A Case Study on Management of Language Choice by Multilingual in Japan

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Abstract

This study covers a survey of (1) whether a multilingual interlocutor responds in a language similar to that another multilingual initiates discourses in ; (2) whether linguistic recency and linguistic distance will affect the choice of a language. The data in this case study was collected from three multilingual individuals, all were Indian males, engaged in a free format conversation session. We assessed self-assessment of linguistic distance and frequency of linguistic recency after the session. The results show the correlation of matching rate of input and output language may be a pattern of behaviors of multilingual. The result indicates the possibility that if a non-verbal language[1] is increased, then the matching rate of initiation language and response language is reduced in terms of choice of a language.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine how multilingual workers in Japan manage their language choice when they interact with a multilingual Japanese ; (1) whether a multilingual interlocutor responds in a language similar to that another multilingual initiates discourses in ; (2) whether linguistic recency[2] and linguistic distance will affect the choice of a language.

Nowadays in Japan, Japanese people are and will be facing the situations that they have to contact with non-Japanese people in various social settings. According to Japanese Ministry of Public Management, the number of legal foreign residents against Japanese population in 2004 was 1,973,747 (3.1% up compared with 2003) as of June 2004 and will be rapidly increasing (Ministry of Public Management 2005). It is about 1.5% of Japanese population, 127,619,000. The number of legal foreign workers in 2006 as of June was 192,124 (3.5% up from 2003), which is about 0.2% of Japanese population. We cannot ignore these numbers as many people will easily face cross-cultural situations on business and/or in daily life. Table 1 shows the numbers of legal foreign workers who were given "technical" visa to stay (Japanese Immigration Bureau 2005). The ranking of the top three countries of origin for immigrant workers in Japan, from most to least, is China, South Korea, and India. Many of foreign workers' mother tongue are not English. So it can be considered that foreign workers use Japanese and/or English as their

[1] Non-verbal language includes gestures, nodding, expressions in face, eye-contact, distance between speaker and hearer, and posture (Nihongo Kyoiku Jiten 2005 : 482) [Japanese].

[2] 'language recency' means which language has been often used recently rather than other languages. 'recency' is considered a possible factor for cross-linguistic influence (Cenoz, 2001).

common languages. Some foreign workers come from such countries where one of official languages is English as India and Philippine. According to the Immigration control report of 2004, Japanese government has a special policy for workers in such fields as computer engineering, wine specialty and medicine and professionals in these fields can easily obtain visa to legally work in Japan. So the number of foreign workers in these fields is expected to increase more. Thus, in many parts of Japan, the monolingual individual can no longer be regarded as the 'standard case' and much research are expected to be carried out in connection with adjusted speech styles as parts of adjustment strategies in their language management in monolingual and cross-linguistic interactions.

The language selection covers wide ranges ; choice of dialects, linguistic styles to infants by mothers, foreigner talk[3], teacher talk toward students, the choice of a language by bilingual and multilingual (Minami 1974, 1983 ; Kumagai 2005). This implies what Neustupný (1997) insists ; human beings have abilities to correct language very often in order to communicate properly. Just as caretakers modify the way they speak to children learning their L1, so do native speakers modify their speech when communicating with learners (Ellis 1997 : 45).

Table 1. "Technique" Visa Holders in Japan (Immigration control of 2004)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
China	876	942	1,192	880	1,016
SouthKorea	398	314	592	596	472
India	154	191	260	277	312
U.S.A.	1,714	1,204	598	488	252
Philippine	75	114	116	97	145
France	50	73	55	46	66
England	65	68	46	46	34
China (Taipei)	36	137	51	27	32
Vietnam	6	10	30	19	31
Germany	26	28	21	17	31
Others	270	315	347	266	252
Total	3,670	3,396	3,308	2,759	2,643

Neustupný (2003) suggests the language management model referring to the model of Hymes (1979). The 1st step of Neustupný's model is the choice of linguistic varieties (such as linguistic style and language) (Neustupný 1997).

Code-switching is practiced for the purpose of achieving mutual understanding

[3] 'foreigner talk' is the variety of language used by native speakers to address non-native speakers (Ellis 1997 : 139).

based on having sufficient competence of each language (Appel and Muysken 1987). On the other hand, it is sometimes activated when a speaker tries to show his/her identity as a member of a certain group, in addition in order to keep his/her status in his/her own group, when a speaker wants to have an advantage in building a good communication getting over social and racial differences, when a speaker wants to exclude a certain member from a conversation, when a speaker wants to cut in a conversation, and emphasize a certain part of speech when a speaker tries to confirm mutual understandings if the message is understood correctly by expressing in different language, to communicate briefly or efficiently (Appel and Muysken 1987 ; Muysken 2000 ; Clyne 1991). The concept of code-switching is treated differently in this study compared with 'Language Choice' due to code-switching is activated not only for consideration to other participants but also for only speakers' intention. 'Language Choice' is defined here to be happened to the communication where a speaker shows his/her consideration to other participants.

It is increasing the importance of achieving skills of language adjustment to manage a discourse for mutual understanding among participants. To investigate the mechanism of 'Language Choice' by multilingual, more attempts are expected to be done.

In recent years a new view of language and human linguistic competence has begun to emerge. A "usage-based" model (e.g. Langacker 2000) holds that "the essence of language is its symbolic dimension, with grammar being derivative" (Tomasello 2003 : 5). In general, in usage-based models the token frequency of an expression in the language learner's experience tends to activate learners' language competence (Hayase and Hotta 2005). "The type frequency of a class of expressions (that is, the number of different forms in which the language learner experiences the expressions or some element of the expression) determines the abstractness or schematicity of the resulting construction-which mainly (along with some other factors) underlines the creative possibilities, or productivity, of the construction" (Tomasello 2003 : 107). The research results in bilingual word recognition demonstrate a considerable amount of interaction between the two languages known by a bilingual, which has led the majority of researchers to believe that lexical access in bilinguals is basically non-selective with respect to language (Kroll and Dijkstra 2001). In this view, lexical word representations from both languages are activated even in situations where only one language is relevant. Langacker (1991) suggests a working hypothesis in relation with 'linguistic selection' that is basically compatible with a "connectionist" as : 'Selection : The likelihood that a given node will be chosen as the active node for categorizing a target expression correlates positively with its degree of entrenchment and cognitive salience, and negatively with its distance from the target (i.e. how far the target diverges from it by elaboration or extension' (Langacker 1991 : 282). Based on that, "Linguistic recency" can be a scale of the token frequency relating this model and might effect "Language Choice." Cenoz (2001 :

10) points out the factors that can potentially affect choice of a language are (not only) 'recency' (but also) 'linguistic distance.' But few cases were appeared to investigate the relation of 'Language Choice', 'linguistic distance,' and 'linguistic recency.'

Based on the above, I chose a free conversation setup as it seems the most reasonable to obtain the data for this study. The self-assessments were also operated with respective to linguistic recency and linguistic distance of each language that the multilingual participants use. The data from non-Japanese multilingual were analyzed. Few attempts were made in connection with 'Language Choice' by multilingual workers in Japan so this study will hopefully show some evidences relating to 'Language Choice.'

2．Method

2．1　Participants

Three multilingual foreign workers holding "Technical" visa and one multilingual Japanese were selected. All foreign workers are Indian origin males, software engineers working for the same information technology company in Tokyo. A multilingual Japanese female is the author. The range of their ages was 28-47 years old. Three foreign workers know each other but met the Japanese for the first time except for Mr. C.

Mr. A is a Hindi-English-Japanese trilingual. His mother tongue is Hindi and the second language is English. The third language is Japanese. The schools he went to from the primary to high school were in English medium. He graduated from Japanese University and has been in Japan after the graduation continuously working as a computer engineer. The total of length of his stay in Japan was about 6 years at that time.

Mr. B is a Marathi-Hindi-English-Japanese speaker. His mother tongue is Marathi, and the second languages are Hindi and English that are official languages in his country. He graduated from a university in India and passed the 1 st grade of Japanese proficiency test before coming to Japan. His length of stay in Japan was about 6 months at that time which was the shortest period among the participants.

