

# Involvement Obligations in Communities of Practice

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One way of studying group involvement is through the paradigm of communities of practice (CofP) (Lave 1988, Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students on university campuses are simultaneously members of various CofPs. This article investigates the CofPs Japanese students were involved in while studying in the United States. It found that the whole notion of CofP involvement is framed (Bateson, 1972; Tannen & Wallerstein 1993) differently by Japanese. Specifically, the Japanese frame for attendance obligations and appropriate behavior is tighter (Goffman 1963) than that of their American counterparts. The results of this study suggest that what constitutes good demeanor is different in both societies and highlights the cultural relativity of frames regarding community of practice involvement.

Keywords: community of practice, frame, *giri*, *ninjo*.)

## Introduction

In recent years the number of Japanese students studying in North American universities has increased significantly from 47,181 in 2000 to 48,288 in 2004 (MEXT, 2005). Irrespective of their length of stay, these students will experience some combination of successful and unsuccessful cross-cultural communication.

Group involvement can be a source of confusion, perhaps even frustration, for Japanese students studying in the United States. Due to a different set of expectations regarding group involvement, communication difficulties with Americans can emerge.

The primary goal of this paper is to shed light on cultural aspects of framing of the concept “communities of practice” (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) by Japanese students. An additional goal is to demonstrate the applicability of frames (Bateson, 1972; Tannen & Wallerstein, 1993) to cross-cultural communication. The Japanese concept of involvement “obligations” (Goffman, 1967) was found to be “tighter” (Goffman, 1963) than that of Americans. Put

another way, Japanese frame two aspects of community of practice (hereafter CofP) involvement—attendance obligations and appropriate behavior—differently than Americans. Since American participants were not interviewed for this study, this reflects only Japanese perceptions of American communities of practice.

First, this paper provides a theoretical overview of relevant concepts: community of practice, frames, and contextualization cues. Next it reviews relevant literature. Finally, it demonstrates through the analysis of four interviews that Japanese frame membership in CofPs differently than Americans. Specifically, it reveals that involvement obligations concerning attendance and appropriate behavior are tighter in Japanese communities of practice.

## Community of Practice

One way to view American college life is through the theoretical paradigm of “community of practice.” Scollon (1998) attests that through the analysis of CofPs, insights can be gained regarding the learning, participation, and identity of the members. A CofP is a

group of people who through the passage of time share in the same set of social practices with a common purpose (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This group would mostly be known to each other through face-to-face interaction, and over time behavioral patterns would develop for entering novices and exiting seniors. Participation in a CofP, at a minimum, involves claiming the identity of a novice to, on the other end of the continuum, that of an expert—which entails a change in identity. Lave (1988) equates identity with theorized participation in CofPs. Based on this definition, it can be concluded that while one may have a relatively stable social identity as a Japanese or American college student, male or female, membership in various CofPs requires a change in identity to some extent.

Participants are simultaneously members of various CofPs. For example, one may be a teacher in a school, a father or mother at home, and a member of a tennis team. While our membership in various CofPs changes over time, so does the degree of membership within these communities of practice; naturally, for various reasons, individuals become more deeply involved in certain CofPs than others. The notion of frames lies at the heart of what constitutes a CofP.

## Frame Theory

Frames can be traced to Bateson (1972) who identifies communication on the the metacommunicative level of communication. This is where individuals exchange messages which signal the frame. (i.e., “joking” or “this is play”). Tannen and Wallerstein (1993) who emphasize the dynamic nature of frames have identified the concept on two levels: (1) the speaker’s meaning during the interaction and how it is categorized, and (2) the speaker’s knowledge schemata which refers to expectations about people, objects, events, and settings in the world.

To illustrate the first type of frames, Bateson (1972) points out the need for monkeys who are biting each other to know how to interpret the biting: as play or combat. Because of the internalized nature of the schemata that constitute the second type of frame, an individual may be unconscious of them. Therefore, it is

not until his/her expectations are not met that he/she has to question those expectations (Tannen, 1993). The work of Gumperz has provided insight into these different expectations or “contextual presuppositions.”

