Interactive Elements:
Japanese Students' Conversation Units in English*

Tae Okada

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Abstract: Sixteen 10-minute English dialogs between a native- and a non-native speaker are coded clause by clause in terms of such interactive elements as topic development, request, response, and communication failure. Each of the interactive elements is briefly defined and illustrated by relevant passages quoted from the dialogs. The discussion, which focuses on the non-native speakers' performance, deals not only with the results of coding procedures but also the data collected from the speakers by the elicitation techniques of thinking aloud.

Introduction

This is a report on sixteen informal dialogs in English by sixteen pairs consisting of a native Japanese-speaking student and an American-English speaking student.** The purpose of this study is to learn about idiosyncrasies of conversational English spontaneously produced by the ten Japanese university students, six of whom participated in two of the dialogs each, the first in September-October and the second in April-May of the

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following year. During the seven months or so between the two recorded dialogs, the partners met more or less frequently to practice each other's target language. Findings from the analyses of these recorded dialogs will hopefully contribute to improving English language instruction, particularly for developing speaking proficiency of Japanese students at the university level.

Over the past years, an ever-increasing demand has been placed upon the university teaching staff to conduct classes for improving the English speaking abilities of the students. For that reason, a need is felt by the author and her collaborators for better information on the kind of English that students are "naturally" capable of producing at the very starting stages of their experience with speaking English. It is presumed that only on the basis of students' natural competence, further steps toward proficiency and effective teaching devices might be built. It is hoped that the present study might be able to do its share of clarifying some of the aspects of student performance at initial stages.

Research background

Given the functional views on language (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), conversational interaction has been a topic of numerous studies from various angles. Hymes (1974), for instance, focuses on the context in which a speech event takes place; Grice (1975) proposes maxims on the basis of which interlocutors operate in conversational encounters; for Goffman (1967) and Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974/78), conversation is fundamentally a turn-taking social ritual; for sociolinguists such as Labov (1972a, b) and Trudgill (1978, 1984), speech is an expression of social, ethnic, and gender status or identity.

Given these varied theoretical backgrounds, conversation analyses deal with a wide range of encounters: transactional contacts (Hasan, 1985), business negotiations (Aoi, 1984; Binnedijk, 1987; Goldman, 1994; Graham, 1985; Graham & Sano, 1989; McCreary, 1986; March, 1989; Mead, 1994; Moran, 1991; Yamada, 1990, 1992), telephone conversations (Halmari, 1993), medical and legal consultations, colleagues' exchanges (Tannen, 1984), and casual conversation (Eggins & Slade, 1997). Also, various aspects of conversational English have been focused on such as pauses (Beattie, 1980; Griffiths, 1991; Jefferson, 1989; Lennon, 1990; Schegloff, 1981), repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977; Schwartz, 1980; White, 1997), topics (Sasaki, 1997; Yamada, 1990), feedback (Maynard, 1990), and back-channeling (Hayashi & Hayashi, 1991; Maynard, 1986, 1997; Schegloff, 1981; White, 1989, 1997). In more function-oriented aspects, there have also been studies on apology (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Garcia, 1989), offers and requests (Fukushima, 1990), face (Matsumoto, 1988; Scollon & Scollon, 1983a, b), and communication breakdown (Milroy, 1984).

Although many earlier studies are more or less relevant to the teaching of spoken English in Japan, there still is little information directly concerned with the Japanese university situation where most students are just beginning to speak English as a foreign language.

Conversational material for analysis

The present study deals with a unique combination of factors. First, the material for analysis is a set of dialogs between a native and a non-native English speaker, which is not necessarily uncommon, but in this study the partners are both university students and share the interest of learning each

other's native language. In that sense, they are close societal equals. Second, the purpose of the dialogs is simply for the partners to get acquainted with each other. With no further request or instruction, the interlocutors decide on their own how to utilize the opportunity given to them.[1]

All the sixteen dialogs under study are approximately ten minutes long. The Japanese interlocutors are second-year students at Doshisha University, all of them non-English-majors, while the English-speaking partners are third-year college students from the United States, studying at Doshisha Univesity in a study-abroad program. They are at varying levels of second-language proficiency.[2] Each Japanese student is paired with one of the students from the U. S., and the sixteen pairs are instructed to meet and get acquainted with each other through the ten-minute dialog in English, which is recorded both on video- and audio-tapes and transcribed.

Encoding the conversation units

Transcribed dialogs are divided into conversation units which are coded unit by unit by the author and the two collaborators. Conversation units are speech segments usually defined by pausal traits or intonational contours and holistically perceived as meaningful in terms of communicative value. In syntactic terms, the conversation units may be sentences, or major or minor clauses.[3] