CHAPTER 5

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What Can Be Said?

Communicating Intimacy in Millennial Japan

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When Yumiko wanted to tell me about the difficulties she was having relating to her mother, she started by talking about their pet dogs. Years before I'd known her and her family, they'd had a corgi named Ma-chan, who had eventually succumbed to old age but whose pictures still filled their home. While we ate dinner together, they'd regularly mention Ma-chan and tell me stories about cute things she used to do, how she'd beg for food or visit each family member before eventually going to sleep in Yumiko's mom's bed.

A few years after Ma-chan's death, Yumiko's mother decided to get a new dog and found another corgi. They named this dog Mi-chan, a name clearly designating her a second to Ma-chan, and it was obvious that this second dog had been abused.[1] She whimpered and cowered. She hated Yumiko's older brother, who was tall and had a deep voice. It took her weeks to believe that they weren't going to hurt her. But when she finally got comfortable with Yumiko's family, she was unbelievably affectionate, especially toward Yumiko's mom. As Yumiko described it to me, Mi-chan did the equivalent of jumping up and down shouting, "I love you!" She followed Yumiko's mother around, never left her side, covered her in little corgi licks, cuddled with her, and generally made her affection incredibly obvious.

According to Yumiko, her mother didn't appreciate, and frankly distrusted, such obvious expressions of love. She thought that such professions were not performing a true affection but covering for a *lack* of affection. Mi-chan was loving too much and was too vocal (as it were) for Yumiko's mother to believe. Although Yumiko had different perspectives on the

dogs and their relative behaviors, she told me about them to describe the similar gaps between her mother's and her own ways of displaying affection. Comparing herself to the second dog, Yumiko said she liked to make her love clear. She liked to use the phrase "I love you" (*aishiteru*) and to give her mom hugs and kisses. Although they have an incredibly close and loving relationship, Yumiko's mother bristles at these displays of affection and, like her reaction to Mi-chan, tends to distrust emotions made explicit. Yumiko characterized her mother's opinion as "If you have to make it obvious, it can't be real." For Yumiko, in contrast, obvious expression and real emotion were not inversely related, and she would be happy to express her feelings to her mother without making her uncomfortable. To be clear, Yumiko thinks she has a wonderful relationship with her mother and never doubts how much her mother cares about her. What is at stake, and what sometimes makes Yumiko uncomfortable or sad, is how different their styles of affection are. Though she can understand—and, indeed, articulate to me—her mother's perspective, Yumiko isn't satisfied with her affection always going unsaid. "Love like air" is not what she wants.

"Love like air" (*kūki youni*) is one standard Japanese idiom that idealizes intimate relationships as best when they are un- or understated. In this belief—common enough to be recognizable to even those who don't hold it—the best relationships are those in which partners understand the love they share for each other through actions rather than words. Within this logic, articulating love is a Catch-22: if people verbalize emotion too frequently (or maybe *at all*), that means they are overcompensating for a lacking emotion. Verbalizing an emotion automatically calls the emotion itself into question. If you really love someone, you have to demonstrate it through actions rather than merely, and quickly, stating it as a given. In its most positive understanding, "love like air" is reassuring because it is always present but not ostentatious or cloying, and it suggests a mature, secure love that does not need to be constantly reiterated. Such understandings link deeply intimate feelings with non-verbal "telepathic" communication (*ishin denshin*), which describes the ways that truly intimate people can communicate without speaking. Although these expectations are still articulated in the current moment, they are more typically associated with what is now described as "traditional" or "old-fashioned" ways of thinking about marital relationships that some people, like Yumiko, find unsatisfying. She is not the only one. The risks and possible conflicts surrounding expressions of love, affection, and intimacy become readily apparent when exploring spousal relationships in twenty-first century Japan.

In mid-2000s Japan, one prominent tip proffered to improve marriages or reduce the risk of divorce suggested that people actively work against the idea that good love should be like air. On television programs, in advice books, and in private counseling sessions or semi-public support groups, many counselors advised spouses to verbalize their love for each other—out loud and on a regular basis (Ikeuchi 2002; TBS Broadcast Staff 2006; Watanabe 2004). This tip is frequently summarized as a deceptively simple command: "Say 'I love you' to your spouse." Counselors aren't the only people engaging the possibility that new styles of communication might improve marriages. In the course of my ethnographic fieldwork exploring experiences of divorce in contemporary Japan, a range of people discussed with me how it might be a good idea to verbalize love: single, married, and divorced people; men and women; younger and older folks.[2] Even the people who didn't feel comfortable enacting the suggestion nevertheless were aware of it as an increasingly common piece of advice.

This tip became popular at a moment when intimate relationships, and especially heterosexual marriages, were increasingly under stress. For most of the postwar period, heterosexual marriage has been a powerfully normative social force marking people as responsible social adults (*shakai-jin*; literally, "social person"). The vast majority of people got married, and ethnographers have demonstrated that heterosexual marriage was used as evidence of a person's "normalcy" (Dasgupta 2005; McLelland 2005). In the current moment, however, both the centrality of heterosexual marriages and the particular forms those relationships should take are being implicitly and explicitly called into question. Japan's rising average age at first marriage and the increasing number of "never-married" people surely include both those who explicitly reject marriage and those who might very much want to get married but haven't found the right person or an acceptable situation (Miles, this volume; Nakano 2010).[3] At this time, many public debates and private conversations compare contemporary relationships with the relational ideals of older generations, describing newer practices, preferences, or recommendations in explicit comparison with what used to be done. When people repeat the tip that in good marriages spouses regularly say "I love you," they are idealizing intimate behaviors diametrically opposed to patterns popular just a generation before.

In mid-2000s Japan, the state of and ideal forms for intimate relationships were frequently discussed through metapragmatic attention to styles of communication between partners. Verbalizing affection and emotion—particularly saying "I love you"—came to be understood as a common measure for the health and strength of a marriage. This chapter's analysis

begins from the premise that there are many different styles of intimacy possible for any intimate relationship and that people are constantly deciding not just *that* they want to share intimacy, but also *how* that intimacy should be performed, embodied, and experienced. In contemporary discussions about which styles of intimacy are best, language and communicative acts often index different styles of intimacy. For instance, an older model for intimacy suggested that spouses should be ideally fused into "one body" (*ittai*), making them so deeply connected as to not need language to communicate (Lebra 1984, 125). Although this model remains popularly recognizable, newer styles of intimacy suggest that spouses should instead be connected as two loving, but fundamentally separate, people. This intimacy through separation—what I label "connected independence"—finds its contemporary apotheosis in the idea that spouses should say "I love you" to each other. This tip suggests that spouses should be connected through feelings of romantic love but nevertheless separate enough so as to need to verbalize those romantic feelings. I argue that this piece of advice, and the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects being attributed to this particular phrase, reflect contemporary attempts to balance connection and independence within relationships. As people struggle to imagine the particular forms of intimacy they desire, let alone to create and sustain relationships based on those ideals, language in and about relationships indexes, facilitates, and performs intimacy in contemporary Japan.

SILENCE, INTIMACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Anthropological and linguistic research offers a rich context in which to analyze contemporary Japanese debates about how intimacy is facilitated through silence or speech. Besnier (1990, 430) frames linguistic research on affect as engaged with a central question that is similarly relevant in the contemporary Japanese context: how can you (or I) tell who is expressing a "real" emotion and who might be faking?[4] What, exactly, does real feeling sound like?[5] Citing Urban's work on socially expected wailing in Amerindian Brazil, Besnier suggests that all answers are fundamentally cultural: if certain ritualized or expected linguistic utterances are culturally defined as valid and true, they are so within that context no matter their "ritual" performance (Besnier 1990, 430; Urban 1988). Urban concludes that when Amerindian adults cry and wail in socially appropriate contexts, they are simultaneously demonstrating their (true) sadness and doing so in a culturally intelligible way that serves to bind them to other social persons: "One wishes to signal to others that one has the

socially correct feelings at the socially prescribed times" (1988, 393). In the contemporary Japanese context, the socially prescribed feeling—that intimate partners should love each other—remains true even as convictions in particular forms of expression have shifted.

Research examining the cultural uses of silence often concludes that silence is fundamental to communication and can be used to convey a range of feelings that might include love. In his analysis of silence in Shakespeare's plays, Bock traces the shifting messages conveyed through silence, ranging from "deep love" to "extremes of alienation," suggesting that silence should be interpreted contextually (1976, 289). In Albert's (1972, 82) examination of speech in Burundi, silence can signal truly held respect as well as temporary placation that will be undermined as soon as the speaker is gone. Basso's (1970) typology of the uses of silence in Apache communication similarly presents silence as a mutable communicative method that can serve in different situations, from meeting strangers to children returning home to courting. In the last case, young sweethearts might spend significant time in silence, even when they are alone, because they don't know how to be with each other and are trying not to do or say something embarrassing (ibid., 218–219).[6] In opposition to common Japanese understandings of the links between silence and love, Basso describes Apache expectations that intimate partners move from silence to speech as they build a deeper intimacy. Similarly, Wright and Roloff (2009) examine American beliefs that speech indexes intimacy—or, more accurately, that speech is necessary but not sufficient for intimacy—through young people's use of "the silent treatment" to punish or signal anger to dating partners. They found that young Americans who expect their romantic partners to be able to understand them without words are likely to be *less* satisfied in their intimate relationships, a conclusion that contrasts with common perceptions in Japan (ibid., cited in Matsunaga and Imahori 2009, 24).

Like Apache people and Native Americans more generally, Japanese people are often stereotyped as especially silent, and the rich literature that has grown in response remains relevant to my analysis of metapragmatic attention to communicating intimacy. Linguistic research about Japan has labeled it a "high-context" society, meaning that speakers and listeners often expect that important information will be left unsaid and must instead be inferred through context (Hall 1976). Lebra's (1987) classic meditation on the uses of silence in Japan suggests that it can be used to convey very different messages, from truthfulness to defiance. Although Lebra (1987, 345) emphasizes the ways in which Japanese cultural uses of silence should not be read as further proof of Japan's inscrutable uniqueness, in

other literature attempts to describe Japanese communication can quickly become orientalizing, exoticizing, or simplistic generalizations not based on empirical evidence (for an overview of examples, see Miller 1994a, 1994b). Many researchers have commented on positive Japanese attitudes toward silence, suggesting that knowing when and how to be quiet is a mark of social maturity (Clancy 1986; Kohn 2001; Morsbach 1973; J. S. Smith 1999; Tahhan 2014). At the same time, precisely because silence could represent a range of possible meanings, it can cause significant stress for Japanese speakers as they try to interpret a silent moment (Hasegawa and Gudykunst 1998, 681).

DISCONNECTED DEPENDENCE AND LOVE IN THE AIR

Especially for generations of Japanese people building families in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, strong social norms dictated a disconnection between gendered spheres of influence. In an archetypal family, fathers were associated with paid labor outside the home, and mothers were associated with domestic responsibilities inside the home. Moreover, many men worked long hours, augmented by obligatory late-night drinking, leaving little time for anything else. For requirements of basic living—food, clean clothes, paid bills—a man relied on his wife, who often accomplished all tasks surrounding the household and children (Dasgupta 2005, 2013; Hidaka 2010). Even though women regularly left their homes and often worked part-time at various points in their lives, older generations can still articulate a standard that women should be home as much as possible (Edwards 1989; Imamura 1987; Rosenberger 2001). Men, laboring as salarymen or otherwise, were responsible for the paid income coming into a family and were associated with outside-ness. Women, even if they worked outside the home, were still idealized as people better suited to, and more reflective of, inside-ness. These separate spheres were reflected in friendship groups and socializing practices (Inaba 2009; Ishii-Kuntz and Maryanski 2003). Within older generations, neither spouse would be inclined to socialize in mixed-gender groups. In ideology, labor realms, and patterns of socializing, spouses were largely disconnected.

Despite such practices separating spouses in the contexts of labor and socializing, in other important ways these spheres were fundamentally connected, often through particular structures of dependencies. Men who were responsible only for outside labor were dependent on their wives to provide all domestic needs, even the most basic ones. Deep connections

underlie these dynamics, and each spouse was supported, in social terms, by the other's complementary set of responsibilities. Walter Edwards (1989) created an evocative phrase to capture the particularities of such relationships: complementary incompetence. Rather than describing an intellectual incompetence, this term describes the simultaneous need and separation between Japanese spouses. Because labor norms often discriminated against married women or mothers to push women out of full-time labor, the average woman was unable to find a career that enabled her to support herself. Men, on the other hand, were not taught basic domestic necessities like how to do laundry or cook nutritious meals. Even if a particular man had domestic skills or knowledge, the demands of his work schedule would likely make it impossible for him to feed and clothe himself. Thus, Edwards convincingly argues, Japanese spouses in the 1970s and 1980s were linked together partially through their complementary needs and abilities—her need for a financially viable salary and his for the domestic assistance required to earn such a salary.

Particularly compared with patterns within more contemporary intimate relationships, these older styles of marriage embody what I label *disconnected dependence*. In this term, I am trying to capture both the centrifugal and centripetal forces that were commonly exerted on Japanese marital relationships. Gendered labor policies, the demands placed on male employees, and family norms pushed men and women to be structurally dependent on each other. Judged solely by the archetypal ways married couples shared money—a husband earned money but dutifully turned his whole paycheck over to his wife, who took care of family expenses and quite likely gave her husband a small weekly allowance—Japanese spouses were fundamentally linked. And yet these strong social centripetal forces were met, in practice, with equally common disconnections between the spouses. While they might need each other, many spouses didn't want to spend too much time together. When I talk with older female friends in their seventies and eighties about their husbands, what I hear are often hilariously crafted narratives of annoyance and incompetence: husbands are punch lines and are regularly made fun of, especially if they are around "too much." Indeed the ethnographic record contains many examples of Japanese wives suggesting that a good husband is "healthy and absent" or that husbands at home are bothersome and under foot.[7] In these ways, discursively and in practice, typical marital relationships for most of the postwar era have been framed through *disconnected dependence*: spouses absolutely needed each other and fully recognized that dependence but often led social and emotional lives that were fundamentally disconnected from each other.

