
“Something Old, Something New”: Cultural *Bricolage* in Japanese Wedding Speeches

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“Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.”
(Traditional American saying for what a bride should wear on her wedding day)

Introduction

The theme of this conference invites us to explore processes of the creation and interpretation of texts in everyday life. This paper focuses on processes of cultural meaning-making in one particular everyday context, namely the congratulatory speeches given at Japanese wedding receptions. Weddings are a particularly interesting site for investigating the production of cultural meanings because they are a situation in which speakers display *for each other* their understanding of important cultural concepts related to marriage, gender roles, and personhood (Dunn, 2004; Edwards, 1989). At Japanese wedding receptions, various categories of guests offer speeches in which they congratulate the couple and express their own understandings and ideals of marriage. In doing so, they both express Japanese conceptions of the marriage relationship and contribute to the cultural discourse through which ideologies of gender, marriage, and social relationships are created, re-created, and changed over time. These speeches thus allow us to observe processes of cultural (re)production in naturally-occurring discourse, without active intervention by the analyst.

I am also drawn to wedding speeches because they are a relatively conventionalized genre in terms of both form and content. Wedding speakers display, not only their understandings of marriage and gender ideologies, but also their competence in the conventions and speech formulae appropriate to public speaking on a ceremonial occasion. Speakers draw on a stock of formulaic phrases and conventional metaphors to congratulate the couple and may also quote directly from authoritative cultural texts to offer marital advice to the newlyweds. At the same time, each wedding speech is unique, and the quoted texts and phrases must be adapted to be appropriate to each specific couple and wedding. Wedding speeches thus comprise, in the words of my title, both “something old” and “something new.” Wedding speakers reuse and reinterpret cultural texts to create new, contextualized meanings in a process similar to that described by Lévi-Strauss as *bricolage*. This process of recontextualizing and reinterpreting prior stretches of discourse will be the focus of this paper.

Theoretical Frameworks: Interdiscursivity as *Bricolage*

I approach the concept of “interpretation” by examining how speakers re-use and reinterpret prior texts in the creation of new utterances. In doing so, I draw on the work of Lévi-Strauss and Bakhtin as well as more recent work on interdiscursivity in linguistic anthropology. In a discussion of what he calls “mythic” or “pre-scientific” thought, Lévi-Strauss (1966 [1962]) compares processes of cultural production to the work of a *bricoleur*. *Bricoleur* is a French word which refers to a type of handy-man who repairs and builds items out of whatever odds and ends happen to be lying around from previous construction processes. As Lévi-Strauss puts it,

The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 17)

In this metaphor, the creation of a new cultural concept, a new text, or a new utterance, is a process of selecting and combining bits and pieces of existing cultural materials.

The concept of reusing existing cultural materials to create new ones is similar to Bakhtin’s concept of discourse as dialogic. Bakhtin (1986) distinguishes the *sentence*, in the sense of a grammatical sequence of words, from the *utterance*, which is spoken or written in a particular, concrete situation. He further argues that we encounter words and sentences only in their manifestation as concrete utterances. Therefore, the process of composing a new utterance necessarily draws on elements taken from prior utterances which contain echoes of their prior use:

This is why the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of *assimilation*—more or less creative—of others’ words (and not the words of a language). Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works) is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of “our-own-ness,” varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (Bakhtin, 1986: 89)

The concept of reusing prior utterances in constructing new ones has been further explored in more recent work by linguistic anthropologists interested in the concept of intertextuality, or more broadly, interdiscursivity. Bauman and Briggs (1990) provide a framework for examining how particular utterances come to be “entextualized”, detached from their spoken or written context such that they become a relatively self-contained “text” which can then be transported across time and space to be “recontextualized” in a new context. The multiple forms that such recontextualizations can take have been explored in some detail (Barber, 1999, 2003; Bauman, 1996, 2004; Dunn, 2006; Irvine, 1996; Scollon, 2004; Silverstein, 2005; Silverstein & Urban, 1996).