Gumperz (1982) provides a model for understanding cross-cultural communication. This framework consists of “contextualization cues” (aspects of language), which signal “contextual presuppositions” (background knowledge) that allow the hearer to make “situated inferences.” Gumperz is referring to both verbal and nonverbal behavior as well as the marginal features of language: “signaling mechanisms such as intonation, speech rhythm, and choice among lexical, phonetic, and syntactic options” (1982, p.16).

Gumperz (1978) also provides an illustration of how contextualization cues function. In a British cafeteria, Indian employees were judged as rude because of their verbalization of “gravy” in interactions with customers. The Indian women said “gravy” with falling intonation which was offensive to British customers who expected rising intonation which is associated with a request in British English. Both parties left the interaction feeling disgruntled about the other side’s intention. This illustrates that a common language does not ensure successful communication. Furthermore, Gumperz (1982) attests that people define an interaction in terms of a frame or schema that is identifiable and familiar. This is similar to the second level of frames defined by Tannen and Wallerstein (1993). Gumperz’s foundational research has influenced a vast number of studies, only a few of which will be discussed here.

Comparative research related to Americans and Greeks has highlighted ethnic style differences. Tannen (1983) distributed questionnaires to Greeks, Greek-Americans, and Americans and had them evaluate the appropriateness of certain responses to invitations. A pattern was found where Greeks were more likely to take the indirect interpretation and Americans the direct one. In another study, Tannen (1993) had Greek and American participants view a film and then summarize the contents for another person. Tannen found differences regarding levels

of frames. On one level, American participants were more conscious of the experiment, thus creating narratives with large amounts of details. On another level, Americans were more conscious of being “film viewers” compared to their Greek counterparts who did not criticize or comment on the film; put another way, while the Americans had expectations about films as films, the Greeks did not.

In a study that investigated interactions among Greeks across three contexts, a preference for disagreement was found (Kakava, 2002). This confirmed earlier research that disagreement characterizes social arguments in some cultures (Schiffrin, 1984). Speakers from outside these speech communities who do not share this assumption risk being negatively evaluated.

Along similar lines, a study of the Athabaskan people (from Northwestern Canada and Alaska) done by sociolinguists Scollon and Scollon (1981) revealed that long periods of silence are an integral part of their turn-exchange organization. Athabaskans regard silence as a crucial element to good conversation. Therefore, a “transition relevant place” (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) is different for an Athabaskan and someone from elsewhere in North America. Put another way, interlocutors’ schema regarding the appropriate juncture for taking turns is culturally determined. People from different cultures have different expectations regarding speech events (Tannen, 1993). The studies discussed here illustrate that one’s speech community propagates certain expectations about communication. Moreover, especially in cross-cultural interactions where aspects of communication are framed differently, the potential for miscommunication increases.

Framing differences have been found specifically related to Japanese discourse. Watanabe (1993) identified framing differences in the speech event of group discussions between Americans and Japanese. There were three main findings in this study: (1) Americans quickly began and ended their discussions while Japanese were methodical in their discussions of procedural matters. (2) Japanese and Americans explained their reasons differently. (3) Americans used

a “single-account” argument strategy and Japanese a “multiple accounts” one.

In her study comparing American and Japanese political debates, Furo (2002) ascertains that Japanese politicians violate the ritual turn-taking sequence of political discourse much less than American politicians who frequently interrupt both the moderator and other politicians. American politicians do this by directly attacking their opponents. Conversely, when Japanese politicians violate the turn-taking system it is done through linguistic politeness strategies. Additionally, the rhetorical structure in response to the moderator’s criticism of Japanese and American politicians was found to diverge.

