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# Dialogue in Cross-cultural Perspective: Japanese, Korean, and Russian Discourses

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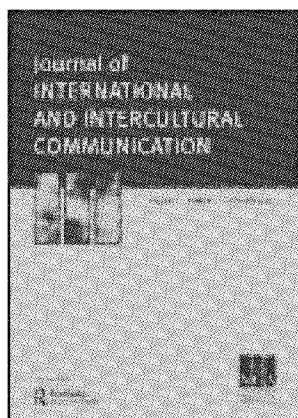
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### “Dialogue” in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Japanese, Korean, and Russian Discourses

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# “Dialogue” in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Japanese, Korean, and Russian Discourses

Donal Carbaugh, Elena V. Nuciforo, Makoto Saito & Dong-shin Shin

*Dialogue has become a key, cultural term in global English. Pleas for its use and enactment are prominent in many spheres of international activity. Following earlier works, this article explores terms (or characters) and practices which relate to dialogue in three cultural discourses: Japanese, Korean, and Russian. Revealed for each are the distinctive goals being targeted, implicit moral rules for conduct, as well as the proper tone, mode, and interactional structure at play. The distinctive features in each discourse of dialogue are discussed, as well as common features. Cross-cultural knowledge of this kind can clarify and address vexing problems such as the cultural balancing of information and truth with relational concerns.*

**Keywords:** *Ethnography of Communication; Cultural Discourse Analysis; Dialogue Studies*

*Dialogue* has been identified as a rich cultural term, pervasive in its use, rich in its meanings, and dense in the morality for conduct its use brings with it. We hear today

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calls for dialogue in multiple academic and public discourses, and the European Union has declared our time a time for “Intercultural Dialogue.” Each such appeal has asked us to reflect upon and engage in dialogue. Each such use presumes a practical good or service of an ethic, through dialogic conduct. As a rich cultural term, then, dialogue has become increasingly circulated in global discourses, and espoused as a preferred form for communication conduct. Across cultural worlds and communities, people declare in a virtually unquestioned way the importance of and the need for dialogue. Indeed, we might wonder, who would be against dialogue?

Of special importance to dialogue are spheres of activity where different peoples are brought together, asked to engage in dialogue, and to reflect upon new ways of thinking about it, of doing it, especially in situations of conflict. Many believe such pleas will help us achieve our goals. Yet, each plea for dialogue can bring with it very specific ideas about what this preferred form of communication is, how it is to be done, and what it means. In an earlier paper (Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi, & Ge, 2006), we found that although dialogue is valued as a social action, the communication practice being valued through the term, and its meanings, varied by language and culture, the goals being targeted, implicit rules for conduct, and what was deemed proper as its tone, mode, and interactional structure. Different moral imperatives were activated when pleas were made to engage in dialogue. Because of this, especially when people speak from different cultural circumstances, with footing in different languages and expressive systems, one plea for dialogue may not match another, with strained relations, confusion, misapprehension, and misattribution of intent resulting. Equally—or even more—difficult are circumstances when people are speaking the same language, increasingly English, but are using that language differently, yet believing they are saying the same thing (Berry, 2009; Berry & Carbaugh, 2004; Carbaugh, 2005a). On these occasions people may speak, and listen, as if they understand what dialogue entails, when the discursive and cultural entailments at play may be quite different.

This leads us, an interlingual and intercultural research team, each practicing ethnographers of our own ways of speaking, to ask the following questions: What exactly is being targeted as people call for dialogue? Into what shape or form is social conduct being cast? What are motives for this form or forms of practice and what are its meanings? Following earlier work, this article investigates three native languages of our research team: Korean, Japanese, and Russian. We do so in order to ask the following: Are there cultural terms for communication in each language which overlap in uses and meanings with the English term dialogue? What does each identify as a form, or forms of communication practice, and what are its meanings? The analyses systematically explore each language-in-use by describing both the related terms in each of these languages and the practices being referenced through those terms. Following others and our own earlier works, we treat each language use as a cultural discourse that is deeply coded (Carbaugh, 2007; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). Our findings are that these cultural discourses, when considered together, bring into view a wide range of possible practices and premises when

dialogue—and its kindred terms—is being advocated, referenced, conducted, and/or interpreted.

### Research Literature, Theory, and Methodology

The analyses that follow are designed within a general program of inquiry which derives from the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974, 1996), including the cross-cultural study of coding practices (see Carbaugh, 1990; Philipsen 1997).

Our report uses a specific theoretical model for studying such terms (Carbaugh, 1989), with a special focus on deciphering communication codes for talk and pragmatic action. Such ethnographic studies have explored over 100 terms for communication in several different languages including American Sign Language, Chinese, Danish, English (in several varieties), Finnish, German, Hebrew, Korean, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. This focus on cultural terms for communication has assumed a central place in the formulation of speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1992) and subsequently served as a rich heuristic for cultural study, especially, in our case, of dialogue.

The procedures we employ follow a four phased methodology. First, the members of our research team identified in their native language a key term or terms, where available, which has some significant overlap in form, meaning, and use with the English term *dialogue*. Our understanding of dialogue was informed by earlier studies about dialogue (e.g., Anderson & Cissna, 1997; Carbaugh, 2005b; Wierzbicka, 2006), by our earlier studies referenced above, and by auditing uses of dialogue in English. Second, each analyst explored, described, and analyzed how the term was used in specific social contexts of interaction. Third, the native speaker, with others, provided an initial analysis of which communication practices were being referenced with those terms. Finally, the native analyst, and eventually the research team together, interpreted cultural meanings of these terms about communication itself, and about personhood and sociality.

