



Doing Interpreting within Interaction: The Interactive Accomplishment of a “*Henna Gaijin*” or “Strange Foreigner”

AUG NISHIZAKA

Department of Sociology, Meiji Gakuin University, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8636, Japan
(e-mail: augnish@soc.meijigakuin.ac.jp)

Abstract. The aims of this paper are: (1) to criticize the traditional conception of understanding in sociology; (2) to show how doing interpreting is achieved within the activity the participant is currently involved in; (3) to show how an individual’s special characteristics, e.g., a “strange foreigner,” are constructed and used within the actual trajectory of interaction; and (4) to demonstrate how the participants in the so-called intercultural communication ‘do cultural differences’ within interaction.

1. Introduction

One day in May 1996, we were sitting in a small room at Waseda University in Tokyo and discussing what the title of the conference to be held the next summer should be. I do not remember exactly who it was that brought up first the one we finally took (it might be that I did), but we were all happy with it. We thus had the conference for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis: East and West in August, 1997. I really think we had a marvelous time and experienced a lot of new encounters, academic and otherwise, between the East and the West, and among those from the East, as we had expected to. Now, however, I cannot help being reminded of what Edward Said writes about the division of human beings into “us” (Westerners) and “them” (Orientals) in his book on *Orientalism*:

[S]uch divisions are generalities whose use historically and actually has been to press the importance of the distinction between some men and some other men, usually towards not especially admirable ends. When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis, research, public policy . . . , the result is usually to polarize the distinction . . . and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies (Said, 1978: 45).

In fact, Japan has been caught within the magnetic field organized around the categories “East” and “West,” and it has also used those categories “historically and actually” to portray itself by duplicating the distinction [West/East] within

one of these terms (so we have, as it were, the nested distinctions [West/East [West/East]]), i.e., by depicting “Asia” as “Japan’s East.” This self-portrait of Japan “historically and actually” has encouraged the country to be oppressive to “others” (cf. Kang, 1996).

On the other hand, here are Harvey Sacks’ observations about “category-bound activities” in 1966: if an activity occurred and the person who did it is not known, then those properties bound to categories permit one to know what the person who probably did it is going to look like and where to search for him or her.

And note that if that were undercut there would be some very serious problems. For example, if you look at the civil rights discussion and any of the literature relevant to it, you’ll find that reports will say things like this: In the last year, in civil-rights-related cases (not legal cases, now) where there have been no convictions, 18 Negroes were murdered, bombed, lynched, whatever. Where, lacking the procedures we’re employing, that could hardly be arrived at. All that we would know is that 18 persons had died, and there are a variety of properties which are true about them. The sheer knowing of the fact that this case is the case of a Negro murdered, much less a Negro murdered for civil rights reasons, takes some of these relevance rules as essential to the finding of what the hell is happening (Sacks, 1992: I, 339).

Because some properties are expected of categories, when a category like “Black” is used to refer to a person, even if one does not know the personality or any other details of the person, one can know what happened to him or her and there is available an explanation for that happening. This is to say, for example, that one can know who else should be involved, even though the details about him or her, e.g., his or her name, personality, hobbies or whatever, are not known at all: A “white” man killed that “black” man because of the color of the skin. Through categories like “White” and “Black” one may divide human reality into “us” (White) and “them” (Black). In the case just cited, however, without using such categories, the murder would be only another “usual” murder. Using such categories can constitute an accusation against “racism.” What is suggested here is this: It is precisely *because* such categories are usually used to limit “the human encounter” that they can also be used to open up a world to come where the very opposite will be possible, i.e., “the human encounter” will be fostered. Is it true? And how exactly is it those categories can be used to encourage “the human encounter”? When, on the other hand, is it they are put to use oppressively? And how exactly?

I will not pursue further these rather practical issues here, although these issues are practically very important. I mentioned them to note an *analytic* problem which also tends to be neglected. (Of course, it is Harvey Sacks who invited our attention to this problem.) When one uses categories like “East” and “West,” “Japanese” and “foreigner” or whatever as the starting and the

end points of analysis, as is usual in the case of “intercultural communication” studies, the result is not only to hinder “the human encounter,” but to hamper the very “interculturality” of intercultural communication from being investigated in its own right. When one uses those “cultural” categories like “Japanese” and “foreigner” as an explanation by which observable communicational patterns, for instance, are to be accounted for, the result is to just presuppose and take for granted the fact that the parties are a Japanese and a foreigner or that there are cultural differences right there. The analytic problem here, however, is *not* to have suspicions against this fact: Is he really a Japanese? Are their cultures really different? Do these categorizations not conceal or limit something important? Etc. The problem here is rather: How is it this fact is a “real” fact right there? How is this fact accomplished as such? The parties are, so to speak, “doing being a Japanese (or a foreigner)” and “doing cultural differences” within interaction. An aim of this paper is to demonstrate how to do these things (with words) within interaction.

