

Japanese *Enryo-Sasshi* Communication and the Psychology of *Amae*: Reconsideration and Reconceptualization

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Abstract

This theoretical essay purports to explore the conceptual significance of *amae* for Japanese communication research. The essay first reconsiders the interrelationship of *amae* with the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style by reviewing the pertinent literature within and outside the discipline of communication. Second, the essay reconceptualizes *amae* as two types of human communication needs (i.e., message-expanding and message-accepting needs) that both encourage and discourage the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style. Based on this reconceptualization of *amae*, the essay finally proposes the new concept of meta-*sasshi* (viz., *sasshi* on the *amae* level or *amae* reading) and presents a systematic model of Japanese *amae*-based communication.

Introduction

It is nearly thirty years ago that Takeo Doi (1973b) first addressed himself to implications of the concept of *amae*¹ for the Japanese patterns of communication. *Amae* has ever since served as one of the key words for deciphering Japanese cultural values and communicative behaviors.² In point of fact, as Maynard (1997) notes, “because of its pervasiveness, its encouragement throughout one’s lifetime, and the importance it plays in determining social and communication

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style, the concept of *amae* remains important in understanding Japanese ways of communication” (p. 36). Although *amae* is briefly touched on in the literature of Japanese interpersonal and intercultural communication, it is rarely detailed as it relates to the purposes, processes, and practices of Japanese relational communication.

The present study, therefore, seeks to explore the conceptual significance of *amae* for Japanese communication theory and research. More specifically, the study first reconsiders the interrelationship of *amae* with the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style³ by reviewing the pertinent literature within and outside the discipline of communication. Second, the study reconceptualizes *amae* as two types of human communication needs (i.e., message-expanding and message-accepting needs) that both encourage and discourage the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style. Based on this reconceptualization of *amae*, the study finally proposes the new concept of meta-*sasshi* (viz., *sasshi* on the *amae* level or *amae* reading) and presents a systematic model of Japanese *amae*-based communication.

This theoretical essay is not intended to be a work of social science. It is instead meant to be humanistic and heuristic in nature. Its goal is to propound a new framework for observing Japanese communication behaviors that will be meaningful and useful to both Japanese and non-Japanese who wish to promote mindful intercultural interactions. The test of its meaningfulness and usefulness is, hopefully, whether or not it provides a helpful window through which to view Japanese communication phenomena. It goes without saying that no single angle can capture the whole profile of the Japanese communicator and the entire picture of Japanese communication.

Reconsidering *Amae* and *Enryo-Sasshi* Communication

Amae is frequently but fragmentarily mentioned in the literature on Japanese interpersonal and intercultural communication (e.g., Cathcart & Cathcart, 1988; Donahue, 1998; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Ito, 2000; Midooka, 1990; Nishida, 1977, 1982; Okabe, 1983, 1991; Yokochi & Hall, 2000). Indeed, the present renderings of this concept in the literature are sparse and sporadic despite its importance in Japanese culture and communication studies. I will set out in this section to make a critical examination of how *amae* is documented in the communication literature and to discuss impacts of *amae* on Japanese interpersonal interactions.

Concept of Amae in the Communication Literature

On his supposition that “all interpersonal communications in Japanese society have the emotional undertone of *amae*,” Doi (1973b, 1974, 1982) explains

nonverbal empathic orientation, a fondness for unanimous agreement, ambiguity and hesitation of self-expression, *honne* (principle) and *tatemae* (true mind) in Japanese communication from the perspective of *amae*. His explanation implicitly suggests that *amae* generally suppresses verbalization and activates *enryo* and *sasshi* in daily social interactions among the Japanese.

Partly due to Doi's explications and implications in his above-mentioned works and other writings, *amae* is oftentimes conceived in the communication literature as a facilitator of *enryo* and *sasshi* and/or as a hindrance to free and frank self-expression (e.g., Hall & Noguchi, 1995; Nishida, 1982; Tezuka, 1993). Quoting Doi (1973a) who points out "the role of *amae* as an expectation that one's interlocutor can understand oneself without one's having to verbalize one's needs and feelings," Tezuka (1992) states that "this *amae* expectation requires an interlocutor to exercise *sasshi*" (p. 38). Okabe (1983), who stresses that *amae* underlies the Japanese emphasis on the group over the individual, writes: "A group player is more liked than a solo player.... The Japanese, therefore, display great cautiousness in expressing personal opinions and in modifying their opinions to be consistent with those of others around them" (p. 26). What he implies is also that *amae* generates the predominance of "we" over "I" in Japanese interpersonal relations and consequently prevents the Japanese from speaking their minds in an exact and explicit fashion.

Amae seems to be treated in the communication literature as a convenient conceptual tool to "dichotomously" delineate communication routines in Japanese culture in comparison with those in the U.S. European-American counterpart. To put it in another way, the conceptual significance of *amae* in current communication research appears to lie solely in its convenience for depicting "diverse and divergent" cultural modes of communication in Japan and the United States. Unfortunately, therefore, its *raison d'être* is largely for "between-culture analyses" rather than for "within-culture analyses" if I employ the terminology of Hirai (1987, 1988).

