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The Importance of Prelingual Affective Communication Some Implications from the Field

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This paper investigates communication between Japanese volunteers and non-Japanese/immigrant children at NPO (Non Profit Organization) from the prelingual affective communication perspective (defined as the various non-verbal interactions that happen mainly when two psychologically connected persons try to find a common ground for their feelings and establish a relationship like an infant and mother). In order to collect the data, the Personal Attitude Construct (PAC) Analysis and Image Maps were used for three volunteers and 11 immigrant children. The data revealed the importance of personal relationship and the function where the communication took place. The relationship between the volunteers and the children was interpreted from "a meta level of interest," "a depth of interest," and "a way of expressing mood." This is qualitatively different from nonverbal immediacy which has been studied intensively in relation to "affective learning" at school. The author emphasizes the importance of Prelingual Affective Communication.

keywords: prelingual, communication, immigrant children, PAC analysis, vitality affect

INTRODUCTION

Teacher immediacy in formal learning situations has been thoroughly researched in relation to affective learning and cognitive learning in the field of communication studies. The concept of immediacy was defined as those communication behaviors that "enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another" (Mehrabian 1969, p.203). Based on this definition, Anderson (1978) constructed a teacher immediacy system to investigate such teacher behavior such as: eye gaze, smiles, nods, relaxed body posture, forward leans, movement, gesture, and vocal variety in relation to classroom student learning. Results revealed a significant relationship between these teacher nonverbal immediacy behaviors and students' affective learning (as cited in Witt, Wheelless, & Allen, 2004). However, nonverbal immediacy cues, like other nonverbal behaviors, are highly inferential and vary with culture and context (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). In addition, the majority of immediacy and learning studies have utilized a survey research design in which students complete questionnaires to measure their perception of teacher immediacy and their own learning, instead of using actual observers of the classroom interaction between teacher and students (Witt et al., 2004). Such questionnaire methodology has limitations when used in culturally and socially diverse classrooms. The meaning of many nonverbal cues will vary across the cultures and certainly nonverbal behaviors which occur unconsciously might have a significantly different meaning to people from another culture.

In this study, I will shift the location of interaction from a formal school learning situation to an informal one. I will try to find some implications for classroom teacher/student interaction by focusing on the communication between volunteers and children in a NPO (Non Profit Organization). These NPOs are successful in re-motivating drop out students, slow learners, school refusers, disabled, and immigrant children to study. They are contextually different from schools, so it can be assumed that the quality of the communication itself will differ from the instructional communication used in school. As Japanese becomes more multicultural, it is important to observe the teacher/student interactions directly and not just apply the ready-made measurements used in the past for a more western learning group.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nonverbal immediacy is often explained in terms of approach-avoidance theory (Mehrabian, 1981). People move closer to people they like, and further away from those they dislike. People adapt the manner and content of their verbal communication to the perceived preference or style of the receiver and the situation. Immediacy behaviors serve to enhance interpersonal closeness (Mehrabian, 1981). Teachers can use such nonverbal and verbal immediacy intentionally to attract their students, which in turn motivates the students to learn.

In contrast, communication between a newborn baby and its mother is different qualitatively from the instructional communication between teachers and students. For pre-verbal infants, from birth to the age of 9 months, the primary mode of expression between a mother and her child is called "interaffective" (Stern, 1985). For example, if the infant expresses enthusiasm through an excited cry, and the mother "matches" her infant's verbal expression in a different modality such as a bodily gesture that matches the timing, rhythm, and intensity of the infant's verbal expression. This is called "crossmodal interaffective attunement." I used the word "match" instead of "respond to," because the mother does not know exactly why her baby makes an excited cry, but she pats its bottom or gently jiggles her baby randomly in order to offer comfort. The mother can do this because she instinctively tuned. As a result, her baby is satisfied and becomes quiet. Since the baby used its voice, while the mother use the patting behavior, the communication modal differs, thus it is called "crossmodal interaffective attunement." These interaffective attunements are largely shaped by what Stern (1985) calls "vitality affects." Vitality affects are best described as "dynamic, kinetic terms, such as surging, 'fading away,' 'fleeting,' 'explosive,' 'crescendo,' 'decrescendo,' 'bursting,' and 'drawn out'." These qualities of experience are most certainly understood by infants" (Stern, 1985). Stern distinguishes these vitality affects from "categorical affects" like happiness, sadness, or anger, which can be expressed with a single noun. The more subtle expressions are called "vitality affects".