The framework at use focuses analysts' attention on two communication phenomena: (1) the native terms related to dialogue; and (2) the communication practices being referenced when those terms are being used—including their meanings. The phenomena are explored concerning levels of application of communication: (a) *acts*, the cultural sense of which involves an individual action; (b) *events*, the cultural sense of which involves sequences of conjoint acts; and/or (c) *styles*, the cultural sense of which identifies a way of speaking that was selected from among available others (e.g., a dialogic style). This conceptual and descriptive work is followed by interpretive analyses which involve identifying the meanings active in the uses of the terms, and in the practices being so referenced. Interpretive inquiry, then, uses the framework above and focuses on the *explicit meanings*: (a) about communication itself, its structuring norms, modes of presentation, and directness of action; and on the *implicit meanings*, (b) about sociation (meanings about social identities, institutions), and (c) about personhood (models for being, personhood,

and the like) which are presumed when dialogue is being referenced, conducted, or advocated (Carbaugh, 1989; Carbaugh, Berry, & Nurmikari-Berry, 2006).

Our analyses of the three cultural discourses are presented below. The first, the Japanese discourse, demonstrates our methodology in most detail—our descriptive, interpretive, and comparative analyses of primary transcripts.

The study is conceptualized within an ongoing program of work (cited above), and complemented by other works focusing on the uses and meanings of dialogue (Anderson & Cissna, 1997; Bakhtin, 1986; Wierzbicka, 2006), and terms for talk in four other languages (Boromisza-Habashi, 2007; Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi et al., 2006; Poutiainen, 2005; Wilkins, 2005). Our analysis explores communicative means, and meanings, to identify the semiotic landscape, the variable discursive and cultural features being charted through and around these rich terms, and practices of dialogue.

### A Japanese Discourse on Dialogue

Two terms in Japanese are related to the meanings of dialogue in English: *taiwa* (対話) and *hanashiai* (話し合い). They are largely interchangeable when used colloquially. Their implied meanings include mutual understanding, agreement, and a particular social arrangement. *Hanashiai* means talking together with each side's talk matching the other. *Taiwa* means people talking about particular issues face-to-face. *Taiwa* is *hanashiai* in which harmony (和), mutual understanding (相互理解), and mutual respect (相互尊敬) are promoted.

One form of *hanashiai* is the exchange of ideas in an interactive and open way. Developed during the Edo period in Japan (1603–1886), *hanashiai* “has been the major communication mode,” “an elaborated and rational mode of communication to form a consensus within a group” even when participants come from different social and economic statuses (Nakazawa, 2000, p. 94). *Hanashiai* is also productive for promoting learning at educational settings (Iba, 2009), and facilitating science and technological communication (Mizukami et al., 2008).

One illustrative situation where a Japanese form of *hanashiai* dialogue becomes active is in an educational television series called *Haato wo tunagou* (Let's Bridge Hearts/ハートをつなごう). One main purpose of this program is to have productive dialogue and discussions about sensitive issues (*hanashiai wo suru*/話し合いをする) with experts.

We present in detail one particular episode, on the topic of gender identity, that depicts the *hanashiai* form of Japanese dialogue. Six prominent experts who have been publicly open about their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) orientations, share—or have *hanashiai*—their opinions and experiences with guests. The main guest is a 16-year-old female high school student, Akito, who is struggling with gender identification. She dislikes wearing female clothing and hates seeing her body becoming more feminine. She feels frustrated as, until 18, she is unable to undergo medical procedures to alter her physical development.



The following interaction takes place toward the end of the program. Ms. Sakurai, the main host, gently and respectfully asks Akito about her family's perceptions regarding the medical interventions. Akito explains that due to her adolescence, she has not been able to discuss her frustration: "We don't really have conversations like that at home." She feels that her parents are unaware of her struggles. However, to Akito's surprise, her parents have written her a letter for the program. Ms. Sakurai asks her assistant Sonim to read it. Akito listens attentively:

1. Akito, who we love very much, you have been dealing with many issues all by yourself.

大好きな 暁人、色々悩みを自分で抱えて

2. There were things that you could not even tell your parents. You were alone, confused, troubled, and in tears.

親にも言えなかったこと、一人で迷って悩んで泣いて

3. How incompetent we have been as parents. We regret that very much.

なんて無力な親なんだろう。今とても悔しいです。

4. But, you had teachers helping you, being helped by your friends, gradually, little by little

しかしながら、あなたは周囲の先生方、友達にたすけられて少しずつ

5. you've become able to say things that you couldn't say before. We're very happy for you.

言えない事を言えるようになった。よかったと思っています。

6. In your future, and your future life, whatever path you take, we, your Dad and Mom, support you.

これからのこと、これからの人生どう歩んでいっても、パパもママも応援します。

7. So, please do not make final decisions too quickly.

だから結論を出すのは急がないで下さい。

8. Look deeper into yourself and your future. Think carefully and take your time.

もっと自分を見つめて将来のことをしっかり、ゆっくり考えてほしいです。

9. There are many more things we wish to talk to you about, and

もっと話したいことがいっぱいありますが

10. by using this opportunity, let us, Akito, Dad, and Mom think about it together.

今回の機会で暁人もパパもママもお互いにゆっくり一緒に考えていきましょうね。

11. We love you more than anyone else.

あなたのこと、誰よりも愛しています。

12. With Love, Dad and Mom

With Love[read in English] パパ ママ

(The letter ends here.)

13. Ms. Sakurai: (Smiles, eyes are teary, but tries to control it)

(微笑む、涙が出る、涙をこらえる。)

14. How do you feel about this?

どうですか？

15. Akito: In the past, often, we did things like exchange diaries, but

昔は結構、交換日記じゃないけど、やってたんですけどね

16. somehow, before I knew it, I was in adolescence like this.

いつの間にかにこんな反抗期になっちゃって。

17. Sometime, uhh, about the future decisions,

いつか、やっぱ、今後のこととかも

18. we should be talking about them, and I want to have conversations about them.

