

Making People Laugh Creates Confidence and Hope:
The Transformation of Place and Relationships through Manzai
Activities in International Student Education

笑わせることが生み出す自信と希望
—留学生教育における漫才の活動における場と関係の転換をめぐって—

Ryosuke MINAMIURA (Faculty of Education, Tokyo Gakugei University)

南浦 涼介 (東京学芸大学教育学部)

Manabu SHIMAOKA (Yoshimoto Kogyo Holdings)

島岡 学 (吉本興業)

留学生教育学会

Making People Laugh Creates Confidence and Hope: The Transformation of Place and Relationships through Manzai Activities in International Student Education

笑わせることが生み出す自信と希望

—留学生教育における漫才の活動における場と関係の転換をめぐって—

Ryosuke MINAMIURA (Faculty of Education, Tokyo Gakugei University)

南浦 涼介 (東京学芸大学教育学部)

Manabu SHIMAOKA (Yoshimoto Kogyo Holdings)

島岡 学 (吉本興業)

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between laughter and language education through the practice of Manzai activity. Research on humor and language education has focused on finding instability and gaps in conversation. In recent years, however, humor and language education have been examined from the aspect of communication that is based on such instability and misalignment. Whereas, recent sociolinguistic findings have shown that in the native nature between language and speakers, there is anxiety about communication and the tendency to be positioned socially in a subordinate position. Additionally, previous studies in general education have pointed out the possibility that the relationship between speaker and listener is transformed by humor. This paper analyzes the practice of Manzai activity between international and Japanese students. From the feedback interviews with the learners, they talked about their understanding of the Manzai style through analysis of the script, their creation of laughter based on it, and their sense of accomplishment based on the feedback from the audience. Through these points, this paper shows the importance of not only an analytical perspective on communication, but also a shift in the language and relationship between speaker and listener.

[Key words: International Student Education, humor, Manzai, transformation of power]

要 旨

本研究は、留学生たちの漫才の実践を通して、笑いと言語教育の関係性を検討するものである。笑いと言語教育に関する研究は、会話の不安定さやズレを見つけること。それをふまえたコミュニケーションの面から検討されてきた。一方で、近年の社会言語学的な知見から、言語と話者の間のネイティブ性の中で、コミュニケーションに対する不安や、社会的に下位に位置づけられやすい。一方教育学の先行研究では、笑いによって話者と聞き手の関係性が転換していく可能性が指摘されている。こうしたことをふまえながら、留学生と日本人学生の漫才の実践を分析する。学習者たちのフィードバックインタビューからは、台本の分析による漫才の文体の把握、それをもとにした笑いづくり、観客のフィードバックからの達成感などが語られた。それを通して、単にコミュニケーションの分析的視点だけではなく、話者と聞き手の間のことばや関係の転換の重要性を示した。

[キーワード：留学生教育, ユーモア, 漫才, 力の転換]

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this paper

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan witnessed a declining number of international students from 2020 onward,

peaking at 312,214 in 2019 (MEXT, 2022a). However, the position and expectations of international students in Japanese society remain high, and the image of international students is diverse. For example, many short-term educational programs accept international students, but the overwhelming majority

of these students are enrolled as undergraduates rather than graduate students (see MEXT, 2021). Even international students do not always seek academic positions; in fact, many find employment in private sector businesses (MEXT, 2022b). Thus, although foreign students are increasing, there are many different images of the purpose of studying abroad and their career paths. However, Japanese language education for international students in universities is expected to be oriented toward the acquisition of “academic language” in many cases. This is because the language for academic study is necessary for fostering expertise. As Paltridge & Starfield (2016) pointed out, even “English as a specific purposes”, does not imply students’ intention to become a member of the academic community, a point of view that is also relevant to the diversification of international students in Japan. Park & Wee (2011) also expressed concern about the elitist nature of language learning, focusing on “academic languages.” In other words, if we do not focus on the inherently diverse varieties of Japanese and concentrate on international students in the “academic languages”, we may overlook the languages of those who do not fall in this category, with whom these students will be involved in the future.

International students at the university to which author 1 belongs are also diverse. Author 1 is in charge of teaching international students, many of whom are in short-term programs. Their needs are not necessarily focused on getting into graduate school. They are more oriented toward cultural experiences and student exchange programs. After 2020, students were unable to travel to Japan due to COVID-19. Therefore, it was necessary to carefully compensate for the international students’ cultural experience and exchange orientation. For this reason, we conducted “Manzai ⁽¹⁾” in the classes for international students in 2021. The language education activity that the authors conducted, which involved the humor of “Manzai”, has shown great potential. Thus, this paper focuses on the practice of Manzai in Japanese language education and examines the relationship between humor ⁽²⁾ and language education as well as the potential of Manzai as material for such activities.

