

Through the Glass Ceiling

A Comparison of Autistics and Foreigners in Japan

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In this paper¹ we discuss the analogy between Autistic² people and foreigners in Japan. Using the metaphor of a glass ceiling, we discuss communication and employment. Thinking about the invisible obstacles facing Autistics, we focus on matters of communicative and other social interaction. Citing some experiences of Autistic people³ in Japan, we discuss how high the glass ceiling may be for them, and we draw parallels with the case of foreigners in Japan.

Key Words : Japan, Autism, advocacy, linguistic discrimination, glass ceiling

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1. This paper is based on our workshop synopsis for Autreat 2007, which was held June 25-29, 2007, near Philadelphia, and which was organized by Autism Network International (ANI), a self-advocacy organization for Autistic people (<http://www.ani.ac/>). We thank Jim Sinclair, a coordinator of ANI, for encouraging our participation. This paper contains some modifications and additions to the earlier synopsis.
 2. The authors are keen to use the terms "Autism" and "Autistic" with upper case "A" when showing respect for the culture of Autism. Similarly, the Deaf rights movement uses upper case "D" in laying claim to their culture, in opposition to scholars who use lower case "d" when discussing deafness solely as a medical condition.
 3. In this paper, "Autistic people" means people with any type of Autism regardless of their Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.). In order to accentuate their group identity in this paper, we prefer to use the term "Autistic people" instead of "people with Autism", an expression which might be encouraged by the American Psychological Association (APA). As we note on footnote 2, the authors respect Autism as a culture, rather as medical condition. Some Autistic activists and scholars have clearly stated their position not to use "person first" language regarding their identity. For instance, Sinclair (1999) states his reasons for his opposition to "person first" language as follows:

- 1) Saying "person with Autism" suggests that the Autism can be separated from the person.[...]
- 2) Saying "person with Autism" suggests that even if Autism is part of the person, it isn't a very important part.[...]
- 3) Saying "person with Autism" suggests that Autism is something bad--so bad that it isn't even consistent with being a person. [...]

Roberson & Ne'eman (2008) accepts Sinclair's position and state in a footnote as follows:

We have chosen to follow Sinclair (1999) with our usage of identity-first language (ex. Autistic people) rather than adopt person-first language (ex. people with autism). The American Psychological Association has recommended that academic authors "respect people's preferences; call people what they prefer to be called" (APA, 2001, p. 63). Identity-first language is widely preferred by the international autistic self-advocacy community.

Out of respect for the above precedents, in this paper, we are proposing an alternative view of the current status and policy for Autistic people in Japan, where such persons have heretofore been discussed mainly from a monocultural medical perspective.

Introduction

How high is the “glass ceiling” for us? This is one of the fundamental questions for Autistic people⁴ surviving in society outside of the Autistic community. To share our critical thinking on this question, we cite some examples of the survival of Autistics in Japan, a country where the social awareness of Autism and related disorders has been rapidly rising. We first review examples of the struggle of Autistic people in Japan, using published anecdotes and our personal experiences. Second, we try to learn from the experiences of “foreigners” in Japan. We hope to draw parallels between “the Autistic” and “the foreigner” through the lens of communication.

Autistic people in Japan struggle in their social lives despite their high academic achievements. For instance, it is normally difficult for Autistics to pass a job interview. One woman, who is regarded as having Asperger’s Syndrome, is a famous author who advocates for Autistics and works at home doing translations. She confesses, “I failed the job interview at any company I visited. One interviewer said “You speak without looking at others’ eyes. Do you have a *Taijin Kyofusho*?”⁵ (Izumi, 2004, p. 42). In general, clinicians and psychologists claim that Autistic people are less social than *normal* or *ordinary* people. There are similar claims that Autistic people have low communication skills (e.g., National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2010).

Reflecting on this situation, all Autism seminars in Japan are focused on *how the behaviors of Autistic people can be modified*, which is a mere continuation of the long-standing medical model. However, we should also consider the advisability of making some adjustments to the social environment of Autistic people for their well-being. We must advance beyond the narrow clinical perspective to look critically at the situation from a macro level. What in the society (local, national, and international) has sparked a sense of the need for *clinical* or *official* support for Autistic people? It is certainly likely that there have

been persons since ancient times who today would be diagnosed as Autistic, yet who were not so diagnosed in former times. In other words, the clinical concept of Autism is relatively new, but this new concept must be kept in proper perspective.