Having said this, however, the main aim of the paper lies somewhere else. (I focused on the interactive accomplishment of “interculturality” elsewhere. See Nishizaka, 1995). It has something to do with topics of classical sociology or sociological methodology, i.e., “understanding” and “interpretation.” There are a couple of points I want to make. First, the traditional conception of understanding in sociological methodology which treats understanding as a kind of interpretation is misleading. Second, while interpretation tends to be regarded as an “internal” process lodged under an individual’s skin, interpretation is rather an interactional phenomenon lodged within joint activity; i.e., interpretation is organized within the ongoing activity and is also an interactional resource for the organization of the same activity. In the course of analysis, I will show, too, how, what kind of person someone is, is constructed and used within the actual trajectory of interaction.

2. Understanding and Interpretation

There has been a general tendency in sociology, especially in the methodological literature, to conceptualize understanding after the model of interpretation. In fact, it has been common sense in sociology, since Max Weber, to distinguish behavior and action. This common sense reasoning goes like this: Since it is impossible to access *social* phenomena by dealing only with what is *directly observable*, it is necessary to move beyond directly observable bodily movements, or (vocal or non-vocal) behavior, and *interpret* them to reach the meaning the agent thinks about his or her own bodily movements.

This interpretive conception is based on what may be called a “two-stage process” assumption. One first observes someone swing an axe toward a tree, for example, and *then* interprets the behavior *as* action of cutting a tree,

exercising their arms, or relieving their frustration. (Here, as interpretation I refer roughly to expressing the meaning of something with something else: recognize, refer to, regard, think of, treat, view or the like, something *as* something other, or “more,” than the thing; I follow Wittgenstein’s (1953) recommendation: “we ought to restrict the term ‘interpretation’ to the substitution of one expression . . . for another” (§ 201)). Note that this interpretive conception does concern the way actors themselves understand each other rather than sociological methodology. In this conception, action is considered to be a double construct, i.e., behavior *plus* the meaning the actor thinks about his or her own behavior.

It is quite well known that this conception leads to fundamental difficulties. If every action is to be conceptualized as behavior plus the “meaning” one thinks, a question will be raised immediately: How is this meaning to be grasped? Suppose that you have now what the actor thinks about his or her own bodily movements. However, still another problem comes up soon: How is what the actor thinks to be understood? Insofar as following the interpretive conception, the actor’s thought should also be conceptualized as images, for instance, plus their meaning, again. However “familiar” these images may be, I do not see why they should not be interpreted in order for their meaning to be grasped. And so on *ad infinitum*. What the interpretive conception is concerned with is how to fill in a gap, as one sees it, between observable behavior and meaningful action. According to the conception, “the meaning one thinks” should be an intermediary, but I do not see how this intermediary can do its assigned job, i.e., to fill in the gap; it seems to me that it only opens up a new gap.

If understanding is (a kind of) interpretation, it would never be possible to understand any thing at all. (Of course, I do not deny that we *sometimes* (very often) interpret *in order* to understand.) Behind the interpretive conception of understanding, it seems, lies the notion that “understanding” aims at grasping what has been attained under an individual’s skin, i.e., the meaning one attaches to one’s own action. From here it seems quite natural to go on to consider the “subjective meaning” of action, in principle, inaccessible to others. In fact, Alfred Schutz, who attempted to “radicalize” Max Weber’s idea of *verstehende Soziologie*, argues (even counter to Weber’s own explications)¹ that it is in principle impossible to grasp the meaning another attaches to his or her own action. After raising questions like how one could know the meaning of another’s action only from its outer course, e.g., how to know whether another who grasps a doorknob does it in order to open the door *or* in order to repair it, he concludes:

Since those questions concern the subjective meaning the actor attaches to his action, it is now evident that the ‘direct understanding’ of the actor’s intended meaning is impossible, insofar as one means by ‘direct

understanding,' as Weber obviously does, the perceptually immediately given possession of the actor's intended meaning. What I grasp in the 'direct understanding' of action is, rather, the objective aspects of a course of action. These objective aspects are placed within a context of meaning *through the act of interpretation*, while this context of meaning does not need to, or rather cannot, be the same as the one the actor 'intends' with his action (Schutz, 1932/1972: 36; emphasis added).