Humor has often been incorporated into Japanese language education. For example, there have been attempts to utilize “rakugo” in Japanese language education (Mori, 2017). In the case of “Manzai”, Sekiguchi & Spain (2020) reported such attempts in their research paper. However, most of them are mainly reports on the practice, and there have not been many discussions that delved into its educational significance and potential as a specific educational method for international students. In this paper, we theoretically

examine the educational value of the relationship between humor and language education. Based on this, we analyze the kind of awareness the students gained through the practice of Manzai dialogue that the author conducted, especially in 2021. We also reiterate the value created by combining humor and language education.

1.2 Reviewing studies on the relationship between humor and language education

Considering the relationship between humor and language education, the perspective of the research has shifted from an analysis of the structure of humor, as seen in the text and language structure, to a perspective in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of speakers. This reflects the fact that language education has come to view “language” as “complex and dynamic” rather than “unitary and static” (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). Here, “complex” and “dynamic” means that in language education, language is used interactively and in the context of the social and historical backgrounds of speakers. Additionally, Rymes (2010) pointed out that language and all other means of communication are used to participate in the community.

Based on these perspectives, Bell and Pomerantz (2014) noted that humor has a lot to do with helping learners acquire the ability to use all means of communication in an interactive manner. First, they hinted at the “jointing construction and emergence of meaning.” Humor can be recognized as a clue that indicates instability or gaps in the conversation. Second, he stated that it has a function of “mediation.” Citing a phrase developed by Díaz (2013), “languaculture dissonance,” he said that humor also lends itself to look at “languaculture dissonance,” i.e., “why and how we find this moment funny,” and to think about its meaning. Rather than having learners focus on the problematic nature of being dissonant, focusing on humor allows them to look at the assumptions of the shared “cultural script” that underlies the dissonance. As a result, the subject of humor allows us to access both what is actually present in the interaction and the expectations and assumptions that should be present. These perspectives of Bell Pomerantz’s (2014) study are also aided in Japanese language education in their study of rakugo. (Yamada, Sakai, & Bushnell, 2019).

1.3 Power shift in humor and language teaching

One important aspect to consider is the relationship between language and speaker authority. It is equally important as interrelationships among speakers are to the relationship between language and society regarding

speakers. Although many studies have already critically examined the power relations between “native” and “non-native” speakers (Penneycook, 2001), in the Japanese-speaking world, Japanese speakers are more likely to be associated with Japaneseness, and as a result, learners of Japanese. The fact that people tend to be placed in lower social positions, regardless of their abilities, has been examined from various perspectives (c.f. Tanaka, 2013). Under these circumstances, anxiety about speaking Japanese tends to increase, and society’s view of such individuals as “weak speakers of Japanese” always lingers.

Humor may be effective in breaking down these situations. Even Bell & Pomerantz (2014) noted that “Humor is an important and frequently used resource for interaction and is particularly helpful for navigating face-threatening situations and criticising inevitable relations of power.” (p. 32). As a concrete example of this, in general pedagogy, Akagi shed light on humor-based improvisation by children with developmental disabilities, inspired by “shinkigeki⁽³⁾” (Akagi, *et al.*, 2019). As students with developmental disabilities perform improvisational “shinkigeki” plays on stage, they make statements that deviate from the script that was supposed to be there beforehand. In other words, they “get it wrong” and this creates the element of humor. However, as the “mistakes” are perceived as “unintentional fun,” the children are not “being laughed at.” On the contrary, they are “making people laugh” through their subject matter. Analysis shows that the children derive pleasure from this.

Akagi *et al.* (2019) recognized the importance of the sense of joy and accomplishment experienced in the process of creating a state in which students are “making people laugh” through humor, while the world of special needs education still focuses only on the improvement of abilities and skills. They also emphasized the importance of the fact that this process, “before they know it,” leads to the development of their ability to express themselves and increases their self-esteem.

This is a strong antithesis to the ability-enhancement principle that has been constructed along the lines of “to be able to do what one cannot do” and “to understand what one does not understand” embedded in special needs education, and this is also suggestive in language education. As described by Larsen-Freeman (2011), the interactional value of language learning is difficult to capture from the perspective of elemental, separate language competence. Rather, it is important to understand the value of education from the perspective of how each learner is involved in the process of weaving language together and making sense of

his or her own learning (Miyao, 2011).