話していかなくちゃいけないことだし、話したいと思いますね。

19. Ms. Sakurai: Your parents wrote “little by little.” (eyes are teary, but tries to control it)

ゆっくり。ゆっくりって、ね～書いてくださってましたねえ。(涙をこらえる)<sup>1</sup>

We note that the metacommunicative phrase, “could not even tell” on line 2 gives way eventually to “conversations” on line 18. The subsequent discussion utilizes *hanashiai* as a basis for conceiving and evaluating the kind of talk being discussed in line 18, and performed here. This is contrasted with the type of talk missing earlier “at Akito’s home.” By line 5 Akito’s parents express the realization that she is now “able to say things” and this recent ability now marks her, through this implicit Japanese premise, and form, as a potential fully fledged participant in *hanashiai*. By lines 9–10, the parents, through the letter, express their hope that Akito will join them in *hanashiai*, thereby experiencing its power of understanding, agreement, and productive social arrangement. *Hanashiai* provides a framing for what was missing in Akito’s family life and its subsequent remedy in Akito’s family (lines 9–10); it also implicitly provides the framing for the conduct of discourse in this television program itself.

Next we examine the specific cultural features and premises concerning *hanashiai*, comparing and contrasting the semantic features with those Wierzbicka (2006) identifies. We discuss (1) attitude to the subject matter, (2) meanings of speaking or saying, (3) listening, and (4) three competencies.

### *A Struggle for Mutual Agreement: Social and Emotional Selves*

One component of *hanashiai* dialogue that is different from those analyzed by Wierzbicka (2006) is the attitude toward the subject matter. *Hanashiai*, as a form of Japanese dialogue, aims at mutual agreement (*doui*/同意), although commitment to this aim might be partial. Here is why. A Japanese sense of harmony (*wa*/和) is closely

interconnected with consensus, ensuring that issues are resolved in a satisfactory manner for all participants. Certainly, reaching perfect agreement and harmony is almost impossible, and thus, different opinions and thoughts always remain. For instance, all the participants in the episode acknowledged difficulty in discussing their LGBT orientations openly due to multiple pressures, such as misunderstanding, stigma, and discriminations.

These pressures are addressed in communication in a distinctively Japanese way. When considering one's sense of self in Japan, it is important to consider both the emotional self and the social self as aspects of one's person. These two selves reflect two major religious traditions in Japan: Buddhism for emotional self and Shintoism for social self. The emotional self (*hone*/本音) reflects feelings that revolve around one's own self-interest. The social self (*tatemae*/建前) reflects needs for social harmony and enacting socially appropriate personhood. Ideally, a mature person is able to balance between the two selves and be at peace within him/herself and other interlocutors without intentionally deceiving others or harming the dialogue. These cultural premises are different from the Judeo-Christian tradition, where a person ideally enacts a self that is consistent, making it harder to legitimately enact two selves within one social situation (Saito, 2009).

In the communication practice of *hanashiai*, then, participants may acknowledge different views and may not insist on overall consensus. However, culturally speaking, they may at least aim at reaching a partial consensus on the level of social self, while respecting the emotional self that may not completely agree with the social self. Privileging either the social or emotional self, without respecting and acknowledging the other, would compromise the efficaciousness of the *hanashiai* dialogic event. Therefore, speakers must aim at promoting and reaching harmony through dialogue, by acknowledging and respecting both selves.

### *Compromise, Giving Advice, Being Self-Critical*

In *hanashiai*, speaking or saying implies at least three communicative acts: compromising (*jyouho*/譲歩); giving advice (*jyogen*/助言); and being self-critical (*jiko hansei*/自己反省). All three encourage mutual compromising (*yuzuriai*/譲り合い). When these communication acts are not respected, a communication event cannot become *hanashiai* (*hanashiai ni naranai*/話し合いにならない).

Compromising acts are most prominent, for they guide how the other two should be employed. People should indicate willingness to make mutual compromises (*yuzuriai*/譲り合い), showing care for the relationship and others' well-being. When a person's speech centers on individual opinions, the clarity and the value of the content being discussed may be compromised in favor of care for others. Enacting this *yuzuriai* form of communication practice involves at least four normative constraints: being (1) supportive (*kyouryoku-teki*/協力的) and (2) considerate (*omoiyari ga aru*/思いやりがある) of other participants; and (3) flexible with (*jyuunan*/柔軟) or (4) open (*oopun*/オープン) to new ideas or difficult issues. For instance, in the above *hanashiai*, Akito and her parents showed their support and

considerateness to each other. The parents showed flexibility, and Akito became open to the new idea of having continuous *hanashiai* sessions to consider all options and not rush to make final decisions (lines 17–18).

In terms of giving advice, the speaker may be direct or clear (*chokusetsu teki*/直接的 *hakkiri*/はっきり), in a mode that varies from direct (*chokusetsu teki*/直接的) to indirect (*kansetsu teki*/間接的), or the speaker may address the topic implicitly (*honomekasu*/ほのめかす). For instance, the parents and Ms. Sakurai gave Akito advice. The parents directly asked Akito not to make her final decision yet (lines 7–8), while Ms. Sakurai indirectly invited Akito to consider all the options (line 19). The closer the relationship, the more straightforward the advice (Saito, 2009). As part of this process, or as its consequence, the speaker must be willing to apologize when pointing out critical and sensitive issues, by acknowledging his/her own faults, that is, by being self-critical (*hanseisuru*/反省する). Akito and her parents critiqued their own inabilities when acknowledging the problems of having no *hanashiai* (lines 3 & 16). In this cultural logic, if the clarity of information clashes with proper relational maintenance, the former often gives way to the latter. Nakazawa (2000) asserted that in *hanashiai* respecting emotional status is more important than insisting upon logical legitimacy. One way to express proper respect for emotional status is to listen carefully without interrupting the speaker.

#### *Listening Deeply, Humbly: Cultural Competencies*

The listener should listen deeply (*yoku kiku*/よく聞く), understanding without interrupting or asking the speaker to elaborate (*sassuru*/察する). This enables proper respect for the speakers' opinions (*iken no sonchou*/意見の尊重). In this form of communication, one has to practice being *sunao*/素直 (docile, obedient), which would require the listener to take in everything the speaker says without complaining or objecting. Here, listening carefully implies that the listener is willing to agree with the speaker (Saito, 2009). Akito enacted being *sunao* and agreed with all the suggestions offered. However, a *hanashiai* requires that the speaker does not abuse a listener being *sunao*, and that the listener does not operate only on the level of a social self, which is listening superficially.