We also consider the language accommodations for foreigners in Japan. There have been some metaphors which connote Autistic people’s difficulty in communicating with the outside world. For instance, as a woman with Asperger’s Syndrome, Sainsbury (2000) refers to persons with Asperger’s Syndrome as “martian” (pp. 1 and 3) and “alien” (pp. 8, 19, and 36), meaning that children with it have difficulty understanding what other people think. Of course, no real martians have ever been discovered, but *registered aliens* are common in Japan, and we cannot help but notice the similarities with Autistic people of these foreigners with their language and cultural difficulties. Despite these similarities, we are unaware of any critical investigation of the analogy of foreigners and Autistics in Japan. Because Japan is a country whose overwhelming majority of inhabitants speak only Japanese language, residents from overseas often struggle to communicate with the majority Japanese people. As a consequence, there is language support from both the public and private sectors (e.g., job interviews in English, radio stations with multi-language programs,⁶ signs in English or Korean on public transportation). Just as foreigners are so accommodated, we question whether Japanese “neurotypical people”⁷ might also be able to accommodate the communication style of Autistic people, rather than forcing Autistic people to modify language that is intended for neurotypical people.

Autistic people in Japan

Let us consider the case of a Japanese man, Taro, who has been diagnosed with “Pervasive Developmental Disorder” (PDD), which is one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders, by the National Institute of Mental Health (2010), and who is similar to many others reported in the literature on Autistic people

4. Our position regarding “people first” is in line with Sinclair (1999) and Roberson & Ne’eman (2008). These and other authors use the term “Autistics”, which we generally applaud. Moreover, although stylistic guidelines of the American Psychological Association promote person-first language, we also prefer the identity-first “Autistic people” as a culturally less offensive compromise between “Autistics” and “people with Autism”. See Roberson & Ne’eman (2008) for a full description of this position, and note too the titles of the references. Keeping these contrasts in mind will allow a better appreciation of our own suggestions in the conclusion of this paper.

5. Our translation from original Japanese, “*Taijin Kyofusho* or ‘anthrophobia’ is a Japanese culture-specific diagnostic label for the presenting problems of various fear reactions in interpersonal situations.” (Tanaka-Matsumi, 1979)

6. Since the 1980s, several radio stations in Japan, other than those from American Forces Network and the Public Broadcaster which broadcasts foreign language teaching programs, have broadcast programs in several languages other than in Japanese, a de-facto dominant language in the nation.

7. Sinclair (1998) defines this term as follows: “Neurotypical (abbreviated NT), used either as an adjective or a noun, refers to people who do not have Autistic-type brains. NT is considered more specific than ‘normal’ as the definition of ‘normal’ is very much dependent on context.”

in Japan (Miyazaki and DeChicchis, 2007). Taro has one persistent frustration: communication and communicative ability seem to delimit a glass ceiling that thwarts the aspirations of Autistic people.

Job Hunting Difficulty

Japanese university students enter society upon graduation in a ritualized process of job hunting, a process that can be debilitating for many Autistic people. As a graduate student in Japan, Taro applied for jobs at over thirty companies and was granted about twenty “first-interviews,” yet he failed to get even one job offer, and the reasons for these failures always involved the word “communication.” Taro asked the career placement office at his university several times for practical advice on job hunting. The advisors told him that companies primarily seek “communication skills” in new graduates. They need neither academic skills, nor academic knowledge. For instance, reviewing statistics and historical documents regarding school-to-work transitions in Japan, Honda (2004, p. 105) argues:

[...] the specific feature of the Japanese transition system is its weakness in providing youth with vocational qualifications on the one hand, and the strong co-operative relationship between schools and employees on the other.