From this perspective, humor and language education can be related in the sense that the enjoyment and sense of accomplishment that learners gain from “using Japanese to make others laugh” in a strongly native Japanese-speaking society can ultimately lead to self-confidence in their own use of the language and can provide an opportunity for others to recognize this.

In addition, humor in a given language area is often rooted in cultural aspects. It is true that if humor is viewed from an essentialist cultural perspective; as in the case of “American jokes,” it may be difficult for second language learners to use it. However, humor is not always culturally essentialist, and as already mentioned in previous studies, it can also be viewed as interactional. In particular, “Manzai,” as described below, is interactional in that the script is created cooperatively and the humor is created with the audience.

2. Outline of practice

2.1 Background and overview of the practice

This paper focuses on the 2021 academic year. In the summer of 2019, author 1 met author 2, who are both comedians, through SNS. After several meetings, they started a class called the “Japanese Expression D (Presentation II)” for international students. In the 2021 academic year, international students could not come to Japan due to COVID-19. This class was conducted as a remote interactive class using Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The following sections describe the specifics of the classes.

2.2 Development of practice

2.2.1 Part1: Orientation (1st-2nd)

The first class was accessed by six international students from short-term programs and research students from their respective countries as well as two Japanese students from the Faculty of Education voluntarily⁽⁴⁾.

In the first class, students tended to be anxious about performing Manzai dialogue and making people laugh, and there was an impression that Manzai involves a lot of fast-talking, which was expected to cause anxiety among the learners. Therefore, we distributed clips of Manzai performances on the Internet and their scripts, which were publicly available. We viewed the clips at a reduced speed to decrease the anxiety of international students.

In the second class, authors 2 were involved as guest teachers. The basic introduction of Manzai dialogue and the basic dialogue format for creating humor were taught.

2.2.2 Part2: Manzai analysis and script development (3rd-6th)

In the third lesson, recalling the basic form of Manzai dialogue by authors 2 in the second lesson, the students looked at the examples of Manzai dialogue scripts seen in the first lesson and analyzed how the humor was contained in them in groups of three. In this section, we referred to the “genre approach” (Byrnes, Maxim, Norris 2010; Kawamitsu 2018), which takes the flow of “stylistic analysis - discovery of stylistic features - stylistic imitation” to acquire the stylistic features of a specific register, to discover the mechanism for generating laughter contained in the script of a comic dialogue. The first step was discovering the mechanism for generating laughter in comic scripts. In the process, we discovered the stylistic structure of a conversation in which “furi (フリ)” – “boke (ボケ)” – “tsukkomi (ツッコミ)” are chained together in Manzai. Through this process, the logicity of “furi,” in which the expected development is explicitly anticipated, and “boke,” in which the expected development is not met, and “tsukkomi,” in which the discrepancy is made explicit, was shared by the entire group.

The students were basically left to make up their own stories for humor. When working in groups, we respected the fact that all of the international students in each group were advanced Japanese speakers. I emphasized the importance of maintaining a flat “teach/be taught” relationship in the groups with Japanese students, so that the students would not feel insecure about their language abilities. Moreover, I urged the participants not to fix their roles concerning other learners.

Since we cannot include all of the Manzai stories due to space limitations, we have presented an overview. Group 1 (Turkish student A and Chinese student B) was an example of a daily conversation in which the participants were humorously named “chuunibyō (中二病)” (excessive self-confidence characteristic of teenagers and the tendency to be greatly influenced by the main characters in manga and anime). Group 2 (Chinese student C and Japanese student D) was a conversation in which an international student C, playing the role of a tourist, was scolding a Japanese student D, playing the role of a Japanese tourist information center staff member who was not used to foreigners and was prejudiced against them. Group 3 (Japanese student E and Chinese student F) was a conversation in a CD store in which a Japanese student F, who came to buy a CD, was scolding an international student E, who was acting as a store clerk with no intention of selling CDs at all and who was working at his own pace. Group 4 (Chinese student G and Chinese student H) was a conversation set in a real estate agency, in which

the role of H, a customer, was to make a comment on G, an international student making excessive and misguided sales pitch.

2.2.4 Part 3: Interim presentation: G-2 Grand Prix (7th)

In the seventh meeting, we held an interim presentation called the “Manzai G-2 Grand Prix.” As in the second presentation, the participants performed a Manzai in front of author 2. In addition to the comedians, the students played the role of audience members to create the necessary audience reaction for the stage under the constraints of the remote Zoom environment. To reproduce the sound of humor, a comment screen was installed on the Zoom screen to allow comments and pictograms to be broadcast on the screen, so that the audience could respond in real-time as much as possible.

