A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF HUMOR IN STAND-UP COMEDY IN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

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Abstract

Using Goffman's (1981) participation framework and Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, this study examines stand-up comedy in the U.S. and Japan and demonstrates pervasive patterns of communication in comedy performance. In the U.S., stand-up acts are comprised of solo comedian's narrative performance, while stand-up comic narrative in Japan is performed in the form of dialogue between two comedians. The study conducts a micro-level discourse analysis of live performances by two U.S. comedians and two Japanese comedy duos. Humor in U.S. stand-up emerges through common ground between the comedian and the audience, whereas the Japanese comedians communicate humor on the basis of the boundary between their performance sphere and the audience's spectator sphere. The boundary markings are further analyzed based on indexical *inclusion* and *exclusion* (Strauss & Eun 2005).

Key words: Stand-up comedy; Manzai; Discourse analysis.

I. Introduction

Humor brings people together under shared laughter. However, since humor requires highly sensitive linguistic and cultural competence, expressing and appreciating humor is often a challenge in cross-cultural communication. What is considered as funny may differ across cultures. A humorous remark in one culture is not necessarily humorous in another culture; moreover, it might be considered as inappropriate or even offensive. This study compares humor in the United States and in Japan, specifically, humor in American stand-up comedy and Japanese stand-up comedy known as *manzai*. By examining the process in which the comedians elicit the audience's laughter, the present study will uncover and illustrate commonalities and differences between humor in comedy in U.S. American culture and in Japanese culture[1].

Stand-up comedy is one of the most popular genres of entertainment both in the United States and in Japan (see Koziski-Olson 1988; Marc 1997; Mintz

[1] For the sake of simplicity, hereafter, I will use the expression, "American," instead of "U.S. American."

1985; Stebbins 1990 for American stand-up and Inoue 2003; Ota 2002; Senzaki 1997; Stocker 2002; 2006 for Japanese *manzai*). At present, solo performance is the standard style in American stand-up comedy, whereas Japanese *manzai* stand-up has long been performed by comedy duos, one performer taking the role of *boke* (fool) and the other, *tsukkomi* (wit)[2]. Thus, the present study compares American solo stand-up and Japanese duo *manzai*. Despite the solo-duo difference, American stand-up comedy and Japanese *manzai* are nevertheless comparable in that the performance centers on the comedians' coherent humorous narrative presented to live audiences and that the performance relies crucially on the comedians' language use[3].

The present study conducts a micro-level discourse analysis of live comedy performances by two contemporary U.S. stand-up comedians, Bill Cosby and Jerry Seinfeld, and two contemporary Japanese comedy duos, Downtown and Yokoyama Yasushi and Nishikawa Kiyoshi. Findings of this study are based on the performances by the four comedians/duos, and therefore, they are not meant for generalizations across the board. Rather, the study is intended as a case study that illustrates tendencies in U.S. American culture and Japanese culture with regard to ways of communicating humor.

II. Linguistic Studies of Humor

The current study will illuminate the communication of humor in Japanese and American cultures from a perspective not previously taken. The study differs from previous linguistic work that analyzes comedy discourse from the perspective of one linguistic/cultural context (i.e., only American or only Japanese). The present study also differs from the majority of linguistic research on humor, whose main concern is to apply linguistic and pragmatic theories to de-contextualized short joke texts.

The conventional approach of linguistic research on humor is to present how linguistic or pragmatic theories work in short joke texts (e.g., Attardo 1994; Dolitsky 1992; Graeme 2004; Milner 1972; Raskin 1985; Sobkowiak 1991; Yamaguchi 1988; Zajdman 1995). Graeme explains that jokes are "methodologically convenient" for linguistic studies for the following reasons:

- There is a ready source of attested examples, since collections of jokes abound.

[2] The English translation of *tsukkomi* is adapted from Joel F. Stocker, "*Manzai*: Team comedy in Japan's entertainment industry," In *Understanding Humor in Japan*, ed. Jessica Milner Davis, 51. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2006.