According to Kujiraoka (1997), the mother is always instinctively in tune with her baby. Therefore the mother will easily notice the infant who expresses his feelings through these vitality affects. In the case of communication between an infant and his mother, Kujiraoka says that it is quite natural that communication occurs not from the sender's side but from the receiver's side (mother's) since the infant can not intentionally send any meaningful verbal message to his mother. Kujiraoka (1997) calls this kind of communication Prelingual Affective Communication. Prelingual Affective Communication is defined as various non-verbal interactions that happen mainly when two psychologically connected persons discover a common ground for their feelings and establish a relationship. It can be observed not only between mother and infant but also between a husband and wife, a boyfriend and girlfriend and between any two people who are close. Once we acquire a language, we tend to forget this pre-verbal ability of Prelingual Affective Communication; however, we all have this ability (Kujiraoka, 1997).

The relationship between a mother and an infant will differ depending on three key concepts: "a meta level of interest", "a depth of interest", and "a way of expressing mood" (Kujiraoka, 1997). For example, when an infant cries, both the mother and the father can easily hear it. This is because parents are always instinctively tuned towards their baby. Thus they have the "meta level of interest" in their baby. However, if the mother notices that the cry is little bit different from the usual one, then, "her depth of the interest" will be different from the father's. The mother will pick up the baby who is crying from a fall and say "Ouch! Ouch!" with empathy while patting the baby's head, but the father who picks up the baby will say, "It hurts, doesn't it?" These are different ways of expressing the "mood". Prelingual Affective Communication is diagramed in relation to vitality affects in figure 1.

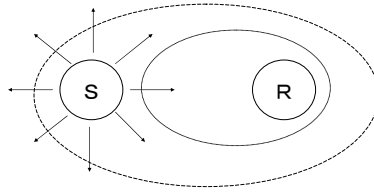


Figure 1. *Prelingual Affective Communication and Vitality Affects*

As shown in figure 1, the quality as well as the method of communication is different from nonverbal immediacy. The significant difference is that nonverbal immediacy is intentionally directed towards the others, while the vitality affects are expressed without any intended directions and the receiver will notice differently depend on “the depth of interest”.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Site

Takatori Community Center (TCC) was the NPO we selected to study. It is an organization based in Kobe city where there are about 44,000 immigrant residents. TCC’s predecessor, called the “Takatori Support Base,” was first established in the compound of a Catholic Church after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995. At that time, its main activities were to provide emergency support for the residents regardless their nationality or ethnic background. Since then, TCC has begun to create multi-cultural “coexistence” activities. Among these activities ReC: (not an abbreviation but a name) is one of the ICT programs offered to the “immigrant” children. These children are mainly Vietnamese and Japanese-Brazilians who came to Japan in the late 80’s and 90s. TCC supports these children through teaching their mother tongue and computer skills. The open space where there are ten personal computers (notebook styles) has become a “hang out” (a gathering space) for them. The volunteers come to the open space regularly and enjoy talking with the children and helping them use the computers besides attending the regular meeting with the staffs. Some of the ReC: activities include: helping the children produce a video, inviting them to appear on the community radio show, and creating an animated film to share with the public. The quality of the ReC: produced videos is high enough to receive awards and be played on the web site.

Participants

A total of 3 Japanese volunteers who have been working at TCC more than one year and 12 children participated in this study. Among 12 children, the non-Japanese were 4 elementary students, 4 junior high school students, and 1 senior high school student. Their ethnic background are 6 Vietnamese, 1 Peruvian, 1 Brazilian, 1 Chinese-Vietnamese and 3 Japanese. The Japanese students were 1 elementary student and 2 junior high school students. These Japanese students are the friends of the immigrant children and come to Re:C constantly. They are included as the subjects since they also contribute to create the atmosphere of Re:C.

Instrument

Personal Attitude Construct (PAC) analysis was used to understand the personal attitudes of each volunteer and an immigrant child towards ReC: activities. For the younger children, an Image Map started from the word ReC: was used. PAC is a new analytical method that was developed by Professor Naito (1997) in the early 1990s and has been used in the fields of social science, counseling, sociology, Japanese language, and international education.

By following the sequential steps, the structure of personal attitude or image is measured and analyzed qualitatively. The basic characteristic of PAC is the blended method of free word-association, hierarchical cluster analysis and phenomenological data interpretation. Thus it becomes possible to analyze individual persons instead of treating people as a blended unit.

Although PAC is a useful method to grasp individual attitudes, it is difficult for younger children to interpret the dendrogram (the result of a cluster analysis). Thus, the younger children were asked to freely draw an Image Map. Image Map analysis was developed by Mizukoshi (1980) as a tool to analyze a learner's knowledge, skill, and concepts through word association. By using Image Maps, fluency (by the number of the words), diffusion (by the variety of words), and structure (by the "depth" of the words) can be grasped.

Procedure

To conduct a PAC, first some stimulating questions had to be developed. The questions we selected this time were: "Did you get anything from working at TCC? What was it? What kind of situations lead to whatever it is that you have gained? Please write one word or an image that comes to mind on a note card and write a number from 1." Then, these sequential steps are followed: 1) Ask the subjects to rearrange the cards according to the importance for them and record the numbers. 2) Chose two cards at random and ask the subject to decide the degree of similarity between the two words written on the cards, using a 7 point scale (1 being extremely alike and 7 being extremely different, while 3 being not decided). 3) Conduct cluster analysis by using the above data and present the result in a dendrogram. 4) Ask the subjects to interpret the clusters by themselves and then the researcher will help to interpret the dendrogram by interacting with the subjects.

The dendrogram may show the deep inner psychology which even the subjects have not realized about themselves and the situation, so it is better to take the time and ask the subjects to interpret the information themselves with the researcher's support. The researcher can observe the subjects' behavior, too.

Regarding the Image Map, the children were asked to write any words which occurred to them when they heard the word ReC. In case of children, the researcher asked the volunteers to collect the data from the children, because it was thought that the children would express feelings more naturally in front of the volunteer than the unknown researcher.

At TCC, this field study was conducted continuously from 2004 through 2007 in collaboration with three researchers. This paper is part of the study and the PAC data and the Image Map data were collected in August 2006 during two weeks at TCC.

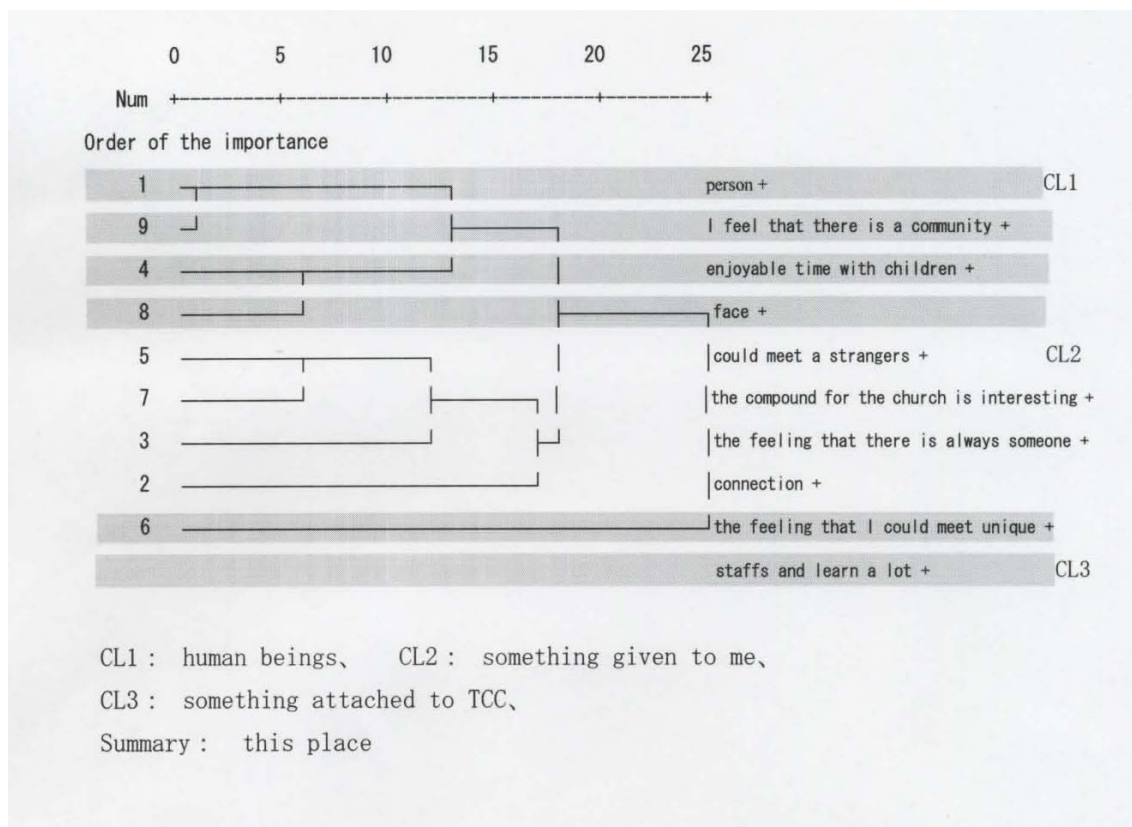
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Views of the volunteers

PAC was used with three volunteers and one immigrant child; however I will present only one here in detail due to limited space. Volunteer A first came to TCC in 2004 and since then has participated in many activities finally becoming a coordinator in 2005. A coordinator is a person who consistently participates in ReC: for a year and takes responsibility for the children and writes a short report about their activities.

According to the PAC Analysis, Volunteer A mentioned 9 items while saying that "I cannot think of any concrete things." The most important item for him was "person." The other items were "connection," "the feeling that there is always someone there," "enjoyable time with children," "could meet strangers," "the feeling that I could meet unique people and learn a lot," "the compound for the church is interesting," "face," "I feel that there is a community". The results of the cluster analysis is shown as a dendrogram in Fig.2. The researcher and the subject agreed to group these into three clusters. Then,

cluster 1 is summarized as “human beings” and cluster 2 is “something given to me,” and cluster 3 is “there is some meaning in being attached to TCC”. The common theme of these three clusters is summarized as “this place.”



(Cluster 1 and 3 are highlighted in order to grasp them easily.)

Figure 2. The Dendrogram for Volunteer A

Next, let’s see how subject A summarized these items in his own words. He said that he thought that he could understand everything once he understood the children. “I feel that I can be helpful here when the children remember my face and know me, then my feet become light (it is easy to come here). And I realized that I can stay here.” Generally speaking, the expression which the volunteers often used in the interview was “to find a way to be useful.” As explained before, TCC was first established after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Many volunteers came to Kobe after the earthquake and wanted to find something helpful to do. The volunteers felt they were needed by helping others. Thus, when I asked whether he felt that he was trusted by the children, he replied that there was a basic “connection” rather than being “relied on”.

“I come to TCC not because the children ask about the computer or home work, but because I can see myself in their minds.” This tells us that TCC is not only a place to teach computer skills or knowledge to children but it is a place to make a significant connection or relationship between volunteers and children.

However, it takes a long time to create a connection with the children. Volunteer A said that “it takes very long to establish a close relationship with the children. I had to make an effort to understand the children. After a while, I found them relating to me and this place, so I felt that I could come here easily.” This suggests that a relationship is not created by forcing anything but by just being together with the children (Ishii, Kume, Okabe, 1996).

This kind of relationship might be easier to establish in an NPO than in a school situation. At an NPO there are no school terms, or any evaluations or grades. In other words, learning is not goal oriented. Therefore the relationship between the volunteers and the children is qualitatively different from the relationship between teachers and students at school.

Volunteer A said that “here is a place where a different language can be used. If I come here, I can talk in other languages. It is enjoyable to get along with somebody through their own language. With child T in my mind I enjoy matching and miss-matching T’s image myself.” This means that Volunteer A notices his image in child T and can enjoy the slight difference between this image of himself and his own reality. It is important to accept these differences as something enjoyable rather than to ignore them or see them as negative which often occurs in an unfamiliar situation.

According to the results of the PAC Analysis, what Volunteer A has gained at TCC seems to be the place itself and the things that belong to a person and a place. The nine items which volunteer A raised were all positive images.

The other two volunteers B and C summarized their clusters as “a driving force” and as “various people” respectively. These results suggest that volunteers realize the importance of individual persons and view TCC as the significant place to nurture these relationships.

Views of the Immigrant Children

In order to grasp the children’s view towards Re:C, Image Maps were used with 11 children and PAC analysis was used with one immigrant child. Figure 3 shows the results of the Image Map done by one Vietnam child who is grade 4 at elementary school.

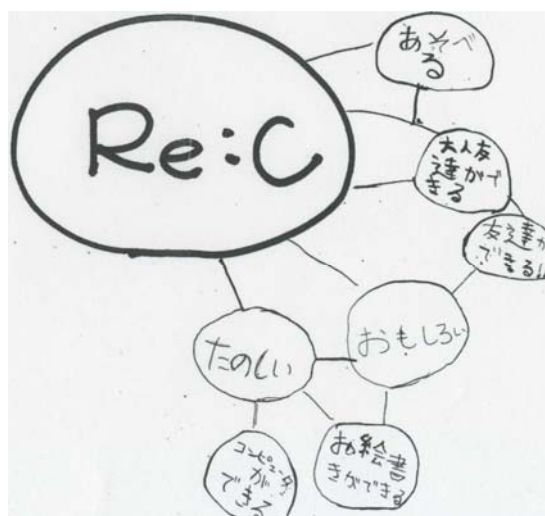


Figure 3. Image Map for a Vietnam child

122 items were identified by those 11 children, among them 39 were from the 5 elementary students. These items were categorized as “person,” “place,” “activities,” “feelings,” “other” as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Image Maps

Category	Detail	Total number of the items (elementary)	The entire Ratio %	Items by Japanese (elementary)	Ratio according to item %
Person		49(6)	40(15)	27(6)	55(100)
	Staff	15(4)			
	Friend	10(2)			
	Entertainer	24(0)			
Place		25(6)	20(15)	7(2)	28(33)
	Haunt	21(5)			
	Related things	4(1)			
Activities		22(7)	18(18)	6(4)	27(57)
	Computer	7(2)			
	Video	5(3)			
	Game	3(1)			
	Other Activities	7(1)			
Feelings		19(16)	16(41)	3(2)	16(13)
	Positive feelings	9(7)			
	Negative feelings	10(9)			
Others		7(4)	6(11)	3(3)	43(75)
	others	7(4)			
Total		122(39)	100(100)	46(17)	38(44)

According to Table 1, the items which belong to the category “person” occupied 40% of the total items. Items such as the staff names, friends’ names and entertainers’ names are included in this category. This category also is related to the category “place” which counted for 20%. The children mainly recognize TCC as a good place to hang out and enjoy chatting with the volunteers. It is natural for children to mention items related the entertainers. Technically, TCC is a place to use computers and edit video, however, only 18% of the items are related to these activities at the TCC.