Contrary to many communication researchers, Maynard (1997) regards *amae* as a basis for Japanese direct and confrontational communication and remarks that "*amae* can be seen as that part of the social contract that allows emotions to be freely expressed with approval" (p. 35). For instance, family members often say "no" directly to one another's face because the *amae* relationship is established among them. Maynard (1990) illustrates: "In this warm and forgiving relationship, self-assertion and selfishness are perhaps unconditionally accepted. In such an environment saying 'no' with no accommodation to others' feelings, which sometimes is taken as a sign of immaturity and selfishness, is allowed" (p. 326). Maynard (1997) further observes in connection with conflict and the myth of harmony in Japanese communication as follows:

Everyday conflicts are mostly among *uchi* [in-group] members. Blatant and blunt confrontations often occur among close friends, where the *amae* rela-

tionship is well established. Here the raw emotions and hard feelings that may result from confrontation and conflict are usually assured of being mended. The *amae* relationship is expected to survive day-to-day emotional skirmishes among its members. (p. 156)

Tokunaga's (1994) empirical findings lend credence to Maynard's observation. Her questionnaire survey results disclose that the Japanese university students who participated in her survey have less *enryo* when they are communicating with their family members, close friends, and boyfriends/girlfriends to whom they can show *amae* than when they are communicating with acquaintances, *sempai* (seniors), *kohai* (juniors), and teachers to whom they cannot show *amae*.

One controversial issue then stands out here: Does *amae* "help" or "hinder" *enryo-sasshi* and self-assertion? This question is worthy of consideration. Communication experts may presume that *amae* suppresses verbalization in communicative interactions because they make use of the concept of *amae* in consistency with the popular collectivism/interdependent self-construal/high-context theoretical combination.

There is one more thing that must be added in this communication literature review. In spite of the fact that *amae* is a very broad concept (Maruta, 1992), most communication specialists do not make any effort to seize on its meaning for their communication inquiries. They instead refer to it rather obscurely and sometimes confusingly. A case in point is Nishida (1977), who loosely equates *amae* with "the Japanese fondness for hesitation or ambiguities of expression" (p. 70).⁴ It may behoove communication scholars to delimit the meaning of *amae* so as to elucidate the premises and practices of human communication.

Impacts of Amae on Communication Styles

I have thus far overviewed the concept of *amae* in the communication literature. In the latter half of this section, I will tackle the question posed earlier—Does *amae* help or hinder *enryo-sasshi* and self-assertion of the Japanese?—by taking a look at the relevant literature outside the discipline of communication and make clear what kinds of impacts *amae* has on Japanese interpersonal interactions. There is no denying that *amae* is inextricably meshed with *enryo* and *sasshi* and reinforces them at least in some communication circumstances. This point is fully endorsed by other professionals (e.g., Johnson, 1993; Okonogi, 1992; Tezuka, 1986, 1993) as well as Doi (1973a, 1973b, 1974, 1982). Due to space limitations, therefore, I will consider herein whether or not *amae* can encourage self-assertion and discourage *enryo-sasshi* and, if so, why this dimension of *amae*-based communication has been virtually neglected by communication theorists.

Kumagai (1981) articulates his idea of what he names “bipolar posturing” in *amae*-related social interactions which are composed of two complementary postures that prescribe, respectively, an individual to indulge herself/himself in love (*amaeru*) or to defer in love (*amayakasu*). “For the Japanese individuals who ‘step in and out’ of these postures,” Kumagai (1981) explicates, “*amae* affords the opportunity for self-assertion on the one hand and of altruistic self-withdrawal on the other” (p. 250). According to Kumagai (1981), “it is through *amayakasu* that freedom becomes an integral component of *amae*. Freedom in *amae* is specifically extended in a concrete act—to offer freedom” (p. 262). Kumagai (1981) maintains: “In *amaeru*, an interactant is given the opportunity to express [herself or] himself and therefore to release tension and escape pressures from nagging conformity. For this reason, *amae* need not to be interpreted as contributing to the demotion of the Japanese ego as implied by Doi” (p. 266).⁵

Okonogi (1992) aptly comments that “the word ‘*amaeru*-ing’ is used to represent a person’s urge or expectation to have another person follow or forgive his or her selfishness, self-centered and unjustifiable demands, or demand for entitlement” (p. 21). This comment explains partly why Kumagai and Kumagai (1986) state that “the closest—though not totally satisfactory—English equivalent for *amae* may be given as ‘permissive love’” (p. 308). Based on his explication with reference to *amae* and forgiveness, Okonogi (1992) duly posits that “the person, having won the acknowledgement that the other person is someone who will accept his or her *amae*, is conveying the fact to the other person” (p. 23).

This line of argument is congruent with the prototype of the *amae* relationship. Doi (1973a, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1992) repeats that the prototype of the *amae* relationship is the mother-child relationship. In such a relationship, the small child often does, and is allowed to, express her or his will with minimal restrictions and maximum affective support on the part of the mother (see Kumagai [1981] for an illustrative example).