Finally, an American politician moves to an emotional frame when an opponent plays unfairly, while a Japanese politician does so when his/her face is threatened. From these findings, Furo classifies American political discourse as heavily steeped in agonism (“ritual combat”) and Japanese political discourse in irenicism (“ritual harmony”). These different orientations reflect fundamentally distinct schemata where American politicians prioritize fairness and Japanese politicians emphasize face.

## The Data

The data for this study came from ten tape-recorded, semi-structured one-hour interviews that were transcribed by the author. Participants were either students or graduates of Aichi Shukutoku University—a private university near Nagoya, Japan. Due to space limitations for this paper, excerpts from only four interviews are presented for analysis here. While an interview schedule was followed, the purpose of the interviews was to elicit the interviewee’s experiences; therefore, each student was encouraged to introduce topics and shift topics away from the interview questions. The participants were all female (ages 22 through 26) and had previously spent anywhere from seven months to four years at a university in the United States. The interview questions used by the author are listed below.

- (1) Please identify and describe various communities of practice that you belonged to while in the

United States.

- (2) Please describe what you did, in other words, what your role was within each group. How often did you attend meetings and spend time with the other members?
- (3) Did you feel that you changed or acted differently within each group than you might have acted in Japan? Why or why not? What difficulties did you experience in joining?
- (4) What would have made it easier for you to participate in each of these communities of practice you have identified? What could you have done to prepare for joining?

This study originally set out to investigate the involvement of Japanese students in American CofPs. What emerged from the data was that Japanese frame involvement differently than their American counterparts. Most individuals are unaware of the frames that govern their expectations (which are rooted in schemata) and hence affect their perceptions of the world. Therefore, it is not until an encounter with someone who does not share the same expectations, and thus perception of the world, that they become evident to the speaker (Tannen, 1993). As previously stated, involvement obligations related to attendance and appropriate behavior are tighter for Japanese than for Americans.

### **Japanese Communities of Practice and the “Tightness” of Involvement Obligations**

A noteworthy finding from the interviews was how the Japanese participants framed involvement in CofP membership. Japanese involvement obligations are tighter than those of Americans. Before discussing specific findings from the interviews, two additional concepts will be defined.

Goffman (1967) identified the concepts of “obligations” and “expectations” in social interaction: rules of conduct that affect individuals. Obligations refer to how one is morally constrained to conduct him/herself, and expectations establish how others are morally bound to that person. Goffman provides an example of how a nurse has an obligation to follow medical orders related to his/her patients and an

expectation that the patients, in turn, will cooperate. Expectations and obligations are akin to contextual presuppositions and knowledge schemata. These are innate assumptions about social situations. Obligations and expectations come into play in the first interview with Chiharu.

Chiharu’s response to an information-seeking question provides some initial insight regarding involvement in Japanese CofPs. As demonstrated by the following excerpt, Chiharu initially identified personal questions as an area of difficulty that she experienced in her Japanese CofP. The deeper reasons for her discomfort are not revealed until later.

#### **[Excerpt 1]**

71. Justin: What difficult parts were there for joining either one of these two groups?
72. Chiharu: Mmm so difficulty...in Japanese group I think...they are sometimes they have try to ask me private questions.
73. Y’ know like Japanese people.

The initial hesitation and subsequent pauses in Line 72 reflect the participant’s discomfort with the Japanese CofP. Her number of pauses was much higher here than in other parts of the interview, which is undoubtedly linguistically marked (Lakoff, 2000) and not related to linguistic proficiency.

In addition, Chiharu de-emphasizes the uniqueness of her experience through the usage of “y’know.” This discourse maker can function to assert a general consensual truth that people share due to membership in the same culture, society, or group (e.g., “y’know they say an apple a day keeps the doctor away”) and to characterize an individual experience as part of a common phenomenon (Schiffrin, 1987).

Furthermore, Chiharu’s Japanese CofP did not give her the amount of free time she required. While up to this point it appears that her only objection is to the personal questions, which intruded on her personal space, it later becomes evident that the source of her discomfort is lack of personal time.