While mainly junior and senior high school students thought the TCC as a “good place to hang out”, while the elementary students thought of this was a good place to share their feelings (41%), draw pictures with a computer, edit their videos, and play games (18%). While 3 of the elementary school students wrote positive feelings such as “enjoyable” “interesting,” 2 elementary students wrote 9 negative feelings such as “lie” and “others are not kind.” However close observation revealed that one boy wrote “to die” and “finish” and then erased them and wrote “lie” in big letters in front of the volunteer. Perhaps the child wrote the words “to die” just to check the reaction of the volunteer, rather than to show her real feelings. Another elementary student wrote 8 items like “only X is kind” which related to her friends’ relationship at school. In both cases, TCC seemed to be a place for the children to meet the volunteers and express their real feelings at that moment.

Besides Image Maps, PAC analysis was conducted for one Vietnam child who is grade 8 at Junior high school. He wrote 13 items within 7 minutes. The most significant item is “enjoyable,” and 13 items were grouped into two clusters, those are “as if we play” and “the speech is something good and long.” Then, he summarized two clusters by using the word, ReC:. Thus it was also proved that ReC: is the important place for him to meet friends, to play soccer, and to participate the radio program etc. He was a troublemaker at school but his attitude has changed gradually since he comes to ReC: and interacts with the friends and volunteers. The teens like he expect the volunteers to help whenever they need it, since they are mature adults and can be consulted about their future life.

SUMMARY

While TCC is a place to teach children how to use a computer and software and how to shoot some video scenes and edit them, no volunteers mentioned these activities directly. It seems that they did not come to fulfill their desire to teach something to children. Instead, the volunteers are always at TCC and whenever the children feel the need to express their feeling through video, then, the volunteers are ready to help them. In the case of a 15 year old child, it took one and a half year to finish producing a 6 minutes video. It is about the struggle of her own identity as a third generation Japanese-Brazilian. She used lemon as a metaphor to express her inner state. During the work, the volunteer took care of her and listen patiently to her, and helped to elicit her feelings through interaction.

This psychologically close relationship can be cultivated with the volunteers who are in their 20s and 30s and have some worries about their own future. In contrast, some retired people who come to TCC as volunteers can not participate TCC like a younger volunteer, because they are eager to teach the children whatever they are interested in and try to establish a relationship their own way. Although it is unconscious, the younger volunteers and the children who are concern about their own identity could discover the common ground for their feelings. In other words, the volunteers could notice the vitality affect of the children. Vitality affects are a broader class of feeling than categorical affects in that they occur with all behaviors. Whether the volunteer notices them or not depends her "meta level of interest" and "a depth of the interest."

The concept of "the way of expressing the mood" will be related to "empathy" which is defined as "the imaginative intellectual and emotional participation in another person's experience" (Bennet, 1979). Different from sympathy, in empathy we "participate" rather than "place," and we are concerned with "experience" and "perspective" rather than "position." If the volunteers could develop empathy with the children, then the way of expressing the mood would qualitatively differ. Therefore, the relationship between the volunteers and the children will be much like the relationship between a parent and child.

Since everyone have vitality affect when they were infant, it is important to nurture it and utilize the prelingual affective communication even when they are grown up. Once the language is acquire people tend to rely on only symbolic interaction, however, it should not forget the important role of prelingual affective communication. Especially, the teachers who engage in instructional communication need to drop the rigid role of a teacher and present empathy with the students who have various backgrounds. This will help to capture the real power of the "vitality affects" that exist in each student.

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