

Refusal in Japanese Foreign Language Classrooms

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Abstract*

In this paper we consider the topics of questions and answers (1) and look at refusals (2) in general and contrastively in the Japanese and German school and university contexts, especially refusals to teacher questions in Japanese 3rd language classrooms (3). We locate 2 types where student reactions can not be counted as answers in content. In the last two parts we relate these types (4) and give hints for teachers (5).

0. Introduction

"Unlike our norm of interaction, that at Warm Springs does not require that a question by one person be followed immediately by an answer or a promise of an answer from the addressee. It may be followed by silence or by an utterance that bears no relationship to the question. Then the answer to the question may follow as long as five or ten minutes later" (Goffman 1981: 25). According to Hermanns, it does not seem to be the case that a question generates a right to an answer. On the contrary, we have to be thankful if we get one, and usually are (cf. Hermanns 1990: 54).

This paper is written from the position of a German who is teaching large language classes at a Japanese state university. We take this paper as

an attempted explanation of one kind of action following teacher questions. As has been experienced in Japan by many teachers with Western educational backgrounds, e.g. English or German or American, questions do not function as simple and effectual elicitations in Japan as in the "West". The points presented in this paper may also hold for many other East Asian societies, although in different shapes and to varying degrees.

1. Creating Problems in the Classroom: the Teacher Question¹

Teacher- learner/ student interaction in second language classroom has been treated extensively in the recent literature (cf. for detailed treatises Chaudron 1988 and Van Lier 1988). Research usually focuses on contents and actions in the answer not within the answering process and the choices students have therein. This even shows in the definition of "wait-time," i.e. "the amount of time the teacher pauses after a question before pursuing the answer with further questions or nomination of another student" (Chaudron, 1988: 128). This teacher-sided definition should be supplemented by a student-sided definition which gives the time available (if any) after one has been asked. In this paper we will especially look at the student's choices after the putting of the question by the teacher.

It seems more or less understood in advance that answers follow teachers' questions almost like second pair parts in adjacency pairs. Thus, if there is no answer, we can speak of a refusal (for a definition see below part 2 and elsewhere).

Following up on a question with an answer is, however, by far not necessarily the case. Many factors may intervene, from outside disturbances to psychological characteristics of the students. There, especially nonverbal parts become important. Our discussion then is to show where preconditions for the success of teacher's questions go apart e.g. between the West and Japan.

1.1 The Case in Germany

In the West, in our case Germany, if a teacher does not lecture and there is no question from him, uneasiness arises. The problem is that the classroom situation has the underlying characteristics of being a place where students have to show knowledge (see below). In case it is not clear what is to be done,

the students at least have to worry. This is aggravated by problems arising from the complicated cooperation circumstances at school: fundamentally, there is not any presupposed cooperation holding between given students and teachers. Such cooperation has to be re-established anew in every class and upheld by various strategies, such as by the construction of mutual trust, or by lively participation in the class on the part of the student. Especially at schools, and even sometimes at universities, oral participation is given marks.

1.2 The Case in Japan

In Japan, if a teacher only stands in front of his class and lectures and if he only has a test at the end of a term, not many problems arise. Teaching at school is mainly performed this way and students even expect this kind of class from their teachers. They feel comfortable with it and know how it works (Marui/Reinelt, 1985; Reinelt, 1988).

The only problem is that this may not be the best way of doing foreign language classes (Cashden 1987: 16), especially if the students are to learn something actively, to have their skills trained. One way to conduct a different class is for the teacher to ask a student a question (of whatever kind). Note that the asking of questions is necessary in school situations in Japan to give the students an opportunity to talk to the teachers at all.

Generally, the situation is unproblematic between students and teachers without the question, in several respects:

- The cooperation between students and teacher is in a stable state, comfortable for all participants (Marui/Reinelt, 1985; Reinelt, 1988).
- Anyone in a hierarchically lower position is not required to take the initiative, unless he or she is asked expressly (Marui/ Ohama 1986).
- The teacher is in full control of the class and nothing more is required of him.