## [Excerpt 2]

80. Justin: Uh, is there anything you could have done or anything that could have been done that would have made it easier for you to participate in these two groups?
81. Chiharu: Uh: in Japanese group I think they...um if they...give me more free time, yeah that would make me easier.
82. Justin: You felt that you had to go to these meetings?
83. Chiharu: Um sometimes.
84. Justin: What do you mean?
85. Chiharu: Well...if I don't go...I kind of feel like like it hurt my relationship with them.

This excerpt further demonstrates Chiharu's desire for more personal space. Both the personal questions and weekly obligations to attend these meetings pose a threat to her negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), or want for independence. Furthermore, Lines 83 and 85 indicate that she was conscious of the negative repercussions of not attending these meetings.

These desires for more free time and personal space have been echoed by other researchers as well. In her study of a Tokyo factory, Japanese-American anthropologist Dorinne Kondo (1990) describes the demands and obligations that accompany Japanese hospitality. Kondo initially welcomed their beneficence; however, as time passed, the demands and obligations of Japanese social life mounted. Along with the mounting frustration that accompanied this constant involvement, Kondo was asked to reciprocate by teaching English. She includes a quote by her landlady that sums up the ritual nature of Japanese involvement and obligations, "*jibun o taisetsu ni shinai no, ne.*" (The Japanese do not treat themselves as important, do they?) (p. 22). That is, they do things for the purpose of maintaining good social relations with others, irrespective of personal desires. Along the same line, Maynard (1997) characterizes "self" as belonging to others in Japan. Chiharu's interview suggests that even for some Japanese these obligations can be stifling.

The next excerpt further attests to Chiharu's

perceived lack of free time which was manifested by having to attend social events. While she cites her personality as the reason for not being able to refuse her Japanese friends, this would not support previous responses from her.

## [Excerpt 3]

- Justin: Is there anything you could have done personally to prepare to join either of these two groups?
94. Chiharu: Prepare? U:h...personally?
- 95: Yeah if I could say "oh I don't feel like going out today."
- 96: I mean to Japanese group. I could say it would have made things easier.
97. But sometimes I couldn't say that.
98. Justin: Why?
99. Chiharu: *Why?*
100. Uh because of my personality

While it is probably true that Chiharu could not refuse the group as indicated in Line 97, it is doubtful that her personality was the sole reason. The more plauging question here is whether or not Chiharu could have refused their invitation and still maintained her role as a member in that CofP: *Giri*, or social obligation, potentially affected her behavior.

In Japanese society conduct is governed by *giri* (Haring, 1967) which refers to the obligations owed to others who occupy specific statuses. In traditional Japanese society, warriors were bound to their master to the degree that they would sacrifice their own lives for him (Frederic, 2002). Today, *giri* binds people to act in socially appropriate ways, even when that conflicts with *ninjo* (personal desires). *Giri* does not imply a single, universal code; in fact, various social situations require new obligations. *Giri* is supported by *honbun* (proper duty) and its variants which include duty toward occupations (*shoku-bun*) and duty to one's class (*mi-bun*) (Haring, 1967).

The interplay between *ninjo* and *giri* seems pertinent to Chiharu's interview. Through the use of constructed dialogue (Tannen, 1989), Chiharu communicates her personal desires (*Yeah if I could say, "oh I don't feel like going out today,"* Line

95). This is the only time that Chiharu constructs her own speech; to state this more accurately, she uses dialogue to report what was not said (Tannen, 1989). The usage of direct quotations is one method of creating a more descriptive portrait of the “author” whose speech is being “animated” (Schiffrin, 2002). In this excerpt, Chiharu is both “author” and “animator” (Goffman, 1981). Thus, it appears that through the use of this direct quotation Chiharu is highlighting its significance. Furthermore, reporting what is not said presupposes that something could or should have happened (Schiffrin, 2002). This supports earlier statements about the desire for more free time (Line 81). This quotation symbolizes Chiharu’s internal conflict between *giri* and *ninjo*. Although she references her personality as the reason for her inability to refuse the group, this contradicts what she said earlier in the interview (“*I kind of feel like like it hurt my relationship with them.*” Line 85). *Giri* is such a strong force that it is linked to moral worth. In Japan, to be observant of *giri* reflects high moral worth, while to neglect it can result in losing the trust of others (Frederic, 2002).