It is conceivable from the foregoing discussion that *amae* can lead to what might be termed an *assertion-acceptance communication style* in stark contrast to the “overstated” *enryo-sasshi* communication style. This “understated” interaction style is characterized by the speaker’s directness of self-expression and the listener’s mind of openness. Now that I have presupposed that *amae* possibly encourages self-assertion and discourages *enryo-sasshi* in Japanese communication, I ought to answer why communication researchers have grossly ignored this side of the same coin. One primary, although admittedly speculative, reason is that they are very likely to associate self-assertion with individualism and independence whose well-springs are diametrically opposed to that of *amae*. They might assume that the motive behind self-assertion is to be individualistic and independent at all times. They might hardly imagine that the motive behind self-assertion is to be accepted by others and to merge with them from time to

time. They are prone to be confined to the U.S. European-American (male-centered) viewpoint on self-assertion.⁶

In summary, I contend that *amae* underlies and underpins both the *enryo-sasshi* and assertion-acceptance communication styles. Accordingly, I also submit that *amae* has “paradoxical” impacts on Japanese interpersonal interactions. *Amae* discourages assertion and acceptance when *amae* encourages *enryo* and *sasshi*. Conversely, *amae* discourages *enryo* and *sasshi* when *amae* encourages assertion and acceptance. Thus, two different types of *amae* can be isolated though both have been simply labeled *amae*. One is *amae* as a facilitator of *enryo* and *sasshi*. The other is *amae* as a bedrock of assertion and acceptance. I find it particularly important to conceptualize these two types of *amae* as communication variables in a more lucid manner. For they have different impacts on the cultural styles of Japanese communication.

Reconceptualizing *Amae* as Human Communication Needs

In the preceding pages, I identified two different types of *amae* that have different communicative impacts in Japanese socio-cultural milieu and urged the importance of formulating a new conceptualization of them as communication variables. In the succeeding pages, I will strive to conceptualize these two types of *amae* as human communication needs, namely, message-expanding and message-accepting needs. Before doing so, however, I will proffer a brief review of the definition, components, and structure of *amae* for the purpose of clarifying what the concept of *amae* is about and how it can be located within Japanese culture and communication studies.

Definition, Components, and Structure of Amae

Amae is a nebulous and elusive concept whose connotations and implications are rich and paradoxical. *Amae* is intuitively and easily accessible to those who have experienced it in everyday life, but its complex nature has defied strictly scientific conceptualization and operationalization (Tezuka, 1986). In response to criticisms by Kimura (1972) and Takemoto (1986, 1988) on the lack of its clear-cut definition, Doi (1988) stubbornly stresses the following definition: *Amae* is, “in the first place, the craving of a newborn child for close contact with its mother, and, in the broader sense, the desire to deny the fact of separation that is an inevitable part of human existence and to obliterate the pain that this separation involves” (Doi, 1973a, p. 167). I am not in a position to problematize this original definition of *amae*. I think, nonetheless, that it is too abstract to be applied to stipulate the above two types of more concrete *amae* observable in Japanese communication.

From her review of the existing literature, Tezuka (1986, 1993) draws forth her conceptualization of *amae* that is more applicable in theorizing about *amae* in Japanese communication. She postulates that *amae* consists of three interrelated and interdependent need components operating in combination. The first component is a need for a sense of oneness with others, which occupies a central place in Doi's conceptualization of *amae*. This oneness need is presumed to function at the deepest and most abstract level of human existence. The second component is a need for dependence on others, which is often described by Doi as a key to the concept of *amae*. This dependence need in Tezuka's limited sense indicates the need to be helped by others whenever one wants to (Tezuka, 1993). The third component is a need for acceptance by others in spite of one's failure, inadequacies, and vulnerabilities. This acceptance need corresponds to a desire to seek indulgence or forgiveness for everything that one does, which is frequently discussed by Doi as an important aspect of *amae*.

Tezuka (1986) believes that the concept of *amae* is unique because it encompasses all these three underlying need components, and that such all-encompassing nature makes *amae* distinctly different from other related concepts such as dependence, attachment, and intimacy (see Tezuka [1986] for her comparisons of *amae* and these related concepts). Tezuka (1986, 1993) further characterizes *amae* in terms of its two-layered organizational structure of the three need components. She speculates that "a need for a sense of oneness with others exists at the deepest level of understanding, whereas the other two kinds of needs exist at a more concrete level of understanding and tend to be associated more with overt behavior" (Tezuka, 1986, p. 35). In her speculation, therefore, the satisfaction of the "peripheral" need for dependence or acceptance leads to the satisfaction of the "central" need for a sense of oneness.

Amae as Message-Expanding and Message-Accepting Needs

Tezuka's (1986, 1993) conceptualization of *amae* as a two-layered basic human need is conducive to theorizing *amae* as a facilitator of *enryo-sasshi* and as a lubricant of self-assertion that I alluded to earlier. For communicators who want to have a sense of oneness through the exchange of messages not only express and sense the dependence and acceptance needs *through* communication, but also bring these two peripheral needs *into* communication itself. In other words, both dependence and acceptance needs play crucial roles in determining interaction styles. I argue, therefore, that *amae* can be conceptualized as two types of human communication needs which are ramifications of the dependence and acceptance needs (see Figure 1).