Although marriages built on such linkages might not seem particularly intimate to an American audience, Japanese cultural norms in the 1970s and 1980s described representations of such relationships as ideally romantic, and this romance was facilitated through air-like communication. In such historical representations, spouses who worked hard at their separate responsibilities and rarely needed or wanted to verbally communicate with each other were held up as beautiful examples of mature love. Ella (Embree) Wiswell, researching with her husband John in Suye village in the 1930s, heard a group of younger married men comparing romantic love with married love to suggest that the latter was more subtle, stable, and constant (Smith and Wiswell 1982, 179; see also De Vos and Wagatsuma 1961, 1210). In contrast to an immature or childish "puppy love," for instance, Lebra's interlocutors in the 1970s described mature love as occurring between spouses who lived largely separate lives but did so for each other's benefit. Indeed it is precisely because spouses understood themselves as fundamentally dependent on each other, as two halves of a single social unit, that their intimate communications were so subtle:

> Because husband and wife are viewed as being *ittai* (fused into one body), it would be unnecessary to display love and intimacy between them. To praise rather than denigrate one's spouse would amount to praising oneself, which would be intolerably embarrassing. In this interpretation, aloofness is not a matter of deception but *a sign of* ittai *feeling*, or an extreme form of intimacy. Many Japanese seem to convey this view when they wonder how American spouses can express their love for each other without embarrassment (Lebra 1984, 125, emphasis in original; see also Vogel with Vogel 2013, 13).

In this logic, the deep (and socially necessary) links between husbands and wives bind them such that verbal communication of affection feels saccharine and embarrassing. Compared with marital advice given in the more contemporary moment, the patterns of belief and behavior described here imply causation as much as correlation; when spouses don't need to verbally communicate with each other, that could be both a sign of the maturity of their relationship and a way to make their marriage even stronger. Less verbal communication, in these older descriptions, is held up as a measure of and tool for marital strength.

In these representations of non-verbal marital intimacy, "love like air" is often linked with telepathic communication. Glossed as "tacit communication" or "telepathy," it describes an ideal and constant communication that needs never to be clearly articulated (Befu 2001, 39). Telepathic

understanding is understood as a beautiful manifestation of deep intimacy between people, a loving mind-meld that renders mere speech evidence of unmet intimate understanding. It is important that these models for intimate relationality through non-verbal communication were not limited to spouses or sexual partners. Linking with this chapter's opening example between a mother's and daughter's differing views of how best to communicate love, ethnographic research has found telepathic communication idealized among family members in other situations (Tahhan, this volume). For instance, Japanese nurses contemplating how best to provide end-of-life care describe family members communicating with each other non-verbally. Because Japanese medical professionals were long unlikely to inform a patient of a terminal prognosis, nurses imagined that patients came to understand that they were dying through telepathic communication with family members (Konishi and Davis 1999, 184).[8] Therefore telepathic communication, which was once idealized as evidence of the best kind of marriage, needs to be understood in relation to a broad cultural context that privileges non-verbal communication.

CONNECTED INDEPENDENCE AND LOVE OUT LOUD

Although tacit or unstated affection remains a recognizable cultural form, in the contemporary moment marriage counselors are likely to emphasize "communication" (*komyunikēshyon*) as a key measure of marital quality. Compared with earlier pieces of advice, this rhetoric both emphasizes that communication is necessary for "good" marriages and regularly suggests that it should be occurring in ways that are more than tacit or telepathic. As the divorce rate has continued to rise in the past decades, "communication" has become a key idiom in which counselors and spouses find inherent risk and possible salvation. In contemporary marital guidebooks, on websites, on television shows, and in my conversations with people, creating and sustaining marital love are regularly premised on rhetorics of "communication." While tacit "love like air" can be attractive or reassuring, marital problems and impending divorces can also be demonstrated through silence. Moreover, an unkind spouse could use "telepathic communication" as an excuse to be coldly silent, unpleasant, or uncaring.

In one example of the pervasiveness of "communication" rhetoric, on a website devoted to sharing marital tips directed at middle-aged couples, "communication adviser" Uchida uses broad definitions of

"communication" to frame what he describes as key ways to protect and save marriages. For him, words, actions, and hearts should all be understood as vehicles for communication; in all of these examples, communication is the key frame through which marital relationships should be understood.

言葉のコミュニケーションは、まさに会話。ご夫婦でキャッチボールは出来ていますか?ボール（パートナーにかける言葉）すら持っていない、というご夫婦もあると思います。. . . .

Communication with words is absolutely about conversations. Is a couple able to play [conversational] catch-ball?[9] I think there are certainly spouses who aren't able to have the word (or ball) to pitch at their partners. . . .