[3] Solo comedians are becoming popular in contemporary Japan. However, Japanese solo comedians typically present one-liner jokes instead of coherent narrative and thus they are not stand-up comedians in the sense understood in the States. *Rakugo*, a so-called "sit-down comedy," may be considered as comparable to American stand-up comedy. However, *rakugo* is a traditional art of storytelling whose performance style is "reduced to inflexible rules" (Morioka & Sasaki 1990: 1) and thus it is a quite different genre from American stand-up comedy.

> • Jokes are relatively self-contained and are typically re-used in a wide range of settings.
> • Jokes are small, which renders them more manageable for the analyst [than amusing incidents that happen in everyday life] (Graeme 2004:15).

As Graeme points out, some types of jokes are short and separable from the surrounding discourse. Consequently, linguistic studies commonly analyze jokes in isolation from the context of the utterance and explicate the mechanism of humor in the joke texts.

While a predominant number of studies in linguistics examine de-contextualized jokes for the purpose of exploring linguistic/pragmatic theories, existing literature has also investigated joking in everyday conversation and illustrated roles and functions of joking in communication (Kotthoff 1996; Norrick 1993, 2001, 2004). Norrick analyzes instances of humorous storytelling in naturally occurring discourse and argues that a narrative that involves "a clash in frame expectations" (Goffman 1986) becomes either humorous or non-humorous, depending on the mode of presentation (Norrick 2004). Norrick (2004) contends that when the speaker intends to present a story to be humorous, he or she introduces a "play frame" (Bateson 1953) by using various "contextualization cues" (Gumperz 1977, 1982).

A small but growing number of studies analyze the discourse of stand-up comedy performance in Japan (Morimoto 2001; 2003) and in North American and British contexts (McIlvenny et al. 1993; Rutter 1997). Using Conversation Analysis as their methodological approach, these studies uncover "the way comedians perform jokes" in stand-up performances (Rutter 1997). McIlvenny et al. (1993) analyze the discourse of stand-up comedy in comparison to the discourse of political oratory. The authors identify verbal techniques that the comedian uses to elicit audience laughter. Based on Atkinson's (1984) analysis of political oratory, McIlvenny et al. (1993) observe that some comedians are similar to orators in that they often present a list of three items and convey the upshot of the statement at the delivery of the third item. The authors argue that presenting the punch line of a joke in the "three part list structure" is a "laughtrap," by which stand-up comedians trigger audience laughter at a particular point of the talk.

The existing literature on the discourse of stand-up comedy mostly concerns comedy performances in a single language (see McIlvenny et al. 1993, Rutter 1997 for American or British English and Morimoto 2001, 2003 for Japanese). Instead of focusing on a single social, cultural, and linguistic context, the current study compares American and Japanese stand-up comedy and discusses American culture and Japanese culture exhibited in the comedy discourse. The study will reveal what is considered as humorous among the respective social members, and the norms of communicating humor within the respective cultural groups.

III. Data

The data for this study consist of commercially produced videotapes and digital video discs (DVDs) of live comedy performances by two American stand-up comedians, Bill Cosby and Jerry Seinfeld, and two Japanese comedy duos, Downtown and Yokoyama Yasushi and Nishikawa Kiyoshi (see Appendix A for the product details of the videotapes and discs).

The total duration of the all comedy performances is nine hours and seventeen minutes, of which five hours are American stand-up comedy and four hours and seventeen minutes are Japanese comedy. The entire dataset has been transcribed according to the transcription conventions of Conversation Analysis (Atkinson and Heritage 1984: see Appendix B). The Japanese transcript is Romanized according to the Hepburn system.

The database contains a total of 21 stand-up and *manzai* performances. Among the 21 performances, four are American stand-up comedy: two by Cosby and two by Seinfeld. The other 17 performances are Japanese *manzai*: eight by Downtown and nine by Yasukiyo. The database contains a larger number of *manzai* performances than American stand-up performances because each *manzai* routine is shorter than a stand-up act. Cosby and Seinfeld each present a single performance about one hour long, and their live discs/tapes contain one coherent stand-up act. Downtown and Yasukiyo perform a routine for about fifteen minutes on average. Each of the duos' discs or tapes contains four to five *manzai* routines, for a total duration of the product of approximately one hour.