If understanding is grasping the "subjective meaning" or "intended meaning" of action which has been constructed inside an individual, it should only be achieved "through the [additional] act of interpretation." However, understanding is quite a different phenomenon than this. You understand that I requested you to bring a red rose when you brought one actually, or when you made a justification or excuse for not doing it. Then understanding is sensibly and reasonably ascribed to you (though the ascription of understanding is always "defeasible;" cf. Coulter, 1979) and, to get understanding ascribed, you do not need to have been engaged in the special act of interpreting my "behavior" or the outer course of my action to reach the subjective meaning concealed behind it. (In some special cases, especially in case something very unfamiliar or strange has been done or said, of course, you might have to interpret it to reach something more familiar).

Some may still feel unsatisfied with these remarks; they may want to further ask how it is possible to understand correctly. Indeed, we sometimes misunderstand what others do or say, and so some may feel like going on to ask how it is possible to understand *without misunderstanding*. However, such a question as how it is possible to understand is based on a confusion, although, when someone *misunderstood* something, it is quite natural to ask why and how they did it.

We ask questions like: How is it possible to get the university administration to accept our demands? How is it possible to get from Meiji Gakuin University to Waseda University within 30 minutes? The "how is it possible to" questions are usually asked when there are some difficulties in achieving the task at hand. In these terms, to ask this kind of question about such a very familiar and ordinary achievement as the understanding of (another's) action and utterance is even bizarre. That question seems to have turned the understanding into something rather difficult and unfamiliar, which should be achieved "through the act of interpretation." Note that we are usually engaged in interpreting something precisely when we do not understand it (cf. Baker and Hacker, 1984; Coulter, 1979).

As for interpretation, it is certainly something we are engaged in. It seems to have a duration, as opposed to understanding; while one cannot say that one has been understanding the rule of addition for ten hours, one can say that one has been interpreting Shakespeare for ten hours. This simple fact induces us to think that interpretation is an internal process lodged under an

individual's skin. But it is not true. For example, when I say, "I have been interpreting Shakespeare for thirty years," I do not mean to say that I have been undergoing some special internal states in succession or having some special experiences without cessation for thirty years, but just to sum up my relationship to Shakespeare in these thirty years. It is strange enough that even Herbert Blumer, for example, who sees meaning as arising in interaction between people, still has the following conception of "interpretive process:"

This process has two distinct steps. First, the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting; he has to point out to himself the things that have meaning. The making of such indications is an internalized social process in that the actor is interacting with himself. . . . Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action (Blumer, 1969: 5).

Here, a paradox is evident. Interpretation here, as "a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action," is considered to be internal acts prior to action. In other words, the actor is considered to first do select, check, etc., meanings and even interact with him or herself, and then, in accordance with this interpretation, perform action. However, insofar as meaningful action should be guided by interpretation, those "internal acts" prior to action should also be guided by another interpretation, and this interpretation, which should be also some "internal acts," by still another interpretation. A regress *ad infinitum*, again.

Rather than going into philosophical arguments, I will treat interpretation as an *empirical* phenomenon. The point I was trying to make is that if understanding were a kind of interpretation, nothing could be understood. On the other hand, however, doing interpreting is doing a specific job within the actual interactional situation: a job specifically appropriate for all practical purposes.

Indeed, in the following fragment (#1), the therapist (T) explicitly interprets the client's (C's) utterances *as* a manifestation of what C thinks. Just before this fragment, from an intake session of psychotherapy, C was talking about his problems.

#1 [Original in Japanese; simplified]

C: Uhm, is it all right to say such things to a stranger?

T:→ Yeah. Well, what are you worrying about?

C: No, nothing.

((11 lines omitted))

C: That's right. So no problems anyway.

T:→ You tend to be too nervous, don't you? . . .