In addition to *giri*, “deference” and “demeanor” (Goffman, 1967) are crucial in providing a complete portrayal of obligations. Unlike *giri*, these concepts are not specific to Japanese culture. Deference refers to the appreciation an individual shows to another. There are two main forms of deference: avoidance rituals and presentation rituals. Avoidance rituals refer to those forms of deference where an actor keeps him/herself at a distance from the recipient. For example, in American society one would not ask a personal question such as one’s age. Goffman provides an example based on his own research in psychiatric wards. When an economically disadvantaged patient declined an offer to go on an outing, feigning lack of interest, the other patients accepted this at face value, knowing she lacked a suitable coat. The second type of deference is presentation rituals. These are ways people show others they are part of a group. Simple examples are greetings, compliments, or invitations. Both presentation and avoidance rituals are forms of deference, thus their purpose is to respect individuals.

This is inextricably related to *giri* and *ninjo*. If Chiharu had indulged her *ninjo*, she would have violated *giri*, which would have resulted in losing good demeanor. As previously mentioned, to neglect *giri* in Japanese society results in losing the support of others. The stakes here are much higher than in societies not bound by *giri* or a similar moral code.

Demeanor refers to the elements of the individual’s behavior conveyed through his/her actions or manner of dress, which conveys to others the presence, or lack thereof, certain desirable qualities. In contemporary American society, someone who displays proper demeanor has attributes including discretion and sincerity, self-control, and poise (Goffman, 1967). Most important, however, is that good demeanor is what is required of an individual if he/she is to be relied upon by others as an interactant in social occasions. By giving or withholding deference to others, an individual expresses good or bad demeanor. To illustrate the interrelationship between deference and demeanor, Goffman gives the example of a patient bathing before seeing his/her doctor to show him/her deference. The patient is concurrently presenting him/herself as a clean, well-demeaned person.

Deference and demeanor simultaneously interface with *giri* to provide a complete portrayal of the obligations that Chiharu was under. The Japanese group showed her deference by asking her to join various activities while she in turn exhibited good demeanor by accepting. In short, her regular participation which was bound by *giri* displayed good demeanor. A rejection is the kind of aberrant behavior that would not display good demeanor. To capitulate into *ninjo* would violate social obligations and perhaps induce a judgment that she is too individualistic and thus selfish—both negative attributes within Japanese society (Yamada, 1997).

Chiharu provides us with a portrait of the relatively tight involvement obligations that frame CofP membership. “Tightness” and “looseness” refer to ways that devotion to a social situation is exhibited as defined by individual societies (Goffman, 1963). Whereas an attendant in a health institution may have to wear a tie during the day, at night he/she may be

able to remove the tie and still exhibit appropriate devotion to the social situation. If one moment of the interaction is isolated and a conclusion drawn that the social occasion is “tight,” this may not be a definitive picture of the occasion. This discussion of “tightness” and “looseness” is limited to attendance and behavioral obligations; it is quite conceivable that other aspects of CofP membership demonstrate “looseness.” Based on Chiharu’s statements, these involvement obligations include answering apparently intrusive personal questions and an obligation to accept social invitations. The tightness of these obligations becomes clear when they are contrasted with the looseness found in American communities of practice.

To summarize the main parts of this discussion so far, Chiharu characterized the actions of her Japanese CofP as violating her negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This was manifested by the personal questions they asked her (Line 72), her desire for additional free time (Line 81), and the potential risk of harming the relationship if she rejected their invitations (Line 85). In short, a conflict between *giri* and *ninjo* exists within Chiharu, but she is obligated to adhere to *giri* or else risk losing good demeanor and potentially the trust of others.