Teachers' questions, then, have a totally different position within the communication system within Japanese classrooms than those within e.g. German classrooms. We will here mainly look at the Japanese side, but we give references where there are notable similarities or differences to the West.

1.3 Questions and Answers at School

Except for rhetorical questions, the main feature of question situations is that they consist of two adherent parts with a change of speakers in between. While it is usually unproblematic to define, even at different levels, what an order, an apology or a question is, it is sometimes quite hard to define an answer, not to mention its contents. Differences in interpretation have led to all kinds of misunderstandings. Even diplomatic problems resulting from these are legends.

Responses (Goffman 1981) can take several forms and have various functions. To an invitation a response is either an acceptance or a rejection. That is to say, one of the next utterances of the person invited counts as such. In this generality, there are several kinds of responses.

While in everyday speech many different responses occur, at school only a limited number of types is possible. At that not the same kinds are available to teachers and students and at different occasions and places. The types of possible refusals are different for teachers and students again. A further complication arises because of cultural differences in the evaluation of behavior at school. We can here only give examples of how the realm varies.

Western and Japanese classrooms differ in that these are fundamentally questioning and answering situations for the students in the West, while this is not the case in Japan (cf. Ueki 1988 for question situation, question and questioning behavior).

For question and answer exchanges at school, the following points seem to hold:

- a) The speaker of the first part can go on after putting a question and provide the second part, too. This is the case only for socially higher persons in and outside of the school context.
- b) The second part is usually to be provided by another person. This puts some obligation on the partner asked. Consequently, sanctions follow, if responses are not provided.
- c) The knowledge distribution plays a role in what questions are like. At school this is turned in a very strange way (cf. Butzkamm 1983): It is not the person who does not know that asks, but the one who does know the answer in advance (by definition of being a teacher).

- d) The person asked is to show knowledge in front of the teacher and other students (cf. Ehlich/ Rehbein 1977 for the different knowledge types involved). If the student does not know the answer, he is not to show his ignorance.
- e) What the teacher wants to know is not the contents of the answer, but whether the student has knowledge of the answer.
- f) Normally an answerer can accept and answer a question on at least three levels: knowledge, understanding and agreement (Ueki 1988). At school, different categories play an important role, too: generation of the answer, normativity, etc. Certainly, the level of mutual agreement is the least necessary at school.
- g) A further complication is that students also have to show appropriate behavior in and by answering. (Marui/Reinelt 1985 and Reinelt 1987)

In other papers, we have looked at situations where students do eventually give answers to the teachers questions. This can however not be taken for granted. (Reinelt 1987 and 1992)

- h) A further problem is the type of answer required:
 - Do the students have to give
 - the correct answer, if there is one
 - the which the teacher expects
 - a relevant answer
 - an acceptable answer, on whatever standards.
- i) The next point is a more general one. Does the teacher really have the right to ask? Does he have the right to intrude upon the student's knowledge? And, finally, are the teacher's questions really useful as a means of education or learning? We can only raise these questions here and have to leave their discussion to the readership.
- j) Long (1983) and Long & Sato (1983) are seminal surveys of the literature on classroom interaction, especially concerning teacher-student exchanges. (See also above part 1). We can, however, see no place where they address the points mentioned here. Also, Arndt and Ryan (1986) give all kinds of categories and communicative functions, but fail to address the points mentioned

here. However, since they can be decisive in the classroom interaction, we think they should be taken into consideration.

- k) Cultural differences exist as to
- what is recognized as an answer and,
 - how long it can take (cf the quote at the beginning of this paper), and
 - how it can or has to be generated (Reinelt 1987 and 1988).²

The differences become problematic when intercultural exchanges are at stake. They can become tragical, when strong power relationships are involved. The latter is especially the case at school, and students cannot evade this.

We then see that there is no clear simple definition as to when an answer counts as such or not. Cases where the response is not satisfying to the partner are, however, dangerous, even where power relationships are not so oppressive as at school.