Here C's talk is treated as a double construct, i.e., a question plus what he thinks about it. Now it is quite easy to see that this treatment is closely related to what the participants are doing here. C tells T his problems. Usually, to tell one's own problems to a stranger, one has to have a special justification (cf. Sacks, 1972). One of the obvious justifications is that the stranger is an expert. On the other hand, the therapist as an expert is systematically motivated and expected to detect the "real" problems which the client as a layperson is not aware of for him- or herself. What the client says to the therapist in the session is the most important information available for a technical treatment of the problems and it is now appropriate for the therapist to try to move the client's talk from one interactional context to another and treat it as information about what he thinks of himself. In fact, in #1 the therapist treats the client's first question as material for her judgment on his "mental state" rather than as the illocutionary act "question." Thus, the interpretation here is lodged within the actual activity in which the participants are involved, i.e., the distinct activity of formulating the client's problems in psychotherapy. The therapist "does interpreting" within social activity rather than undergoing an "interpretive process" under her skin.

3. Interpretation within Social Activity

In the rest of this paper, I want to focus on the following fragment (#2), from a radio interview series conducted with foreign students in Japan. The aim of my analysis is to demonstrate how participants organize their activity, i.e., doing interviews, locally by distributing relevant entitlements among themselves through doing interpreting; i.e., that doing interpreting is a practice with which participants organize their activity.

#2 [Original in Japanese; simplified*]

- A: You have been using a lot of difficult words or technical words, right?
 B: But, I must say, technical terms are much easier for me, = because most technical words are composed of Chinese characters. Intrinsically Japanese words, without any Chinese characters, are much more difficult for me, especially, when reading. Without any Chinese characters, so it's impossible to imagine,
 A:→ Ah, [Oh,] you can imagine the meaning of Chinese characters,
 B: *Soo desu yo.* [That's right.]
 A:→ only by looking at them.
 B: *Soo* [Right] *soo soo soo.*
 A:→ As for those words without any Chinese characters, you can't understand them unless you know their meaning beforehand.
 B: *Soo.* And as for pronunciation, words composed only of Chinese characters are shorter and easier to pronounce *ne.*
 A: *Ee* [Yes]

- B: Words without any Chinese characters are longer *yo ne*.
 A: They are longer *yo ne*.
 B: *Un*. [Yeah.]
 A:→ *Ah, soo*. ((long inhalation)) What a *henna gaijin* [strange foreigner] *dana*. ((Laughs)) *Sorede* [And] when you study Japanese, do you have a special method for that?

*I translated the original exchange roughly, only leaving intact some Japanese particles which are relevant to the analysis and more or less difficult to translate. The same is true for the other fragments. The original exchange and a word by word translation of this fragment will be found in the appendix.

In this fragment, A, the interviewer, “does interpreting” in a way appropriate to their interactional setting. However, he has trouble continuing the interview in the course of interaction. Constituting B, the interviewee, as a “*henna gaijin*” or “strange foreigner” is at the same time sensitive to this interactional trajectory *and* projected as a remedy of the trouble. More detailed analysis is in order.

Before going further, however, it is helpful to turn to what Harvey Sacks says about “showing understanding.” Sacks gives the following example in one of his lectures.

#3 [Sacks, 1992: II, 104]

- Roger: Turn on th'microphone.
 (1.0)
 Al: T(h)esting,
 Roger: We're about to sta(hh)rt. hehh hh heh

Sacks remarks on this fragment:

. . . the way Al has of showing that he sees what Roger is doing, is to do something that fits there. Not to say, e.g., ‘I understand,’ or to say ‘What you said was . . .’ but to produce an action that fits there . . . In terms of sequencing in conversation and many other things, you do ‘showing that you understand something’ when what you do is, not talk about it, repeat it, paraphrase it, etc. — that would normally mean that you’re puzzled. . . . The way that you go about exhibiting your understanding is just to produce another that you intend belongs, given what has just been done.” (Sacks, 1992: II, 112–113).

While Al, in fragment #3, exhibits, or even embodies, his understanding of what Roger has just done, A, the interviewer, in fragment #2, rather does *checking* his understanding of what B, an American student in Japan, has just talked about, by paraphrasing what B has just said, or interpreting it. Indeed, B confirms A’s interpretation with “*Soo*” or “*Right*”. (Incidentally it is unimaginable that Roger confirms Al’s understanding with “*That’s right*”).