When a text is spoken or written in a new context, it shifts its meaning. Returning to Bakhtin’s distinction between sentence and utterance, we can also distinguish *sentence meaning*

from *utterance meaning*. The very same sentence or sequence of words can have different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. As Bakhtin puts it, “... only the contact between the language meaning and concrete reality that takes place in the utterance can create the spark of expression. It exists neither in the system of language nor in the objective reality surrounding us” (Bakhtin, 1986: 87). The meaning of an utterance depends, not only on the actual words selected, but on how they are interpreted in relation to that particular context. Meaning occurs in the fusion of words and context.

Take the phrase *Ohayoo gozaimasu* which is uttered on a daily basis as an early morning greeting throughout Japan. Its meaning shifts slightly each time it is used; it refers each time to the fact that it is early today, as opposed to yesterday, or tomorrow. Furthermore the meaning of *hayai* or ‘early’ can itself shift fairly radically across different speech communities. When I first lived in Japan, I worked in an office where people showed up for work at eight-thirty A.M. and greeted each other with “*Ohayoo gozaimasu*.” Despite the fact that this greeting is often translated as “Good morning,” I learned that if one first encountered someone at eleven A.M., it was too late for this greeting and one shifted instead to “*Konnichi-wa*”. Several years later, however, I was back in Japan working with college students, and I quickly discovered that for college students, “*Ohayoo gozaimasu*” is a perfectly normal greeting for eleven in the morning, or indeed, one in the afternoon. What is *hayai* ‘early’ for college students is quite different from what is *hayai* for office workers.

Thus, any utterance, even the most mundane, involves the (re)contextualization and (re)interpretation of texts, not only by the listener, but also by the speakers who, like Lévi-Strauss’s bricoleur, reshape and reinterpret existing cultural materials even as they reuse them. Indeed, the title of this paper exemplifies the trope under examination. The initial phrase comes from an American saying used to describe what a bride should wear on her wedding day: “Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.” The analysis in this paper applies that phrase, not to American brides, but to the speeches given at Japanese wedding receptions. I will argue that Japanese wedding speeches are also comprised of “something old, something new, and something borrowed”.

Note what has happened here. I have taken a phrase used in one context, transported it across the Pacific ocean and applied it, not to Japanese brides, but to Japanese wedding speeches. The same phrase is being reused in a *different* context in ways that reshape its meaning. The following sections will examine similar processes of reusing and reinterpreting prior texts in the context of Japanese wedding speeches.

Cultural Conventions in Japanese Wedding Speeches

Let us begin with the obvious fact that Japanese wedding speeches are highly formulaic.¹

1 This paper is based on video recordings of five Japanese wedding receptions that took place in the Tokyo area between 1990–94. All of the couples were college-educated, from upper-middle class backgrounds. Videotapes of the wedding receptions were collected from recently married Japanese friends and acquaintances and are not statistically representative of any larger population. Videotaping has become a standard part of most Japanese wedding receptions, and many wedding halls include a professional videotape as part of the wedding package. In other cases, the couple ask a friend or relative to tape the reception for them. My data include examples of both types. I did not personally attend any of the wedding receptions.

The corpus includes a total of twenty-five speeches, including speeches by four go-betweens (two college professors and two workplace superiors of the groom), eleven workplace superiors or colleagues (employers included a bank, insurance company, private high school, electronics company, and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry), four professors, one colleague of the bride’s father, and five high school or college friends of the groom and bride. Exact ages were not always available, but friends of the couple were generally in their early twenties to early thirties, whereas workplace colleagues and superiors ranged from late twenties to sixties. Six of the speakers were female (three professors of the bride and three friends of the bride), and the rest were male.

Indeed, when I told one friend that I was interested in collecting and studying wedding speeches, she wondered why. “They’re boring,” she said. “Everyone says the same thing.”

This formulaic quality is particularly obvious in the opening and closing sections of speeches in which speakers rely on a relatively small stock of formulaic greetings. Wedding speeches generally begin with some combination of the following elements, each expressed in highly formulaic phrases (Dunn, 2005):

- Self-introduction
- Congratulations to the couple and their families
- An apology for speaking ahead of other guests
- Metalinguistic announcement of what the speaker is about to talk about

For example:

Opening of a speech by the groom’s workplace superior²

- 1 *M ginkoo no K de gozai-masu./*
M bank NOM K COP HPOLITE-DIST
‘I am K of M bank.’ [Self-introduction]
- 2 *Honjitsu wa,/ ee Y-kun M-san,/taihen omedetoo gozai-mashi-ta./*
today TOP YTI M TI very congratulations HPOLITE-DIST-PAST
‘Today, congratulations, to Y and M.’ [Congratulates couple]
- 3 *Mata,/ aa go-kazoku, go-shinzoku no kata,/*
also HP-family HP-relatives GEN people(H+)
makoto ni,/ omedetoo gozai-masu./
sincerely as congratulations HPOLITE-DIST [Congratulates families]
‘Also, uh my sincere, congratulations, to the families and relatives.’
- 4 *Ee senetsu nagara,/*
presumptuous while
‘Ah although it feels presumptuous,’ [Apology]
- 5 *hito koto go-aisatsu sase -te itadaki -masu./*
one word HP-greetings permit-and receive(H-)-DIST
‘permit me to say a few words.’ [Metalinguistic announcement]

Similarly, the closing section of the speech generally involves wishes for the couple’s future, and there are a variety of conventionalized themes and phrases for expressing these wishes. Speakers emphasize themes such as cooperation and harmony and draw on a relatively limited stock of conventional metaphors including marriage as building a new home together, marriage as an object jointly created by the couple, marriage as a journey, and marriage as a union (Dunn 2004). For example:

2 Glossing: ADJ adjective marker; COP copula; DIST distal form (addressee honorific); DO direct object; GEN genitive; H- humble form; H+ subject honorific; HP honorific prefix; HPOLITE hyperpolite; IP interactional particle; NOM nominalizer; PASS passive; PAST past; PL plural; QM question marker; QT quotative; SU subject marker; TI title; TOP topic marker. Initials are used in place of proper names. Transcription conventions: Following Maynard 1989, / marks a pause-bounded phrasal unit. Punctuation is used to show intonation. : indicates lengthening. Unclear segments are enclosed in single parentheses while double parentheses are for non-verbal behavior.

Speech by go-between (Build a home metaphor)

Shiawase na go-katei o kizui-te itadaki -tai to zonji-masu.
 happiness HP-family DO build-and receive(H-)-want QT think(H-)-ADHON
 ‘I hope that they will build a happy home.’

Speech by friend of groom (Build a home metaphor)

Sore de ano,/ ma kongo wa,/ kitto futari chikara o awase-te,/
 that and um well hereafter TOP surely two-people strength DO unite-and
 ‘And then well from now on these two will unite their strength and,’
E: tanoshiku akarui katei o kizui-te -iku to omoi -masu keredomo,/
 fun bright home DO build-and-go QT think-ADHON but
 I think they will build a bright and fun home but,

Thank you speech by father of the groom (Journey metaphor)

chikara o,/ awase-te
 strength DO unite-and
 ‘uniting their strength,’
i-ppo,/ i-ppo o,/ kakujitsu ni,/ayun-de
 one-step one-step DO reliably walk-and
itadaki-tai to,/ nengan shi-te ori-masu./
 receive(H-)-want QT desire do-and be(H-)-ADHON
 ‘our deepest wish is that they can reliably walk forward together one step at a time.’

Speech by workplace superior of groom (Journey metaphor)

Ee o-futari mo,/ oo kore kara,/ nagai jinsei ee
 HP-two-people also this from long life
tomo ni ayun-de ik-areru wake de -gozai -masu./
 together as walk-and go-SUBJHON situation COP-HPOLITE-ADHON
 ‘They will also walk together through their long life from now on.’