そこで、私がもっとも大切に思っているのは、心のコミュニケーション。『以心伝心』とよく言われますが、これはかなりハイレベル。「わかってると思ってた」なんて、喧嘩の種にしかなりません。

But I think that, by far, the most necessary communication is with hearts and souls. People talk a lot about "telepathic" communication, but that only happens at really high levels. There are many fights when one partner says, "I thought you had understood!"[10]

In this model, communication is clearly key, but its definition is also broad enough to include almost every action imaginable to save or protect a marriage. Moreover, Uchida specifically advises against the telepathic communication that was recommended in previous generations. The point is not that improving communication improves marriages but that, in many counselors' tips, "communication" becomes the general rubric through which marital advice is framed (Waki 2009).

A new group, the National Chauvinistic Husbands Association (Zenkoku teishu kanpaku kayokai), became a media darling in 2006, outlining the ways through which communication could save marriages. Founded in 2005, the group rose to prominence during the national reconsideration of conjugal relationships that occurred on the eve of the 2007 pension law change (Alexy 2007). As outlined on the group's website, the association members are husbands who recognize and want to change problems in their marital relationships.[11] In a play off twelve-step recovery programs but with apparent earnestness, this group enumerates a hierarchy of traits that demonstrate a husband's recovery from chauvinism. The list provides an example of common expectations that contemporary marital problems stem from male (mis)behavior, as well as a summation

of standard foci of marital risk. For our purposes, the fundamental point is the qualitative difference in the three highest levels below the "platinum master level"; these highest degrees of transformation come when men become able to speak.

初段 3年以上たって「妻を愛している」人	Level 1 A man who still loves his wife after more than three years.
二段 家事手伝いが上手な人	Level 2 A man who shares the housework.
三段 浮気をしたことがない人、ばれていない人	Level 3 A man who hasn't cheated or whose cheating hasn't been found out.
四段 レディーファーストを実践している人	Level 4 A man who puts "ladies first" principles into practice.
五段 愛妻と手をつないで散歩ができる人	Level 5 A man who hold hands with his darling wife while taking a walk.
六段 愛妻の話を真剣に聞くことができる人	Level 6 A man who can take seriously everything his darling wife says.
七段 嫁・姑問題を一夜にして解決できる人	Level 7 A man who can settle any problems between his wife [literally, bride] and mother in one night.
八段 「ありがとう」をためらわずに言える人	Level 8 A man who can say "thank you" without hesitation.
九段 「ごめんなさい」を恐れずに言える人	Level 9 A man who can say "I'm sorry" without hesitation.
十段 「愛している」を照れずに言える人	Level 10 A man who can say "I love you" without hesitation.
プラチナ・マスター段 妻にプラチナをプレゼントして「プロポーズ・アゲイン。」した人	Platinum Master level A man who gives his wife a "platinum present" by proposing again.

In this self-consciously performative example, anti-chauvinistic enlightenment comes not when men can say "thank you," "I'm sorry," or "I love you" with *true feeling*, but when they are able to say them *at all*. Conforming to a model of "love like air," in which spouses love each other but never articulate those feelings, this model for advancement never questions a man's love for his wife—seemingly, the men who don't love their wives wouldn't be interested in the group or wouldn't get past the introductory level. Instead of asking men to rediscover their love to save marriages, this chart asks men to *explicitly articulate* the feelings they are assumed to already have, suggesting that such articulations are the hardest things for men to do and the surest way to save a marriage.

The need to communicate love and affection in such explicit—and verbal—ways reflects new models for relationality between spouses. While the earlier norms suggested the best style of intimacy was for spouses to be fused into one body, thereby obviating the need for any verbal communication, the current models suggest that even if spouses feel like they shouldn't have to verbally communicate with each other, such communication is vitally necessary for a healthy relationship. Spouses who say "I love you" to each other are not just verbalizing their love, but are also simultaneously demonstrating their need to talk, thus attesting to the lack of any fusion between selves. Needing to speak suggests that spouses are fundamentally separate beings who, nevertheless, work to care for each other. In contrast to the older patterns of relationality and intimacy, this pattern of *connected independence* emphasizes the complicated web of connections and disconnections through which spouses build a relationship with each other. In this model for intimacy, spouses are ideally linked through emotional and affective ties rather than highly gendered structures of labor. Saying "I love you"—both having loving feelings and being able to share them out loud—marks relationships as aspiring to this newer kind of ideal type.[12]

Sadako, a semi-professional marriage counselor, described the work she and her husband needed to do around this specific point. In her mid-thirties and living a few hours from Tokyo, Sadako turned herself into an unpaid online marriage counselor. With a website advertising her willingness to answer questions, she estimates that she's exchanged emails with many thousands of clients over the few years she has been dispensing advice. Her training for this position was, she explained to me, the practice that came with listening to her friends, watching TV shows, and reading popular magazines.[13] Her ideas about what makes a good marriage, and therefore the advice she dispenses, frame verbal communication as an

important signifier of a healthy relationship. While her husband puttered around their kitchen assembling lunch for all of us (as well as their infant daughter)—very much playing the role of an *ikumen*[14]—Sadako contrasted their current happiness with how they used to treat each other.

