult to do the task. When we were doing the task, we didn't get the point. Today's task was a little hard to understand how to do it.

I learned other expressions today: "Let's look at the topic from another point of view" and "Let's summarize what we've said so far!" These look useful in the discussion. I think they make the discussion more active. In today's discussion, the topic was more difficult to discuss because there's no exact solution. But what I'm regretting now is that I couldn't tell my own experiences although this topic was easy to tell from the view of my experience. I thought I should have prepared more before the discussion.

Strategy: correcting yourself

In today's strategy I thought these expressions are very useful for correcting myself.

Especially, “What I mean is” and “Don’t get me wrong” are easy to use naturally. And I enjoyed the practice too. I want to use them in the real discussion.

In the discussion, we talked about working. As for this topic, there were many things I wanted to say. But I couldn’t convey them because of my lack of English ability. It’s difficult to tell what I want to say clearly. And I also thought this discussion would be more exciting if we did it in Japanese. So I think my aim of this class is to be able to discuss in English as I do in Japanese.

Appendix 2

Examples of Discussion Tasks

1. Should violence be shown on TV?
2. Is the communicative approach in teaching better than the traditional approach?
3. Should English be taught in primary schools?
4. Should smoking be allowed in public places?
5. The death penalty- for or against?
6. Euthenasia
7. How can we solve the problem of bullying?
8. How can discipline in schools be improved?
9. Which would you rather work to live or live to work?
10. Should we lower the legal age of drinking from 20 to 18?
11. various case studies

(materials removed for copyright reasons)

Appendix 3

Transcript of a Discussion

1G: I think 18 is OK because when when we enter the university or other school we
2 often drink (8)

3B: I think so too because I I don't think errr twenty or eighteen err this two year is
4 has soo many difference and err many high school students enter university
5 and err they begin to drink so it is reasonable (?) is it right reasonable *rikutsu*
6 reasonable to err (2) change to 18 (.)

7 C: I agree with your point (2) but I think we have to think about their attitude when
8 you drink alcohol, for example um at first when we drink alcohol for the first time
9 (3) in my opinion people will not know how much degree we can drink alcohol or
10 not so if they don't know their limit sometimes it cause the big problem such as
11 their life so (2) so before we start drinking we should know the err danger of the
12 drinking alcohol (.)

13 B: I see your point but I think how can you say the age of 20 is enough age to know how to
14 drink mmm and (5) eh *nandaro* so I if there is no exact reason that the law
15 decides the age of 20, I think 18 is more proper age to start drinking. (1) I think
16 there is many 20 years people who don't know how to drink and but I know
17 there's more *nandaro* adult mature person who is 18 so (3)

18 H: Then is it very right errr why errr why should it err decide change to 18 years old.
19 I think when we change the err age age to drink alcohol I think we can we can
20 define the minimum age more more younger. (4) I think there is you said as you
21 said there are many child who drink under under 18 err it's it's what is important,
22 what's important thing is to know how to drink when they drink not when they
23 drink but to know what to drink I think so err what's the most important thing is
24 we should (1) um learn teach them more about drinking in school or in public.
25 Can do can you understand?(.)

26 G: Yes. That's a very good idea (.)

27 C: Considering that other countries have a culture like they started to drink err under 18
28 (0.5)and it' s legal and it's one of the culture and also um probably their

29 um (1) parents will tell their children how to drink in at home so (1) if we err if
30 we decided to err change the age of started drinking alcohol then the also parents
31 should err think about the er how to teach or=
32 H =Ahuh. Yes=
33 C: =Yes. There are some parents who who don't know how too drink (2)
34 H: So not only house but also in school we should (0.5) teach how to drink=
35 C:=Yes (2)
36 B: I see your point but one problem is that the students of high school or junior high
37 school can't drink of course (2) but (2) err they can't drink but they have to learn
38 about drinking. Don't you think it's a little bit strange thing?(.)
39 H: Aaah=
40G: =But in high school and junior high school they sometimes learn about smoking=
41 B: =[Aaaah]
42 H: [Aaaah] Even so, it is important to learn when they are young I think (13)
43 B: By the way err, how about you, did you drink in age of 18? (3)
44 H: Err (laughs) actually yes=
45 B: =Of course you did =
46 H:=Yes=
47 B:= And err many students of university also did the same thing=
48 H:=Yes=
49 B:= And some teachers allowed them but only (2) law? doesn't allow it and (3) its I
50 feel it's some strange thing
51H: Aaaah=
52 B:= And not only university students but also the high school students to go to
53 society? to so working also have opportunity to drink also have opportunity to
54 drink and so only law doesn't allow? the drinking. I feel it's also, it's also a strange
55 they break the law. (1)
56C: They should rethink, you mean they should rethink this age?(.)
57B: Er yeah (2)
58G At 18 many people drink, so we can lower the age they can protect? yes, protect
59 the law=

60H =I think mmmmm (1) the law isn't work doesn't work well um (1) there are many
61 people who don't doesn't work well and there are many people who mmm don't
62 prevent the child from drinking because err they don't punish be punished well
63 (1) err so law is very important so we should punish more strictly err who drink
64 alcohol and err law decide the age law decide. Then there are many people so if
65 we err, what I mean is (1) it is good idea to decide minimum drinking age
66 under 20 and 18, it's good idea but if we decide it then we should we should allow
67 the law more (3) more honestly. (4) mmm and the law change to under18 err under
68 20 but there are many children err who drink under 16 or it's not it's not it's not
69 it's not ummmm=

70B: I understand=

71H:=Can you understand? So if if we decided we should err allow the law more
72 strictly. (4) Um it is prob um problem that the adults (2) recommend child to drink
73 alcohol (.)

74 B: Mmmmmm what you mean is that there it's a really dangerous point that the all
75 the younger children start to drink at earlier age if the law changes or
76 [or younger]

77 H: Yes [and we yes] and we should more er strict obey the law (2)

78 G: I see your point, but I wonder how we punish the person who drink, younger
79 person. I think it's important to the people who sells don't sell to younger people

80B : Aaah. Yes. Mmm.

81H: So our opinion is if we change the law from 20 to 18 then children must
82 allow the new law to(1) err allow the law otherwise there is no meaning to change
83 the law because more and more people start drinking under 18 so (4) our opinion
84 is err if we change the law we should keep it

Appendix 4. Transcription conventions based on those in Ten Have (1999)

Each student is identified by a letter of the alphabet and the lines are numbered.

1. Sequencing

- [A single left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset
 -] A single right bracket indicates the point at which an utterance or utterance part terminates.
- There was very little overlap in the transcribed conversations.

2. Latching

= Equals signs, one at the end of one line and one at the beginning of the next, indicate no gap between two lines.

3. Timed intervals

Numbers in indicate elapsed time in silence by tenth of seconds.

(.) indicates a tiny gap within or between utterances.

4. Characteristics of speech production

Underlining indicates some form of stress.

? A question mark indicates rising intonation.

5. Japanese words are written in italics

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