Despite the conventionality of these metaphors, speakers also sometimes drew on personal details about the couple to individualize traditional metaphors or create new ones. For example, in a case where the couple had met playing tennis, one speaker asked them to make use of their tennis partnership to build a new home:

Speech by workplace superior of bride (Build a home metaphor)

Maa soo iu koto de,/ tenisu no paatonaashippu o ikashi-te,/
 well that say thing by tennis GEN partnership DO make-good-use-and
rippa na katei o,/ o kizushi-te i-tte—,
 fine ADJ home DO build-and be-and
kizui-te itadaki-tai to,/ ee omoi-masu./
 build-and receive(H-)-want QT think-DIST
 ‘Well in this way, I uh hope that, using their experience as tennis partners, they will be— will build, a wonderful home together.’

In another case, the bride had recently bought a piano. Her friend used this information to add an individualizing detail to the conventional metaphor of building a home:

Speech by friend of bride (Build a home metaphor)

Sono piano o kakom-are-te,/
that piano DO surround-SUBJHON-and
‘[They] will sit around that piano and,’

kore kara,/ T san to futari de,/ haamonii yutaka na,/
this from T TI with two-people as harmony rich ADJ

ataakai go-katei o,/ kizui-te ika-reru koto to omoi-masu./
warm HP-home DO build-and go-(H+) NOM QT think-DIST

‘I think that from now on, together with T [the groom], [she] will build a warm home filled with rich harmonies.’

Thus, several of the speakers at these weddings combined formulaic phrases such as ‘building a new home together’ with personal details that contextualized the metaphor as appropriate to the specific couple, sometimes creating novel metaphors such as marriage as a musical harmony. Speakers at these weddings creatively adapted conventional phrases and metaphors in ways that made them appropriate to the context of specific weddings and specific couples. Here we have cultural bricolage at its most mundane—a standard cultural image is inserted into a specific context and interpreted in terms of that context. The process of recontextualization creates a contextually specific meaning, and this is true whether or not the speaker engages in overt recontextualization by adding phrases referring to that specific couple. Even in a totally conventional metaphor, the abstract sentence meaning of a phrase like “building a new home together” takes on a concrete, utterance meaning through its use in a specific context—the phrase now describes a specific newly-married couple, while still trailing with it the echoes of prior use to refer to other couples at other weddings. Thus, any time a conventional phrase is reused, it is also reinterpreted in relationship to its new contextual surroundings.

But if metaphors or other conventionalized phrases can be personalized in relation to individual brides and grooms, it must be noted that the process also works in reverse. The cultural conventions and genre expectations of wedding speeches also flatten out the distinctive personalities of individual grooms and brides. In analyzing a corpus of twenty-five speeches given at five different weddings, I was struck by the similarity of the phrases used to describe the brides and grooms. All of the brides were beautiful, and all of the grooms were hard-working young men with a promising future. Rather than conventional phrases being reinterpreted in light of specific biographies, here individual characters and personalities are reinterpreted to fit cultural norms and expectations for the ideal bride and the ideal groom. Thus, there is a dialectic between cultural texts and cultural contexts with each being reshaped in terms of the other. We fit ourselves and our ideas to existing discourses as much as we reshape prior texts to specific situations.

Recontextualization of Quoted Texts in Wedding Speeches

The type of interdiscursivity I have been describing occurs throughout everyday discourse and is so mundane that we often fail to notice that, as Bahktin says, our speech is “filled with

others’ words.” Yet wedding speakers also engage in much more overt and deliberate quotation of others’ words. In the course of their speeches, many of the older honored guests in particular provide the new couple with thoughts and advice on marriage. Sometimes these are drawn from their own experience, but equally often, the speaker quotes an existing text to express some sentiment about marriage. In contrast to formulaic expressions and conventional metaphors, these texts are specifically framed as quotations of someone else’s words.