あの頃はあの頃で普通だなって思ったんだけど。今思うともう冷め切っていて会話もないし、毎日仕事で帰りが遅くて、子供がいなかった時。で帰ってきて、ご飯を出して、「いただきます」も言わないで食べて。終わったらそのままで、お風呂入って寝ちゃうっていう。私がもうイライラしちゃって。イライラしちゃうから強く当たっちゃうんですよ。そしたらやっぱり、そういう夫婦が多いんですよね。だからこのままじゃマズイと思って穏やかにして自分を。毎日笑顔を忘れずに「お帰り」とか「ただいま」とか、挨拶を自分から多くするようになって。で、少しづつだんなもそれに答えてくれるようになって。一杯私が話しかけるの。会話が一番大事だと思うから、夫婦にとって。

In those days, we thought we were "normal." Back before we had kids, my husband would stay at work late, and we would only talk a little. After he got home, I'd serve dinner, but he wouldn't say "Thank you for this meal" or anything, but just eat, take a bath, and go to bed. I got so irritated! It was really irritating. But there are many couples living this way, I think. I started to think about it and realized that this was really bad. We couldn't go on this way. I started to remember every day to smile, to say, "Welcome home" or "I'm happy to be home."[15] Little by little, my husband got better at responding, and we started to actually talk. Conversation is the most important thing for couples, I think.

Sadako brought up her own marriage to demonstrate how common patterns of non-communication are and how problematic they can become. Not communicating, especially if spouses assume their feelings are clear and obvious, causes trouble and increases the likelihood of divorce in her mind.

Fujita-san, a happily married man in his mid-thirties with whom I talked in 2006, shared opinions and experiences that demonstrate the potential gaps between theories and practices surrounding the stakes of intimate communication. When I asked him directly, Fujita-san articulated the idea that better, stronger relationships were those that were built on air-like relationality. He suggested that a person who was so crass as to say "I love you" was doing something that was at once unconvincing, cinematic, and potentially American.

アリー：プロポーズはしましたか?

Allison: Did you propose [to your wife]?

藤田さん：一応しましたよ。したけど、そんな「結婚してください」とかそういうんじゃなくて。でもうちの奥さんも多分全然結婚する気だったんだと思うんで。自然に。どうする？　いつ来る？みたいな。じゃあ今度の3月でいいかなみたいな。そういうノリ . . . でした。 そんなテレビとか映画のような「アイ・ラーブ・ユー」みたいなのはなかった。自分もうちの奥さん。もよく言っているのは、2人とも空気みたいな人。	Fujita-san: I did in a roundabout way. I did, but it was none of this "Will you marry me?" kind of stuff. See, I knew that she wanted to get married. Just naturally, I knew. We knew. "What are we going to do?" "When should we?" Those kinds of things were what we were talking about. Things like, "OK, so, next year in March would be good, huh?" Kinda like that. It wasn't like how it's on TV or in the movies! There was none of this "I love you" stuff. Sometimes we call each other "people like air."
アリー：どういう意味ですか？	Allison: What does that mean?
藤田さん：要は、なきゃ困る。空気だから、なきゃ困る。でもあっても邪魔じゃない。	Fujita-san: Basically, if it wasn't there, we'd be in big trouble. It's air, so if it wasn't there, we'd be in trouble. But its existence is not intrusive.

The typed transcript fails to represent the mincing sarcasm with which Fujita-san delivered the key phrase in this quote: *I love you*. Although many Japanese people regularly use so-called English "loan words," Fujita-san rarely did (Stanlaw 2004). He does not speak English and generally described himself as an undereducated everyman who had been working in a suburban barbershop since he graduated from high school. This context, and my previous interactions with him, made his abrupt switch even more striking when he said "I love you" (pronounced *ai rābu yū*) with an English-derived pronunciation rather than the myriad ways to say a similar idea without referencing English. Although Japanese television dramas (to which he explicitly refers) could also include such outright articulations of affection, Fujita-san's switch into an English register made me think he was picturing the line being delivered by an American celebrity, a screen-sized Brad Pitt making a treacly declaration.