1.4 The Teacher-Student Relationship in the Case of Unanswered Questions

The relationship between teachers and students is regulated differently in Germany, and similarly in the West, and in Japan. We consider foreign language classes of the practice, not the seminar type. Especially the background for the situations with non-satisfactory answers is different in Japan and the West. The only commonality is that after a teacher's question, the responsibility goes to the students' side.

First, talk in the West, on all general levels, is weakly founded on a common level of cooperation that guarantees mutual contact, but not graceful evaluation at school. Since students first have to establish a cooperative situation, a non-satisfactory answer readily leads to a negative evaluation and a breach of cooperation. Certainly, a teacher can refrain from such an attribution, especially if he has other proof that the failure this time was an exception and the student asked is otherwise trying to cooperate. For this, however, the student depends totally on the teacher's good will. Especially, the student has no right to complain about the attribution of a

bad mark. As seen in 1.2, for all Japanese students a cooperative situation is more or less given as long as they do not act contrary to it.

The problem is now as follows. In case no answer is possible or seems generatable to the student asked, the student has to make this clear to the teacher without intending to break up the cooperation which is appropriate at school between teachers and students. The rest of this paper tries to show some of the students' strategies in such situations.

Until very recently, teachers' questions have not been very frequent in Japanese classrooms, not even in FL classes. Considering that teachers have to teach and students to study, a teacher question is in the first instance a breach from the teachers side of the situation and the cooperation in it. This facilitates the students' task considerably.

The student who is asked a question then only has to make sure that his response is not uncooperative to the teacher or that it is not interpreted as such. At that he has to make sure that no problem arises with the other students. Their cooperation should work out an answer, but if it does not, it is still required that the student who is asked take care of the normative framework, which is valid in the situation.

After a teacher asks a question, there seems to be two types of activities available for the Japanese student: normal positions and intermediate activities.

Normal positions are expected of a student as befitting him or her at any time. They are safe and unassailable, while intermediate activities are only taken for granted and allowed without guarantee.

There are only a handful of normal positions, and the number of intermediate activities is certainly quite limited. Some examples:

- a) Normal positions
 - sitting up straight,
 - looking attentive,
 - bowing (if necessary)
- b) Intermediate activities, e.g.
 - looking at (/up to) the teacher,
 - looking up to the teacher, head tilted,
 - telling the neighbor something,
 - backing away from the direction of the teacher,
 - turning pages in a book/ the dictionary,

- showing the student asked a page in the textbook,
- turning and talking to the neighbor,
- giving translations or interpretations to the student asked,
- repeating what the teacher said,
- confirming,
- reading in the textbook.

Note that all normal positions and intermediate activities can be a sufficient response to a teacher's question.

Whenever a teacher asks one student, all students within a certain area around this student also automatically become involved. They can, (and to a certain degree are all expected to) "contribute something towards the answer, e.g.

- give a translation,
- look something up in the dictionary,
- gather parts or all of the contents,
- put the contents of the answer together,
- give alternative answers,
- discuss correctness of answers,
- assemble a sentence in a foreign language,
- give moral support, etc." (Reinelt 1987).

This shows why students mostly work together, even if only one has been asked.

In the next part we want to look at what students do in case they can not or do not want to give an answer to a teacher's question.

2. What is a Refusal in the Japanese FL Classroom?

2.1 Problematic Responses in General

We have to distinguish two problematic things that may happen after something like a first pair part (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974) has been initiated by one of at least two parties to a conversation. In the first case the second party tries to provide a second part, but this does for some reason not come about. Either the line is cut, it takes too long, or is too late to be

regarded as response (Goffman 1981). This happens sometimes when Japanese wait before responding, although they have been asked a question, just because the time for exchanges at the turn is longer in Japan. A similar case is reported with the Warm Springs Indians etc. (cf. also Scollon & Scollon 1981).