As suggested above, this practice of checking one's understanding or doing interpreting has a great deal of relevance to the social organization of their activity. This practice, in fact, very frequently occurs throughout this interview series, entitled "Hang in There, Foreign Students: My Method of Learning Japanese" (which was broadcast by NHK in September, 1992). It also can be very often found in radio counseling programs. Here are a couple of examples, in both of which the client tells her complaint to the host of the program before a professional counselor comes in.

#4 [Original in Japanese; simplified]

((Mother (C) is talking about her son.))

- C: In the morning he went out, but he didn't go to school. He went straight to his friend's house, and from there he called school, saying something like "Feeling sick, I'll be there afternoon." He stayed at his friend's room alone and didn't go out, and then came back home around ten.
- H: Uh huh.
- C: In the late afternoon, the teacher, worried, called me. I didn't know what happened that day.
- H:→ Yeah, *jaa* [then] he didn't go to school at all, right?
- C: No, he didn't.

#5 [Original in Japanese; simplified]

- C: My husband always says, "I don't care what he [the son] does." But I can't think that way myself.
- H: Yeah, yeah.
- C: I don't think the same way as men.
- H:→ *Soosuruto*, [Then,] how could you deal with this, it is your point, right?
- C: Yes, it is.
- H: Okay. Now Doctor will be with you.

In these fragments, the host (H) paraphrases what the client (C) has just said, substituting C's expression for another one which C did not use. What does this practice, paraphrasing or interpreting, achieve here in the interactional context of the activity the participants are involved in? As I mentioned, these fragments are that part of a radio counseling program in which the host tries to get the client's complaint, or her problem. The client's talk is here normatively expected to constitute a "presentation of her problem." It is easy to see that H's paraphrasing in both cases is directed to this expectation. In fact, it makes C's talk explicitly into a presentation of her problem, through making explicit in #4 the fact that C's son did *not* go to school *at all* that day, and, in #5, formulating the problem in a question format ("how . . ."). Thus, C's problem is stated explicitly, in front of the audience, and then handed over to a counselor.

We have now a sense that the practice of doing interpreting does a specific job for the social organization of activity. It should be noticed here that there is one slight, but significant difference in the way of paraphrasing between the foreign students interviews and counseling programs. Focusing on this difference will help further specify the job of the practice of doing interpreting in fragment #2.

In #4 and #5, from radio counseling, the paraphrases state explicitly what another party suggested only implicitly. Indeed, H's paraphrasing in #4 and #5 is initiated with a marker of inference ("jaa" and "soosuruto", or "then" or "thus"), i.e., the paraphrases are marked out as an inference from what has just been said. The practice here can be formulated this way: substituting the expression "AxC" for "B," or presenting one's interpretation by supplying an item (B), which has been only implicitly hinted at and has to be made explicit as a point of the talk for all practical purposes, i.e., a demonstrably missing item. What kind of item (B) should be supplied depends on the current state of activity. In the cases at hand, in #4 the fact that the client's son did not show up *at all*, which should be an important point of the client's talk as a description of her problem, needed to be made explicit, with "jaa" marking it as inferable from what had been said so far in so many words; and in #5 the problem which was the very reason why the client called the program needed to be formulated as a "problem," also with an inference marker initiating the practice.

On the other hand, in #2, from a foreign student's interview, the interviewer (A) initiates his paraphrasing with "ah" or "oh," i.e., what John Heritage (1984) calls a 'change-of-state' token; with this token, it is marked out that A "has just got it," which, in turn, indicates that A did not know what B was talking about (whether or not it may be A *really* did not know it). Now the practice of paraphrasing here can be formulated this way: substituting the expression "ABC" for "A'B'C';" A claims that he did not understand what "ABC" means but that he has now an interpretation of it, that is, "A'B'C'." (Note that we here encounter as an actual phenomenon the kind of circumstance which the interpretive conception assumes: a double construct of a string of sounds *and* the meaning one thinks about them.

Our question was: What special job does this special kind of practice of doing interpreting do within that interactional context of activity? It will be helpful to cite one more fragment from another interview of the same series.

#6 [Original in Japanese; simplified]

((A and B are talking about how TV programs have helped B learn Japanese.))

B: These are uhm uh:: *shootai suru, shuzai su- shookai suru*

A:→ *Ah, [Oh,] shookai bangumi* [reportage programs] *ne* [right]?

B: Yes.