While Fujita-san presented himself as part of a quiet partnership demonstrated more through action than words, in practice his experience told a very different story. In introducing his marriage to me, he described his wife as a close friend with whom he shared deeply affective ties, saying, "My friend became my wife" [友達から奥さんになったって感じ]. Ten years into their marriage, with a son who is four years old, Fujita-san remained glowingly happy about his relationship. Atypically, he and his wife both live and work together; she also cuts hair in the same barber shop, so they

regularly see each other for many hours of every day. Although in the quotes above Fujita-san represented their relationship as one that rested on tacit communication so strong that they did not really need to discuss their decision to marry, in practice that exact time of his life was characterized by tremendous amounts of language. Fujita-san described his decision to marry his future wife as stemming from a series of absurdly expensive phone bills:

結婚したきっかけは、やっぱり経済的なこと。自分が千葉まで車で奥さんを送迎していたけど、高速代やガソリン代がかかって。あとは電話代。今みたいに携帯も無いし、電話料金が八万円にもなった。毎日話していたから。うちの奥さんが年下だから電話代ぐらいは自分が持とうと思って、かかってくると一回切って、こっちからかけ直した。なるべくうちの奥さんに負担をかけないようにね。でも八万円を超えた時はね。だって家賃より高かったから。

I decided to marry her because of financial reasons. Every time we went out, I drove to Chiba to pick her up and drop her off. Gas fees and toll-road fees cost me a lot. But the worst was a phone bill. There were no cell phones at that time. I was once charged ¥80,000 as a monthly charge.[16] We talked on the phone every day. But I didn't want to impose a financial burden on her because she is younger than me. So when she called me, I hung up right away and called her back.[17] But over ¥80,000 was too much. That was more than my rent.

Although Fujita-san first characterized his relationship as one in which understanding occurs without speech, in practice he had an obvious measure of precisely how verbal their relationship was. In this example, we see two divergent understandings of how a marriage proposal was prompted, discussed, and settled; his first characterization of their relationship as ideally air-like is rapidly revised to include so much talking that it became financially burdensome. I interpret this seeming contradiction to reflect Fujita-san's deep happiness with his marriage. In trying to represent it to me, he employed the rhetoric of "old-fashioned romance" while describing a relationality built through constant contact and verbal communication. It is also quite possible that all the talk that ran up an ¥80,000 phone bill did not seem, to Fujita-san, to be real "communication." Sure, they were talking, but precisely because they were talking about everyday occurrences rather than big ideas or deep feelings, such talk might have seemed less substantial. Speech, talking, and communication are not necessarily the same thing, and each connotes shifting and contested intimacies in contemporary Japan.

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In January 2014, I received an email request from BBC Radio reporters asking if I'd be willing to provide context and analysis of an event they were covering. "Love Your Wife Day," an event that began in 2008 in Tokyo, involves men yelling professions of love to their wives (Fujita 2013). Standing in a public park, in front of a powerful sound system, the men yell as loudly as possible, suggesting a hope that sheer volume might translate into affective efficacy. In video news coverage, the wives stand and giggle while their husbands shout love and afterward congratulate the embarrassed husbands for their courage and efforts ("Video" 2013). Although I had never attended this particular event, I was aware of similar activities that asked men to loudly and publicly verbalize their love; such activities are of a piece with the newly popular idea that verbal communication can be used to save marriages.

BBC interest in this event was not unusual, and in recent years multiple English-language news organizations have covered the relatively small event (Craft 2013; Fujita 2013). Such foreign media attention to Japanese intimate practices should be neither surprising nor overlooked. As discussed in this volume's introductory chapter, Japanese intimate practices have long been an object of fascination in the English-language press. The written introduction to this audio story makes clear its orientalizing efforts, describing the event as "one of the stranger rituals" within "the sometimes-bizarre standards of modern Japanese culture" (BBC Radio 2015). I interpret these media stories to simultaneously allow viewers to feel a self-satisfied degree of cultural relativism ("I am open-minded enough to accept strange practices as normal in Japanese culture") and enjoy the laughable weirdness of the situation ("What a strange way to be romantic!"). The Japanese example feels informational, if not educational, and yet nevertheless entertaining and wacky—everything a fluffy news piece aspires to. Although I taped a short interview with a BBC reporter in January 2014, I was told that it wouldn't air for another year; the network was preparing background with which to cover the same story in 2015 and seemed untroubled by the changes that might occur between those two disparate moments (BBC Radio 2015).

Although metapragmatic interest from foreign news media often overlaps with easy exoticism, this kind of story parallels Japanese attention to how people communicate and what they say in contemporary intimate relationships. As older styles of intimacy, symbolized through non-verbal "telepathic" communication, are increasingly read as representative of unhealthy connections, people work to negotiate between what feels good, what they think they should do, and what their partner might want.

Finding a balance between degrees of dependence and forms of connection, people use styles of communication to simultaneously enact and represent their intimate relationships. It is never easier said than done.

NOTES

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1. "Mi" follows "ma" in the Japanese syllabary system, as Mi-chan followed Ma-chan in Yumiko's family.