Barber (1999) has noted a similar distinction between quotation and the use of formulaic phrases in Yorùbá verbal art. She argues that many Yorùbá genres are characterized by the pervasiveness of quotation where the speaker is actively felt to be repeating the utterances of past speakers: “There is a whole field of texts that are constituted as quotations: rather than being merely uttered, they are cited” (1999:18–19). She contrasts these genres with formulaic greetings that are repeated verbatim in the appropriate situations. Such a greeting is conventional and contextually appropriate but “is not uttered in such a way as to draw attention to its status as text that has been previously constituted and already uttered by others” (Barber, 1999:19). By contrast, the process of quotation presents texts as autonomous objects detached from particular contexts of utterance in a way that invites analysis and interpretation.

Japanese wedding speakers frame their texts as quotations by following a sequence of citation, quotation, and interpretation (Dunn, 2006). The speaker first announces the text’s provenance or original context, then quotes the original text, and then proceeds to explicate its meaning and relate it to the married couple. Here we see the processes of entextualization, recontextualization, and reinterpretation actively displayed.

Speech by Workplace Superior of the Groom

A. Citation

- 1 *E kono sai watakushi wa: aa:/ ma,/ toku ni kekkon ni*
 this occasion I TOP well especially marriage to
kagi-tta wake de wa nai-n de -gozai -masu kedomo, /
 limit-PAST situation COP TOP not-NOM COP-HPOLITE-ADHON but
 ‘On this occasion I, well it’s not particularly limited to marriage but,’
- 2 *hito-koto, / oo, / kotoba o, / okuri-tai to omoi-masu. /*
 one -word word DO give -want QT think-ADHON
 ‘I’d like to give these words.’
- 3 *ee sore wa watakushi ga hijoo ni sonkei suru, / senpai no kata*
 that TOP I SU very respect do senior GEN person(H+)
kara, / i -ware-ta kotoba na -n de -gozai -masu ga, /
 from say-PASS-PAST words COP-NOM COP-HPOLITE-ADHON but
 ‘Ah it’s something I was told by a senior colleague whom I greatly respected but,’

B. Quotation

- 4 *on wa, / shita ni kaesu. /*
 obligation TOP below to return
 ‘Pay one’s debt downward.’
- 5 *on wa shita ni kaesu to iu koto de -gozai -masu. /*

obligation TOP below to return QT say thing COP-HPOLITE-ADHON
 ‘It’s the saying pay one’s debt of gratitude downward.’

C. Interpretation

- 6 *e:/ kore wa ano:/yoosuru ni,/on-gaeshi*
 this TOP um summary as obligation-repay
(wa desu ne)ue no,/ shi-te kure-ta
 TOP COP(ADHON) IP above GEN do -and give-PAST
hito ni,/suru no de wa naku-te,/
 people to do GEN COP TOP not -and
 ‘In short, the repayment of “on” is not to those above who did things for you but,’
- 7 *jibun yori shita ni,/shi-te ager-o./*
 oneself from below to do -and give-IMP
to iu imi de -gozai -mashi-te,/
 QT say meaning COP-HPOLITE-ADHON-and
 ‘the meaning is that one should give “on” to one’s own subordinates/dependents and,’
- 8 *e:/to iu koto wa desu ne,/kanarazushimo,/oo anoo,/*
 QT say thing TOP COP(ADHON) IP necessarily um
on o ada de kaesu,/aruiwa on o wasureru to iu koto
 obligation DO evil with return or obligation DO forget QT say thing
de wa mochiron nai wake de -gozai -mashi-te,/
 COP TOP of-course not situation COP-HPOLITE-ADHON-and
 ‘Ah which of course is absolutely not to say that one should return “on” with evil or forget one’s obligation but,’
- 9 *ee:Y-kun ni:/ii,/on o,/ hodokoshi-te*
 Y TI to obligation DO give -and
kure-ta kata wa desu ne,/daitai moo,/
 give-PAST people(H+) TOP COP(ADHON) IP generally already
oo Y-kun no on o kitai shinai demo,/
 Y TI GEN obligation DO expectation do -not even
 ‘ah the people who have given “on” to Y generally don’t expect it in return since,’
- 10 *iikurai no hito da./*
 good-roughly GEN people COP
 ‘they are people who pretty much have enough.’
- 11 *to iu koto mo ari -mashi-te,/*
 QT say thing also exist-ADHON-and
 ‘There’s also this and,’
- 12 *Toku ni,/ sono meue no kata ni desu ne,/isshookenmei,/*
 especially those superior GEN people(H+) to COP(ADHON) IP extreme-effort
ee tsukusu to iu koto wa,/moo o-wasure itadai-te
 do-greatly QT say thing TOP already HP-forget receive(H-)-and
 ‘especially please forget about striving to do all you can for your superiors since,’