Attendance obligations are a common thread that link Chiharu’s interview with the one that follows and illustrate how Japanese frame CofP involvement. In the first excerpt, Kayoko discusses the ease in which she could enter an American CofP—in this case the campus Outing Club.

[Excerpt 4]

54. Kayoko: But I think compared to other groups like a fraternity or many causal groups, so we get, we had a meeting once per week, but there’s nobody pressure you to join the meeting.
55. Then, on weekends, if we go on that trip we can go, but if we have something to do we don’t have to go.
56. Justin: Okay.
57. Kayoko: I like that style because in Japan if we organize, if we belong to some

organization we *must* u:m attend the meeting or join, so that’s why I like that style, so if I’m busy I didn’t go.

Notice the change from “have to” (Line 55) to “must” (Line 57) when describing a hypothetical Japanese community of practice. Moreover, the stress on the modal “must” is a contextualization cue signaling how Japanese frame CofP membership. One function of modals is to speak with authority (Schiffrin, 1994). Through the usage of the modal, Kayoko simultaneously evokes her authority and emphasizes the mandatory nature of attendance in Japan. She contrasts this with the American style in Lines 54-55 which does not have this obligation.

Kayoko’s comments regarding involvement obligations not only support those of Chiharu, but take an additional step by not classifying an American CofP as an actual “organization.” In other words, the involvement obligations that constitute an American community of practice are nonexistent in the schemata that frame “organization” for her.

[Excerpt 5]

86. Justin: So do you feel like you changed or acted differently when you were in these different groups; differently than you would have acted in Japan?
87. Kayoko: Uh I think uh...I didn’t have to go there, so I didn’t feel it’s like organization.
88. But I think if I belonged something in Japan maybe I feel more obligation to attend the meeting or to join, so I like the way in the States...yes.

This excerpt seems to suggest some conflicting feelings for Kayoko. Membership in American CofPs is paradoxical in nature for her; while she likes the American style of CofP membership, she does not feel as though it is an actual organization which she expresses in Line 87. Kayoko seemingly identifies the concept of “organization” as involving mandatory attendance.

While Kayoko appears to understand and enjoy the American style of CofP membership, her internalized concept of membership continues to

influence her as demonstrated by the next excerpt. On the one hand while she seems to want to adopt the American style of group membership, on the other hand, her frame for group membership does not allow this flexibility. This parallels Goffman's (1963) theory which maintains that employees who are unable to leave their uniforms in a locker room continue to devote much of themselves to non-work related occasions. Kayoko, too, cannot remove this invisible uniform which represents the tightness of social obligations.

[Excerpt 6]

92. Justin: Did you experience any difficulty in joining?

93. Kayoko: Uh but when I didn't attend, I feel um should I go today or like eh ISA [International Student Association] you know many, I know the member so it's the same in Japan too.

I wonder if they feel bad if I don't go there, so I tried to go to most meetings.

Kayoko, too, appears to be bound by *giri* to attend the CofP events ("*I wonder if they feel bad if I don't go there, so I tried to go to most meetings,*" Line 93). Her comments support Chiharu's in the sense that her decision to attend is not strictly governed by personal feelings: she is concerned about the feelings of others. This desire to maintain harmony has been reported elsewhere (Maynard, 1997; Yamada, 1997). Their comments diverge in that Kayoko knows the involvement obligations are looser in the American CofP.

American CofP involvement obligations are depicted as looser compared to Japanese ones ("*Then, on weekends, if we go on that trip we can go, but if we have something to do we don't have to go,*" Line 55). As previously stated, the involvement obligations of Japanese CofPs are much tighter.

To conclude this section, the tightness of involvement obligations regarding attendance, which is rooted in the code of *giri*, is a condition that presupposes membership in Japanese CofPs. This finding suggests that Japanese frame CofP attendance obligations more tightly than Americans. The above

discussion has only begun to suggest that framing differences can be possible sources of cross-cultural miscommunication. This will be elaborated on in the next section.