Various cultural competencies are essential for enacting a good *hanashiai*. Of many, only three are mentioned here. The first is *kyouchousei*/協調性 (the ability and willingness to collaborate and be considerate). If a person does not have this ability, s/he could be too dominating or argumentative. For instance, Akito demonstrated her *kyouchousei* when agreeing to reconsider her decision to alter her gender (lines 17–18). The second cultural competency is *jintoku*/人徳 (personal virtue or charm). Respect and support, in speech and action, must be earned. The parents (lines 1–12) and Ms. Sakurai (lines 13–14) demonstrated their virtue by expressing their sincere care for Akito and Akito earned her parents' trust (lines 5–6). The third is *kokoro*/心 (heart). People must be capable of caring for others: *Omoiyari no kokoro*/思いやりの心. When people's deeds or talk lack kindness, even if the talk is correct and legitimate, they will not be fully respected. People should also be kind and

considerate to others, by empathizing with them. For instance, the parents empathized with Akito (lines 1–3). And Ms. Sakurai's tears indicated her true kindness (lines 13 & 19). All the participants enacted their hearts (*kokoro*/心), thereby bringing them together in this *hanashiai*.

In summary, although the utilizations and enactments of *hanashiai* vary by social situation, when conducted successfully, participants in collaboration may experience great satisfaction, harmony, and/or transformation. Ideally, in achieving these goals, all participants observe the premises for integrating the emotional self and social self, for speaking, listening, and their essential competencies. Even if a violation of the premises occurs, they should remain willing to make compromises, thereby maintaining the productivity of *hanashiai*. As *hanashiai* carves out a particular form and meanings about communication in Japanese, it does so through its own uses, drawing attention to these particular acts, sequences, and goals.

We turn now to a second, Korean, cultural discourse. We find in it related, but distinct, communication practices where dialogue and its kindred terms are at play.

### A Korean Discourse on Dialogue

When translated into Korean, the English word dialogue becomes *daehwa* (대화 對話). Along with this Korean word, *hwedam* (회담 會談), *hwehwa* (회화 會話), and *daedam* (대담 對談) are also translated into English as dialogue (Si-sa Elite English-Korean Dictionary, 1997; Si-sa Elite Korean-English Dictionary, 1998). All four come from Chinese characters, as *daehwa* and *daedam* mean “talk while looking at each other,” while the others can be translated as “convene and talk.” Yet each is used in different contexts, with different meanings.

The most equivalent word to dialogue is *daehwa*. Its principal medium is speaking in face-to-face interactions. The term can apply to various social settings, from formal or informal exchanges to public or private occasions. It can be used, for example, to refer to a form of cultural exchange between South and North Korea, to political interactions between South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and citizens of the country, and to social interactions between a student and a professor, between family members, or between a wife and husband. The following excerpt from a local community newsletter (Jang, 2010) presents uses of *daehwa*:

서로가 오해가 있다면 허심탄회하게 인격체로 만나서 대화로 풀어 갑시다

[If there is any misunderstanding about each other, let's solve the issue through dialogue with open minds and respect.]

*Daehwa* assumes that different views are being discussed and participants strive to understand each other, working cooperatively with one another. The term also expresses positive social values such as creating solutions to social conflicts, or forging productive international relationships. A *daehwa* might be enacted in a sequence such as participants greeting each other, the introduction of a point, discussion of the issue with collaborative interruptions for clarification, and final resolving remarks or gestures (e.g., shaking hands). Participants engage in *daehwa* in

a nonverbal manner of sincerity with linguistic and paralinguistic expressions that show respect for different opinions.

The communication norms governing any *daehwa* are to be collaborative in your actions and open to different views. Social practices of *daehwa* derive from the genre of reconciliation. As a result, the existence of *daehwa* in social life suggests a remedy to problems, and its practice presumes a communicative path to fewer problems. When applied to a person, that person is understood to be one who is open to and listens well to others' opinions. Thus, the positive value of *daehwa* foregrounds the productive and open exchange of views in ways that solve social problems.

*Hwedam*, an official type of *daehwa*, uses spoken language as its principal medium. This term refers to official talks in political contexts such as summits, negotiations between two countries, or meetings between leaders of opposing political parties. *Hwedam* is a formal political dialogue that occurs between two or more political leaders to discuss current or future issues of a nation or between nations. An agenda for *hwedam* is announced publicly through the media; the public is informed of scheduled *hwedam* such as those between U.S. President Barack Obama and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak about the United States-Korea free trade agreement (FTA). The following excerpt introduces the television news report (June 17, 2009) on this *hwedam*. The reporter introduced the outcome of the *hwedam*, quoting Obama's statement as follows (Park, 2009):

실질적인 문제가 해결된 뒤 동의안 제출 시기가 논의될 것입니다

[Once we have resolved some of the substantive issues, then there's going to be the issue of political timing and when that should be presented to Congress.]

Although the contents of these dialogues are not revealed to the public, unlike *daedam*, the final outcomes of *hwedam* are publically reported emphasizing achievements toward solving political issues or maintaining relationships between two countries. *Hwedam* are planned and executed to achieve positive outcomes, but not all *hwedam* lead to positive outcomes. Even though *hwedam* are confidential to the public, based on information revealed through the media, it could be reasonable to assume that its generic form is based on formal negotiation for one's interests. As such, *hwedam*, as an official and formal type of dialogue, offers information about national politics and international relationships to citizens, and is intended to have positive value for national sovereignty.

*Hwehwa*, a pedagogical type of *daehwa*, uses face-to-face speaking in a foreign language as its principal medium, yet this also identifies ways of doing so in a private context. People use this word when they talk about practicing a foreign language such as at *hwehwa* class, or a person being good at English *hwehwa*. Its norm is speaking in a foreign language in an informal manner that is pleasant and not serious. Unlike *daehwa*, there are no implied positive social values such as cooperative problem-solving in *hwehwa*, although the educational and social benefits of such exchanges are understood. As a cultural practice, *hwehwa* presumes not only verbal and linguistic but, moreover, interactional competencies in a non-native language.