IV. Analytic Frameworks

Three theoretical frameworks are used for analyzing comedy discourse: Goffman's (1981) participation framework, Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, and indexical *inclusion* and *exclusion* (Strauss and Eun 2005). The third framework will be related to the Japanese organizational concepts, *uchi* (inside) versus *soto* (outside), for the analysis of the Japanese *manzai* performances.

IV.1 Goffman's Participation Framework

Goffman (1981) explains that individuals participate in talk with a particular type of participation status. Further, the participation status of all individuals in a gathering constitutes a participation framework. This study focuses particularly on Goffman's conceptualization of the hearer as a participant in spoken interaction. Goffman (1981) identifies three types of hearers according to their participation status in an interaction, that is, hearers can be categorized as "addressed recipients," "ratified overhearers," and "unratified overhearers". A hearer is an addressed recipient if he or she is the speaker's target interlocutor. One may also participate in the talk as an overhearer by attending the talk while not being directly

addressed by the speaker. If the overhearer is acknowledged by the speaker, the person is a ratified overhearer. If not, this participant is considered an unratified overhearer.

In this study, the audience represents the collective set of hearers in Goffman's terms. The participation framework in American stand-up comedy consists of a dyadic relationship between the solo comedian and the audience as addressed recipients. The comedian speaks directly to the audience, and the audience responds mainly in the form of laughter or applause. The audience thus participates in the performance as addressed recipients. In contrast, in Japanese *manzai*, the audience is positioned variably as ratified overhearers or addressed recipients of the comedians' talk. The audience is framed as ratified overhearers when the comedians converse with each other while the audience listens to their dialogue unfold. The duo sometimes also addresses the audience and involves them in the performance as addressed recipients. The American stand-up and Japanese *manzai* performances exhibit distinctive patterns with respect to this concept of participation framework, which points to a number of cultural expectations that are presumed to be shared among members of the respective societies.

IV.2 Brown and Levinson's Model of Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose a universal framework of social interaction which is based predominantly, if not entirely, on the notion of "face" (p.61). "Face," according to Brown and Levinson, refers to "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself [or herself]" (p.62). The concept is then broken down into two aspects of face: on the one hand, *positive face* is considered "the desire to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired" (p.70). *Negative face*, on the other hand, is "the want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination" (p.70).

Within this theory, verbal and non-verbal communicative acts are potentially threatening to a speaker's or hearer's positive or negative face. Any act that carries this potential is referred to as a *face-threatening act (FTA)*. Brown and Levinson propose a taxonomy of FTAs, ordered according to the seriousness of the FTA itself and the degree of risk involved in producing it. In order to mitigate the seriousness of a speech act or alter the degree of risk in carrying out the act, speakers and/or hearers employ redressive strategies. The authors delineate a set of these strategies depending upon the extent to which an act could or should be mitigated. In particular, they propose *positive politeness* and *negative politeness* strategies. With positive politeness strategies, the speaker satisfies the interlocutor's positive face, for example, by "treating [the interlocutor] as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). In this sense, positive politeness is "approach-based" (p.70). In contrast, negative politeness strategies are "essentially avoidance-based" and "characterized by self-effacement" because the speaker avoids interfering with the interlocutor's "territories, personal preserves,

right to non-distraction, that is, to freedom of action and freedom from imposition"(p.61). While Brown and Levinson consider the interrelationship between *face* as the individual's public self-image and the expectation among social members to maintain each other's face as a universal phenomenon, what comprises face across different societies and cultures appears to vary.