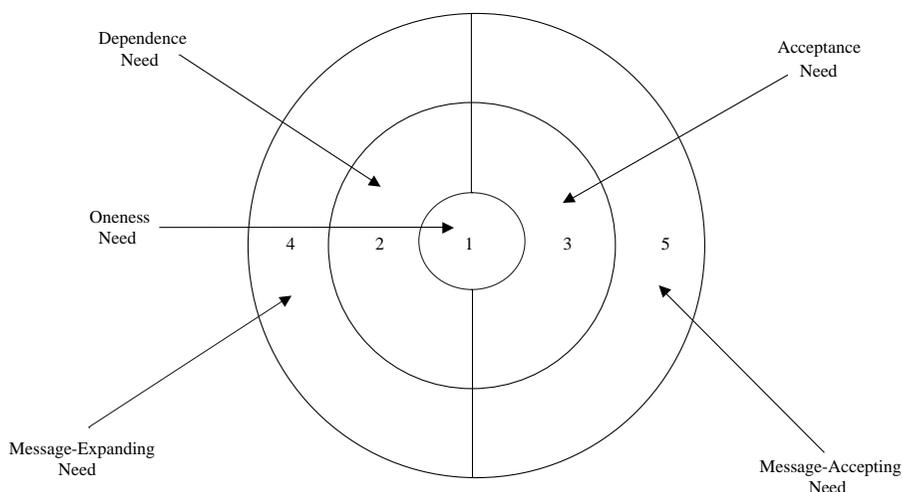


Figure 1. A multi-layered model of *amae*

The need for dependence on others (Need 2 in Figure 1), which is one manifestation of the need for a sense of oneness with others at the deeper level (Need 1 in Figure 1), is the need to be helped by others when one wants to. From an interaction perspective, it is interpretable as the communicator's need to be helped by the fellow communicator to understand the intended meaning of her or his message when she or he wants to. This communicative dependence need is compatible with *amae* as a facilitator of *enryo-sasshi*.

The communicative dependence need, which is a ramification of the dependence need (Need 2 in Figure 1), can be further specified as "the message-expanding need" (Need 4 in Figure 1) in the process of Japanese *enryo-sasshi* communication. *The message-expanding need* is the communicator's need for *sasshi* on the part of the fellow communicator. In the process of Japanese *enryo-sasshi* communication, the interlocutor who has *enryo* and sends a message must be helped by the fellow interlocutor who receives the message and makes *sasshi* in order to catch on to its intended meaning. It is this *amae* as the message-expanding need that at times encourages the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style and discourages the assertion-acceptance interaction style.

The need for acceptance by others (Need 3 in Figure 1), which is another manifestation of the need for a sense of oneness with others at the deeper level (Need 1 in Figure 1), is the need to be accepted by others in spite of one's failure, inadequacies, and vulnerabilities. From an interaction standpoint, it is comprehensible as the communicator's need to be accepted by the fellow communicator even when she or he deviates from social interaction norms and sounds

inappropriate and emotional. This communicative acceptance need is consistent with *amae* as a lubricant of assertion-acceptance.

The communicative acceptance need, which is a ramification of the acceptance need (Need 3 in Figure 1), can be further identified as “the message-accepting need” (Need 5 in Figure 1) in the process of Japanese assertion-acceptance communication. *The message-accepting need* is the communicator’s need for openness on the part of the fellow communicator. In the process of Japanese assertion-acceptance communication, the interlocutor who expresses herself or himself outspokenly must be accepted by the fellow interlocutor who is open-minded and receptive. It is this *amae* as the message-accepting need that occasionally encourages the assertion-acceptance interaction style and discourages the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style.

In general, *amae* as the message-expanding need manifests in Japanese communication with strangers, acquaintances, out-group people, and people in higher and/or senior status. It is also commonly shown in formal and public communication settings in Japan. By and large, on the other hand, *amae* as the message-acceptance need manifests in Japanese communication with family members, close friends, in-group people, and people in lower and/or junior status. It is also usually displayed in informal and private communication settings in Japan. I hasten to add, however, that the manifestation of *amae* as the two types of human communication needs cannot be easily generalized because it rests at least on spatial, temporal, relational, and historical contexts (i.e., place, occasion, personality, and relationship history).

The aforementioned reconceptualization of *amae* makes it possible to identify and clarify the meanings of *amae* when it is used in relation to Japanese communication. For one example, we hear those Japanese who have overseas experiences complain, “*Amae* doesn’t work abroad. You have to say everything.” This *amae* refers to the message-expanding need. For another example, when Maynard (1997), whom I quoted earlier, makes the observation that “confrontations often occur among close friends, where the *amae* relationship is well established” (p. 156), she means the relationship where the message-accepting need is allowed to be called and responded to.

Meta-*Sasshi* and *Amae*-Based Communication Model

In the previous section, I defined *amae* as two types of human communication needs—message-expanding and message-accepting needs—that both encourage and discourage the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style. In this last section, on the basis of the above-discussed reconceptualization of *amae*, I will propose the new concept of meta-*sasshi* (viz., *sasshi* on the *amae* level [or *amae* reading] as opposed to *sasshi* on the message level [or mind reading]) and present a

systematic model of Japanese *amae*-based communication. I will also touch briefly on the distinction between *amae* and the psychology of *amae* and lay out possible theoretical contributions of this new *amae* model.

