

## PERFORMING TO INCREASE TURNOVER A STUDY OF JAPANESE MANUALS FOR SHOP VENDORS

Peter Ackermann, Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

### Introduction

Increasing turnover is a vital concern in any society based on a commercial economy, so its mechanisms can be expected to be a focus of attention. Anyone who steps into professional life in such a society will become subject to values and orientations which seek to maintain its competitiveness and thus ensure its survival. I assume, therefore, that looking at normative concepts of how to increase turnover will shed some light on what a society based on a commercial economy sees as its core values. I also assume that, in view of the importance of these values, the society will seek to stabilize them through systematic training and evaluation. By doing so, such values become normative, i.e. they are elevated above the discursive and interactive level on which individual social actors feel free to determine the games they wish to play. What normative values, then, are reflected in “performances” intended to increase turnover?

We probably all know that the atmosphere characteristic of Japanese customer relationships differs considerably from what we find in Germany. However, if the aim is the same in both the German and the Japanese shop or company, namely the increase of turnover, then the difference must lie in the understanding of what kind of performance is needed to achieve this very essential goal.

In the following, when speaking of “performance,” I will use this word in a relatively narrow sense. While acknowledging that all human activity *can* be understood as “performance,”<sup>1</sup> I would like to pay special attention to the question whether the actors themselves understand their activity as performance or not. Seen from this perspective, I maintain that the Japanese understanding of human interaction is very much more “a performance” than the German under-

1 Cf. the key-term “cultural performance” in WULF et al. 2001:9.

standing. This statement should also be taken to imply that the Japanese consciously take a more encompassing view of the human body, not only as a static unit, but especially also as a dynamic object determined and determinable by flows of energy.

### 1. The body as a more or less static unit

The first thing to point to is that in Japanese bookstores one can find great quantities of carefully illustrated material specifically on the body and how to shape it. This kind of material is practically absent in German bookstores, even in the shelves dedicated to good manners in polite society. Japanese titles dealing with the use of the human body to increase turnover in shops include, for instance: KŌDA Yūzō: *“Ureru o-mise” no tsukurikata* [How to create shops that sell] (1994), or MABUCHI Satoshi, and NANJŌ Megumi: *Shinpan Hairiyasui mise – ureru mise* [Shops that are easy to enter, shops that sell – New Edition] (Part 1: 1993, Part 2: 1997).<sup>2</sup> Moulding the body is an essential basic element in all Japanese writing on the individual in social context. There are precise regulations, accompanied by charts, for *tachikata* (how to stand), *o-jigi* (how to bow), *arukikata* (how to walk) or *midashinami* (how to appear),<sup>3</sup> and there are clear instructions, of course also accompanied by illustrations, on the proper pose for listening, on how to train facial expression, or on the correct focus of gaze.<sup>4</sup>

Kōda Yūzō in his *How to create shops that sell* begins his arguments by drawing attention to the following statistics (KŌDA 1997, p. 33). He says, people are judged as much as 55% by movement of their body and hands, their gestures, facial expression, clothing, bearing, behaviour, and posture, but only to 7% by what they actually say. The remaining 38% is related to the voice, its colour, quality, intonation, loudness, style, and speed of what is uttered. Therefore, a good salesperson must “commandeer the body and [...] transmit feelings through every limb” (*karada o kushi shite [...] zenshin de kimochi o tsutaeru*) (KŌDA 1997, pp. 26–32). Kōda depicts the ideal shop vendor, whose “heart” (*kokoro*) puts the physical body to full use. This body is described minutely: starting with the eyes and proceeding to expression of the body, first the face, then the hands, then the feet and legs. Kōda says, “The heart shows itself right

2 In the following I cite Japanese material using the English translation of the book title.

3 Cf. for instance: KANAI 1997.

4 Cf. for instance: The Speaking Essay [Group]: 2002.



down to the tip of the toes” (*kokoro wa ashisaki ni mo arawaremasu*), and his description culminates with the statements, “Posture should be like that of a marionette” (*shisei wa marionette no yō ni*), and “The body (should be) adequately tense” (*tekido ni kinchō shita karada*) (KŌDA 1997, pp. 30–32). The Japanese focus on the body, combined with the awareness of traditions of body training (*sahō* 作法), forms the basis for exact observations as well as minute discussions of the elements of the body, including the voice and the emotions. The results of these observations can be tapped and discussed in Japanese manuals like those written by Kōda.