After the performance of the G-2 Grand Prix, author 2 received feedback from the audience, and along with positive praise, there were comments on the need to increase the number of funny scenes and the value of the funny points of each story, clearly stating the point of humor.

2.2.5 Part 4: Refinement of scripts and mock practice (8th-12th)

Based on G-2 Grand Prix comments, each participant refined their script and practiced more and more. The original plan was to create another new material for the G-1 Grand Prix, but the winter vacation period of the university coincided with this phase, and the remote class tended to slow down the discussion among the duo. Hence, we focused on refining and practicing the same material repeatedly. Additionally, just before the actual performance of the G-1 Grand Prix, we realized that we were each looking at a script on the other side of the screen as we spoke. We then told them that it was okay to make mistakes in each group in turn and that they should look at the other’s face (i.e., toward the camera) without looking at the script and try to have a conversation. By the end of the class, they were confident that they could do it without looking at the script.

2.2.6 Part 5: G-1 Grand Prix and reflection (13th-14th)

On the event day, 12 people signed up as the audience that was unknown to the international students except for their friends in their home countries. The 13th G-1 Grand Prix similarly utilized the comment screen reflected on the screen on Zoom to make it easier to express the reaction of humor even remotely.

The day began with a Manzai entertainment by author 2 and his comedy partner, followed by a demonstration of Manzai performances by student groups, Zoom voting, feedback comments from author 2, and comments from the

audience. The students then reflected on their experiences and findings.

3. Learner's perspective

3.1 Analysis procedure

In this section, we look at what perspectives the learners gained during the Manzai lessons described above. As mentioned in chapter 1 of this thesis, we examine: 1) how the learners, based on the analysis of previous studies, gained an awareness of the linguistic-cultural dissonance in humor and the premise of the conversation through their involvement in the learning activity of Manzai; 2) how the experience of “making people laugh independently” in Japanese provided specific insights to the students.

Three weeks after the end of the class, follow-up interviews were conducted with the three students based on their comments in the 14th class, and these were used for the analysis. The three students were, Turkish student A, Chinese student C, and Japanese student E. The reason for interviewing the Japanese students was that, although this was a class of international students, there was a great deal of commonality in the relationship between humor, language, confidence, and participation.

As for the method of analysis, from the viewpoint of placing a perspective on certain commonalities in the narratives of the three participants, each participant's narrative was conceptualized in the form of a modified M-GTA concept sheet that was used as a reference and supporting material⁽⁶⁾. In this process, we examined the meanings of the common mentions made by the learners (if not by all of them) and the context behind each of their mentions, connecting them to each other.

3.2 Confidence generated by logical knowledge of humor

All the international students said that they enjoyed the Manzai activity because it gave them more freedom than the language education classes they had taken in the past. However, such extensive freedom was also accompanied by personal accounts. For example, C stated that she was “nervous” at the beginning: “Actually, at the beginning, I was not good at making people laugh, or I didn't have much experience in speaking or performing in front of others, so I was most worried about whether I could remember the lines and whether I could speak well because I was too nervous. I was worried”. At that time, the analysis of a Manzai performance in the early stages of the class (the third and fourth lessons) gave this student a great deal of confidence.

C I think the analysis will be very useful. Japanese Manzai is something that we don't hear very often, and I think there are probably a lot of learners, especially learners who like Manzai, who watch Japanese Manzai with subtitles, so they often have to read the actual script to understand what is going on. (はい。分析がとても役に立てると思います。日本の漫才、あんまり聞くことがなくて、そして、特に学習者にとって漫才が好きな学習者、多分とても多いと思いますが、基本的に字幕付きで日本の漫才を見るから、実際の台本を読まないで結局分からないことが多いと思います)

In this way, C described his impression of the style of writing that includes “boke” and “tsukkomi” peculiar to Manzai and his impression of making it her own by analyzing it. This point was also mentioned by Japanese student E.