The reason for this is that, according to the survey by Honda, schools and universities do not train students for specific jobs, so the hiring companies must provide basic training and professional development for new graduates. As part of this training, most companies force young people to work as salespeople. Thus, good communication skills are sought in new graduates as a guarantee that they can succeed at Japanese companies. For instance, according to research funded by the Benesse Educational Research & Development Center, a Japanese think-tank for educational policy, a majority of Japanese companies expect new college graduates to have potential and generic skills, such as manner and teamwork skills, and companies emphasize interviews when evaluating job candidates (Okabe and Higuchi, 2009). Reflecting the above facts, we suspect that, the communicatively atypical Autistic people are thus judged to be unsuitable.

Taro, the man with a PDD diagnosis, realizing that he has some difficulty with interpersonal communication (e.g., stammering, getting confused by unexpected responses), would sometimes tell an employment counselor at his university, “I

worry about interpersonal communication.” The counselor would then reply, “Please get accustomed to interpersonal communication. The more interviews you take, the more you get accustomed to interpersonal communication. It is a good opportunity to change yourself!” The university counselor continued, “If you can’t change yourself, then it is just due to your lack of effort. Everyone can succeed by just making an effort.” (Personal communication, January 17, 2007)

Given his talents in several areas, as measured by objective criteria (e.g., TOEFL scores from Educational Testing Service, GPA from a Japanese university), Taro could not understand why he could not pass any of his job interviews. He became further confused when he sought advice from a counselor at a staff agency outside of his university. When asked, “How do you define communication skills?” he was told by the agency counselor, “I cannot define that. Please play along with others.” Taro recalls thinking to himself, “I am struggling because I do not know how to play along with others.” He also realized that the felicitous use of Japanese language by the counselor had collapsed, because the counselor had been using the term “communication skills” as a magic talisman, without questioning what the term might actually mean. Having at first honestly sought to learn the basis of “communication skills,” Taro later realized that this was simply a meaningless label used to exclude individuals who have undesirable patterns of language use. (personal communication, January 17, 2007)

The situation facing this man and many other Autistic people is reminiscent of the discriminatory treatment that some African Americans have received because of their “sounding too black” over the telephone. For example, in parts of the United States, it has been common to screen prospective apartment renters with a telephone interview, ostensibly to assess their character and to gather some pertinent facts about income and family size. However, the landlords’ decisions were often based primarily on the applicant’s sociolect, a variety of language associated with a social group such as a socioeconomic class, an ethnic group, an age group, etc. (Wolfram, 2004). Applicants who “sounded white” were accepted in favor over applicants who “sounded black.” In the U.S., relevant court cases and settlements have been tracked by the Tennessee Fair Housing Council and have been widely reported (e.g., Berry, 2007; National Fair Housing Advocate 1992). The sociolinguistic basis of sounding black has been researched since the 1960s (cf. Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Rickford 1972; Wolfram & Fasold,

1974), and the phonetic elements associated with African American English are discussed in current textbooks (e.g., Green, 2002). As a consequence, linguists have argued that we should not discriminate unfairly against speakers of nonstandard language varieties, and that we should strive to understand the regular patterns of those nonstandard varieties.

Employment for People with Disabilities in Japan

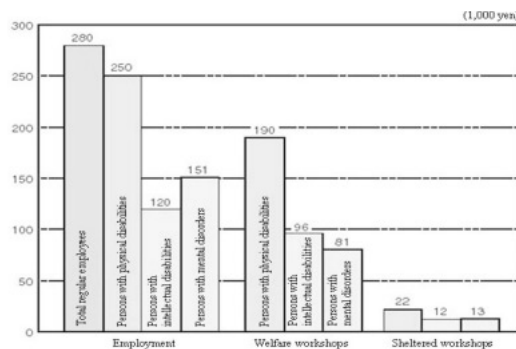
In Japan, Autistic people and people with other developmental disorders are in a complicated situation vis-à-vis disability. People with disabilities are covered by *Shogaisha Kihonho* [“the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities”] (Japan 1970). Such people are entitled to receive a booklet called the *Shogaisha Techo* [“disabled persons identification booklet”], which identifies a person as disabled, and which serves as proof of entitlement to certain benefits. The *Shogaisha Techo* is issued in accord with a governmental screening process, which is initiated at the request of a disabled person or family member.

In Japan, disability is divided into three categories: *physical*, *intellectual*, and *mental* disabilities. Legally, the term *Shogaisha* [“persons with disabilities”] is defined thus: “The term ‘persons with disabilities’ in this law means individuals whose daily life or social life is substantially and continuously limited due to physical, intellectual, or mental disability (hereinafter referred to as ‘disability’).” (Japan, 1970, Section 2)⁸ Because there is no individual category of *developmental disorder* (including both high-functioning and low-functioning Autism), Autistic people may be placed in one or more of these three categories, depending on the specifics of each individual. For instance, if the person’s Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) is low, he or she could be regarded as an *intellectually handicapped* person, and he, she, or the person’s parents may choose to register the person as such with the municipality. Some Autistic people with this identification are categorized as *mentally handicapped* people, because they have been diagnosed as mentally depressed or schizophrenic, for instance.

In our experience of interviewing job seekers with Autism and managing a nonprofit organization for facilitating the employment of Autistic people, we

have observed that Autistic people, especially those regarded as high-functioning, may wonder whether they should get a job as an *ordinary person* or as a *handicapped person*. If they market themselves as an *ordinary person*, it is risky because most colleagues may not know that a developmental disorder can sometimes result in difficulties with communication or other work tasks. On the other hand, if they are hired as an *intellectually* or *mentally* handicapped person, it could also be risky because many companies are reluctant to hire people *who are not likely to work as normal*. These observations are certainly understandable given the income data published by the Japanese government, which show that a person who gets a job as a handicapped person typically gets a lower salary than does a *regular employee*. Figure 1 shows the income differences for *regular employees*, *people with physical disabilities*, *people with intellectual disabilities*, and *people with mental disabilities*.

Figure 1: Average Amount of Monthly Wage (Source: Japan Cabinet Office, 2005)⁹



In Figure 1, *Welfare workshops* and *Sheltered workshops* indicate the types of governmentally supported workshops especially designed for disabled people, such as factories, second-hand shops, and restaurants¹⁰. This graph shows that an Autistic person hired as an *intellectually* or *mentally handicapped* person may suffer a lower income, perhaps half that of an ordinary person, or even lower. Even so, looking for a job as a regular employee may result in great anxiety.

8. Cited from the English translation.

9. Japan Cabinet Office. (2005). Annual report on government measures for persons with disabilities (Summary). Retrieved August 16, 2008, from <http://www8.cao.go.jp/shougai/english/annualreport/2005/mokuji.html> and <http://www8.cao.go.jp/shougai/english/annualreport/2005/1-5.html>

10. New statute, *Shogaisha Jiritsu Shienho* [“Persons with Disabilities Independence Support Act”] (Japan, 2005), implemented in 2006, has changed categorization of these workplaces which are designed for people with disabilities.

Japanese Law

The general public in Japan is just starting to become aware of Autism. In April 2005, a statute for supporting people with developmental disorders was implemented. The *Hattatsu Shogaisha Shienho* ["The Persons with Developmental Disabilities Support Act"] (Japan, 2004) assigns to many institutions the responsibility of supporting people with developmental disorders. These include national and municipal governments, governmentally funded support centers, and other institutions. The statute encourages early identification of children with developmental disorders by medical experts and early intervention on their behalf. According to Article 2 of the law, *Hattatsu Shogai* ["developmental disorders"] is defined as Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, other kinds of developmental disorders, learning disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other disorders of brain function. The symptoms of these disorders appear at an earlier age. (Japan, 2004, Article 2)¹¹

The Persons with Developmental Disabilities Support Act is a statute for defining the responsibilities of stakeholders, including municipalities, schools, and social welfare services organizations. The statute does not define concrete services for persons with developmental disabilities and Autistic persons. In typical Japanese fashion, the statute is vaguely written, and its interpretation varies from one municipality to another. For instance, regarding the *Shogaisha Techo* ["disability handbook"], according to the primary author's personal experiences with social workers and medical experts, it is said that there are some municipalities where persons with developmental disabilities without mental retardation can easily receive the booklet. But, in other municipalities, this is not the case. A common perception among psychiatrists is that *The Persons with Developmental Disabilities Support Act* has made it easier for persons with developmental disabilities without mental retardation to get welfare benefits from municipalities. However, the level of service for the wide range of Autistic people in Japan is determined on an inconsistent case-by-case basis, especially regarding employment.