Unlike Japanese texts, German texts do not tap into any consciously perceived *tradition* of deportment, and thus never refer to bodily posture and movement as a “timeless” phenomenon. Instead, and in stark contrast to the Japanese texts, they must legitimize their arguments by reference to present-day requirements. Also, the German texts have no concept of “basics of body postures” (*kihon* 基本) in the form of *kata* 型 (a basic pattern, a mould). The German concept of “kontrollierte Körpersprache” (controlled body language) emphasizes something that might be called “cornerstones” or “boundary posts,” pointing to limits that must not be crossed, whereas the Japanese *kata* emphasize not cornerstones or boundaries, but what is inside, i.e. precise forms, shapes and structures.

## 2. Formalised patterns of speech communication

Usually, discussions of communicative patterns differentiate between verbal and non-verbal communication, verbal communication as a rule being the focus of language or linguistic studies. However, we should also look at the verbal elements of Japanese communication from the perspective of performance, and especially from that of the concept of *kata*. Whereas the German materials relate shape and content of verbal communication to individual judgement and merely give some examples that might or might not be appropriate in a given situation, Japanese materials present long training lists for verbal expression that are structured in much the same way as the tables for the training of the body. Thus one can be trained to master such expressions as *o-tsutsumi itashimashō ka* (Shall I wrap it for you?), *taihen osore irimasu ga kaiten no ojikan made mō shibaraku omachi kudasai* (We are very sorry, but please wait a few minutes until the shop opens), *makoto ni mōshiwake gozaimasen, chotto seki o hazu-*

*sasete itadakimasu* (We sincerely apologize, but please forgive us for momentarily being absent from our desk), and even: *ohige o osori shite yoroshii deshō ka* (Is it all right if we shave your beard?).

This is a highly formalized concept of verbal communication, which leaves almost nothing to the judgement of the salesperson. In this sense we might indeed speak of verbal “performance,” this performance consisting of the reproduction of a carefully calculated and perfectly rehearsed set of signals following something like a score. We may thus differentiate between:

- verbal communication that proceeds along the steps: “prescription – training and rehearsal – perfection,” with emphasis on direct sensual impact,

as opposed to:

- verbal communication proceeding along the steps: “no detailed prescription – no training and rehearsal – irrelevance of the concept of formal perfection, but full attention to the logical quality of an argument with little or no thought given to direct sensual impact.”

### 3. Sensual impact

In the Japanese material, the importance of bodily performance and the concept of sensual impact comes across to a surprising degree when we note how an instruction book for correct communicative behaviour appeals to all five senses, and in particular to the sense of sight. The very first chapter of a book on training verbal communication (The Speaking Essay Group: *Jōzu na hanashikata ga mi ni tsuku hō* [literally, What to do so that speaking skills become part of you], 2002) refers almost entirely to the visual dimension of speech: “What do I look like?”, “[Am I] aware of how I appear as a speaker?”, “How do I appear in the eyes of others” (*hito no me ni utsutte iru jibun wa*)?”, “Am I really the ‘self’ I wish to show other people?” (The Speaking Essay Group 2002, p. 14).

Communication is based largely on clues gathered entirely or partly visually. In order to acquire the “power” (*chikara*) to know who someone is, we read, it is necessary to consider: What is his job? What is his position? What is



his age? What is the person's gender? What is the person interested in? What feelings does the person have at this moment? A human being possesses all kinds of powers, physical power (*tairyoku*), spiritual power (*seishinryoku*), the power of endurance (*nintairyoku*), or the power of speech (*gogakuryoku*) etc.. Speaking, as we see, is one type of human "power," and as such it is action (*hanasu koto wa kōdō suru koto desu*) (The Speaking Essay Group 2002, p. 3). Thus the goal of communication is, we are taught, to get people first to consent, but then to act (*nattoku shite hito wa ugoku no desu*) (The Speaking Essay Group 2002, p. 30). Verbal activity, in other words, is aimed – not at the relatively abstract notion of "understanding" – but very concretely at moving, pulling, pushing somebody, it is a *visible* action of a speaker that has an effect on the *visible* action of someone else.