Mr. C is a Bengali-Hindi-English-Japanese speaker. His mother tongue is Bengali and the second languages are Hindi and English which also official languages in his original country. He stayed in America totally for 10 years for his higher educations after the graduation of a university in India and came to Japan to work. His length of stay in Japan was almost 13 years at that time. Mr. C is the boss of Mr. A and Mr. B in official setting.

Table 2.　Participants

	L1	L2	L3
Mr. A (Male)	Hindi	English	Japanese
Mr. B (Male)	Marathi	Hindi,English	Japanese
Mr. C (Male)	Bengali	Hindi,English	Japanese
Ms. D (Female)	Japanese	English	Bengali

Ms. D is the author, Japanese female. Her mother tongue is Japanese, the second language is English and the third language is Bengali. The author studied Bengali in India for 2 years and obtained the certificate from a University in India. The author uses Bengali continuously in informal settings after coming back to Japan. The author's English is frequent and has no problem in verbal communication with native English speakers.

All of the participants are considered with fluent competence of each language they know in informal settings.

2．2　Procedure

The four multilingual participants were instructed to talk freely for about 30 minutes. They agreed that discourses to be recorded by a video camera.

The session took about 30 minutes and the data was videotaped (Sony Digital Vide Camera Recorder DCR-TRV 15) and described. After the session was completed, the self-assessments regarding 'linguistic recency' and 'linguistic distance' were measured.

The 'linguistic recency' was assessed by the participants counting hours that each participant use each language in a week in his daily life in Japan. It was shown by sharing rates of percentage. The 'linguistic distance' in each matching of the languages they speak is assessed by 5 scales ranging from 0 (very close) to 4 (very far) points.

We categorized the data as per the initiation language and the response.

3．Results

3．1　Mr. A (a Hindi-English-Japanese speaker)

Figure 1 indicates that when an input language was English, Mr. A had a strategy to use the same language : English or non-verbal language such as nodding and laughing. Mr. A replied in his L3 : Japanese mostly when he had input in Japanese. But when

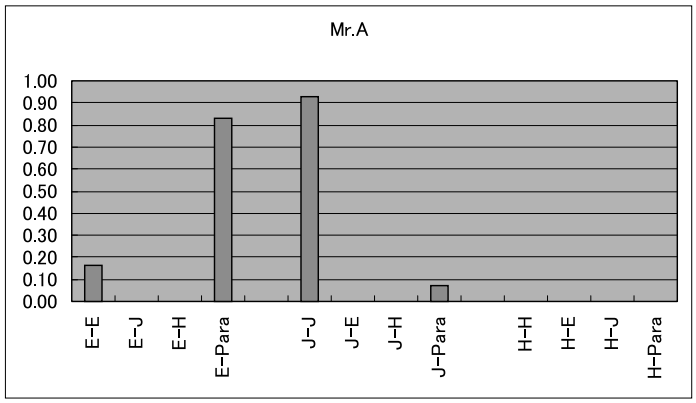

Figure 1.　Response Language toward Initiation Language of Mr. A
"Para" of E-Para, J-Para and H-Para stands for non-verbal language.