*Daedam*, a formal type of *daewha*, engages face-to-face spoken language as its principal medium, but the spoken interaction occurs in the form of an interview among well-known participants in a formal setting. *Daedam* refers to long format, conversational-style interviews with famous political figures, scholars, or social leaders that are transmitted on television, radio, online, or in newspapers, covering current national and societal issues. Television and radio programs carry titles such as *Daedam with a Distinguished Figure* or *Daedam with Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman* about the future of the Korean economy.

The goal of *daedam* is to analyze current social, political and economic circumstances in order to suggest a future course of action. The *daedam* format is sequential: A host-interviewer introduces a guest-interviewee to an audience, asks prepared questions to the interviewee during their talk, and concludes the *daedam* with appreciative remarks. The host leads a *daedam* in a formal manner that shows his or her respect for the guest, with the interview following a prepared or improvisational structure. *Daedam's* norm is informational and educational, and its generic features resemble a formal interview. Thus, *daedam* is an official and formal type of dialogue, offers information to viewers and is intended to have positive social value.

The Korean discourse analyzed here foregrounds different inflections related to dialogue in Korean, demonstrating a normative sequencing of collaboration and openness to other's views. These meanings are made through Chinese characters and the character for dialogue derives from Chinese. As a loan word from English, dialogue is not active, or at least not in the same way that it is elsewhere, as for example in Russian cultural discourse, to which we now turn.

### A Russian Discourse on Dialogue

In Russian the closest term to dialogue is *диалог* (pronounced as *dee-a-log*). Our analysis focuses on the most recent uses of the term, those borrowed from English in times of political, economic, social, cultural and diplomatic challenges in Russia in the second half of the 20th century (Wierzbicka, 2006). Recent meanings of *диалог* refer to an interaction which brings people together in an effort to accomplish various communication acts, events, and a style of collaborative social action.

The term *диалог* integrates the act of a performance of communication within a communication event where interlocutors socially engage in a specific cultural way. *диалог* also identifies a specific "style" of communication which presumes "a broader ordering of talk, itself consisting of a set of acts and events" (Carbaugh, 1989, p. 98). For example, as part of an ongoing Russian style of communication, two participants can enact a Russian ritual of "soul talk" and thereby accomplish certain cultural goals that will contribute to desired outcomes of a dialogue, *диалог* (Carbaugh & Khatskevich, 2008). Such an outcome or an end of interaction can be that of *ponimanie* (roughly meaning understanding). Soul talk is conducted through dialogic acts, specific events, as well as a dialogic style, which are all part of *диалог*.

The social situation of *диалог* presumes that some level of disintegration or some social, political or diplomatic problem is in place. The participants need to achieve

agreement regarding an issue and they indicate their readiness to move to such an agreement by planning for **диалог**. Sometimes the participants declare that they are *otkryti dlya dialoga* (open for a dialogue). Dialogue can last several hours, weeks, months, or years. It can span several communication situations, cities, countries, or continents. One requirement for the “scene” of a **диалог** is *ploshadka dlya dialoga*—some common symbolic site, or agreed starting point to begin to address matters:

Чем больше общаются представители власти и бизнеса, тем лучше для всех.  
Проведенная РСПП Неделя российского бизнеса—уникальная площадка для  
такого диалога

[If representatives of business and authorities communicate more, it is better for everyone. The Week of Russian Business organized by the Russian Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs is a unique site for such a dialogue.] (Poltev & Ugodnikov, 2010)

Participants of **диалог** may involve two or more sides, entities, or agencies, all of whom hold a stake in some issue, project, or program, but they need not be in opposition to one another. As such, they may be predicated to persons, or to collective agencies (as the two examples below illustrate).

Ends or goals of **диалог** are to *uslyshat* (hear) the sides, *ponyat situatsiyu* (figure out the situation), *naiti kompromiss* (achieve compromise), *pridti k soglasheniiu po voprosu* (come to an agreement), and *dostich ponimaniya* (reach understanding). Very often, having a constructive dialogue may not mean that all issues have been resolved and all solutions have been found. However, the sides will have created a certain level of collaborative spirit and achieved some degree of mutual understanding. So, having a style of communication that could later be described as **диалог** is an achievement or end in itself. This often means that if people are communicating in a way that could be termed **диалог**, they are avoiding harsh critique, confrontation, arguing, negative expressions, and taking sides or extreme positions:

Сегодня был, действительно, конструктивный диалог. Представители всех  
партий слышали друг друга и обсудили проблемы, которые волнуют  
жителей области и города. Такие встречи необходимы, так как  
позволяют разрешать имеющиеся проблемы не путем митингов  
а путем диалога.

[Today we had a really constructive dialogue. Representatives of all the parties were able to hear each other out and discuss problems that are of importance to people living in this province and the city. Such meetings are necessary because they allow us to resolve existing problems not through rallies, but through dialogue.] (“Popelyshev,” 2010)

A set of communicative events is invoked through this dialogic style of communication. These are as follows: *diskussia* (discussion), an extensive verbal exchange between two or more sides regarding a set of issues; *peregovori* (negotiations), official exchanges of opinions in order to reach a common goal or resolve an issue in the political or business domain; *razgovor* (talk), mostly informal verbal exchanges with a varying degree of emotional depth, but usually is linked to serious and sometimes difficult discussions of issues important to participants; and *beseda* (conversation), peaceful and informal social interactions between persons who already have



something in common. However, these events and their constitutive acts of communication cannot replace **диалог**, nor can **диалог** be replaced by them:

“Оппозиционные партии всегда считали необходимым свое участие в таком диалоге. Но широкий диалог не может заменить механизма переговоров.” Последняя фраза здесь главная: оппозиция заявила, что диалог диалогом, а переговоры по функциям парламента и избирательному законодательству должны быть.