There is a specific statute which addresses the employment of persons with disabilities, *The Shogaisha no Koyo no Sokushinnado ni Kansuru Houritsu* ["The Law for Employment Promotion

et cetera of the Disabled"] (Japan, 1960). The interpretation of this statute also varies according to municipality. Consequently, depending on the Autistic person's municipality of residence, it may be either easy or impossible to receive support.

Some professionals object to the statute, because it may further stigmatize people with developmental disorders. One psychiatrist (Ishikawa, 2005, p. 54) argues that "The law is focused on the early detection and intervention of the disorders. If the law is going to be seriously implemented, it is clear that some people may be deeply labeled."¹²

Myths of Communication

Many scholars (e.g. Cohen and Remillard, 2006; Oi, 2004; Shriberg et al. 2001; Sugiyama, 2002) have described the communication of Autistic people, but we suggest that such description often encourages inaccurate stereotyping among the therapists, teachers, and caregivers who work with Autistic people. Moreover, we suspect that some scholars harbor narrow understandings of communication which may ignore certain mannerisms of Autistic people's communication. Oi, a Japanese scholar of speech pathology, explains the main obstacles of the communication behavior of youth with high-functioning PDD as (2004, p. 24)¹³:

1. Not able to make flexible negotiation; not even about minor or trifling matters.
2. Speaking too honestly.
3. Speaking unilaterally.
4. Changing the topic of conversation without notice.
5. Using phraseology that listeners find unpleasant.
6. Problems with gaze, facial expression, and proximity.
7. Not able to guess what others' speaking means.
8. Has difficulties understanding jokes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, irony.

We suggest that this explanation of obstacles reflects a therapeutic perspective, which is why it tends toward modifying the patient's behavior, rather than modifying the attitudes of the neurotypicals who communicate with people diagnosed with PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder). Also

11. Our translation from original Japanese.

12. Our translation from original Japanese.

13. Our translation from original Japanese.

problematic is the undefined boundary between “speaking honestly” and “speaking too honestly.” Although such a description may be the result of respect for Autistic people and a hope to strengthen people with PDD, it also demeans Autistic people by discussing how to “improve” the behavior of Autistic people in order to meet a neurotypical standard of communication.

Other professionals involved with Autism have suggested the possibility of societal changes which have created difficulties for Autistic people or people with Asperger’s Syndrome. Shimizu (2005, p. 103), a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Japan, looks back on the personalities of men who seemed to have had Asperger’s Syndrome some decades ago in Japan, when the notion of Autism or Asperger’s Syndrome was unknown by the general public. He notes that such men, for instance those who worked as craftsmen, were evaluated as “being unique” and that they could avoid complicated communications with others. Shimizu argues (p. 103):

Although being respectfully shunned and treated as lucid masters, as fastidious men, as persons who do not like socializing, as unreasonable men, they were trusted with respect to their jobs. Because of this, others distanced themselves from them, so that the persons themselves might better concentrate on their principal occupations. As a result, they could improve their techniques as a master craftsman. I assume that there was such a story. ... If we reason as though they are lacking “sociality,” being bad at “communication,” and having difficulty sharing sympathy, and if we use a foreign-made diagnosis, who could benefit and how so?

Shimizu suggests that the de facto internationally dominant diagnostic systems for psychiatric disabilities, including tools such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disabilities (DSM-IV-TR)* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (World Health Organization, 2007), may have increased the useless labeling as “disabled” of some persons who used to be considered valuable professionals in particular industries.