### American Communities of Practice and the "Looseness" of Involvement Obligations

The "looseness" of involvement obligations in American CofPs was particularly noticeable in the dormitory. Excerpts from the next two interviews show evidence that suggests framing differences of another aspect of CofP involvement: behavior obligations. In the proceeding excerpt, Miho describes the common practice of visiting other peoples' rooms unannounced in American dormitories.

[Excerpt 7]

65. Justin: So what part of the dorm was *different* for you?

66. Miho: Well, everyone was really friendly, like they said me "Stop by anytime." That was um one of the *difficult* things because in Japan we never do it. They kept saying me that but I couldn't do that even at the end.

67. Justin: Did you notice what some American students did?

68. Miho: Yes, I saw they are visiting other rooms freely, so I know it's real, but still I couldn't do it.

Miho points out the interviewer's assumption: the dorm was not "different" (Line 65) but in fact "difficult" (Line 66) for her. One context where the discourse marker "well" is utilized is when a questioner makes an inaccurate assumption (Schiffrin, 1987). She emphasizes that it was difficult for her, and framing differences emerge concerning the looseness of involvement related to behavior. The use of constructed dialogue creates a more descriptive portrait of the "author" whose speech is being "animated." As previously noted, the use of direct quotations can create a sense of aliveness that would otherwise not exist (Schiffrin, 2002). Even though her floormates make it clear that visiting their rooms unannounced is perfectly acceptable, Miho is



not comfortable with this because it is not common practice in Japan (“*That was u:m one of difficult things because in Japan we never do that,*” Line 66). Evidently, she is not questioning the sincerity of the invitation (“*Yes, I saw they are visiting other rooms freely, so I know it’s real, but still I couldn’t do it,*” Line 68). Presumably the extension of this presentation ritual is to acknowledge that she is part of the CofP.

Unlike Kayoko, Miho does not positively evaluate the looseness that seems to dominate much of American dormitory social life. Recall Kayoko’s positive evaluation of the way Outing Club members approached involvement obligations (“*Then, on weekends, if we go on that trip we can go, but if we have something to do we don’t have to go,*” Line 55). A common thread linking them is they were unable to accept the looseness of involvement obligations in their subsequent American CofPs. It appears that this is due to framing differences. Finally, another participant commented on the looseness of American dormitory life in general.

**[Excerpt 8]**

81. Justin: So what was the dorm like?  
 82. Yumi: U:m it was very relax. I mean the peoples very casual.  
 83. Justin: In what way?  
 84. Yumi: They wear pajamas even in the daytime, yes they eat cereals in front the TV in the lounge...I am shocked was shocked by that. They seems like not care anything...  
 85. Justin: I see. You wouldn’t do that in Japan?  
 86. Yumi: We *cannot* do it.

Yumi, like Miho, does not positively evaluate the looseness of involvement related to behavior in her dormitory. Initially, it is not apparent that she will negatively evaluate the dormitory (“*I mean the peoples very casual,*” Line 82). Americans place great importance on the kind of relaxed atmosphere Yumi describes (Sakamoto & Naotsuka, 2004). Her self-initiated self-repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977) indexes her prolonged shock regarding this (“*I am shocked was shocked by that,*” Line 84). A

final point regarding this excerpt is the significance of both the usage and subsequent stress on the modal “cannot” which evokes her authority (Schiffrin, 1994).

Demeanor comes into play differently in all of the interviews discussed. Chiharu is seen as having good demeanor because of her adherence to attendance obligations. Kayoko understands that she will not risk displaying poor demeanor by not attending every Outing Club event, yet she feels obligated at some level to do so. The interviews with Miho and Yumi shed additional insight into what constitutes proper demeanor concerning behavior in Japan.