[“Oppositional parties have always considered it necessary to participate in such a dialogue. But a comprehensive dialogue cannot replace the mechanism of negotiations.” This last phrase is important here: opposition declared that a dialogue is a dialogue, but negotiations about parliament functions and voting legislation have to be in place.] (Dubina, 2000)

All the communication events within **диалог** are usually organized in a way that leads participants towards understanding, improved collaboration, and public acknowledgement of partnership. Successive or parallel occurrences of these forms of communication in **диалог** suggest movement from a point of common interest in resolving an issue towards a better understanding of each other and further cooperation in certain areas. This is illustrated in the following Internet blog of a Russian politician:

Сегодня интернет—это не только информационная сеть в ее привычном понимании, это—площадка для дискуссий, где каждое мнение является оценкой происходящих событий. Именно поэтому я решил создать собственный сетевой журнал. И сегодня, открывая его первые «страницы», приглашаю к диалогу всех пользователей сети интернет. Уверен, что общение будет живым, искренним, заинтересованным и полезным, а темы подскажет сама жизнь.

[Today the Internet is not only an information network in its regular meaning, it is a site for discussion where each opinion is an evaluation of current events. That’s why I decided to create my own Internet journal. And now, opening its first “pages,” I am inviting all the Internet users for a dialogue. I am confident that communication will be lively, sincere and useful, and the topics will be prompted by life itself.] (Mitin, 2010)

The tenor of **диалог** is a spirit of openness, collaboration, trust, and predominantly positive emotions. Instruments or channels of **диалог** may involve various electronic media sometimes simultaneously—Internet-based discussions, blogs, and person-to-person, group and mass communication. The tone is more formal than informal, although some communication forms constituting **диалог**, such as *beseda* (conversation), may involve a modest level of informality, thereby contributing to the sincerity of **диалог** and facilitating mutual understanding.

The normative, moral ordering **диалог** is quite explicit and very often formulated by the participants in their evaluation of this style. We identify two main rules of **диалог**: (1) There must be mutual respect and consideration for all participants at all times (Партия готова идти на диалог при условии создания атмосферы “уважительного отношения и стремления к взаимопониманию сторон” [the party is ready to start a dialogue only if there is an atmosphere of “respectful attitude and desire of the sides to understand each other”] [Dubina, 2000]); and (2) harsh critique of others and negative emotions must be avoided. For example, witness the Russian Ministry of

Education in their response to a community commission's critique of a document describing educational standards):

В этой комиссии собрались действительно очень серьезные люди, поэтому им ранее предлагалось оформить техническое задание, повлияв на формирование стандартов. ... Но они предпочли такой профессиональной работе критиковать то, что делается. Это нельзя назвать конструктивным диалогом.

[This commission brought together very serious people. That is why they were offered to outline their requirements beforehand and in this way influence development of the standards .... But instead of this professional work, they preferred to critique what is being done. This cannot be called a constructive dialogue.](Chernykh & Isayeva, 2010)

This exploration of what **диалог** means in Russian discourse can have important implications when compared to other cultural forms of the word in other languages. While **диалог** seeks to minimize critique and confrontation, the Japanese form of dialogue above included critical statements, so long as the participants were open. In her analysis of Russian and American interpretations of dialogue, Wierzbicka (2006) concluded that the forms of communication that constitute dialogue, and the ends accomplished, may be substantially different. For example, when the Russians and Americans hold international talks, each side may have different notions of what they wish to accomplish in a dialogue. While the Russians may be happy (or unhappy) with the level of mutual understanding achieved and demonstrated, the Americans may be satisfied (or unsatisfied) with the specific goals reached (Carbaugh, 2005a).

Thus, as suggested here, there is much to be learned by juxtaposing various cultural discourses about dialogue. Each cultural discourse explored above brings into view its own ideas about dialogue through its own terms, its own cultural premises and practices. When considered together, all reveal the possibility, not only of divergent, but also common, ground.

### **Cultural Forms and Meanings in Dialogue: Communication, Sociality, and Personhood**

In exploring these three discourses, we noticed a wide range of features such as the degree to which such practices are linguistically elaborated, the use of dialogue as a loan word from English in Russian or from Chinese into Korean, the various applications from personal to more political actions (Russian more toward the latter with Korean and Japanese spanning the spectrum), to the ways interaction as such is to be normatively structured, the various goals brought into view, preferred modes for action, and associated acts, styles or sequences, among other features. There is not only considerable variety in communicative forms, but cultural density in the meanings attached to dialogue.

In Japanese, for example, *hanashiai* (話し合い) identifies a cultural form of communication with roots in the Edo period. *Hanashiai* places a premium on

face-work or relational work, facing each other about particular issues but doing so within the group's shared goals. The specific cultural premises in this activity involve normative guidelines for collaborative action, and makes virtues of a charming personality, sincerity, caring, and deep respect. Interactional goals are maintaining harmony, sharing understandings, and cooperative trust. The form has currency in various social, political, educational and historical contexts.

In Korean, *daehwa* (대화 對話) means talking while looking at each other, addressing topics for which there are presumably different views about which one should be cooperative, all the while seeking both mutual understanding and solving problems. The idea, and the cultural communicative form implementing it—along with various related forms of practice—is used in a range of educational, political and social contexts.

In Russian, *dialogue* (диалог) refers to a way of communicating when two or more sides (usually in a political, business or other formal context) convene on the basis that social interaction regarding an issue is necessary. The primary goals of a *dialogue* are collaborative meaning making that leads to *ponimanie* (mutual understanding), and/or *reshenie voprosa* (the resolution of an issue). *Dialogue* includes serial action, where each interaction—which includes various communication acts and events—is meaningfully and explicitly connected to the previous one.