In a second case the person spoken to or asked to provide the second pair part somehow shows that he or she is not able to give the second part. Normally, second parts are to be given with some obligation. Not to give them nevertheless implies:

1. To know that a second part is wanted,
2. To be ready to acknowledge the existence of obligations, and
3. To be ready to take what comes when an obligation is not fulfilled.

The last point especially includes:

- To know what kind of sanctions there will be, if any.

The participants in a conversation have to manage such cases of unsatisfactory answers on two levels. On the intercommunicative level, they use linguistic and paralinguistic means to participate in the conversation. The receiver then has other means to show his recognition, etc., of the problematic answer. On the extra-communicative level, the participants have to manage their relationships to each other. For this it is vital whether the problematic response can be interpreted as intentional or not. Intentionally refusing to answer a question can easily lead to a breach in the relationship between those involved. It is then important to show that the missing second pair part results from ignorance or other reasons not within the power of the answerer (and is not intended to hurt the partner).

If the parties involved have no close relationships or are not bound otherwise, refusals may be without consequences. After all, no one has obligations to the other after getting out of the situation. In the school situation, however, tight rules accompany actions for disobeying obligations. For the teacher-question-student-answer relationship this means that it has to be clearly defined what is possible as a refusal and what not. What causes which sanctions on a refusal at school has to do with the definition of the goal of the school and whether it allows for refusals!

2.2 A Definition of "Refusal"

Then what is a refusal?

A description could run as follows:

- A has a (purported or real) right to an answer by his partner B, and
- if A puts a question to which
- B does not answer
- this is considered a refusal by A, his institution (and maybe B, too).

Such rights of questioning exist in various institutions, for example, in a court of law, where they are to work for the better of either A or some third party. Only in the school context are they supposed to work for the purported benefit of B. (cf. also Rehbein 1984).

In practical terms, we can define a refusal in the Japanese foreign language classroom as a verbal or nonverbal conscious or unconscious sign which the student gives to show that he is not proceeding to answer while keeping up the normative framework unharmed.

This includes that he or she wants it taken as that. Other ramifications may however differ as the rest of this paper is to show³.

In this paper we will only deal with such refusals. They are a small subset of possible reactions for a Japanese student to a teacher's question (c.f. 1.4 above).

Two points show the difference to refusals in Western school contexts.

- 1) In the Japanese context, the normative framework guarantees that the student's response is not interpreted as an intentional wrongdoing. This means that intentionality is--in the extreme case--irrelevant to the discussion of such refusals. Accordingly, the sincerity condition is irrelevant, too.
- 2) "Western" students have to answer questions and secure cooperation at school at any time. These two points are separate for the Japanese students. Giving no (fast) answer is an almost automatic breach of any student-teacher relationship on the part of the "Western" student. On the other hand, the Japanese students only have to show their sticking to the normative framework as part of any action or response, whatever its contents may be. Thus--again, in the extreme--even *hai*

(English "yes") or a non-verbal sign such as bowing (recognition of being spoken to) is enough.

2.3 Some Remarks on Refusals

First, facilitation for the student asked is that only one positive part is necessary to establish his response as a good one. He or she thus can give several refusal signs to indicate that no correct response is to be expected. The channel is open and the student can--and sometimes has to--go on like that until the teacher finalizes the student's turn. This simply means that refusals are not clear from the start. Rather, they can be ordered somewhat on a continuum.

Refusals not clear from start

Immediate

"I don't know" to the teacher, during this time the student may be considering an answer

Intermediate

hesitation signals without any answer

Long

long period of silence or hesitation signals without answer

Second, in our material questions are with foreign and Japanese teachers. No important differences in the refusal behavior could be found. We can then presuppose that similar strategies are used towards both. On the other hand, there may be regional and age differences, but they still have to be looked into.

A third point has to be made here on silence (cf. also e.g. Raffler-Engel 1979). Any question defines a certain time for it to be answered. This lapse is very short in Western schools and usually longer in Japan. Note that we here only consider relative length. In the up-low situations in Japan, no response is necessary and thus silence behavior in such a normatively adequate position is among the or the most preferred choices of response.