((10 lines omitted))

- B: Yes, and listening to expressions, expressions and, new expressions is, I understand the situation, understand the situation while seeing. Of expressions, when to use, to be usable, //us-
- A→ *Ah*, you can learn how to use words, including what situation they are used in.
- B: That's right.

In #6, the interviewer (A) paraphrases the foreign student's expression twice, and both times A initiates his paraphrases with "*ah*," again. As I suggested, substituting "ABC" for "A'B'C'" implies that the original expression was not understood. There is an ambiguity as to who is responsible for it: whether it is due to the lack of ability to understand on the side of the hearer or to the lack of ability to express him- or herself on the side of the speaker. We should turn to the sequential environment in which A paraphrases B's expressions. Just before each of both paraphrases (the arrowed utterances), B's (the "foreign" student's) talk was observably linguistically disorganized (though, I am afraid, the English translation may fail to reflect precisely the original state of the talk). In the first case, B was searching for the right word, trying three candidate similar words. In the second, B observably had trouble in constructing a sentence, repeating the same words a couple of times respectively. It seems to me that through paraphrasing, the interviewer claims that he understands what B has been talking about *in spite of* that disorder of the talk. This means, in turn, that the difficulty in understanding is attributed to B's deficiency in expressing, *and*, at the same time, that A is entitled to evaluate the understandability of what someone says in the Japanese language, or that the language belongs to A's territory and not to B's (cf. Nishizaka, 1995). (Remember that the subtitle of the interview series is "My Method of Learning Japanese." The interviewee basically figures in the program as a *learner* of Japanese.) Doing interpreting is here a practice of asymmetrically distributing the entitlement to the Japanese language between the participants, and this practice is embedded precisely in doing an interview between a "Japanese" and a "foreigner."

Now back to #2. There are no observable linguistic perturbations on B's side here. However, there is a reason to mark out a "change-of-state" with "*ah*." In response to A's suggestion that "technical terms" are "difficult," B asserts that "technical terms are much easier," while the assertion is modified by "for me." That is to say, B, a *non*-native Japanese speaker, claims the entitlement to report what is easy/difficult for non-native speakers to learn/understand. A ratifies this claim by paraphrasing B's expression with a "change-of-state" token, i.e., by claiming that he now understands what B has been talking about *in spite of* the fact that he did not understand it until now. Although this fact is now attributed to A's lack of ability to understand, the practice of

paraphrasing here fits well with A's being a "Japanese;" for what A did not understand is rather what non-native speakers are more entitled to than native speakers, i.e., knowledge belonging to the territory of the non-native *learner* of the language. Thus, here, again, doing interpreting is a practice of asymmetrically distributing entitlements among the participants. (Note that when B is confirming A's interpretation, he uses the particle "yo," with which B emphatically claims entitlement to the circumstances he has disclosed). So far, the interview is well organized as one between a "Japanese" and a "foreigner."

After confirming A's paraphrase, B moves on to talk about pronunciation. Here it is still possible to regard what he talks about as what non-native speakers are more entitled to. Even B's last remark on "words without any Chinese characters" can be regarded as one which non-native speakers are more entitled to make, i.e., a remark on what natives, who are too familiar with the language, could not notice by themselves. Indeed, A could have responded to the remark with a "change-of-state" token. However, in response to it, A repeated the same phrase *with the exactly same particles* ("yo ne"); in doing so A claims that he had known it before B mentioned it (for the use of "yo ne," see Kamio 1990). After this, B passes the opportunity to take a full turn, and the current topical talk thereby comes to an end. Here, B has been constituted to be one who is not a native speaker and, nevertheless, can claim the same knowledge that the Japanese is also entitled to claim, i.e., a "*henna gaijin*." (Note that "*henna gaijin*" is an idiomatic phrase, designating, with some negative implications, foreigners whose behavior is very Japanese-like; for example, non-Japanese who always wear a Japanese yukata or who are good at using a non-standard Japanese.) B's being a '*henna gaijin*' is thus locally constituted, dependent on the contingencies of the actual development of interaction (i.e., A's mere repetition of B's phrase with the same particles, and B's passing the opportunity to take a turn).