In her *These are the basics of manners* Kanai Yoshiko (KANAI 1997, p. 25) gives us an idea of the relative position of Japanese verbal communication within an encompassing field of "performance." This is illustrated by a chart. In the centre is *kokoro* (the heart). The heart is the source of feelings (*kimochi*), emotion (*kanjō*), character (*hitogara*), opinion (*mikata*), disposition (*seikaku*), and ways of thinking (*kangaekata*). *Kokoro* (the heart) emanates, as it were, clockwise into a surface structure. In the north, it emanates in the form of visible expression (*hyōjō*). This flows over into attitude and behaviour (*taido*) in the east. Expression, attitude and behaviour appeal completely to the eyes. Then, as we move south, the optic dimension flows over into the acoustic dimension, first into speech (*kotoba*). As we continue from south to west speech flows into tone and atmosphere of voice (*gochō*), this then revolving back to visible expression (*hyōjō*) in the north. Speech (*kotoba*) is thus just one tiny point in a continuum of sensually recordable expression that emanates from the heart (*kokoro*).

#### 4. The body in motion

Japanese manuals pay greatest attention not only to how the body appears, but especially to how it moves. This brings the communicative process particularly close to the concept of performance, as movement includes rhythm and flow. Kōda Yūzō (KŌDA 1994, p. 26) in *How to create shops that sell* says, "When the role of the heart has been clarified, the first thing to actually do to attract a customer is 'commandeer the body and [...] transmit feelings through every limb' (*karada o kushi shite ... zenshin de kimochi wo tsutaeru*)." Not merely the

cornerstones of bodily appearance, but the complete body in action is the essential element of a shop. This takes place, in the words of Mabuchi and Nanjō, in the form of, for instance, *itten chūi* 一点注意 (concentration on one point) or *kibinkuse* 機敏癖 (the habit of making prompt, quick movements) (MABUCHI and NANJŌ 1993, pp. 198–209). Body movement must always be characterized by *tekipaki* (brisk, crisp movement), *satto* (moving instantly, quickly); *subayaku satto te o hikkometari, patto ushiro ni sagattari suru yō na ugoki* (“satto! [swiftly withdrawing one’s hands], patto! [sharply moving backwards]”) (MABUCHI and NANJŌ 1993, p. 204). The important thing is always: Much movement!

In recent years a whole series of publications, as well as website information and video material, has been produced under the direction of Mabuchi Satoshi, the co-author of *Shops that are easy to enter – shops that sell*. Mabuchi’s logic is as follows (MABUCHI and NANJŌ 1993, pp. 184–213). The modern customer is a *ikken kyaku* 一見客 (a one-time, anonymous customer). If the one-time, anonymous customer gets what he wants, he will return, thus increasing the profit of the shop. Otherwise he will go to the competitor. The modern customer does not want to be cared for attentively. So what should the shop vendor do? Mabuchi says that the shop vendor must be busy and ignore the customer until called for. Be busy doing what? According to Mabuchi, never mind what; they should just show that they are busy, moving their limbs and bodies about. Mabuchi’s books are full of charts – called “*action hanbai jutsu*” アクション販売術 charts (“Charts introducing the Art of Selling through Action”) – illustrating what this busy activity should look like. Important is “the appearance of being busily working” (*isogashisō ni hataraku yōsu*), and “a continuous chain of movement” (*ichiren no dōsa*) (See illustrations 1 to 10). To underline his point Mabuchi makes use of terms from the performing arts. What must be trained is *kyaku-yose odori* and *kyaku-yose ondo* (“dances to attract customers and tunes<sup>5</sup> to attract customers”). Conversely, what should be prevented is *kyaku-oi odori* and *kyaku-oi ondo* (“dances that will chase away customers and tunes that will chase away customers”).

5 The expression used for “tunes” – *ondo* 音頭 – usually refers to the singing of folksongs in rural villages, which is often accompanied by vigorous movement and intricate patterns of interaction between a leading singer, a chorus and the villagers.