Fourth, this also determines how long a teacher is going to wait for an answer (see a. 1). Other choices for him are to give up, or to turn to someone else while keeping the channel open (for a discussion see Reinelt 1988). We here only treat student strategies which are meant to be refusals, not what is

accidentally taken as such by teachers. Such misunderstandings do happen, admittedly, but can in most cases be reduced to misinterpretations by teachers.

In this paper we will determine 2 types of refusals within one answering process. Each type has its own complexity and deserves a fuller discussion in the future. For example, combinations are possible, which we cannot account for yet.

2.4 Verbal and Non-Verbal Refusals

Our material contains cases where verbal and/or nonverbal refusals are used. In non-verbal refusals emblems are used, like crossing the arms in front of the face, or other body movements⁴. Also the face and the direction of the eyes play a certain role (see below part 3).

The use of emblems and kinesics has a certain influence on the ongoing progress of foreign language classes (Raffler-Engel 1979). If students and teachers share the same culture, we can suppose that teachers inherently understand what could be interpreted as a refusal. Problems arise if teachers and students have different cultural backgrounds. This can concern the use of space (St. Clair 1977) or even haptics (Hoffer/Santos 1977). In the extreme, the interpretations can even be taken as offensive behaviors or so on. They can also apply to the use of silence (Enninger 1991). We think it is vitally important for non-native foreign language teachers to understand the students' paralinguistic signs. Also, since these are different from culture to culture, they must be a subject of foreign language learning and foreign teacher training.

3. Two Examples

3.1 A Non-Verbal Refusal

An example from a videotaped actual classroom interaction has been analyzed and will be discussed under the light of the actions of the students. We recorded a class of students at the end of their first term of German studies at Ehime University, Matsuyama, Japan (cf. Reinelt 1987).

We have taken shots of stills of the videotape as examples to demonstrate the points of this paper. We give pictures only when there were changes from the preceding state.

Although in research on non-verbal communication (Birdwhistell 1970) and gestures (Fast 1970 and Rinn 1984) technical terminology has been developed, we will here use everyday terms for description. All the actions are highly standardized anyway.

For the explanation of the students' activities, the seating arrangement is important, and, as seen from the teacher's perspective, it was as seen below:

Abbreviations:

SA Student As ked

SR Student to the Right of SA

T Teacher

Numbers refer to the discussion below.

Time is given in seconds and tenths of seconds.

In the example, the teacher's question, practiced before in class, was:

(Wie heissen Sie?/ Wie heisst Du?) What is your name?⁵

Teacher's question:

Wie heissen Sie?

(What is your name?)

(1) SA looks down,

(2) no reaction

(00: 0)

- (3) SA looks up to the teacher
- (4) Face direction right forward
- (5) eye right up to teacher
- (6) slightly smiling

(03: 5)

- (7) SA turns to the right neighbor SR,
- (8) SR turns to SA

(05: 3)

- (9) SA turns to SR,
SA: face and eyes together
- (10) SR looks down
- (11) no help

(06: 2)

T: Wie heisst du? (08: 41)

(12) SA head tilted

(13) SR looks up to teacher

(14) face direction right
forward

(15) slightly smiling

(16) SR turns to SA, but
does not help

(10: 2)

(17) SA looks down in front
of himself, no answer

(18) SR looks at SA

(11: 2)

3.2 An Explanation

We can now try to order the students action according to the types introduced in Reinelt 1987 before (cf. 1.4 above):

- A. Normal positions: (1), (4/5 Aborted look attentive), (11, 17=1).
- B. Intermediate activities (3), (5), (7), (8), (9), (10), (12), (18).
- C. Rest: (2), (6), (13), (15).