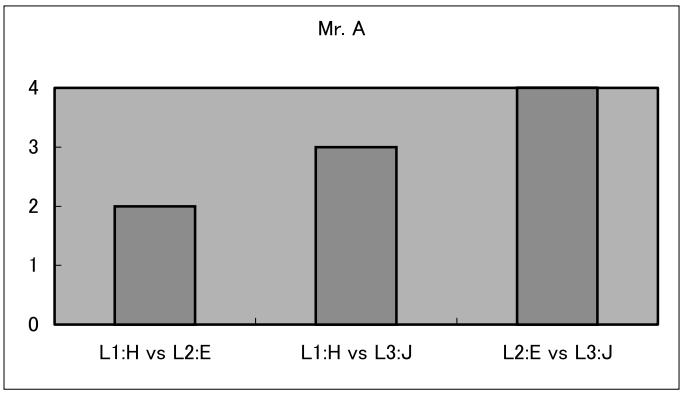

Figure 2.　'Linguistic Distance' of Mr. A

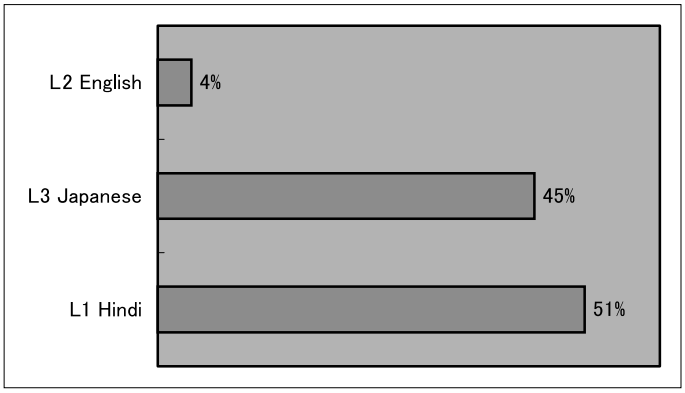

Figure 3.　'Linguistic Recency' of Mr. A

he heard initiations in English his L2 : English, the percentage of usage of non-verbal language was more than 80%.

It was found that Mr. A has been using mostly L1 : Hindi more than 50%, secondly Japanese more than 40% in his daily life in Japan.

According to Mr. A's self-assessment, it could be said that Mr. A thinks of the linguistic distance between L2 : English and L3 : Japanese are the biggest. Mr. A considers the distance between L1 : Hindi and L2 : English the smallest.

3．2　Mr. B (a Marathi-Hindi-English-Japanese speaker)

Figure 4 shows that when the input language was in his L2 : Hindi, he answered in Hindi 100%. When the input was done in another L2 : English, the ratio of E-E was more than 70%. When his L3 : Japanese was the input one, he responded in using paralanguage more than 50%.It was found that Mr. B was using Japanese more than 50% in his daily life in Japan.　L2 : Hindi was secondly used at the rate of 37%. His L1 : Marathi was little used. It can be said that Mr. B thinks of the linguistic distance between L1 : Marathi and L2 : Hindi the smallest.　But both of the distance between L1 : Marathi and L3 : Japanese, L2 : Hindi and L3 : Japanese the biggest. The distance between L1 :

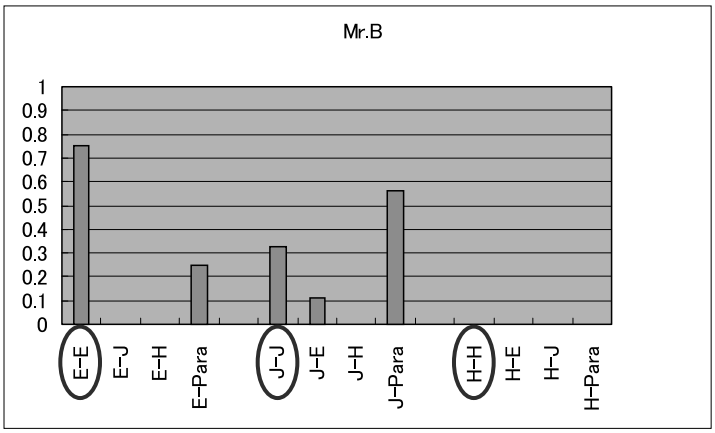

Figure 4. Response Language to ward Initiation Language of Mr. B
"Para" here stands for non-verbal language.

