

Linguistic Constructions of Sociocultural Difference:

the initial perceptions of Japanese and German students at a New Zealand university

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Introduction

- **Main aim**: to investigate the ways in which language is used in the discursive construction of national identities
- **Object of Analysis**: interview data in which six international students from Germany and Japan enact their early study abroad experiences to a young New Zealand researcher

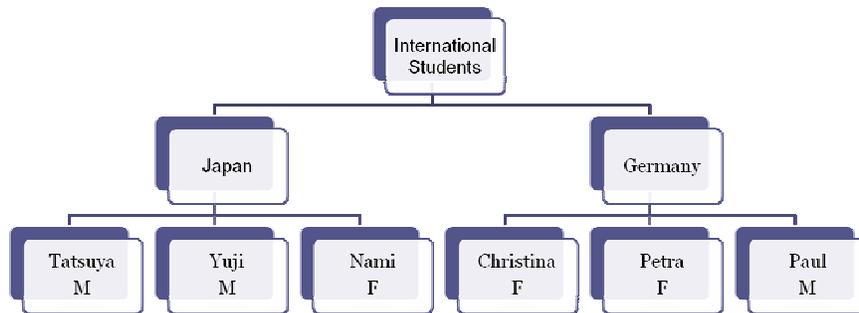
Linguistic Analysis of Perceived Sociocultural Differences

- construction of sociocultural differences analysed using techniques of conversation and discourse analysis
- primary focus on ‘extreme language’ or Extreme Case Formulations (ECFs).
- ECF’s justify, legitimise (Pomerantz 1986), eg. “in Japan **everyone** is **so** busy”.
- ECF’s soften or mitigate (Edwards 2000), eg. “**sometimes** Kiwis are **a bit more** practical **in a way**”

Research Questions

1. *In an interview with a New Zealand researcher, how do the participants in this study discursively represent their experience in New Zealand with regard to sociocultural differences between their own and others’ national identity?*
2. *What patterns, if any, are to be found within and across the two national groups?*

Participants



Methodology

- 20-60 minute interviews, in English, conducted on campus, general questions, e.g. “How has your experience in New Zealand been so far?”
- interviews audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim
- data selection: (i) sociocultural differences expressed, (ii) indicative of student’s wider experience, (iii) use of ECFs

Findings: Japanese Students

- Yuji: “*ah **everything!***”
- Tatusya: “*lifestyle is **so** slow and **everyone** in Japan is **so** busy”*”
- Nami: “*I like New Zealand **very much***”
- present a positive stance toward New Zealand (vis-à-vis Japanese culture and society) using ECF’s
- serves to construct a relationship of solidarity with the New Zealand researcher

Findings: German Students

- Christina: “*and they say ‘**everything’s fine**’ but actually it’s not fine”*”
- Petra: “*for me it feels like **so perfect***”
- Paul: “*it’s not like you gotta have the **complete, exact, precise** system”*”
- somewhat more critical of New Zealand than Japanese students
- use ECF’s to mitigate their constructions of sociocultural otherness

Summary

- (i) the unique and complex way each individual participant used (extreme) language in the discursive representation of their own and other's national identity,
- (ii) discursive patterns within and across the two national groups, and
- (iii) how the data from the study is both consistent with and transgresses prior widespread perceptions of German and Japanese interactional style

Empowerment Framework

- conducting research on language should be “empowering” not only to the researcher, but also the participants and the wider community (Cameron et al,1997).
- practical application of the interview data from this study should serve to mitigate the sense of ‘otherness’ represented by the students

Social Application of Research

- *How can we promote the awareness of cultural differences in intercultural interaction without over-generalising or stereotyping?*
- Kiwi culture: *“Kiwis think they are pretty funny and will laugh at their own jokes”* (Guide For International Students 2007, p. 65).
- More nuanced alternative based on interview data: *“Some international students feel that the people in New Zealand are more relaxed and that the pace of life is slower than in their home country.”*

References



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