A. Normal Positions (1) and (4)/(5)

In the Japanese school context, a student is required to sit up, at least when asked a question by the teacher. In our example, in (1) the student looks somewhat downward. We could call this the abortion of a normal position. Looking down has sometimes been interpreted as respect, or diffidence, or so on. Be that as it may, the student does not take up the normal position, but also does not refuse to respond straight away, for example, by standing up and walking out.

There is another example of an aborted normal position in (4/5): the student is expected to face and look at the teacher according to the normal position, at least shortly after he has been asked a question. While his eye direction is turned towards the teacher⁵, his face is not. Note that the student is looking down (1) or straight on (4/5), and not looking away, such as out of the window. Rather he just avoids the sightline of the teacher. We could then take such abortions of normal positions as a hint at refusals.

B. Intermediate activities (IA): (3) (5) (7) (8) (9) (10) (12) (18)

The intermediate activities are possible actions at hand for the students after being called upon in class. This performance by itself does not tell us in any way whether the student is going to answer or not. It is, however, possible that, if too many IA behaviors crop up, and/or if they take too long, it is probable that no answer is going to follow. This is especially the case when IA are performed remarkably slower than usual.

C. The rest (2) (4/5) (6) (13/14) (15)

In the example, we find actions not found in the cases where answers are followed:

- C.1 (2) No reaction: i.e. going on with what one is doing, e.g. doing nothing, sitting, or talking to the neighbor, etc.
- C.2 (4/5) (13/14) The split of face and eye direction
- C.3 (6) (15) Slightly smiling

C.1 No reaction and face direction forward or down in front of oneself, especially in the Japanese school context where showing attention to the teacher seems obligatory, look like willful ignorance of the teacher. Outside of school, however, avoiding action and reaction as a sign of non-initiativity is often a sign of accepting one's socially lower position and thus not

necessarily offending. This meaning seems to be transferred here into the university context.

C.2 Split of face and eye direction: While at school looking at the teacher seems to be required (see normal positions), the eye direction could be enough to warrant the upholding of the cooperation relationship mentioned above. From outside school, again we have the avoiding of the sightline, also as a sign of subordination. Thus the split can be interpreted as a two-way relationship upholder without any relationship to the contents of the answer.⁶

C.3 It is however, an element of casual communication and serves to avoid overt breaches in the relationship. The person who smiles does, however, not take over any responsibility for the content at talk. Thus, a smile often indicates non-understanding.

As shown in preceding papers (Reinelt 1988/1987), the generation of an answer is also a group task. In our example we also get a hint, that no work out is going to take place between those around SA: While SR performs an intermediate activity in (8) he does not follow this up with more of the same or similar actions, but rather remains right like that: (11/16), or uses the same refusal as SA (10). We here also have an example where the surrounding students integrate a cooperation upholding element into the school context without giving content of the answer.

3.3 A First Summary

To summarize our findings so far, we may say the following:

- 1) Since students have to keep up the cooperation situation at school, various actions are performed to indicate that the student asked does not want to break the norms. None of these do imply that the student is actually working towards an answer in contents.
- 2) Students use various non-verbal, "paralinguistic" elements. Many of these have meanings in and/or outside the school context.
- 3) One kind of REFUSAL is a local minimal deviation from a normal position.
- 4) As hint at a refusal we can interpret the cropping up of intermediate activities, especially if they are performed remarkably slower than usual.

- 5) Students can take over elements into the school context, which have especially a non-breaking meaning outside the school, but otherwise make no sense in the school context, like smiling or no reaction.
- 6) Also combinations of in-school and out-school elements are possible. In lots of cases only the normative part is performed (cf. the split).
- 7) Just like the student asked, those around him take to the same strategies.
- 8) All in all, we should perhaps say that it is not only one instance of activities that constitutes a refusal. Rather it seems to be the case that an accumulation of such actions should be interpreted as a refusal.

3.4 A Verbal Refusal: "wakarimasen"

No verbal means of refusal have been looked at yet. They are the same for the student asked and the group around him, and very, very different from any means legally safely available to e.g. German students. So far I have been able to locate only one hint at "I don't know": (Faerch/ Kasper 1986: 184).