We can now look across these Japanese, Korean, and Russian discourses on dialogue, and make several observations which reiterate, and slightly revise, our earlier findings based upon Blackfoot, Chinese, Finnish and Hungarian discourses (Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi et al., 2006, pp. 41–42). We summarize features of the above discourses, marking each general feature that is active in J (Japanese), K (Korean) and R (Russian) discourse. Our summary is intended to identify the general range of features potentially active across languages when dialogue or something like it is an interactional concern. The summary is structured by the theoretical framework we used to study terms for talk and the practices they reference. We use it to identify possible similarities and differences across discourses (e.g., Japanese *hanashiai* and Korean *daewha* share meaning about face-to-face, verbal coproduction between participants, but differ in meaning about channel of communication and structuring norms).

### *Messages about Communication*

First, multiple features of communication practices are being expressed through these various terms. Our summary begins with the most literal and explicit meanings about communicative action at play in this discourse:

1. The terms refer to face-to-face, verbal coproductions, between two or more participants or parties (J *hanashiai*; K *daewha*; R *dialogue*, *beseda*, *razgovor*, *diskussia*, *peregovori*);

2. The practices being referenced range from cooperative interactions which share a goal, to competitive debates (J *hanashiai* except competitive debate; K *hwedam*; R *dialogue*, *beseda*, *razgovor*, *diskussia*, *peregovori*);
3. An ethos of mutuality of exchange (or motivated interdependence) pervades these practices (J *hanashiai*; K *daewha*; R *dialogue*, *beseda*, *razgovor*, *diskussia*, *peregovori*);
4. The predominant tone or feeling is social cooperation, and varies from serious and formal to informal (J *hanashiai*; K *daewha*; R *dialogue*, *beseda*, *razgovor*, *diskussia*, *peregovori*);
5. While the predominant channel is face-to-face verbal exchange, it may also include other channels such as writing, scripted and spontaneous practices, as well as various electronic media—digital, newsprint, Internet, radio, television (J *hanashiai*; K *daedam*; R *dialogue*, *beseda*, *razgovor*, *diskussia*, *peregovori*);
6. Structuring norms include speaking in a sincere, informative, and ably expressive way about one's views; and listening in a way that is open to learning additional information, including the emotions of others (J *hanashiai*; K *daewha*; R *dialogue*, *beseda*, *razgovor*, *diskussia*, *peregovori*);
7. Goals of the practice vary widely from producing harmony, to winning a verbal contest, to informing participants about issues, problem-solving, clarifying the nature of the issues, presenting a range of views, developing shared understanding or mutual trust, resolving a conflict in a mutually satisfying way, transforming social circumstances, establishing a common goal, affirming and/or repairing social relationships, establishing future actions (J *hanashiai* and R *dialogue*, except winning a verbal contest; K *hwedam*); and
8. The practices of dialogue are conceived as being of varying importance, but most are deemed highly efficacious, yet the locus or site of the efficacy varies: In some cases, the primary salient issue is the relations among the participants (as more important than the information exchanged); in others, it is the topic being addressed (as presumably weighty, e.g., societal, political and economic matters); in still others, the primary concern is the value of the form of the communication activity itself (with less focus on relationships or the topic of discussion); or further, of primary salience is the balance between clarity of the information expressed, the agreement being forged, and the emotion involved in its expression (J *hanashiai*; K *daedam*; R *dialogue*).

### *Messages about Sociality*

In addition to these meanings about the communication practice itself, the terms also express more implicit meanings about sociality. These are meanings about social life and its organization which participants hear in these cultural discourses about dialogue, and thus, they are active in a more metaphorical or figurative way. In other words, as people call for and discuss dialogue, they are not only talking about a

communication practice, but also, as part of their metacultural commentary, they are signifying something about social identities, relations, and possibly institutions. We formulate these features as follows:

1. The dialogic form of practice activates multiple possible social identities: Some are political or social opponents; some are high status participants, for example, scholars or official representatives; others are guests and hosts, disputants and intermediaries, employers and employees (J *hanashiai*; K *hwedam*, *daedam*; R *dialogue*);
2. The form may presume social relations are already in an important way equal, or are moving towards equality along some dimension (as in earlier studies);
3. The form can activate various social institutions: These can be familial, political-governmental, religious, educational, friendship, therapeutic, related to entertainment media—hosts, guests, and radio, television, theater, opera organizations (J *hanashiai*; K *daewha*, *hwehwa*, *hwedam*; R *dialogue*); and
4. The dialogic form is designed to balance relations among people: within social scenes, their social and emotional selves; and the rational and emotional concerns of relationships (J *hanashiai*; K *daewha*; R *dialogue*, *razgovor*).

#### *Messages about Personhood*

Finally, cultural discourses pertaining to dialogue offer a range of premises about personhood. As with the meanings above concerning sociality, these features are largely taken for granted, and as a result, are expressed more implicitly and metaphorically. The first three formulations, below, operate as an interactional exigency, or as an occasioning antecedent condition for dialogue as a social form itself. We introduce these as a way of capturing a sequential movement in cultural meanings about persons which motivate dialogue as a form:

1. Persons can act poorly, be insincere, conniving, or inappropriately (in)expressive (J many terms; K *daehwa*; R *dialogue*);
2. Persons can act on the sole basis of selfish interests, or on the basis of an imbalance of power, or in other unbalanced ways—as in being too individualistic or too socially constrained (J many terms; K *daehwa*; R *dialogue*);
3. The above are ultimately of limited value, immoral, or bad (J *hanashiai ni naranai* does not become *hanashiai*; K *daehwa*; R *dialogue*);
4. Persons need a form of social interaction which is sincere, informative, expressive of their views, and receptive to the views of others as discussed above (J *hanashiai*; K *daehwa*; R *dialogue*);
5. Persons need a form of social interaction which is educational, socially productive, disseminates information widely, advances mutual interests while managing social relationships in proper ways (J *hanashiai*; K *daehwa*; R *dialogue*);

6. Persons need a form of social interaction which balances informational needs and social care, or individual and communal concerns (J *hanashiai*; K *daedam*; R *dialogue*); and
7. These needs are attached to specific philosophical, literary, and cultural traditions, axioms of particularity and actuality (J, *hanashiai*, Buddhism and Shintoism; R, soulfulness, potential for understanding if *obshenie* is properly done).