IV.3 *Uchi* (Inside) versus *Soto* (Outside) and Indexical *Inclusion* versus *Exclusion*

The *uchi/soto* distinction is said to be an essential concept according to which aspects of Japanese society have been accounted for in the literature: social relationships (Doi 1986; Nakanae 1970), self and other (Lebra 1992; 2004), and the interrelation of self, social order, and communication (Bachnik and Quinn 1994). The present study examines the linguistic manifestation of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) in *manzai* discourse, specifically from the point of view of indexicality (Ochs 1990; 1996; Hanks 1990; 1992; Strauss and Eun 2005). In *manzai* performances, the *uchi* (inside)*/soto* (outside) distinction is reflected particularly in the alternations of speech levels (i.e., formal and informal forms) and speech varieties (i.e., Standard Japanese and the *Osaka/Kansai* (Western region) dialect).

Strauss and Eun (2005) argue that the speaker's speech level choices reflect differing degrees of "sharedness of domains of experience and cognition between and among interlocutors" (p.619). The authors analyze the two honorific speech levels in Korean (i.e., the polite form and the deferential form) and contend that with the deferential form the speakers "exclude the interlocutors from their personal spheres of experience and/or cognition" (p.613). Thus, the deferential form signals the semantic feature + *boundary* and indexes the speaker's core stance of *exclusion* vis-à-vis their interlocutors or the audience (p.628). In contrast, the polite form exhibits the semantic feature – *boundary* and the speaker's core stance of inclusion. (p.628)

We can expand Strauss and Eun's notion of +/– *boundary* into the analysis of the formal/informal speech levels exhibited in *manzai* discourse. With the formal speech level, the comedian selects a + *boundary* feature vis-à-vis his interlocutors (i.e., the audience, his partner comedian, or both parties). In contrast, the informal form reflects his stance of *inclusion* or the signal of – *boundary*. Another way that the comedy duos convey their stance-marking with regard to the indexical *inclusion* versus *exclusion* of the audience involves the alternation between dialect and standard forms.

It should be noted that the comedians' *uchi/soto* orientations expressed through the two speech levels/varieties in turn reflect their expression of politeness strategies. Using the informal form and/or dialect, the comedian considers his/her addressee (i.e., the audience or his partner comedian, or both parties) as in-group members and expresses positive politeness. In contrast, using the formal form and Standard Japanese speech, the comedian maintains an appropriate level of

formality, deference, and social distance with the addressee and thereby attends to the addressee's negative face through avoidance-based strategies.

V. Analysis

American stand-up and Japanese *manzai* performances exhibit distinct participation frameworks and politeness strategies. American comedians frame the audience as addressed recipients, involve them in the performance, and thereby appeal to their positive face. In contrast, Japanese comedians frame the audience as ratified overhearers of their comic dialogue and, thus, they attend to the audience's negative face. The cross-culturally distinctive communication styles will be discussed below along with excerpts from actual comedy performances.

V.1 American Stand-Up

The pervasive pattern in American stand-up routines is the comedians' indexical *inclusion* of the audience with positive politeness techniques. Both Cosby and Seinfeld express humor on the basis of shared common knowledge and experiences with their audiences. Common ground is established, maintained, and reiterated throughout their stand-up routine performances. The characteristics of American stand-up comedy performances are exemplified in Jerry Seinfeld's routine about milk extracted below.

(1) [*Seinfeld 2* Milk routine 1]
1 → JS: people are never really sure if they have milk.
3 JS: I thi^nk we have milk. we mi^ght have milk. ((Imitation gesture: Talks to someone besides him.))
((8 lines skipped))
11 → JS: [there's nothin' worse than thi^nkin' you have milk and not ha^ve (any left)
13 → JS: you know you've got the bowl set u^p. the cereal, the spoon, the [napkin,
14 → the TV, the newspaper everythin' is ready to go.=
17 → JS: =you're gonna lift up the carton and it's too light, (.) HA^::HH. ((Imitation gesture: Lifts up a carton that is almost empty and expresses an utter shock on his face.))
22 JS: OH: NO^:::: ((Imitation gesture: Looks at the *imaginary* carton with his mouth wide open in an utter shock.))
24 JS: too LI^GHT.