Two configurations are possible:

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------|--|
| crossed | 1): Wakarimasen | often preceded or accompanied by swerving the head left to right and/or raising the arms in front of the face (and bowing) |
| | STi > T | |
| | 2): Wakarimasen | |
| | STi > STii | |

The following is an example of 1):

continuing from above (18):

- (19) SA turns to the left,
away from SR and the
teacher

(12: 1)

(20) SA turns in one long move from the left slowly to the right in the direction of the teacher. While his face direction slightly avoids the teacher, he looks up to T, head slightly tilted, and slowly says: "Wakarimasen".

(14: 3)

This utterance deserves special attention: "wakarimasen", or its less polite variant "wakaranai", the latter especially in affected intonation. Both mean: (I) don't know (the answer) or don't understand (the question or problem).

If a student in the West says "I don't understand", he is up to facing a negative mark instantly, since he has, even by word, proved his ignorance. As might be expected, Japanese students would be very surprised, if a teacher surmises that and gives a bad mark.

"Wakarimasen" is used in the school context in at least two ways.

- 1) Student to teacher. The student indicates that he is not able to satisfy the content part of the answer. He is however not ready to accept that he has done anything against any norm or rule with the consequence of a bad mark.
- 2) "Wakarimasen" is used among the students both ways from and to the students asked. This is not a cry for help as it might seem. Rather the utterer shows that he is refusing to work on the contents of the answer while remaining within the norms. Call this

sympathy, empathy or whatever, it refers to that students can be expected to know something only to a limited degree.

This point shows that besides the content part of the answer, which can be refused easily, the student asked has to take care of the normative part towards the teacher, only e.g. by "Wakarimasen" or shaking his head, or looking askance, even withdrawing the body, etc. The students have to take care of each other, i.e. those in the area of the one asked and vice versa. Although the utterance is almost identical: "wakarimasen", the addressee is different. The point here is that in learning environments persons in a lower social position cannot be held responsible for any lack of knowledge, content, etc. Similarly, no negative rewards are to be given to any of the consequences thereof. Furthermore, no conclusions are expected to be drawn from the lack of contents. While this sounds rather tragical, it is a safety measure for extreme cases. While following it strictly, this would throw everyday life into turmoil, it is a shelter if worse comes to worst.

Then, as normally, the socially higher person has to take care of the lower. Showing ignorance is after all one way of showing ones "low"-ness, and recognizing this one way of showing care.

What a socially lower person has to show, then, is sticking to norms, as the least reactivity. This is what all the strategies considered so far do.

Note that "Western" students do not have this possibility, although a very good student gets liberties for all kinds of behavior normally. At that, if worse comes to worst, a good pupil can claim that he has fulfilled whatever he was to do, and that the school can make no further demands on him or her.

All in all, except for the case of "wakarimasen", we do not get one clear sign that means refusal. We can then summarize that it is either the number of signs with this potential appearing in the answering context, or their constellation or mixture, that signal refusal.

4. A Comparison

All schools strive to educate children in two ways.

- a) To transfer the most important knowledge parts. This is tested in every school in examinations. Other confirmations are possible (e.g. in the West in class, too)

- b) To implant into students the most important behavior patterns of the respective society. This includes among other things, knowledge about when and where to refuse in which way. (In Japan, a nice refusal is then a good achievement). The distinction of knowledge and good behavior showing, and the possibility of refusals in the classroom can now be ordered like this.

critterion	knowledge show	requirement of good behavior
Japan	only partly in class, rather in test	strong, but safe way of refusal possible
West	test, also in-class refusals lead to sanctions	overlaid by knowledge show requirements

As seen above, in this context in Japan responses are in no way workouts of single persons. Automatically, working together builds an important backing among the students and strengthens them against eventual problems with the teacher or other parts of the institution. That also shows why it is so important to involve the others around even when refusing. This situation is in stark contrast to the "West", where no responsibility can be diverted to others. Rather, at least in Germany, the neighboring students can be penalized for any try at helping the students asked.