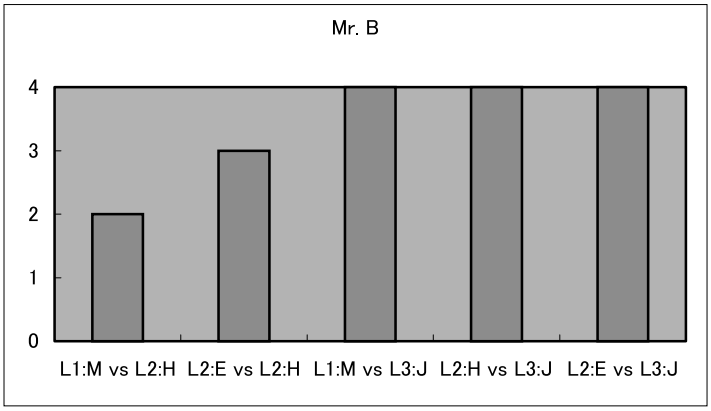

Figure 5. 'Linguistic Distance' of Mr. B

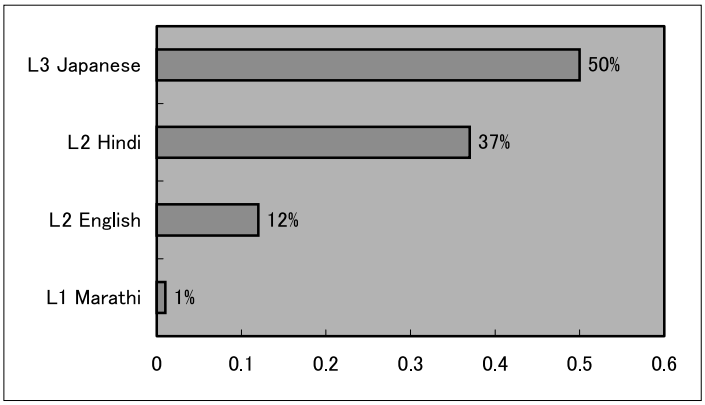

Figure 6. 'Linguistic Recency' of Mr. B

3．3　Mr. C (A Bengali-English-Japanese Speaker)

Figure 7 is the result of the frequency of the choice of a language by Mr. C. This shows that Mr. C always responded in the same language as the input language like L2 : E-E and L3 : J-J to him. But when the input was made in his L2 : Hindi, he used L2 : English 100% to respond. The percentage of his using of English was more than 50%. The usage percent of his L3 : Japanese was 33%.

The self-assessment of linguistic distance by Mr. C shows the linguistic distance between L2 : English and L3 : Japanese, and the distance between L2 : Hindi and L3 : Japanese were the longest. The distance between L1 : Bengali and L3 : Japanese is the 2 nd, and the interval between L1 : Bengali and L2 : Hindi and English the shortest.

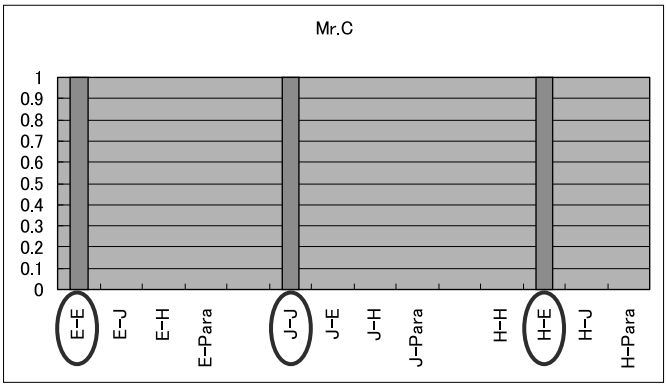

Figure 7.　Response Language to ward Initiation Language of Mr. C.
"Para" stands for non-verbal language.