In line 1, Seinfeld introduces the topic as people's general experience: "People are never really sure if they have milk." Common ground is established between the comedian and the audience in line 11, as he states, "There's nothing worse than thinking you have milk and not having any left." Seinfeld then focuses on the little speck of reality in everyday life in lines 13 and 14; step by step, he describes the

procedure of eating a bowl of cereal ("You've got the bowl set up. The cereal, the spoon, the napkin, the TV, the newspaper everything is ready to go."). He delivers the joke upshot in line 17, as he continues, "You're gonna lift up the carton and it's too light." The moment of discovery is carried out dramatically as he screams with his face showing utter shock. In this way, the comedian creates humor by providing a magnified comic look at a tiny slice of our daily life.

Seinfeld's stance of *inclusion* becomes more explicit in the subsequent turns in the same routine about milk. Now the routine centers on the audience's actual personal life:

(2) [*Seinfeld 2* Milk routine 2]
26 → JS: [or sometime you think you nee^d >milk.<=hey we gotta pick up some
27 → mi^lk. like many of you^ are thinkin' right no^w.
((6 lines skipped))
33 → JS: so you pick up some milk on your way home.
34 (0.5)
35 → JS: and then you discover yo^u already ha^ve milk.
37 → JS: and no^w you got way too much milk.
39 JS: that's no good either.=now it's a race against the clock of expira^tion date.
41 → JS: tha^t freaky thing.

In lines 26 and 27, he provides another scenario: "You need milk," thinking that there is no milk at home. Seinfeld then continues, "Like many of you are thinking right now," and thereby situates the audience as the central topic. Hereafter, humor emerges as the comedian describes what the audience will do after the show is over: "So you pick up some milk on your way home. And then you discover you already have milk. And now you got way too much milk" (lines 33, 35, and 37). By orienting the routine to the audience's immediate and actual circumstance, Seinfeld involves the audience in the performance and communicates humor while attending to their positive face. He further intensifies the shared laughter in line 41, by anaphorically referring to the situation as "that freaky thing" and thus underscoring the shared domain of knowledge. In this way, the comedian's stance-marking with regard to the indexical *inclusion* of the audience becomes particularly evident when he builds the routines on the audience's immediate experiential standpoint and frames the audience as the central topic of the performance.

Compared to Seinfeld's performance, shared common ground is not as solid in Cosby's routines. Instead of building the routine on the audience's standpoint, Cosby performs his narrative from his own experiential point of view, "I." By telling the audience his personal life stories, however, Cosby still expresses his indexical *inclusion* of the audience. The indexical *inclusion* in the comedian's performance is illustrated, for example, in the routine below where he describes his first experience with trifocals.

(3) [*Cosby 2* Trifocals routine 1]
40 BC: I get up to <u>lea^ve,</u>

41 BC: and the doo^r::?
42 A: hahahahahah
43 BC: is [wa::::::::::[:y down there. ((Extends the right arm to indicate the long distance))
44 BC: I said man, I don't reme^mber the door be[in all the way down there,
45 A: [hahahahah hahahaha

Cosby expresses his shock and surprise when he "get[s] up to leave [the optometrist's office]" (line 40) and realizes that the door was "wa::::::::::y down there" (line 43).
He continues to recount his experience of walking with his brand-new trifocals. The excerpt below shows the continuing part of the narrative. Having left the optometrist, Cosby now attempts to get on an elevator:

(4) [*Cosby 2* Trifocals routine 2]
((13 lines skipped))
59 BC: now the e^levator door opens? and there's about four peo^ple in the thing,
60 ·hh but they're wa^:::::::::[::y >back<.
61 A: [hahah hahahah hahahah hahah
62 BC: I looked at them and said wh^y you are all wa^::[::y back the^re.
63 A: [hahah hahahaha hahahah
64 BC: but this- (.) the- the thi^ng to step o:n, (.) is up ↑here. ((Indicates the chest level))
65 A: hahah ha[hahahah hahah hahahahah
66 BC: so I^ said ↑GO::D ma::n?
67 A: hahah hahaha[hah hahahahah
68 BC: [they oughtah fi^x this thing ((Raises his left leg high to climb up the giant step))
69 A: [hahahah hahahahah ((Merges with applause))
((Narrative continues))

When "the elevator door opens," he sees the passengers standing "wa::::::::::y back" (lines 59, 60). He also finds that the step into the elevator is up on the chest level ("the- the thing to step on is up here") (line 64). Here, humor emerges as the comedian provides an exaggerated and lively account of the world seen through his trifocals, where his sense for space and distance is completely distorted.