- 13 *kekko de -gozai -masu./*
sufficient COP-HPOLITE-ADHON
‘[they have] enough.’
- 14 *Kore kara atarashii jinsei,/kore kara atarashii shakai-jin toshite*
this from new life this from new society-person as
desu ne,/shuppatsu suru ni atari -mashi-te wa
COP(ADHON) IP start-off do to connected-ADHON-and TOP
desu ne,/ue no hito kara uke-ta
COP(ADHON) IP above GEN people from receive-PAST
on wa,/ jibun no meshita,/ jibun yori jakusha ni,/
obligation TOP oneself GEN subordinate oneself more weak-person to
kaeshi-te age-te itadaki-tai./ to iu koto de-gozai-masu./
return-and give-and receive(H-)-want QT say thing COP-HPOLITE-ADHON
‘In his new life from now on as he sets off as a new member of society, I ask that he will return the kindnesses that he has received from those above him to his own subordinates and dependents.’
- 15 *Ee kore kara no:; jinsei de,/tatoeba,/ okusan./toshishita no okusan,/*
this from GEN life in for-example wife younger GEN wife
‘For example in your future life, your wife. Your younger wife.’
- 16 *Aruwa,/atarashiku o-umare ni naru dearoo:/o-ko-san./*
or newly HP-be-born SUBJHON perhaps HP-child-TI
‘or the new-born child you may have.’
- 17 *Aruwa,/kore kara motsu dearoo,/ buka desu ne./*
or this from have perhaps subordinate(s) COP(ADHON) IP
‘Or the subordinates you may have in the future.’
- 18 *Koo i-tta kata ni desu ne,/ata— atatakai*
this say-PAST people(H+) to COP(ADHON) IP warm
desu ne,/ ee kokoro—/ kubari o ya-tte itadai-te,/
COP(ADHON) IP heart give-out DO do-and receive(H-)-and
‘I ask that to these kinds of people he will give his warm—warmest care and consideration and,’
- 19 *kongo shita no kata ni,/taishite ()./*
hereafter below GEN people(H+) to towards
‘towards the people who hereafter will be below him ().’
- 20 *Kore ga,/ ee,/atarashii jinsei,/aruwa,/*
this SU new life or
ningen toshite no desu ne,/ aruwa shakai-jin
human-being as GEN COP(ADHON) IP or society-person
toshite no,/ tsutome dearoo ka to omoi-masu./
as GEN employment perhaps QM QT think-ADHON
‘I think that perhaps this is [his] work in his new life or as a human being or as a member of society.’

Some of the texts quoted in these speeches had a clear relationship to marriage as when one speaker quoted a Chinese proverb that “With a hundred men it’s easy to build a house, but it takes a wife to make a home” (*Hyakunin no danshi atte, shukusha o tsukuru no wa itomo kantan dearu keredomo, hitotsu no katei wa tsuma nakute, tsukuru koto wa dekinai*). Similarly, a professor of American literature quoted William Faulkner’s “you do not love because, you love despite.” However, many of the quoted texts were only tangentially related to the topic of weddings or married life. In the example presented above, for instance, the speaker noted that the advice to “pay one’s debts downward” is not limited to married life, and making it relevant to marriage requires conceptualizing, not only the groom’s future children, but also his wife as his subordinates or dependents.