E I had an image that when a comedian or a Manzai actor makes people laugh, it is ambiguous, or unclear, or mildly amusing, or something like that. When I saw the manuscript of a Manzai, there was a premise, and I wanted to turn it upside down. When I did that analysis, I found that the humor was created in a flow, but this and that were similar. I found out that there were commonalities between these two types of humor. And when I applied it, I was able to make it funny, regardless of my sense of style. (漫才とか笑いが起きるときとかって、とにかくあいまいというか、よく分からないものというか、ほわってしたイメージ、なんか面白いみたいな、そういうイメージだったんですけど。漫才が原稿になってるやつを見て、前提があって、それをひっくり返してみたいな。その分析をしたときに、一個一個、ばらばらに笑いが起きてるわけじゃなくて、これとこれは似た種類でみたいな。そういう共通している部分があるっていうのが分かったっていうのが、共通してる部分あるんだってなって。で、それを応用させてったら、別にセンスとか関係なく面白くできたんです)

Japanese student E also stated, “I was not the type of person who would think of saying something funny in everyday life. At first, I thought it was ‘surprising’ that I participated in a Manzai class”. She said, “In fact, I was never good at communicating through humor”.

Although there is a difference between second language and native speakers, both C and E did not consider themselves good at “communicating with humor.” This leads to an objective view of the “furi”- “boke”- “tsukkomi” relationship. The existence of such an analytical activity has a significant

contribution toward those who are second language speakers and not good at humor, as it creates a perspective from which one can communicate using humor.

3.3 Sense of accomplishment brought about by the response

One of the common comments made by the learners was a reference to “reactions” on the day of the Manzai performance. For example, C, while performing their Manzai, received the audience’s reactions in the form of comments and pictograms and stated the following:

C For example, there was a barrage of bullets in Zoom, and I was very happy to see the real-time reactions to the barrage. I was very happy to see the barrage. I felt that I was happy because the other person felt happy. (例えば、Zoomで弹幕がありまして、弹幕でリアルタイムの反応があって、弹幕見てとてもうれしかったです。相手が楽しいと感じられたから、自分もしあわせだなと感じました。)

Although it was remote, the reactions that came up in Zoom were reassuring. She also said that she felt relieved to see that her attempt at making people laugh actually received a reaction. Furthermore, C described her “happiness” through the reactions she received and further described her feeling as follows.

C Making people laugh by doing a Manzai because making people laugh is the purpose of Manzai. If I am successful in making people laugh, it is like achieving my goal, so I think I am more happy than embarrassed. For example, when a learner makes a mistake when speaking and makes the other person laugh, it is not actually his/her intention to make the other person laugh. But at that time, they are glad they did. If I can change my mind, even something a little embarrassing can become a joyful experience. I felt that this was a good thing. (漫才をやって笑わせるって、笑わせるは漫才の目的だから。笑わせるということがうまくできたら、自分の目標が達成するみたいな感じなので、恥ずかしいよりうれしい気持ちが多いと思います。例えば、学習者はちょっと話すときミスをしたりして、相手を笑わせるというときは、笑わせるというのは自分の本意ではないですけど、そのとき、あ、笑わせて良かったと。気持ち的に転換したら、ちょっと恥ずかしいこともうれしいことになって、それでもいいではないかと感じました)

The “happiness” here is not only because of successfully making people laugh. As a second language speaker, C stated

that the disappointment when one “makes a mistake when speaking a little” in the language in question is never “the intention.” However, instead of being discouraged, she described her discovery: “If you turn your mind to the fact that it was good to make you laugh, the embarrassing thing can become a joyful thing.” She further stated, “It’s okay to be happy”. Instead of saying, “Don’t make mistakes, don’t make mistakes”, and regarding it as a “mistake or failure”, she claimed that embarrassment “can be a joyful thing”. She believed that the words she speaks are a contribution to the event.

This narrative can also be observed in international student A’s account, who mentioned in the interview that he used to be a “shut-in”.

A In my case, I had already been a recluse for 8 years or so, so I didn’t talk to people at all and didn’t have any friends. After that moment, when I was in college, I was conscious that I could not go on like this, so I chose to make people laugh, to change my personality, to change my relationships, to be a good person if I was a very good person, or a funny person if I was a funny person, and I acted in that way. So, I used to not like making people laugh at all, but after I entered college, I started to like making people laugh because people were happy when I made them laugh, and that’s when I started to like making people laugh, too. (私の場合はもう8年とか引きこもっちゃってるときもいたから、人と全然話さなくて友達もいなかった。その後の大学に入ってる瞬間の後、このままじゃ駄目だっという意識がいたので、人を笑わせたり、性格を変わせたり、人間関係、とてもいい人間だったらいい人間、面白い人間だったら面白い人間になろうという、人間を選んでそのように行動を行っていたので。だから昔は笑わせるのは全然好きじゃなかったけど、大学に入った後、人を笑わせるという、みんなを笑わせると人は喜んでいたので、そのとき私も笑わせるのが好きになっちゃって)

This episode of A’s life is unrelated to the Manzai activity itself. However, in the context of his background, A described how his experience in Manzai is connected to his own experience. In the process of confronting himself as a recluse and trying to build relationships with others, he felt that people were happy when he made them laugh, which was the beginning of his love for making others laugh. His sense of Manzai performance was an extension of this experience.