## 5. A closer look at German manuals

As already mentioned, German texts place little emphasis on the body. Discussion of the body is largely limited to static physical appearance, and stays on a very general level with regard to action. The emphasis of German material clearly lies on verbal interaction. We can say that the “body” in the German material is almost entirely defined by what it says, and by the range of ideas it expresses on the level of language.<sup>6</sup>

To take one example, Joachim Gehringer, *Umsatzsteigerung leicht gemacht* [Increase of turnover – made easy] (1999) begins with an extensive introduction into the organization of a company. On a theoretical level the reader is led to understand points like “What does it mean to sell?” “To sell means,” we are taught, “finding customers,” “adapting to customers,” “building trust,” “offering advantages,” “making profit,” “helping to make decisions,” “solving problems,” “convincing,” and “offering service.” So far, no mention at all is made of the fact that selling is done by concrete “bodily” individuals in concrete shops. When we do arrive at the individual, it is in the book’s central chapter: “Das Verkaufsgespräch” [“Salestalk”]. Gehringer pays little attention to the body, and, above all, contains not one illustration. Explicit reference to the body is as follows: “Smile!”, “Make a good first impression!”, “Be relaxed!” and “Look well-groomed!” Beyond that, certain minimal standards of correct behaviour are to be observed, such as the “rules of social order” (i.e. The man must be inferior to the lady, the younger person inferior to the older, the salesperson inferior to the customer). However, there are no explicit bodily movements that can be trained and perfected.

Peter Ebeling, in his *Verkäuferwissen für den Einzelhandel* [What salespersons should know in the retail trade] (1999) stresses dealing with customers on a personal level and understanding their personal wishes, but again is extremely brief when it comes to bodily performance. It goes without saying that Ebeling too contains no illustrations. With regard to the body, there are practically no indications of what to *do*, merely a list of what *not* to do: Don’t speak to people over the shoulder; Don’t stare when speaking; Don’t leave a hand in

6 I have here not considered English language material available in German translation, which is somewhat different in style and argument. It should be noted, however, that possibly the majority of material in German on the structure of shops and on details of a salesperson’s activity is, it appears, not genuine German material at all but translated from English!

your pocket when speaking; Don't put your head too far back; Don't be too subservient; Don't play around with your pen, etc.

German materials basically follow the same pattern, first of general theoretical explanation (for instance: "Analytical survey of basic concepts," "What is professional friendliness?", "How is teamwork important for success?"), after which the verbal level becomes the focus of attention. Max Meier-Maletz in his *Professionelles Verkaufen im Einzelhandel* [The professional way to sell in the retail trade] (1997) bluntly stresses that, "As a salesperson, your work with customers takes place in the form of verbal communication."

## 6. What might differences between the German and the Japanese material be attributed to?

To slightly overstate the point, the Japanese material pays no attention to the elaboration of thoughts expressed in language, whereas the German material pays no attention to the body, especially the body in motion. Moreover, the German approach suggests open-endedness of action and speech and admonishes readers to think of what might be said or done in a variety of ways and situations. By contrast, the Japanese approach is far more "closed" in character, with no reference to suggestions or stimuli, instead stressing facts that imply unchanging truths about the nature of being human.

The very wording of the Japanese material makes this clear. Thus many statements begin with: "It is the habit of people in this world" (*yo no hito no narai*), or "People first pay attention to the outside of an object" (*hito wa, mazu mono no sotogawa o mimasu*), or "People do not like going uphill" (*hito wa agarizaka o iyagarimasu*), or "People like places where there is much light" (*hito wa akarui tokoro ga suki desu*). Since the Japanese arguments are based on definitions of human nature, and human nature is defined as known, action can proceed according to pre-defined patterns. It is therefore not surprising to see how communicative processes are action-oriented, and not really interaction-oriented.

Whereas the German books put greatest emphasis on interaction, rooted in detailed knowledge of products, friendliness, convincing customers verbally, or structuring and restructuring conversation, and are full of admonishments like: "Show that you want to help!", "Show interest in person-to-person relations!", or "Make an effort to understand your customer!", Mabuchi and Nanjō in *Shops*



*that are easy to enter – shops that sell* (1993) admonish the shop vendor to produce a good but 100% bodily performance: maintain *kakki* (spirited activity), let strong energy be felt (*tsuyoi energii o hassan suru*), react with brisk movements (*kibikibi*), never stand still (*jitto tatte iru*) and never take on the posture of waiting for customers (*kyakumachi shisei*).