Other quoted texts seemed even less directly relevant to marriage. For example, one speaker quoted a newspaper editorial concerning Japan’s economic recession, in which the writer used the slogan “Recovery, restructuring, recycling.” He then proceeded to discuss how these three concepts could be applied, not to restructuring Japanese businesses to make them more competitive, but to marriage. For “recovery,” he explained that different people naturally have different cycles, and that, like an airplane with two engines, one person can help the other recover when things are not going well. Restructuring was defined as “cutting out the fat.” He speculated that now that the groom was married he might spend less time eating cup-noodles, but warned him to take care of his health and not overeat his wife’s cooking. Finally, recycling was characterized as “thrift,” and the couple was encouraged to be thrifty.

In this and other instances, speakers took a text which previously referred to very different circumstances and reinterpreted it to make it relevant to marriage. Such examples demonstrate that texts can be almost infinitely malleable in their meaning and recontextualization. In terms of form, the quoted texts were generally pithy, memorable, neatly self-contained utterances, qualities which made them particularly suitable for being detached from one context and reinserted into another (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). However, their content and previous context seemed almost irrelevant as speakers demonstrated a broad capability to reinterpret such texts in ways that made them relevant to their new contexts. This is where Levy-Strauss’s idea of bricolage is so powerful in thinking about cultural production. The key characteristic of bricolage is not simply that the bricoleur reuses items, but that they are frequently reused in an entirely different function to build a completely different item than that from which they were originally extracted. The creative power of culture is not only to reuse older cultural constructs, but to reshape them into something new. Culture in the making is neither completely novel nor completely conventional, but an odd mish-mash of the two, often in rather unexpected ways. It is indeed, something old, something new, and sometimes something borrowed and reinserted into a radically different context to create new meanings.

And Something *Aoi*: The Creation and Enactment of Identities

What then of identity, the third of the themes for this conference? One of the primary functions of weddings is of course to create and display a couple’s new identities as husband and wife, something that in the Japanese context also defines them as *shakaijin* or contributing ‘members of society.’ Indeed, one function of the wedding speeches described here is to do precisely this type of identity work—to describe a particular groom and bride as instantiations of the “ideal type” of man or woman and to provide them with models of how they should act in their new roles.

Somewhat in contrast with my own expectations, much of the more explicit discourse was quite gender neutral. Many of the conventionalized metaphors and requests, for instance, referred to the couple as “cooperating” or “working together” without differentiating the roles of husband and wife. However, it is in the interpretation of quoted texts that were less overtly concerned with marriage that one finds deeply embedded assumptions about gender roles—models that may be all the more powerful because they were presumed rather than being overtly didactic. We have seen this with, for example, the comment about the groom eating fewer cup noodles once he is married or in the “*on wa shita ni kaesu*” quotation with the interpretation of the wife as the groom’s subordinate or dependent. Another example involved a text whose previous context was a political speech: “The government is the sail; the nation is the ship; the era is the wind; and the people are the sea.” (*Seifu wa hoo de ari, kokka wa fune de ari, jidai wa kaze de ari, kokumin wa umi de aru.*) The speaker went on to say that,

Speech by workplace superior of the groom

- 1 *Ma sono mama ni de mo,/ imi ga*
well that state in COP even meaning SU
tsuuji -nai to omoi-masu node,/
get-across-not QT think-ADHON since
‘Well since I think that if I just leave it at that the meaning won’t be understood,’
- 2 *ma ho—/T [groom] kun ga yahari,/ ho no yakuwari./*
well sail T TI SU naturally sail GEN role
‘well the sail—T [the groom] of course has the role of the sail and,’
- 3 *De,/ M [bride] san wa,/ sono,/ kokka/ dearu,/ fune no yakuwari.*
and M TI TOP that nation COP ship NOM role
‘And, M [the bride] has the role of the ship which is the nation.’

In other words, husband is to wife as the government is to the nation, an authoritarian philosophy of government translated into an authoritarian philosophy of marriage.