This is also observed in Japanese student E’s experience. As mentioned above, E often “thought but did not say” but in

the response from the comment screen,

- E In that context, I think it was time to be a little more positive. It would be nice if I got a good response, but if it was not what I was expecting, that might be interesting, but I was anxious about that. I have been vaguely aware of this for a long time. But when we talked about it, I think it was not so unexpected. (その中で、ちょっと前向きになれる時間だったと思います。いい反応を返してくれたらいいけれど、それが期待しているものじゃなかったら、それはそれで面白いのかも知れないけれど、それに対する不安があって。それをずっと漠然と感じていて。でも、話してみると意外と、そんなこともなかったりするとは思う)

Reflecting on her time as a Manzai actor, E described a sense of anxiety on not receiving the kind of response she normally expected: “When you try to talk, you may be surprised to find that it is not like that”. However, as she bounced back and forth between these vague anxieties, she found a place where she could “try to talk,” and she found the discrepancies between the expected response and the actual one interesting. She reaffirmed the value of this experience through Manzai. She stated that the time of the Manzai strip is alive and well.

The confidence in communication gained from the sense of accomplishment in response to students’ reactions is connected to the sense of communication gained in their own daily- and historical course of their lives. This transcended the difference between students who use it as a second language and those who use it as their mother tongue, and helped the students gain a perspective from which they could resolve their sense of anxiety about communication or feel a sense of support for the anxiety they had been facing.

4. Discussion

4.1 Confidence brought by analysis of humor

The first thing observed in the learners’ narratives is that the logical analysis of Manzai performances brought them confidence. The analysis of the structure of humor using the existing Manzai scripts in the early stages of the practice of Manzai provided the students, especially those who had not actively tried to use “humor” in their daily lives, with immense confidence. However, we would also like to address the importance of analytically grasping the structure of humor for learners who are often uncomfortable or anxious about humor. Díaz (2013), introduced in a previous study, described the importance of capturing the “languaculture

dissonance” of “why and how we find this moment funny” and considering its meaning. The genre of Manzai language intentionally creates linguistic-cultural dissonance. Clarifying the structure of humor from an analytical perspective led to “the analysis being very useful,” as C stated, and this boosted her confidence in applying it to create her own scripts. While many Japanese conversation practice skits do not focus on “dissonance”, the fact that they dared to focus on “dissonance” was, as A and C stated, “different from what they had learned before”, and this was not only interesting, but also led to the dissolution of their anxiety and confidence. It is also worth mentioning that not only second language speakers, but also first language speakers, such as E, experienced a decrease in anxiety, which led to their incorporation into their own communication and enhanced confidence.

4.2 Shifting perspectives on being laughed at

Another thing that the learners gained through this practice was the confidence that “making people laugh” brings. In this practice, the final event, the G-1 Grand Prix, a Manzai performance, was held online due to COVID-19. Therefore, the important element of audience reaction was made visually available through text and pictograms on the commentary screen, and this “understanding of audience reaction” boosted the performing students’ confidence. What was important was that this did not just lead to confidence in their own conversational skills. C, for example, realized that her “Japanese mistakes have the power to make people laugh”, which instilled confidence in her. In the past, there have been discussions in language education about “misuse” or “intermediate language”, but these discussions were based on the premise of “improvement” or “something that should be eliminated someday”. However, this is not the case here where C provided a positive viewpoint of the power of one’s own language, including one’s own failures, as in the case of C’s mistakes and C’s claim: “If I can change my mind, even something a little embarrassing can become a joyful experience. I felt that this was a good thing” This is in line with the discussion of Akagi et al. (2019) in the context of special needs education. In other words, due to the sense of anxiety triggered by being in the midst of learning Japanese, they inevitably find themselves in a subordinate position while communicating in Japanese, as the “weak side” or “taught side” (see Akagi, et al., 2019). The learners, who had tended to be placed in a position of “failure” in their own language use, gradually moved into a “state of ‘making people laugh’ through the subject”, while also feeling that the “failure” in their own language use was also their own. In

this structure, the students felt a sense of “achievement”. Not only C, but also other international students had this effect as they talked more or less about the “sense of accomplishment”. Additionally, A connected her experience of learning Japanese through Manzai with the fact that “actively making people laugh” transformed her situation wherein she resolved her own experience of withdrawal. In this way, the participants included their own “weak points” and “lack of self-confidence” in their lives and sublimated them as a strategic means of participating in the scene. This was also a “time to be a little more positive” for E, a native Japanese speaker. In this way, the form of “making people laugh and feeling a sense of accomplishment” is not just a way to improve one’s conversational skills and confidence, but also an opportunity to recognize the weakness of one’s own position and life history while participating in the situation and rebuilding relationships with others. We can see the possibility of transforming the “weakness” in the context of using the Japanese language.