As the example above illustrates, Cosby expresses the signal of *–boundary* to the audience by designating them as the addressed recipients of his life stories. Laughter arises in the in-group sphere between the comedian and the audience; Cosby establishes common ground with the audience by telling a series of events that he went through, which, though personal, is familiar to the audience and easily relatable from their own life experiences.

V.2 Japanese *Manzai*

Similar to the case in American stand-up routines, humor in Japanese *manzai* also builds on shared common ground. In *manzai*, however, shared laughter does not emerge in the in-group sphere between the comedians and the audience. Rather, the shared feelings are communicated on the basis of the comedians' indexical *exclusion* vis-à-vis their audience; the duo engages in their insider-performance dialogue while framing the audience as ratified overhearers. The contrast is also observed in terms of the comedians' politeness strategies. In contrast to American comedians, who appeal to the audience's positive face, *manzai* comedians perform while showing negative politeness to their audiences.

The *manzai* comedians' negative politeness strategy is evident, for example, in their pattern of constructing the initial joke. The *manzai* duos violate their own face and serve as the butt of the initial laughter. It was found that only one out of the 17 *manzai* performances involves an initial joke that violates the audience's face[4]. Excerpt (5) illustrates the typical participation framework in Japanese *manzai*. In this opening segment, H complains that his staff prepared a pair of tacky jeans for him to wear in the current performance. H adds humor to the complaint by relating his appearance to that of the female *manzai* duo, *Ikuyo Kuruyo*, who usually appear on stage with extraordinary, comical, and foolish costumes. For the Japanese excerpts, speech level has been marked in bold caps and the use of dialect versus standard speech appears in italics in the transcripts.

(5) [*Downtown 2*: Opening talk]
((A pre-recorded male voice says, "Ladies and gentlemen," in English and announces the beginning of the show. A short introductory tune starts in background and the duo appears on stage. The audience applauds and welcomes the duo. The two comedians, Matsumoto (M) and Hamada (H), stand close to each other in front of the microphone.))

1 M: ((To the audience)) do^:mo. konnichiwa.
'Hello'
((The audience continues to applaud enthusiastically.))
 ((H turns his body toward M, M turns to H))

2 H: iya: ano ne: ((H looks downward, first, then looks at the audience but soon shifts his gaze to M.))
'Well uh'
((Audience applause continues))

3 M: hai hai.
'Yes'
((Audience applause continues))

4 H: ((To M)) wa^tashi [ne^
'I'
((Audience applause continues))

5 Female audience:[maccha^::n. ((*macchan = Matsumoto's nickname*))

[4] This pattern of conveying humor sharply contrasts with the opening sequences of American stand-up comedy, in which the comedians consistently deliver the initial joke by violating the audience's face.

6 M: ((To H)) un.
((Audience applause continues))
7 H: ((To M)) betsuni: (.) Ikuyo Kuruyo **nai^** kara isho^: no koto **i:ta nai** kedo
ne: **[INF]** ***dialect***
'(I) am not Ikuyo Kuruyo, so I don't want to comment on my clothes, but'
8 A: hahahah
9 H: ze^nzen **nio:te [nai** [koko to. **[INF]** ***dialect***
((H looks upset but shows a subtle smile on his face. His gaze shifts to the upper left, apparently addressing the staff member who prepared H's jeans for this performance. When stating "*koko* (here)," H looks at his jeans and designates its reference. He then shifts his gaze back to M.))
'Here (=the jeans) do not suit (with me) at all'
10 M: [i(h)[he(h)he(h)h
11 A: [hahahah hahah hahahah