The meanings above help us identify a range of general features that are active when people call for dialogue. When doing so, one is inevitably using, or working within or between specific cultural discourses, each with its own specific features about what is being advocated both in the practice of the communication being requested, and the meanings that are activated when communicating in that way, or those ways. Mention of dialogue may motivate and foreground one form of communication here (e.g., problem-solving in Korean, agreement in Russian), and another there (e.g., clarifying information in Russian or a harmonious self-relational care in Japanese). Combined with our earlier studies, we note that such a form can invoke relations of equality, but not necessarily in the three languages we explore here. It can invoke specific aspects of tradition within a society, for example Buddhism and Shintoism in Japan, or one in particular as in Korean. Further, it can signal change within a society in what is deemed proper as public dialogue. This is evident explicitly in the Russian case and its recent importation of dialogue. In contemporary Finland, also, we earlier noted movement from the more traditional Finnish *vuoropuhelu* (taking turns in talking about an important topic) to *keskustelu* (where value in the interactive quality of the exchange is amplified over the clarity of the topic being discussed; see Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi et al., 2006, pp. 38–39).

The features summarized above can help sensitize us to the particular meanings in various cultural discourses as dialogue is being advocated. A wide range of acts, events, and styles of communication are active; a wide range of possible forms, norms, contexts, goals, and meanings are brought into view. Clearly, more research is required to understand what is being said—and called for—through one discourse of dialogue, and how it relates to others, for one can emphasize relational care while another focuses on informational needs.

Our theoretical stance, described earlier, was a valuable heuristic in the study of dialogue across cultural discourses. In particular, the conceptual framework has provided a way of investigating these discursive phenomena by attending to key cultural terms for talk (and communicative action generally) in each language, to exploring specific contexts in which each is used, and to examining actual practices which are being referenced with the use of these terms. Our approach, then, is related to Wierbicka's (2006) important study, yet differs by exploring not only uses of terms but, moreover, the larger social contexts of their use, as well as observations of the sequential forms of practice being referenced through those terms. For example, in Japanese, using the term *hanashiai* invokes group goals as central, self-goals as secondary yet active, and asks one to strive for balance between one's emotional and

social self. These features are not only activated by the term, but in the practice itself. All are implemented in a special sequential form of problem-solving.

Next, each term was examined for its referencing of specific communication acts, larger events, and/or styles of speaking. We found, as a result, the importance of listening deeply as an action within *hanashiai* without having to ask the speaker to elaborate, or speaking in Korean through *daehwa* as a way of conducting a political event where different views are expressed while simultaneously seeking mutual understanding and solving a problem. Through the Russian *dialogicheskoe obshenie*, the social stage is set as a communication event in which people strive toward unity with others, or with other collective agents, because—it is assumed culturally—people hold things in common. Our studies, therefore, explored the term's deployment in its cultural discursive context, including the practices being referenced, with each analyzed as an act, event, and/or style of communication.

Finally, each discourse was interpreted as carrying with it deeper, literal features about communication itself, the way it is normatively structured, the tone it carries, its mode of use, its situated efficacy; each was interpreted further, when possible, as a carrier of implicit meanings about the social roles appropriate when conducting this form, how social relations are to be managed, and what, if any, social institutions—political, religious, familial—are active or presumed in dialogic conduct (Carbaugh, 1989). This general way of studying dialogue, with attentiveness to its key terms, contexts, acts, events, styles, and meanings about communication, sociality, and personhood, has been designed, in short, and collaboratively carried out, through stages of descriptive, interpretive and comparative analyses (Carbaugh, 2007).

Through such cultural and cross-cultural study we have been able to identify some common features of dialogue in cultural discourses. These include a general ethos of mutuality in a verbal exchange, events of cooperative production, social relations in which some semblance of interactivity is being conducted or sought. However, whenever we construct a generic formulation, as in the prior sentence, we shudder. In writing, we wonder, as mention is made of mutuality or exchange, or in using the words, cooperation or collaboration, prominent as these terms are in global humanitarian discourses, what each means for participants here, and there, in practice, and in norms for specific communication conduct in one cultural discourse relative to another? We wonder indeed if such terms are even salient there as opposed to here? What, then, is being targeted through these terms, about speakers' rights, or obligations, within this, their form? Which receives more weight: informational or face concerns; one's duties to a group, one's rights as a speaker, or a balance between them? What are the meanings and motives being expressed? Our generic formulation always gives way to more localized discourses which shape life in some places more than others. Multiple questions can and should be raised immediately. In so doing, we can develop better knowledge about dialogue as it is being advocated within and across specific cultural discourses, sensitize ourselves to its various means of expression, interpret the variety of meanings it engages, and thereby contribute to a better understanding when pleas for it are being made, including occasions when it

is enacted. Precisely because of the plethora of such pleas in global discourses today, dialogue requires our careful attention.

Sensitivity to such variations in the shape and meaning of dialogue and communication generally is part of what we hope our study—along with many others—contributes (e.g., Bloch, 2003; Bloch & Lemish, 2005; Goldsmith, 1989–1990; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Hall & Valde, 1995; Poutiainen, 2005; Scollo Sawyer, 2004; Wierzbicka, 2006; Wilkins, 2005). We cannot assume different participants come to dialogue with the same context, acts, events, styles, and meanings in view. These must be carefully studied, and we hope our framework for doing so, including its critical assessment, is of value to others who are interested in joining these efforts. In the process, we strive for balance between an overly generalized sense of dialogue sapped of its particularity, and an overly particular form which is so provincial it cannot accept others. We hope this study of dialogue in cross-cultural perspective by an interlingual and intercultural team of ethnographers has contributed to these various practical and theoretical ends. Moreover, we hope that further work in this manner will help maximize the possibilities while minimizing the pitfalls of intercultural dialogue.

## Note

- [1] Transcript from the television program, *Nippon Housou Kyokai* (“Haato wo tunagou,” 2007).

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