5. Conclusion

Manzai was conducted as an educational practice for international students during COVID-19. The students were forced to live remotely, and although they would have been able to use and learn Japanese during their university life in Japan, they were not able to do so. The stage for the Manzai was also remote. The specificity and limitation of such a situation must be taken into account.

However, we would like to consider a perspective beyond such specificity and limitation. It is the possibility of application to a place of Japanese language education that is the situations except of the place of international students’ education. Not only international students, but also Japanese undergraduate students participated in this practice. In both the “script analysis” and “Manzai stage” situations, the roles of “teaching” and “being taught” were not seen (in fact, there was no mention of this in the post-program interviews). Rather, “logical analysis of humor” and “a sense of accomplishment from making people laugh” became meaningful to each of the students, transcending differences in “Japanese language ability.” Thus, this kind of practice has great potential not only for Japanese language education for international students, but also for creating learning by changing the hierarchy of Japanese language ability in collaborative activities at places of learning among local residents, such as Japanese language education for foreigners living in region. It also has the potential to be shown in school

education, for example, as an activity in the pick-up classes for Japanese Language Learners at schools, or as an event activity in a Japanese language class in the whole schools, bringing about a change of place and the building of approval relationships.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, as the international student population becomes increasingly diverse, the future field in which they will advance is not necessarily the world of “academic language” alone. As the world of the Japanese language in its many variations tends to be overlooked, it is meaningful to shed light on the acquisition of a “style of humor” as a way for international students to access the diverse world of the Japanese language. In an era where such students are becoming increasingly diverse, it will be necessary to provide a variety of education that does not equate education for international students with a connection to the academic world. The boundary between international student education and local Japanese language education as well as between Japanese language education in school education, is a cradle that is influenced by the students’ residential location, age, and career direction. Particularly, for the international students in COVID-19, whose dreams of improving their Japanese language skills in the Japanese-speaking world they had envisioned seemed to have come to an end, the experience of being in a remote Japanese-speaking world, using their own language, including both their weaknesses and strengths, and feeling a sense of accomplishment in making others laugh, made them experience anxiety and accomplishment in their own language. The fact that both the international and Japanese students were able to set aside their complexes, and that they promised to meet again when they were able to travel again, may have provided a glimmer of hope in terms of connections and expectations for participation in this class.

Notes

- (1) The word “Manzai” refers to “a performance in which two people exchange manzai stories in a dialogue”. (Kojien)
- (2) Here, “laughter” and “jokes” are collectively referred to as “humor”. These are often referred to as “humor” in language education papers in English-speaking countries, and this paper follows the same practice.
- (3) “Shinkigeki” here refers to Japanese light theater troupes, comedies that do not deal with current events, do not attack individuals, and depict life while focusing on plot interest and characterization of the characters, such as love stories. (Commentary based on the International Encyclopedia Britannica)
- (4) All Chinese students were accessed from China, and Turkish

students were accessed remotely from Turkey until the fourth week and then from Japan. International and Japanese students are hereinafter collectively referred to as “students”.

- (5) However, since this study does not attempt to generalize the concept through M-GTA, no strict storytelling or categorization was conducted. Such modeling is not appropriate for the four students in the class. We are trying to see how each of them gained awareness through the class.