A final point is to ask what happens, when the cooperation really breaks down, e.g. the refusal is interpreted as intentional and/or uncooperative. To answer this we have to look at the classroom situation again.

In the Japanese situation, as long as teachers stay within their roles and students with theirs, too, no breach is possible at all. For this, teacher and students would have to go to extremes, e.g. curses or accusations. This is rather avoided by both parties, because the effect would certainly spread out

of the classroom situation and could easily uproot the whole institution. And this would not pay in any case.⁷

5. Hints for Teachers

Refusals can be very disturbing. They can turn every try at pacing a class into turmoil. And they especially crop up, when teachers try to push. We thus think that some general points should conclude this paper.

In Japanese FL classes, it is very important to avoid embarrassment and eventual loss of face in class. Refusals, and vice versa insisting on answers can easily lead to this. Considering them in advance, e.g. in the preparation or in the teaching process, especially in large classes, can help saving valuable time.

Most native speakers of the students' mother tongue understand their refusals unconsciously. For non-native speakers, however, it is of utter importance to be able to recognize possible refusals, be they verbal or non-verbal, and to develop techniques to overcome them. If this is not given due consideration, even the preconditions for practicing the foreign language can be destroyed.

Above all, a considerate proper treatment, e.g. an avoidance of going to extremes, can lead to a better understanding between students and teachers.

Notes

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We are fully aware that contrasting the "West" and "Japan" is a tremendous and somewhat dangerous oversimplification, but we hope it makes the points of this paper clearer. Much more detailed and contrastive analysis is needed.

1. We are fully aware of the teacher's question as an educational or language teaching means. However, the simple fact that they are used very frequently, and that problems crop up, justifies our discussion. For a recent discussion on the turn-taking characteristics of Western e.g. Dutch classrooms cf. Mazeland (1983). Cf. for a further comparative study on teachers question Reinelt (1992).
2. Most transcripts of recorded material of classes in the "West" give time intervals for the pause between teachers questions and students answers only when they are remarkably longer than usually, e.g. 10 seconds (cf. Redder 1988). No time intervals are given throughout in Faerch/Kasper (1986). This means that immediate answers are thought to be the rule rather than the exception.
3. A methodological remark: What we get as results here might look very accidental. But we have two tests:
 - 1) The interpretations are similar from different viewers and these show up with similar results from different viewpoints.
 - 2) Even stronger is the following proof: What we get corresponds to, but is not identical with, the ways people, i.e. here students, want their actions received practically. The ideal of student-teacher interactions is one concept, the practice in everyday classes another one. Relationships exist only insofar as education specialists have been successfully implanting their ideas in the educational system. Our paper does not include any statistics. Based on hundreds of teaching hours, it is meant to give a basis on which and the background before which hypotheses for statistical research can be developed and variables sorted out. That this is necessary is obvious: If teachers have a sound definition of what exactly a refusal is and how it can be recognized, the whole teaching of foreign languages in Japan and in other countries, where refusals play such an important role, could be upgraded considerably.
4. Especially in Japan: Lowering the head, moving away from the teacher, slanting the head, swerving the head (cf. also Akiyama 1991), taking in breath noisily and others, cf. also Kanayama 1983. For a discussion of

the definition of emblems s. Safadi/Valentine 1988. The movements the students used are stylized and there is few doubt about their interpretation.

5. This question is a typical school question. To ask it makes sense only in such an educational or practice context. Such questions can highlight the artificiality of the school situation. Since students are very much accustomed to this type, refusals reveal themselves in them even more clearly.
6. While Japanese, as has been noted, often avoid eye contact, most students usually look at teachers when called up. The latter could be a school specific normative way of acting.
7. With the recently increasing concern for the teacher-students relationship at school, breaches of cooperation are often publicized later on, but still usually not treated in the very situation itself.

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