2. The fieldwork on which this chapter is based occurred first from 2005 to 2006, with regular follow-up research since then. I conducted ethnographic research in various marital, family, and personal counseling centers; spent time with married, divorcing, and divorced people; and conducted interviews among the same groups, as well as with counselors, lawyers, and religious leaders. Primarily based in Tokyo, I also conducted fieldwork in Chiba (the far suburbs of Tokyo) and Matsuyama city on Shikoku Island.

3. Since 1990, the population of men and women who have never been married increased substantially. For instance, in 1990, 6.7 percent of men aged 45–49 were never married, but that increased to 22.5 percent in 2010. Comparatively, in 1990, 4.6 percent of women aged 45–49 were never married, a figure that more than doubled to 12.6 percent in 2010 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2010). See Raymo (2003) and Ueno (2009) for more on the increasing rates of never-married men and women.

4. Although I do not have space in this section to engage it all, a large body of scholarship analyzes the intersection of emotion and language; for instance, see Levy (1984); Lutz (1988); Lutz and Abu-Lughold (1990); Ochs and Sheiffelin (1989); Palmer and Occhi (1999); Stankiewicz (1964). My ideas in this chapter draw from this rich literature.

5. Caffi and Janney use evocative phrasing to describe the risks inherent in representing emotion through language: "The complexity of the interface between language, people, and affect is implicit in the observation that: (1) we can all express feelings that we have, (2) we can all have feelings that we do not express, (3) we can all express feelings that we do not have, or feelings that we think our partners might expect or wish us to have, or feelings that simply might be felicitous to have in a given situation for particular reasons" (1994, 326).

6. Basso (1970, 219) also suggests that in the context of courting, young women especially are told to keep as silent as possible because speech might be read as a sign of wanton sexual experience.

7. One classic pattern is comparing annoying husbands to garbage (*sodai gomi*; literally, garbage so large one has to pay to get rid of it) or wet leaves (*nure ochiba*), which are clingy and hard to clean up. Taking such rhetorical patterns seriously, we also need to be aware of the ways in which these highly gendered performances of complaining might reflect the social norms of female talk about (annoying) husbands, rather than actual annoying husbands (Lebra 1984, 124; Salamon 1975). My research engages the joys and social rewards possible for men and women telling stories of marital dissatisfaction, while I also register and represent attempts to convey genuine dissatisfaction about marital relationships. The patterns of complaint and the gaps between speech that might be fun to say and speech intended to convey a real problem remain worthy of attention.

8. This practice is no longer as prevalent as it once was but was built from the premise that if a person knew he or she was dying, the experience would be even more stressful and difficult. Therefore, especially for patients with cancer, Japanese medical professionals regularly did not inform a patient of a terminal diagnosis and relied on family members to decide if the patient should be told. Although this system might seem distasteful or patronizing, it meshed with frankly paternalistic attitudes by doctors and a sense that the doctors were trained and able to bear the burden of terminal diagnoses (Annas and Miller 1994; Higuchi 1992). I thank China Scherz for pointing out that such strategic silences by doctors surrounding terminal diagnoses are not limited to Japan (Harris, Shao, and Sugarman 2003; Rothman 1992).

9. A similar idea is expressed by Waki (2009, 61).

10. The broader context for this quote, including more advice about communication, can be found on the original website: http://www.jukunen-rikon.com/2007/03/post_37.html.

11. This list was originally published on the organization's website: http://www.zenteikyou.com.

12. At the same time that the benefits of air-like relationships are being questioned in intimate relationships, a relatively new insult derides people who "can't read the air" (*kūki yomani*; often shortened to KY)—that is, those who are socially oblivious or clueless. The insult derived from this idea is not limited to intimate relationships and is instead a general term to describe a socially awkward person. While being able to "read the air" might be judged as a positive attribute, it is different from the notion that married spouses assume their feelings are so obvious as to not need verbalization. The centrality of "air" in contemporary Japanese discourse about relationality seems ripe for future theorizing. I thank Laura Miller for bringing up this point.

13. Sadako told me that she used advice from magazines to give suggestions to her online clients. For more on the ways that magazines directed at women influence public discourse about gender and intimacy, see Holthus (2010) and Sato (2003).

14. This newly popular term describes fathers who are actively involved in rearing their children.

15. Like "Thank you for this meal," an expression Sadako used above in this quote, the phrases she uses here are everyday greetings that are very typically used to demonstrate the kind of "polite speech" that should occur within healthy families. These are *aisatsu* phrases, which are commonly recognized greetings and responses. Elsewhere (Alexy 2011, 896) I have written about Japanese marital guidebooks suggesting the regular use of *aisatsu* as a way to improve one's marriage.

16. This is approximately $800.

17. In Japan, only the person placing a call is charged; someone receiving a call isn't charged at all. In this situation, Fujita-san was being generous and bearing the cost of all the phone calls between himself and his future wife, even when she was the person who initiated many calls.

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