New Concept of Meta-Sasshi or Amae Reading

Before I propose the new concept of meta-*sasshi*, which has more to do with the psychology of *amae* than with *amae*, it is wise for me to make clear some differences between *amae* and the psychology of *amae* in human communication. First, while *amae* refers to message-expanding and message-accepting needs themselves, the psychology of *amae* indicates the communicator's enactment, treatment, expectations, and reactions concerning these needs. Second, while *amae* as message-expanding and message-accepting needs themselves is enacted only in the message-sending process, the psychology of *amae* operates in the both message-sending and message-receiving processes.

Of particular relevance to this second point of difference is the reciprocal relationship between the psychology of *amaeru* and the psychology of *amayakasu* (let *amaeru*). A successful *amae*-based human relationship requires both a person who expects *amae* (the psychology of *amaeru*) and a person who responds to the *amae* expected (the psychology of *amayakasu*). In a similar vein, successful *amae*-based communication demands both the psychology of *amaeru* (*amae* enactment and expectation) in the message-sending process and the psychology of *amayakasu* (*amae* treatment and response) in the message-receiving process.

To feel *amae* as human communication needs is one thing, but to actually enact and expect *amae* (*amaeru*) is another. Even when she or he feels a certain type and amount of *amae*, the message-sender does not always enact it and expect it to be met by the message-receiver. By the same token, being willing to meet the expected *amae* is not identical to being actually able to respond to the expected *amae* (*amayakasu*). Even when she or he is willing to meet a certain type and amount of *amae* enacted by the message-sender, the message-receiver is not always able to respond to it as expected. Here, I suspect, meta-*sasshi* competence comes into play. I define meta-*sasshi* as *intrapersonal guesswork about the quality and quantity of amae that the communicator engages in before she or he encodes meanings and decodes messages in the communication process*. This meta-*sasshi* may be named "*amae* reading" if *sasshi* can be called "mind reading."

There are two important functions of this meta-*sasshi* in *amae*-based communication. The first function of meta-*sasshi* is to make assessments of the quality of *amae* before encoding meanings and decoding messages. In the meta-*sasshi* stage, the communicator is conditioned to make guesses about "which type of *amae*" (that is, the message-expanding or message-accepting need) is allowed in the message-sending process and expected in the message-receiving process. Such

quality assessments of *amae* help the communicator determine whether she or he needs to have *enryo* or can be assertive in the message-sending process. They also enable her or him to determine whether to make *sasshi* or just take the message at face value with her or his open-mindedness in the message-receiving process.

Doi (1973b, 1974, 1982, 1989) emphasizes that *amae* is ordinarily conveyed without words. The Japanese rarely say, "I want to *amaeru* on you." Although it is more common for them to say, "You are *amaeru*-ing on me," they usually avoid saying it altogether. The same thing can be said regarding *amae* as two types of human communication needs. The message-sender hardly says, "I need your *sasshi*." or "I need to be accepted by you." The message-receiver also avoids asking, "Do you need my *sasshi*?" or "Do you need to be accepted by me?" Therefore, guesswork on the *amae* level is essential to successful *amae*-based communication.

The second function of meta-*sasshi* is to make assessments of the quantity of *amae* before encoding meanings and decoding messages. In the meta-*sasshi* stage, the communicator is conditioned to make guesses not only about which type of *amae* but also about "to what extent" a certain type of *amae* is allowed in the message-sending process and expected in the message-receiving process. Such quantity assessments of *amae* lead the communicator to estimate how much *enryo* she or he should have or how assertive she or he can be in the message-sending process. They also allow her or him to calculate how much *sasshi* she or he should make or how much she or he needs to be open-minded in the message-receiving process.

Miike (1997) belabors that "*enryo-sasshi* communication functions successfully only when *enryo* is a counterbalance to *sasshi*. In other words, unless the extent of *enryo* on the part of the speaker meshes with that of *sasshi* on the part of the listener, both *enryo* and *sasshi* will be communicative impediments rather than communicative lubricants" (p. 85). For instance, if the speaker has moderate *enryo* in encoding a meaning while the listener makes too many *sasshi* in decoding the message, their communication will not be successful.

By the same token, assertion-acceptance communication smoothly operates only when the degree of assertion on the part of the message-sender matches that of openness on the part of the message-receiver. Even if both interlocutors employ the assertion-acceptance communication style, their communication will be harmful to their interpersonal relationship when the speaker asserts herself or himself so much that the listener cannot be open enough. Their communication might also be dissatisfying if the listener is too open to accept the speaker.

As Maruta (1992) pinpoints, "If you do *amae* a bit too much, others think you are imprudent or audacious; if you do not do it enough, you are cold, aloof, and even arrogant" (p. 16). Therefore, guesswork not only about the quality of *amae* but also about the quantity of *amae* is vital to successful *amae*-based communication.