Following M's greeting to the audience in line 1, H and M face each other, signaling their intention to engage in a conversation between themselves. H interacts with M in the informal, dialect form, exhibiting the indexical *inclusion* of his partner comedian (lines 7 and 9). In contrast, he consistently shows the stance of *exclusion* to the audience. During this segment of the performance, H does not look at the audience except for the one time at the beginning (line 2). Furthermore, although the audience persistently applauds (lines 1 through 6), the duo provides no uptake on the prolonged applause. The audience's enthusiasm is left unattended, and their participation status remains as ratified overhearers. This Downtown performance also illustrates Japanese patterns of creating humor, which is essentially different from the American patterns we observed in the previous section. That is, the shared common ground of experience, i.e., the essence for creating humor in American stand-up comedy, is absent from the *manzai* opening sequences.

The basic structure of *manzai* is comprised of the duo's inside "*uchi"* dialogue in which the comedians address each other in the informal form in the *Osaka/Kansai* dialect. Being ratified overhearers, the audience is excluded from this in-group performance sphere. Even when the *manzai* duos address their utterances to the audience, the comedians signal their *exclusion* to the audience by switching their speech levels to the formal form and using Standard Japanese. The *+boundary* contrasts with the stance of *inclusion* that the duos signal when addressing their partner comedians. Excerpt (6) is a case in point. In this performance, the comedy duo, Yasukiyo, first received gifts and bouquets directly from individual audience members who came to the front of the stage[5]. In the following segment, K jokes that having received plenty of gifts, he is now ready to leave the stage without performing.

[5] Of the 17 *manzai* performances, this is the only case where the comedians receive gifts directly from the audience. In general, *manzai* duos very rarely make direct contact with their audience in live performances.

(6) [*Yasukiyo 4*: Opening talk]

((10 turns of greeting and thanking skipped))

11→+ K: ((to Aud)) dete kite konai yo:ken moro: te sassoku de warui n **desu** ga
[FML] *'Having come out and received this many (gifts), right away and so I feel bad, but'*
12 Y: ha: ha:=
'uh huh'
13→+ K: =kyo: wa korede **shitsure: [sasete itadako:- [HUM]** ***standard***
[((K bows, turns his back to the audience, and attempts to leave the stage))
'Today I/we will excuse myself/ourselves for now'
14→– Y: ((To K)) **[mate^:[: [INF]**
'Hold on'
15 A: [hahahahahahahahah
16 →– Y: ((To M)) **[na(h)nya(h)nen.** [**INF]** ***dialect***
'What the heck'
17 (.)
18 →– Y: **ya(h)ra^(h)shi:na.**= ((Address K)) **[INF]** ***dialect***
'(That's) sly'
19 →– K: ((To Y)) =sonai kyu:ni kaettara **ikan** na,=**[INF]** ***dialect***
'I/we cannot go back that soon, right?'
20 →– Y: ((To K)) =morai ni kita n to **chau no ya**(h)kara. **[INF]** ***dialect***
'We didn't come to receive (gifts), you know'

The duo's boundary marking via formal and informal speech levels is noted in the transcript directly to the right of the line number as "+" and "–" (i.e., +/– *boundary*), respectively. When addressing the audience, K speaks in the formal speech level that even involves the humble form in Standard Japanese (line 13)[6]. In contrast, once the participation framework shifts such that the audience becomes ratified overhearers, the comedians' speech level shifts to the informal with dialect expressions (from line 14 through 20). The boundary between the audience and the duo is also evident in the joke expressed in this opening segment. The gist of the humor here is K's somewhat dismissive attitude concerning the performance that will take place; the attitude is the comedian's personal candid feeling at the moment, which is not shared by the audience.

[6] In addition to plain vs. polite forms, Japanese also has an inventory of lexical items known as "humble" or "hyper polite" forms.