## Discussion

The four interviews diverge at one point: whereas Chiharu and Kayoko discuss attendance obligations, Miho and Yumi are concerned with appropriate behavior in the social occasion, or what is referred to as situational proprieties (Goffman, 1963). For Miho, it is not appropriate to unexpectedly visit her floormates’ rooms. Yumi, on the other hand, interprets her floormates’ behavior as socially inappropriate, or a situational impropriety (Goffman, 1963). The significance of this becomes accentuated in a cross-cultural encounter where actors who are accustomed to different structures of involvement may unintentionally offend others. Once again, this is rooted in differences related to the framing on the level of schemata (Tannen & Wallat, 1993). It is quite conceivable actions natural for Americans would result in losing demeanor in Japan. This is explored in greater depth in the final section of the paper.

## Conclusion

The study reported in this paper demonstrated framing differences in American CofPs by Japanese international and exchange students. More specifically, the tightness of obligations related to attendance and behavior is different in Japanese and American CofPs. Whereas American CofPs tend to lean toward the looser end of the spectrum, the opposite is true of Japanese ones. The analysis herein has shown that some aspects of frames are culturally specific which has implications for cross-cultural communication.

First, involvement in Japanese CofPs may be difficult for many Americans. For instance, the finding that Japanese CofP membership is defined by relatively tight attendance and behavioral obligations may be unfamiliar to many Americans. Because Americans are usually not accustomed to these implicit requirements, they could unknowingly create an impression to the Japanese of lacking good demeanor. This concept of expected participation is foreign to many Americans due to the nonexistence of a moral code analogous to *giri*. Moreover, even if they are aware of this expectation of regular attendance, in practice, it may be difficult to follow. Research has shown that the acculturation attitudes between American and Japanese co-workers are not always compatible (Komisarof, 2004). Furthermore, the looseness that seemingly prevails in American dormitories, which prompted a negative reaction by a Japanese participant, could become a potential source of negative appraisal in Japan. The maintenance of public appearance is one of the most evident ways an individual exhibits situational presence (Goffman, 1963). Further, this could evolve into another reason supporting the commonly held belief that Westerners are unable or unwilling to adapt to Japanese culture. Japanese sometimes regard certain aspects of their culture as inaccessible to outsiders. Iino (1996) has referred to this as “restricted culture,” and she gives the example of many Japanese not expecting Westerners to be able to eat *natto* (fermented soybeans).

Second, there is the risk of a similar belief developing here along the lines of Japanese not being able to participate appropriately in American CofPs. For example, an inability to adapt to the American custom of stopping by another’s room could potentially create an assumption that the individual is anti-social. Whereas Americans are often characterized as outgoing and cordial, one often needs to take initiative in order to form relationships (Tsukamoto, 2003). Thus, stereotypes about Japanese being shy or lacking self-initiative may continue to prevail (Tsukamoto, 2003). Unfortunately, an offense can be generalized to other social gatherings even when that is not the intention (Goffman, 1963). Additionally,

improper behavior in one situation tells us a great deal about behavior in other situations (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, one runs the risk of being judged as engaging in situational improprieties across a wide array of social situations.

In conclusion, the current study has shown cultural differences in the concept of framing regarding CofP involvement. It also demonstrates that the careful analysis of contextualization cues, and subsequent frames they signal, can serve to help identify the causes of miscommunication among people from different cultures. Finally, the notion of frames, allows researchers to connect people’s knowledge schemata at the global level about concepts such as group membership with their communicative behavior at the moment of interaction. The former has a constant influence both on individuals’ behaviors and on their interpretations of the interaction in progress.

#### Appendix: Transcript Conventions

Transcription conventions follow those used in Schiffrin (1987).

- . falling intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at the end of declarative sentence)
- ? rising intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at end of interrogative sentence)
- , continuing intonation: may be slight rise or fall in contour (less than “.” or “?”); may be followed by a pause (shorter than “.” or “?”)
- ! animated tone
- ... noticeable pause or break in rhythm without falling intonation (each half- second pause is marked as measured by stop watch)
- self interruption with glottal stop
- : lengthened syllable
- italics* emphatic stress
- CAPS very emphatic stress

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