Model of Japanese Amae-Based Communication

Placing meta-*sasshi* as the paramount component of Japanese communication, I will now present a dyadic model of Japanese *amae*-based communication that can serve as a hypothetical theoretical framework for the study of relational communication (see Figure 2). Japanese A, who has a certain meaning to convey to Japanese B (Stage 1), first engages in meta-*sasshi* to assess the allowed quality and quantity of *amae* by carefully considering spatial, temporal, relational, and historical contexts (i.e., place, occasion, personality, relationship history) in which she or he is situated and activates an “appropriate” amount of *amae* (either the message-expanding or message-accepting need) that Japanese B can allow and meet (Stage 2). According to the enacted *amae* as the message-expanding or message-accepting need, Japanese A chooses to have *enryo* or to be assertive, determines to what extent she or he does so (Stage 3), and produces a message (Stage 4). The message is then either ambiguous enough for Japanese B to make some *sasshi* about or direct enough to accept with some open-mindedness in order to understand the intended meaning of the message (Stage 5).

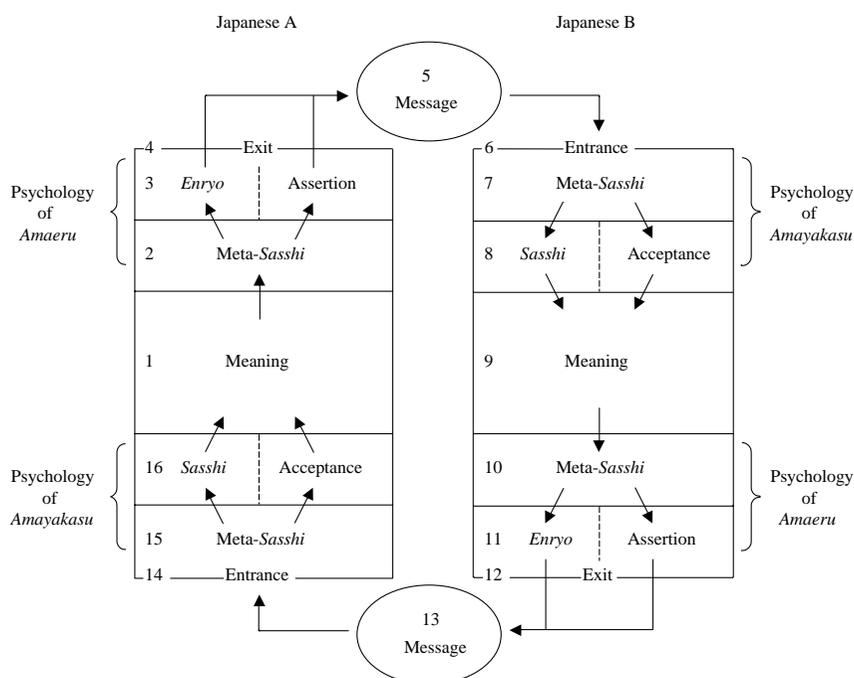


Figure 2. A model of *amae*-based communication

Japanese B, who received the message from Japanese A (Stage 6), also first engages in meta-*sasshi* to assess the expected quality and quantity of *amae* by referring to the spatial, temporal, relational, and historical contexts and tries to meet the amount of *amae* (either the message-expanding or message-accepting need) that Japanese A enacted and expected (Stage 7). In accordance with the expected *amae* as the message-expanding or message-accepting need, Japanese B chooses to make *sasshi* to expand the message or to accept the message with her or his open-mindedness, determines to what extent she or he does so in processing the message (Stage 8), and deciphers the intended meaning of the message (Stage 9). Japanese B goes through the same message-sending process and transmits a message (Stages 9-12). The message then requires either Japanese A's *sasshi* or acceptance with her or his open-mindedness (Stage 13). Japanese A, who received the message (Stage 14), does the same thing as Japanese B did (Stages 15-16) in order to share the intended meaning of the message (Stage 1).

A careful look at this new *amae* model reveals that, in order to be communicatively competent in Japanese interpersonal interactions, one must be a good *amae* reader as well as a good mind reader. The sheer absence of meta-*sasshi* or the unsuccessful engagement in meta-*sasshi* leads to relational miscommunication or to damaged interpersonal relationships. The misassessment of the *amae* quality in meta-*sasshi* in the message-sending and message-receiving processes might destroy the best intention of mutual adaptation. If Japanese A is assertive when she or he needs *enryo*, for example, Japanese B may make (extra) *sasshi* about Japanese A's purpose of communicating a message. The misassessment of the *amae* quantity can also be very harmful to harmonious communication and relationships. If Japanese A has too much *enryo*, the message becomes too ambiguous for Japanese B to make appropriate *sasshi* about, which makes her or him think over this and that and eventually feel frustrated with not identifying the intended meaning of the message (Miike, 1997). If Japanese A is too assertive, on the other hand, the message becomes too direct for Japanese B to accept. In such a case, she or he may get the intended meaning of the message. But this communication is prone to result in interpersonal relationship deterioration or termination.