Although it is difficult for us to generalize, we can see parallels between *foreigners* and *Autistic people* through the lens of communication. Both

might have some problems of socialization, and both could be stigmatized. However, one fact is that some *highly skilled workers* from outside of Japan actually exist.¹⁴ We suggest that it is the dynamic system of medical, environmental, economic, and political powers that determines the well-being both of Autistic people and of foreigners in Japan, and this system tends to view both types of people through the lens of *communication*.

Thus, following Shimizu’s argument, we ask: Who can benefit from attaching labels such as *less social* and *abnormal communication* as descriptions of the behavior of Autistic people? What benefit does Japan derive from changing society’s perception of Autistic people (i.e., from *different* to *disabled*)? Moreover, by encouraging society to view Autistic people as *disabled*, Japan seems to be constructing a glass ceiling blocking the advancement of Autistic people within normal Japanese society.

In order to ameliorate this situation, Miyazaki (2007) proposed that we paraphrase the negative explanations of Autistic communication patterns with positive ones. For instance, instead of saying *Speaking too honestly*, we could say *Having a strong tendency to state facts precisely*.¹⁵ Although the details of such paraphrasing will naturally require the discussion and assent of clinicians, such linguistic advocacy is certainly worthwhile. As Gottlieb (2001) reviews, there is a history of variation in the language which describes disabilities in Japan. However, the language of Autism and developmental disorders seems to be in its infancy.

Autistic people as foreigners

In considering the communicative patterns of Autistic people, it strikes us that they are in many ways similar to foreigners in Japan. It is routinely observed that foreigners in Japan are disabled by their inability to speak Japanese perfectly. Even in the case of non-Japanese who speak Japanese with perfect pronunciation and grammar, they may be discriminated against because of their looks or their ways of thinking. In sales encounters, it is not uncommon for a blond ethnic European to be treated one way when conducting business over the telephone, and yet be treated very differently when speaking face-to-face. Not only has this been confirmed with direct experiments by one of us, but it is also attested by language teachers (cf. Tarvin-Isomura, S., et al., 2009) and by countless

14. Fuess (2003) discusses legal workers as being among “highly skilled workers” in Japan.

15. Our translation from original Japanese.

reports by internet bloggers and webpage writers with experience in Japan (e.g., Ager, 2008; “Japanese Culture”). Despite fluent language skills, one’s body gestures and other visual factors can greatly affect the manner of Japanese verbal communication. One might consider this to be the sociolinguistic realization of the McGurk effect observed for phonemic perception (McGurk, H & MacDonald, J, 1976).

It is also well known that many Japanese want foreigners to speak imperfect Japanese, and they become uncomfortable when a foreigner’s Japanese language skill is too good. A well known illustration of this desire was the gaff made by TV-Asahi’s anchorman Kume Hiroshi, who, upon hearing an Indian restaurateur speaking excellent Japanese, said “Shikashi, gaijin wa nihongo ga katakoto no hoo ga ii yo ne” [“It’s better to have foreigners speaking in broken Japanese”]. (News Station, TV-Asahi, 14 October 1996)

Of course, the vast majority of foreigners in Japan cannot speak Japanese perfectly. Much as in any culture, the worse their Japanese language skills are, the less is their access to Japanese society (cf. Inoue, 2009). For a nonnative speaker of Japanese, job-hunting can be as daunting as it is for Autistic people. As a professor with two decades of observing and advising job-seeking undergraduates in the Tokyo and Osaka areas, one of us can confirm that a clear barrier faces foreigners who seek regular Japanese employment. Despite having graduated from a prestigious Japanese university, and despite having adequate Japanese language skills, and despite doing well on written selection exams given by employers, the job interviews of foreigners are rarely successful. Consequently, most of the nonnative speakers of Japanese hold short-term contract jobs (cf. Eda, 2009). Unlike regular jobs, these contract jobs are typically low-paying (cf. Tsuchida 2004, pp. 30-32), and many of them are dirty and dangerous. Good social connections or a rare skill set can secure a regular long-term seniority-based job for a foreigner; otherwise, getting such a job is a crap shoot, and the odds for a foreigner are very bad.