VI. Conclusions

The American stand-up and Japanese *manzai* performances under study exhibit pervasive patterns of communication respectively, with regard to the participation framework, politeness strategies, and the comedians' signaling of *inclusion*/*exclusion* vis-à-vis the audience. The contrasting patterns of communicating humor indicate that the members of the respective societies expect differing degrees of involvement and social distance between the comedian/duo and the audience. In the American context, the comedians create an in-group sphere and invite the audience to join the sphere. Humor emerges within this in-group sphere and, thus, as the laugher occurs, the distinction between the comedian and the audience decreases. In contrast, the Japanese *manzai* duo reinforces the performer-spectator distinction. In *manzai,* laughter usually emerges based on the distinction between the duo's *uchi* (inside) sphere and the audience's *soto* (outside) sphere. Unlike in American stand-up, a certain degree of distance between the two parties is presumably preferred and expected in the Japanese context of comedy performance.

The current study presented a comparison of humor in the two countries based on a small set of data involving four comedians/comedy duos. For better understandings about American stand-up comedy and Japanese *manzai*, it is necessary to investigate performances by a larger number of comedians/duos. Because this study only focused on male comedians and male-male duos, future studies should include performances by female comedians, female-female duos or female-male duos. Comparison of stand-up comedy in English among English-speaking countries such as Australia, Britain, and Canada is another direction to pursue in future research. Stand-up comedy in countries other than the United States and Japan would also yield further insights into culture of comedy.

The interface between language and culture is being explored from various perspectives in the field of applied linguistics (e.g., language socialization, language and cognition, language and identity, interactions in foreign/second language classrooms). However, few studies have been conducted that illustrate how members in a particular culture utilize language to communicate humor. It is hoped that the present study contributes a new perspective to examine culture in close relation to language.

Appendix A: Product Details of Videotapes and Discs

Comedian	VHS/DVD Title	Year	Duration
Bill Cosby	'Bill Cosby, Himself'	1981	105 min
	'Bill Cosby: 49'	1987	67 min
		Total duration: 172 min	
Jerry Seinfeld	'Jerry Seinfeld: Stand-up Confidential'	1987	53 min
	'Jerry Seinfeld: 'I'm telling you for the last time' Live on Broadway'	1998	75 min
		Total duration: 128 min	
Downtown	''*Downtown no gaki no tsukaiya arahende!!*' *Maboroshi no kessaku manzai zenshū* Part 1' ('Downtown: It's no kid's business!!' Precious masterpiece *manzai* complete works Part 1)	1989	55 min
	''*Downtown no gaki no tsukaiya arahende!!*' *Maboroshi no kessaku manzai zenshū* Part 2' ('Downtown: It's no kid's business!!' Precious masterpiece *manzai* complete works Part 2)	1989	51 min
		Total duration: 106 min	
Yasukiyo	'*20 seiki meijin densetsu: Bakushō!! Yasushi Kiyoshi manzai daizenshū* Vol. 6' (20th century master legend: An explosion of laughter!! The complete works series of Yasushi-Kiyoshi *manzai* Vol. 6)	1985-1988	78 min
	'*20 seiki meijin densetsu: Bakushō!! Yasushi Kiyoshi manzai daizenshū* Vol. 4 & 8' (20th century master legend: An explosion of laughter!! The complete works series of Yasushi-Kiyoshi *manzai* Vol. 4 & 8)	1983-1988	73 min
		Total duration: 151 min	
Total performance duration: 9 hours and 17 minutes			

Appendix B: Transcription Conventions

Symbols	Meaning	Example
:	sound stretch	my:
::	longer sound stretch	uh::
upper case letters	increased volume	and THE^N
° °	decreased volume	°and°
underline	stress	very emotional
period	final, falling intonation	he uses profanity.
question mark	final rising intonation	with my father?
^	non-final rising intonation	fir^st of all
comma	continuing intonation, slight rise	right,
↑	sudden rising intonation	↑GO::D
=	latched speech	and=uh
> <	compressed speech	>if I were to<
-	false restarts	I- I would
square brackets	overlapping speech	we got off the [a^irplane, [right.
parentheses	uncertain hearing	(wha:^t.)
(.)	micro pause	
(1.0)	timed pause	
·h	in-breath	
·hh	longer in-breath	
(h)	aspiration	
(hh)	longer aspiration	
hah heh huh	laughter	
(( ))	comments	

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