This new *amae* model sheds light on at least four neglected dimensions of Japanese communication that Ishii's (1984) *enryo-sasshi* model does not illuminate and illustrate. The model also makes it possible to locate his *enryo-sasshi* model in a more holistic picture of Japanese communication. First, the *amae* model acknowledges that the Japanese *do* use the "direct" and "low-context" assertion-acceptance interaction style and elucidates how they *choose* to use one of the two interaction styles. Ishii's (1984) *enryo-sasshi* model is a useful theoretical contribution in systematically delineating one important mode of communication that is not so recognized and appreciated as it should be in Western societies. However, it also inevitably gives non-Japanese the false impres-

sion that the Japanese always employ the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style and are not given opportunities to be self-assertive. In this sense, the *amae* model has more explanatory power about the choices of the Japanese communicator and the complexities of Japanese communication.

Second, the *amae* model, along with the new idea of meta-*sasshi*, serves as a conceptual outlook through which to probe into the dual structure of Japanese miscommunication. If the message-receiver fails to engage in proper meta-*sasshi* (or *amae* reading), she or he will misunderstand the intended meaning of a message. Even if she or he does, there will still be the danger of misunderstanding depending on her or his *sasshi* (or mind reading). Miike (1997) critiques Ishii's (1984) *enryo-sasshi* model by pointing out that it does not elaborate on when, where, why, and how Japanese miscommunication occurs. The *amae* model can provide some systematic theoretical accounts of the nature of Japanese miscommunication.

Third, the *amae* model holds some theoretical promise to address universal implications of Japanese *amae*-based communication. Doi (1973a) proclaims that *amae*, which is fundamental to all human beings, has cultural universality as well as cultural specificity. Morsbach and Taylor (1976) concur with Doi by observing that "although there is no special word for them, *amae*-type feelings do exist in Western culture, since the ideal of individualism and independence is far from realized in practice" (p. 144). As Tezuka (1986) surmises, however, the manifestation or overt expression of *amae* differs from culture to culture because it is likely to be conditioned by cultural values and norms.

Along this line of argument over the cultural universality and specificity of *amae*, the model presupposes the universality of *amae* as two types of human communication needs, the nature and functions of meta-*sasshi* in the communication process, and the use of *enryo-sasshi* and assertion-acceptance interaction styles. Nevertheless, culture *does* assume a primary and pivotal role in shaping and suggesting when, where, with whom, and in what relationship a certain type and amount of *amae* is allowed or expected and which interaction style is encouraged or discouraged. Culture is thus a crucial factor that has a considerable impact on the "universal" communication practice of meta-*sasshi*. In a nutshell, meta-*sasshi* is universal, whereas meta-*sasshi* competence is culture-bound.

Fourth and finally, the *amae* model captures Japanese direct communication in a harmonious interpersonal relationship of mutual dependency. Both implicitly and explicitly, the research literature in the field of intercultural communication assumes that developing and maintaining harmony is in direct opposition to self-assertion especially in non-Western collectivistic cultures. In reality, however, the assertion and acceptance interaction style, when used appropriately, *does* contribute to the development and maintenance of harmony, just as the use of the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style does not always promote harmonious relationships. As Miike (2002, 2003) asserts, mutual adaptation is of cen-

tral importance in harmonious communication processes. And this mechanism of mutual adaptation ought to be conceptualized in terms of how the communicators “peacefully” produce and process not only indirect, high-context messages but also direct, low-context messages. The *amae* model adumbrates such important aspects of the mechanism.

Conclusion

Japanese communication has been dichotomously compared and contrasted with U.S. European-American communication over the last three decades. This academic predisposition more often than not has diminished similarities and has expanded differences between Japanese and non-Japanese cultures (Bruneau, 1996; Hirai, 1987, 1988). As Hall (1998) writes, nevertheless, “it is many similarities across cultures that make understanding differences possible, both in terms of scholarly study and daily practice” (p. 172). Although its objective has been to explore the conceptual significance of *amae* for Japanese communication research, this theoretical essay has hopefully suggested the possibility of accounting for culture-general aspects of communication through a culture-specific concept and example.

Amae has been reconsidered and reconceptualized in the present study as it pertains to the psychology of the Japanese communicator and to the process of Japanese communication. *Amae* was first critically examined in particular connection with the *enryo-sasshi* interaction style. *Amae* was then theorized as message-expanding and message-accepting needs that are ramified from dependence and acceptance needs. A more holistic model of the *amaeru-amayakasu* dynamism of Japanese communication was finally constructed in relation to the newly proposed concept of meta-*sasshi*. It is beyond the scope of the present study to expound on the communication psychology of *amae* in other nations and regions. It is believed, however, that the foregoing conceptualization of *amae* might be somewhat helpful in viewing interpersonal interactions within and across national borders and cultural boundaries.⁷

Intercultural communication scholarship has come a long way in identifying and analyzing characteristics of Japanese communication. And yet, it still has a long way to go in order to evaporate the fallacious peculiarity and inscrutability of Japanese communication and to evaluate its effectiveness and appropriateness in the 21st century, either intraculturally or interculturally. It is to be hoped that *amae* in Japanese culture and communication will be understood in non-pejorative ways and turn out to be one of the primordial emotions for successful intercultural interactions between people from slightly dissimilar countries and cultures.⁸