Atypical communicators

We have observed that foreigners are often marginalized by mainstream Japanese society in much the same way that Autistic people have been. In the workplace and in service encounters, casual conversations are avoided, and verbal humor is not attempted. Invitations to certain social gatherings and memberships in certain community associations

may not be offered, and even apartment rentals may be denied (cf. Yoshitomi, 2008). There is a general ostracism of foreigners in Japan (Dolan & Wolden, 1994), much as there is a general ostracism of Autistic people. This ostracism is not maliciously discriminatory per se, it is merely the consequence of the Japanese penchant for placing great emphasis on spoken language skills. Anyone with atypical Japanese language usage is at a clear disadvantage. No matter how good the language skills of a foreign worker, he or she can inevitably advance only to the height of the glass ceiling that separates foreigners from the typical Japanese. For instance, regarding Brazilian laborers of Japanese descent who moved to Japan, many of them have difficulty communicating with Japanese residents and have worked as “unskilled workers” with various positions in their companies (Ishida, 2003).

In the Osaka area of Japan, we have observed that communication between a foreigner and an Autistic is often better than between either of them and a typical Japanese speaker. A typical Japanese speaker often considers the foreigner’s speech weird, and this can hamper the communication process (cf. Kawahara, 2009). A similar effect is observed in the interaction of Autistic people and neurotypicals (cf. Sugiyama, 2002). On the other hand, neither a foreigner, nor an Autistic will harbor such a stereotype about each other. Thus, in groups of foreigners speaking Japanese, communication is often successful (cf. Kawahara, 2009). Similarly, foreigners and Autistic people can often communicate well. However, communication becomes strained when typical Japanese speakers are involved.

We concluded that, despite several similarities, the great difference between foreigners and Autistic people in Japan is the attitudes of typical Japanese people towards them. As mentioned above, Japanese have come to consider Autistic people as *abnormal*. In other words, the Japanese government and the Japanese people are increasingly thinking of Autistic people as being *disabled, impaired, broken*, and generally *no good*. (e.g. Ishikawa, 2005; Izumi, 2004; Sugiyama, 2002) On the other hand, Japanese people continue to think of foreigners as being *normal but different* or *weird but okay* (cf. Tabuchi, 2011). Thus, foreigners are evaluated independently of their communicative skills (cf. Dolan & Worden, 1994). Despite the low pay of foreigners overall, some foreigners with special skills (e.g., one of the authors and his foreign colleagues in academia and industry) are valued highly, and they are remunerated accordingly (cf. Fuess, 2003). Foreigners are often given special language support; however, such support

is not considered to be aid for the disabled; rather, it is considered to be support for communication between *typicals* (the typical Japanese) and *atypicals* (the foreigners). In other words, we argue that foreigners in Japan are generally evaluated on their merits (against their demerits for atypical language and communication skills), whereas Autistic people are first categorized as *disabled* and thus never fully evaluated. An Autistic is immediately regarded as a person who needs special support (e.g. Dahl & Arici, 2008; Unger, 2002); the communication channel between Autistic and non-Autistic Japanese is not considered to be in need of special support.

Many people connected with the American Autistic community, such as participants at Autreat, an international annual conference primarily for Autistic people held by Autism Network International, often use the term *Autistics* in contrast with *neurotypicals*, as a way of avoiding more pejorative terms. We applaud this usage. We would also suggest that perhaps even the term *Autistics* be avoided; instead, we advocate saying *neurological typicals and atypicals*, and even extending this nomenclature to other dimensions of difference, such as *communicative typicals and atypicals*, or *gestural typicals and atypicals*. Described in these terms, the parallels between Autistic people and foreigners are easily noted, and the inappropriateness of the terms *disabled* and *abnormal* becomes clear.

Conclusion

We have considered the struggle of two types of minorities in Japan: Autistic people and foreigners. The glass ceiling posed by communication and language is still high for both. In Japan, this ceiling is unlikely to disappear completely, unless typical Japanese can begin to accommodate atypical patterns of communication. In the meantime, just as foreigners have pushed the ceiling higher by striving to speak Japanese, Autistic people must persevere in their attempt to communicate, even to the point of shunning recent government attempts to label them as disabled. We hope our perspective offers an alternative way of thinking about the social characterization of Autistic people in the world.

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