Are we thus dealing with two totally different concepts of human identity? It is a fact that in important parts of the Western world being true to one's identity precludes thinking of oneself as a performer. "Identity" is often understood as the very opposite of "performance." Moreover, there is a clear tendency to distinguish between a person's physical and spiritual identity, the body being something like a prison, while spiritual identity alone enables self-determined action not based on natural laws or any kind of prescription.

The refusal to subject bodily activity to prescription came across in an amusing German TV program (ARD) on the training of good manners on Feb. 19, 1999. This training had quite a surprising effect on the German pupils who had never given the slightest thought to observing, let alone shaping their body or bodily movements. After the training, most pupils seemed proud to appear smarter than before. However, some of them refused to adhere to what they had been taught. It was as if they were haunted by the terror of having their "very self" destroyed if their bodies were forced to perform. We can also say that these pupils wanted people to see their "true self" as something different from the body.

Modern German manuals, written in an age when "service" must be attractive, cannot completely ignore the areas stressed in the Japanese books. However, unlike German material, the Japanese texts will, as mentioned, go to great lengths explaining the general nature of man. Doing so they imply that by understanding human nature a profitable relationship will automatically ensue. What is the Japanese concept of human nature? Human nature – and here Japan's Daoist-Buddhist tradition can be felt – is the body characterized by the flow of energies, appearing as emotions. Kōda Yūzō in *How to create shops that sell*, for instance, states that human beings are moved primarily by sets of emotions such as impatience, like and dislike, curiosity (*kōkishin*), and quite particularly also by fright (*kyōfukan*) and anxiety (*fuankan*). Moreover, human beings want to feel rhythm, since once they feel rhythm, they can grasp things (*hito ni totte wa nagare, tsumari rizumu ga kanjirareru mono ga miyasui desu*) (KŌDA 1994, p. 146).

We should also not overlook deeper cultural structures that determine the "performance" quality of communicative signals in Japan. Especially the con-

cepts *en* 縁 and *ki* 気 warrant attention. *En* 縁 (translatable as destiny or karma) implies that a human being is part of a network of relationships shaped by destiny, which in turn means that each encounter with someone is meaningful. Why it is meaningful only time will show, but as it is axiomatically meaningful it needs to be carefully structured following the rules of proper performance. The other basic concept, *ki* 気 (meaning something like “the energy that flows through the universe”), explains how every organism maintains its vitality through the flow of energy. Good examples of this are books and pamphlets that deal with fatigue, for instance, of shop vendors. Whereas indeed the high demands on the body, which is expected to perform within an overall flow of activity, does lead to stress and fatigue, the body should not react by withdrawing from this flow, which alone guarantees life and vitality. A cure for fatigue is sought in manuals such as: Ō Teiken: *Tachishigoto ga chūshin no kata ni – yobō to kenkō tsubo kikō* [For people who do their work standing – Enhancing the circulation of *ki* by massaging the therapeutic pressure points to maintain health and prevent illness]. What is important to note here is that the individual body itself is understood as part of the flow of universal energy, which can be regulated by massaging the therapeutic pressure points.

The German view of being human is certainly not based on concepts like *en* or *ki*. Though there are certain differences in Protestant and Catholic traditions, a clear line is drawn between “real life” and “performance.” In a religious system that gives no weight to concepts of karma and the flow of energy through nature, to be human is to acknowledge being an individual creation by God. This very specific concept of individuality theoretically precludes adhering to any prescriptions other than those of God, which certainly are not built around the idea of the flow of energy. In fact, the very definition of culture and civilization in Christian nation-state societies is based on the contrast between being and not being subject to the energies of nature. In this sense, it is basically impossible to get a shop vendor to see him- or herself as part of an overall flow of movement and energy, and required to perform as part of such a flow. (Incidentally, military drill, which is a Western form of subjugation under rules of coordinated movement, nowhere draws on the concept of the natural flow of energy that can be encapsulated and trained in the form of *kata*.)