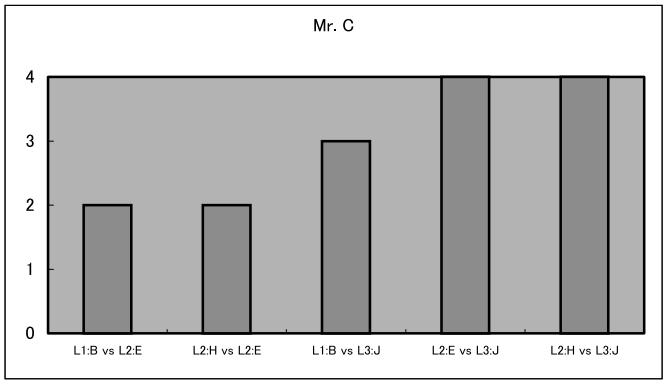

Figure 8.　'Linguistic Distance' of Mr. C

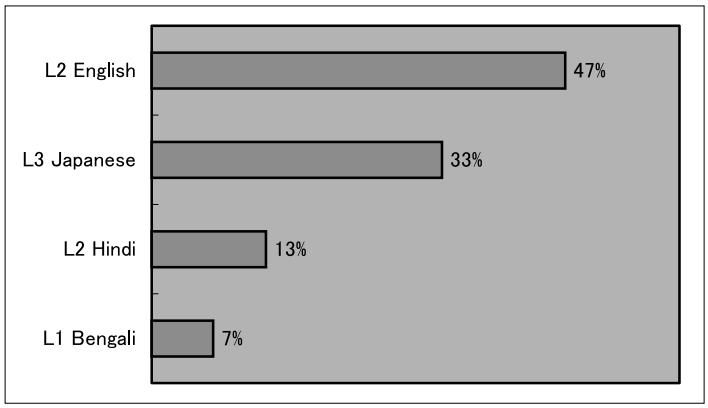

Figure 9. ‘Linguistic Recency' of Mr. C

3．4 Topics appeared in the data

The numbers of interactions were higher (Figure 10) depending on topics in the body part of the data. Leadership in managing topics and turn-takings could be bigger factors of communication in connection with language management (Yoshii,1991). It has been recognized that the frequency of introduction of new topics and types of forms could affect the language management when a topic is introduced (Usami & Mineda,1995). Figure 11 show that multilinguals in this case operated introduction of new topics at 75%. Some topics that the participants showed their interests had frequent interactions. This supports the hypothesis of Yoshii (1991) leadership in managing topics can play a role to effect on managing language. This data can tell us that the ability of managing topics is important in language management. It can be said the language competence in managing topics is very important.

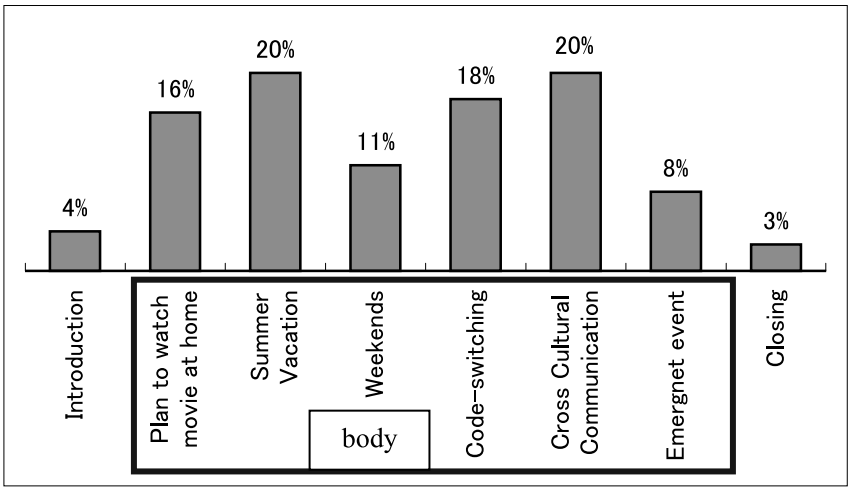

Figure 10. Topics appeared in the data.

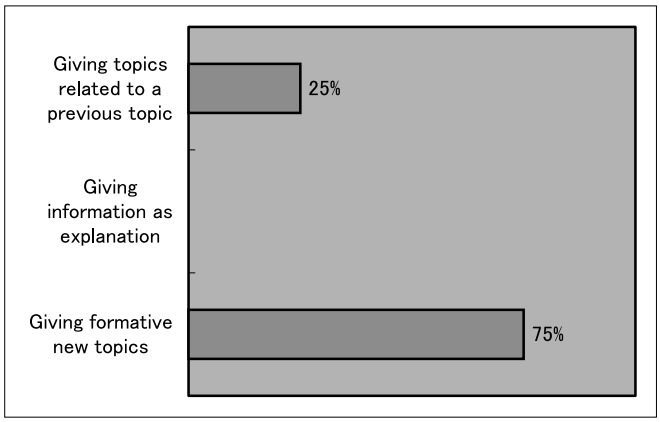

Figure 11.　Results of Categories in the structure of casual conversation

4．Discussions

As the result of 3.1-3.3 and Table 3, one may see degrees of entrenchment of languages that each multilingual use was revealed. Mr. A uses his L1 : Hindi and L3 : Japanese very often in his daily life although he speaks L2 : English. The degree of Mr. A's entrenchment of Japanese could be said higher as he replied in Japanese 90% when the input language was Japanese. So it could be concluded that Mr. A's language choice was affected by recency but distance.