Immediately after calling B "*henna gaijin*," A moves on to ask a question, which is very suitable to the main topic of the program, i.e., "My Method of Learning Japanese." It can be noticed now that A's first remark in #2 ("You have been using a lot of difficult words or technical words, right?") was a preliminary to a question about B's "method." Since a presupposition of the preliminary has been rejected, A has now to redesign his question into a more general one. However, the problem A now faces is this: because of his mere repetition of B's words with the same particles, their identities which are relevant to doing the interview on a "foreign" student's method of learning Japanese (i.e., "Japanese" and "foreigner") are now in danger. In order to continue the interview and go on to ask questions on that subject, A has to restore those identities. Constituting B as a "*henna gaijin*" or "strange foreigner" does this special job; by so constituting B, A claims that B is still a "foreigner" even though they have failed to distribute relevant entitlements in an appropriate way; only he is a little "strange," i.e., strange in the way

that he is Japanese-like. In this way, A tries to barely maintain their identities “Japanese” and “foreigner.”

Incidentally, what Paul Drew observes about the use of idiomatic expressions in the management of topic transition in conversation has a great deal of relevance here (Drew, 1998; Drew and Holt, 1988). The idiomatic expression “*henna gaijin*” here, although it is not figurative as Drew’s cases are, has all the relevant features Drew observes: 1) it summarizes what has been going on in conversation; 2) it does not add any details about what is referred to by the expression; 3) it is disconnected to the preceding exchanges of talk, especially as the speaker, A, detaches himself from the current interactional context with a monologue marker, i.e., the particle “*(da) na*,” a long inhalation, which often serves as a disjunction marker, and laughter, which marks the remark as a kind of joke. With these features, the expression constitutes an offer to close down the current topic. In this way, a crisis in participants’ identities was overcome.

4. Concluding Remarks

Human interaction is not a process between two “private” spheres in which one attaches meaning to one’s own action and one grasps the meaning of another’s action alternately. One of the aims of this paper is to set the notion of interpretation free from this kind of conception. I have been trying to show that doing interpreting is a practice to be used for socially organizing the activity at hand. If interpretation is assumed to be just a mental operation under the human skin, a rich empirical field will go out of sight. Of course, those practices of doing interpreting I have mentioned above are only some examples, but I think it has been demonstrated that practices of doing interpreting are very finely organized in a way appropriate to the ongoing activity; particularly, how the practice which marks out the asymmetrical distribution of entitlements to knowledge contributes to the management of maintaining participants’ “cultural” identities. Doing interpreting is lodged within social activity in the sense that it organizes, and is organized by, the activity at hand.

Another aim of this paper was to show that an individual’s particular characteristics are interactively constituted. For example, B’s being a strange foreigner depends heavily on contingencies of interaction; it is constituted in and through the actual development of interaction. On the other hand, calling B ‘strange foreigner’ is a device to be used to arrange the prospective trajectory of interaction. An individual’s characteristics are social objects in the double sense: they are socially constituted and socially usable.

Acknowledgments

I benefitted from many of the comments and suggestions made at the International Conference for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis held at Waseda University, Tokyo, particularly those by Peter Elgin, Paul ten Have, Jeff Stetson and Hiroko Tanaka. I am also very grateful to Dom Berducci, Jeff Coulter and Chuck Goodwin for their encouragement and valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am indebted to George Psathas for his editorial suggestions.

Notes

1. Toshio Nakano (1983) shows through detailed examinations of Weber's methodological texts that his notion of "*deutende Verstehen*" or "interpretive understanding" represents an opposite idea about understanding.

Appendix

The original transcription and a word by word translation of fragment #2

Abbreviations used in the word by word translation are:

JD = judgment
 NG = negative
 P = particle

- A: . . . nan' ka anoo::: (.) nihongo kii te iru to ne?
 somehow uh Japanese listen be when P
- B: 'N,
 yeah
- A: e::: (0.6) muzukashii kotoba ya, (1.0) tsumari senmon no kotoba ga
 uhm difficult words and/or that is technical words P
- dondon de te kuru desho?
 one after another come out you see
- B: (.) Iya, shikashi desu ne,
 no however JD P
- A: U [n
 yeah
- B: [senmon yoogo no hoo ga, watakushi ni totte::: anoo:::
 technical terms P side P me for uh
- kantan desu yo = naze ka 'tte iu to ne,
 easy JD P why P ask if P