Yet it is not only the roles of the newly married couple which are defined in and by wedding speeches. The social identities of the speakers are also at stake. One of the things that is most striking to an outsider is how carefully the speakers at Japanese weddings are chosen and how defined and conventionalized these speaking roles are. Wedding speech manuals available in local bookstores typically provide sample speeches divided into different categories of speakers such as *baishakunin* ‘go-betweens,’ *shuhin* ‘honored guests,’ *ippan raihin* ‘ordinary guests’ and *yuujin* ‘friends’ (Fujino, 1977; Teeburu Spiichi Jissen Kenkyuukai n.d.). Each of the speakers is asked in advance to give a speech, and the order alternates between speakers for the groom’s side and speakers for the bride’s side. In general, speakers are selected, not only because of their personal connection to the groom or bride, but also because of their social position. With the exception of the friends, the speakers are usually high status people in positions of authority to whom the couple (or their parents) are obliged for past or future benevolence. The most common wedding speakers are thus workplace superiors and former teachers.

Not only are speakers chosen on the basis of demographic and social role characteristics, but the form and content of the speeches also vary in predictable ways across the different conventional categories of speakers (Dunn, 2005). In particular, the forms of bricolage in which speakers engage vary across the different categories, and here at last we perhaps come to

“something blue.” The kanji 青 not only means the color blue or green, but can also mean unripe, youthful, or immature as in the 青 of 青年. The final guests to speak before the closing words by the groom and his father are indeed “*seinen*,” the youthful friends of the groom and bride from high school or college and their speeches are rather different from those of the more senior guests who speak earlier.

Certainly these younger speakers also make use of formulaic phrases and conventional metaphors, even if their stock of these is often not as large or elaborate as those of the more experienced speakers. It is often the younger speakers who creatively combine personal characteristics with conventional metaphors to create hybrid wishes for the couple’s future. Although the friends also praise the couple in very conventional and gendered terms, they often tell amusing anecdotes which may reveal less laudable and more individual characteristics as well. Their speeches are thus less standardized and somewhat more individual and idiosyncratic.

Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, none of the unmarried friends at these five weddings gave any advice relating to marriage. Given that they themselves were unmarried, it is hardly surprising that they did not draw on their own experience to offer advice, but they also did not quote other, authoritative texts. It may be that the act of advice giving is an assertion of a hierarchical position that is not appropriate between friends, even if the advice is attributed to another source. Whatever the reason, we find that in this context it is only the more senior and experienced speakers who engage in the quotation and (re)interpretation of prior cultural texts. The use of such texts lends an authoritative weight to the speaker’s advice, but the act of exegesis and reinterpretation itself also requires or perhaps instantiates a kind of authority. Engaging in this particular type of cultural bricolage is an enactment of a particular cultural role and status which is only open to certain speakers. Or, to turn it around, engaging in (or avoiding) this type of cultural bricolage is one way in which speakers enact particular social roles and identities. The question of who is authorized to reuse which types of texts and in which contexts is an important locus for identity construction and enactment.

Conclusion

This paper has explored various aspects of cultural bricolage in the speeches at Japanese wedding receptions. We have seen how Japanese speakers recontextualize conventional phrases within each wedding ceremony and also how they frame certain texts as quotations of other, prior texts. As Bakhtin (1986) notes, these recontextualizations occur with varying degrees of awareness. Speakers may consciously frame an utterance as a reproduction of another’s words, distinctly separating the “original text” from their own interpretation. But they also routinely reuse standard phrases with no felt disjuncture between their own utterance and those of prior speakers. Sometimes the recontextualizations are slight, congratulating this *particular* couple rather than another. Sometimes, as with some of the quoted texts, the recontextualizations radically reshape the meaning of the recreated text. Bricolage is not a static reproduction, but a process of shifting and changing cultural meanings, sometimes gradually, and sometimes radically. This paper has explored the process of bricolage in one particular context, but such reusing and reshaping of prior utterances occurs all around us, not least of all in our practice as scholars. As I have done in this paper, we too reuse the words and ideas of others—both those of prior scholars and the words of our informants—as we attempt to reshape them into something new. And, like the wedding speakers discussed here, it is partly through our skill in culturally approved ways of doing this that we enact our identities as scholars.

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