Mr. B does not seem to have chances to use his 1st language, Marathi, in his daily life in Japan. But it must be the strongest language as it is his L1 or his proficiency level of L1 : Marathi and L2 : Hindi might be almost the same level because the ratio of input-output (H-H) was 100%. His proficiency of another L2 : English could be higher as he responded in English when he had input in English at 70%. It could be said that Mr. B's degree of entrenchment of L3 : Japanese could be lower as he used non-verbal language when he heard Japanese although he used Japanese 50% in his daily life during his 6 months stay in Japan. It could be concluded that Mr. B's language choice was related with recency but distance.

Mr. C's proficiency of each language he speaks can be concluded that L1 : Bengali ≒L2 : English > L2 : Hindi > L3 : Japanese. His ability of English must be higher and Japanese proficiency level could also be said very high as the ratio of input-output, E-E and J-J was 100%. It seems that he treated his L2 : Hindi as if his one of L2 : English because the ratio of input-output was H-E 100%. As a result of his data, Mr. C's language choice was also affected by recency but distance.

It seems it would not be rude at all if they response in different language from the initiation language for multilingual as long as they understand each other. That means when multilingual are involved in discourses, all of the languages they know may be activated. There seems to be a correlation between non-verbal language and usage of the same language as an initiation language of topics. It is likely to say if percentage of the

choice of a language is close to 100%, the proficiency of the output language could be stronger in connection with a "usage-based" model in terms of frequency of token.

Table 3. Results of self-assesments on Linguistic recency and distance

	Mr. A	/Recency/	Distance from L1	Mr. B	/Recency/	Distance from L1	Mr. C	/Recency/	Distance from L1
L1	Hindi	51%	—	Marathi	1%	—	Bengali	7%	—
L2	English	4%	2	Hindi	37%	2	Hindi	13%	2
L3	Japanese	45%	4	English	12%	3	English	47%	2
L4				Japanese	50%	4	Japanese	3%	4

Table 4. Results of Language Choice

	Mr. A			Mr. B			Mr. C		
	Input-Output			Input-Output			Input-Output		
Frequency of	J	-J	90%	H	-H	100%	E	-E	100%
Language Choice	E	-Non-verbal	80%	E	-E	70%	J	-J	100%
				J	-Non-verbal	50%	H	-E	100%

5. Conclusion

So far, we have seen (1) whether a multilingual interlocutor responds in a language similar to that another multilingual initiates discourses in ; or (2) whether linguistic recency and linguistic distance will affect the choice of a language.

As to (1), multilingual interlocutors did not always respond in a language similar to that another multilingual initiates discourses in as a result of this case study. A multilingual sometimes responded in different language, sometimes in non-verbal language. It seems that if a multilingual respond in a language similar to that of initiation of discourses, the competence of that language may be higher in the languages that a multilingual knows. But they have tendencies to pay more attention to the meaning than a language choice. So it can be concluded that there is no such a rule which they respond in the same language as long as hearers understand what a multilingual speaker wants to say. But the data can tell us that the ability of managing topics is important in their interactions.

Regarding (2), linguistic recency may affect Language Choice but linguistic distance. A self-assessment of linguistic distance is likely reference in order to predict competence of each language they know because we do not see any direct effectives from the utterances in the data in connection with language distance.

It is reasonable to conclude that multilingual pay more attention to the function if it is correctly understood what they want to say and Language Choice is adequate for

mutual understanding than simply languages themselves. This tells us that cognitive-functional approach will be adequate for the studies of multilingual language management. "Empathy[4]" toward the other participants in discourses may affect Language Choice.

Nowadays it is getting a big issue to communicate smoothly not only with Japanese but also with foreign residents in the Japanese society so that a continuous examination of multilingual foreign residents would be necessary. More studies in connection with "empathy" are expected to be done soon.

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[4] Empathy means the ability to understand other people's feelings and problems. It is considered as one of important social skills and often discussed in relating with social competence. (Nakajima et al (eds.) (1999) Shinrigaku Jiten, Tokyo : Yuhikaku. [Japanese])

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