NOTES

1. Doi (1973b) explains the concept of *amae* by quoting the following passage from Doi (1956):

Amaeru [*amae* is its noun form] can be translated as “to depend and presume upon another’s love.” This word has the same root as *amai*, an adjective which corresponds to “sweet.” Thus *amaeru* has a distinct feeling of sweetness, and is generally used to express a child’s attitude toward an adult, especially [her or] his parents. I can think of no English word equivalent to *amaeru* except for “spoil,” which, however, is a transitive verb and definitely has a bad connotation; whereas the Japanese *amaeru* does not necessarily have a bad connotation, although we say we should not let a youngster *amaeru* too much. I think most Japanese adults have a dear memory of the taste of sweet dependency as a child and, consciously or unconsciously, carry a life-long nostalgia for it. (p. 92)

The formal definition, need components, and structural aspects of *amae* will be further discussed in the second portion of the present essay. For additional English-language sources on *amae*, see Doi (1973a, 1976, 1986, 1989, 1990) and Johnson (1993). For recent Japanese-language writings on *amae*, see Doi (2000, 2001) and Kitayama (1999).

2. Dale (1986) decries Doi’s theory of *amae* by pronouncing that he generated the “myth of *amae*” discourse. Many critical scholars across disciplines, Japanese and non-Japanese alike, “uncritically” favor Dale’s argument on *nihonjinron* as an ideology. For some reason, nonetheless, they appear to be quite disinterested in responses by Aoki (1990), Johnson (1993), and Wierzbicka (1997) to Dale who displays his Eurocentric attitude throughout his work.
3. *Enryo-sasshi* communication, as described by Ishii (1984) and by Ishii and Bruneau (1994), has been considered as the predominant mode of Japanese communication. *Enryo* was originally used “to mean thoughtful consideration in the literal sense of the two characters with which it is written—*en*, distant, and *ryo*, consideration” (Doi, 1973a, p. 38). It refers to reserve, modesty, self-restraint, and holding back. *Sasshi* as a noun can be defined as conjecture, surmise, or guessing what one means. In its verb form *sassuru*, its meaning is expanded to include imagining, supposing, empathizing with, and making allowances for others (Nishida, 1977, 1982). Bowers (1988) witnesses that *enryo* (self-restraint vis-à-vis explicit verbal responses out of consideration for the source and/or presence of other receivers) and *sasshi* (perceptive understanding of messages from a minimum number of explicit cues) are signs of maturity and highly valued in Japanese culture. See Miike (1997) for a detailed review and critique of Ishii’s *enryo-sasshi* communication model.

4. Another case in point is Gudykunst and Nishida (1993, 1994) who cite Miyanaga's (1991) perplexing explanation of *amae* and *sasshi*:
Although a high *sasshi* ability in the recipient of cues is much appreciated, an expectation of *sasshi* effort from the other is discouraged. The word for this is *amae*. Although *amae* has been co-opted as a psychological concept by Takeo Doi (1973a), in the interaction ritual, it is simply used to indicate the restriction of excessive dependency on the *sasshi* of the other person. *Sasshi* is good, but asking *sasshi* is not; it is considered to be aggressive. *Amae*, when used in a conversation, signifies a passive aggression in which one depends on the manners of the other. (p. 86)
5. Kumagai (1981) also illustrates:
In reviewing popularly recognized forms of *amaeru*, we have observed that they are self-assertive to the extent of appearing conspicuously self-indulgent.... Self-indulgence in *amaeru* can include teasing, play-acting, showing-off, flirting, seducing, exaggerating, imposing. But it can also offer the opportunity for an individual to cry, laugh, expose [her or] his failings, comfort [herself or] himself in self-pity and drunkenness, trespass upon minor rules (both social and regulatory), and periodically allow [herself or] himself the privilege of acting unreasonably. (p. 256)
6. In passing, homogeneity also cannot explain why the Japanese are not motivated to be self-assertive. While it is the case that people are less talkative and straightforward because they can sometimes easily understand each other without words in a homogeneous society, it is also true that people are more comfortable and secure to be frank and candid because they feel accepted and free from misunderstandings (Ito, 1992). Cross-cultural communication researchers are uncritical of the common argument over the impact of homogeneity on high-context communication.
7. Doi (1986) notes that "though I have stated that there is no exact equivalent word *amaeru* in all European languages, I do not say that *amaeru* is unique to the Japanese language" (p. 129). It is indeed important and interesting to compare the Japanese concept of *amae* with similar Asian concepts such as the Korean concept of *õrigwan* or *ũnsõk* (Lee, 1984). It is also imperative and intriguing to observe *amae*-related communication phenomena in other Asian cultures. From a Chinese perspective, Chen (2001, 2002) defines communication competence as the interactant's capacity to continuously adapt and relocate herself or himself in a dynamic transforming process of mutual dependency in order to cultivate and maintain a harmonious relationship with the fellow interactant. This Chinese view seems to have a great deal to do with meta-*sasshi* competence in *amae*-based communication.

8. Tekeichi (1997) discusses three Japanese ethical principles—harmony, group solidarity, and affinity or empathy—in such a way that they could be applicable to the project of universal values while he criticizes traditional patterns of Japanese communication. In one way or another, the psychology of *amae* bears relevance to all these three principles.

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