- A: Un
- B: senmon yoogo no hoo ga- hotondo ga
 technical terms P side P most of all P
 kango desu kara ne?
 Chinese words JD because P
- A: Ha:: [:::::::::::::::::::
 uh huh
- B: [Kanji no maa gengo desu ne::?
 Chinese characters P so to speak language JD P
- A: Hai, hai, hai.
 yes yes yes
- B: Kango desu yo ne?
 Chinese words JD P P
- A: Un
- B: Gyaku ni:: muzukashii kotoba wa [yamato kotoba desu ne
 on the contrary difficult words P original Japanese words JD P
- A: [(Un)
- A: [Yamato kotoba ga muzukashii,
 original Japanese words P difficult
- B: [.h de sonoo:-
 and uh
 so::::: Kanji de kak' e nai kotoba no hoo ga,
 that's right Chinese character in write can NG words P side P
 gyaku ni muzukasii [desu yo:::
 on the contrary difficult JD P
- A: [(Un)
- Ha:::: [:::::
- B: [Ne? (.) Tokuni yomu toki ni desu yo ne?
 P especially read when JD P P
- A: [.hhh A, so:::::::::: ka
 oh I see P
- B: [Yamato kotoba ne? Zembu hiragana de
 original Japanese words P all Japanese phonograms in
 kaku n' desu yo ne?
 write JD P P
- A: Ee.
 Yes
- B: Dakara: soozoo deki nai n' desu yo =
 therefore imagine can NG JD P

- Kanji wa kai' te nai kara::
Chinese character P write be NG because
- A: [A,
oh
- B: [soozoo deki nai n' desu ne.
imagine can NG JD P
- A: [Kanji da to:: imi ga::: (.]
Chinese characters JD if meaning P
- B: [Hinto ga mattaku nai desu kara ne],- Soo desu yo.
hint P at all P JD because P that's right JD P
- A: imi ga waku::
meaning P understand
- B: Soo desu yo.
that's right JD P
- A: mita dake de:::
look only by
- B: Soo soo soo [soo
- A: [Hiragana de kai' te aru to::
Japanese phonograms in write be when
- B: Ee:::
- A: kore wa::: imi sono mono o shira nai to,
this P meaning as such P know NG if
- B: Soo.
- A: wakara nai,
understand NG
- B: Soo, soozoo deki nai n' desu ne? 'Shite:: hatsuon ni kanshi te
right imagine can NG JD P and pronunciation as to
wa ne::: [kango no hoo wa
P P Chinese words P side P
- A: [(Un)
- B: maa daitai futatsu no kanji desu ne:::
so to speak roughly two Chinese character JD P
- A: Ee, ee, [ee,
- B: [Dakara mijikaku te::: (.) anoo hatsuonshi yasui desu ne:::
therefore short and uh pronounce easy JD P
- A: E [e
- B: [Gyakuni yamato kotoba no hoo ga nagai desu yo ne:::,
on the contrary original Japanese words P side P long JD P P

- A: Naga:i [desu yo ne: [:.
long JD P P
- B: [Ne? [U::n
- A: A, so:..... .hhhhh Henna gaijin da na(h) [uhhhhhhhhhh
oh I see strange foreigner JD P
- B: [()
- A: So(h)rede(h):: nihongo(h) o ben(h)kyosuru toki(h) ni ne? ...
and Japanese P study when P

References

- Baker, G.P. and Hacker, P.M.S. (1984). *Language, Sense & Nonsense*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Coulter, J. (1979). *The Social Construction of Mind*. London: MacMillan.
- Drew, P. (1998). Figures of speech: Idiomatic expressions and the management of topic transition in conversation. A lecture at the University of Tokyo.
- Drew, P. and Holt, E. (1988). Complainable matters: The use of idiomatic expressions in making complaints. *Social Problems* 35: 398–417.
- Heritage, J. (1984). A change-of-state token and aspects of its sequential placement. In J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of Social Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kamio, A. (1990). *Joho no Nawabari Riron*. Tokyo: Taishu-Kan Shoten.
- Kang, S.-J. (1996). *Orientalizumu no Kanata e*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Nakano, T. (1983). *Max Weber to Gendai*. Tokyo: San-Ichi Shobo.
- Nishizaka, A. (1995). The interactive constitution of interculturality: How to be a Japanese with words. *Human Studies* 18: 301–326.
- Sacks, H. (1972). An initial investigation of the usability of conversational data for doing sociology. In D. Sudnow (Ed.), *Studies in Social Interaction*. New York: Free Press.
- Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on Conversation*. 2 Vols. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.
- Schutz, A. (1932/1972). *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