References

- Abe, Y., & Yokoyama, N. (1991) Issues in Long-Term Training Programs for Overseas Japanese Language Teachers: In Search of Teaching Methods that Take Advantage of Foreign Japanese Language Teachers, *Bulletin of the Japanese Language Institute*, 1, pp.53-74. (阿部洋子・横山紀子 (1991) 「海外日本語教師長期研修の課題—外国人日本語教師の利点を生かした教授法を求めて」『日本語国際センター紀要』1, pp.53-74.)
- Bell, N., & Pomerantz, A. (2014). Reconsidering Language Teaching Through a Focus on Humor. *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, 1-1, 31-47.
- Byrnes, H., Maxim, H., & Norris, J. (2010). Realizing Advanced L2 Writing Development in a Collegiate Curriculum: Curricular Design, Pedagogy, Assessment. *Modern Language Journal*, 94(Supp. 1), pp.222-230.
- Akagi, K., Sunagawa, K., Okazaki, H., Murakami, K., Aso, T., & Shigero, Y. (2019). Emergence of expression born from humorous improvisation: developmental disabilities, shinki geki, noritsukomi. *Creations Kamogawa*. (赤木和重・砂川一茂・岡崎春奈・村上公也・麻生武・茂呂雄二 (2019) 『ユーモアの即興から生まれる表現の創発—発達障害・新喜劇・ノリツッコミ』クリエイツかもがわ.)
- Díaz, A. R. (2013). Developing critical languaculture pedagogies in higher education. Bristol, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2011). Complex, dynamic systems: A new transdisciplinary theme for applied linguistics? *Language Teaching*, 45 (2) pp. 202-214.
- Miyo, J. (2011). The Meaning of the Japanese Language Classroom as a ‘Place’: Significance and Issues of Guaranteeing the ‘Right to Speak,’ in Hideo Hosokawa (ed.), *Language Education and Identity*, (pp. 75-97) Shunposha. (三代純平 (2011) 「『場』としての日本語教室の意味—『話す権利』の保障という意義と課題」細川英雄 (編) 『言語教育とアイデンティティ』 (pp.75-97) 春風社.
- Mori, M. (2017) Practice of “Learning with Rakugo” course design focusing on linguistic and non-linguistic aspects: Activities for intermediate learners of Japanese, *Kinjo-gakuin University Review of Humanities and Sciences*, 13 (2), pp.207-230. (森真由美 2017 言語的および非言語的側面に焦点を当てた「落語で学ぶ」コース・デザインの実践—中級日本語学習者を対象とした活動, 『金城学院大学論集 人文科学編』13 (2), pp.207-230)
- MEXT (2021). Results of the Survey on Acceptance of Foreign Students through Short-Term Education Programs in 2020. https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/ja/_mt/2022/03/date2020p.pdf (See, 22th Mar, 2022) (文部科学省 2022b 「2020 (令和2) 年外国人留学生進路状況・学位授与状況調査結果」)
- MEXT (2022a). Survey on Enrollment of International Students’ and ‘Number of Japanese Students Studying Abroad, etc. https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1412692.htm (See, 22th Mar, 2022) (文部科学省 (2022a) 「『外国人留学生在籍状況調査』及び『日本人の海外留学者数』等について」)
- MEXT (2022b). 2020 Survey of International Students’ Career Progress and Degree Awarding Status. https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/ja/_mt/2022/04/date2020sg.pdf (See, 22th Mar, 2022) (文部科学省 (2022a) 「『外国人留学生在籍状況調査』及び『日本人の海外留学者数』等について」)
- Paltridge, B., & Starfield, S. (2016). English as Specific Purposes. In Hinkel, E. (Ed), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning 3rd Edition*. (pp.56-67.) MA: Routledge.
- Park, J. S-Y., & Wee, L. (2011). A Practice-based Critique of English as a Lingua Franca, *World Englishes*, 30 (3), pp.360-374.
- Pennycook, A. (2001). Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rymes, B. (2010). Classroom discourse analysis: A focus on communicative repertoires. In Hornberger, N., & McKay, S. (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language education*, (pp. 528-546). New York: Multilingual Matters.
- Sekiguchi, M., & Spain, D. (2020) Creative writing activities among intermediate and advanced learners of Japanese: Through the teaching of manzai, *The Review of Japanese Language Education*, Center for Global Communication Education, University of Tsukuba, 35, pp.45-53. (関口美緒・スペイン, D. (2020) 「中上級日本語学習者における創作活動—漫才の指導を通して」『筑波大学グローバルコミュニケーション教育センター日本語教育論集』35, pp.45-53.)
- Tanaka, R. (2013). ‘Native’/‘Non-native’ Concepts in Japanese Language Education: From a Review of Related Literature in Linguistic Research and Language Education, *Journal of Language and Culture Education*, 11, pp.95-111. (田中里奈 (2013) 「日本語教育における「ネイティブ」/「ノンネイティブ」概念—言語学研究および言語教育における関連文献のレビューから」『言語文化教育研究』11, pp.95-111.)
- Yamada, T., Sakai, T., & Bushnell, C. (2019). Rakugo CALL Program for Japanese Language Learning: Its Development and Possibilities for Implementation: Technology-Supported Learning In and Out of the Japanese Language. (pp. 149-170), New York: Multilingual Matters.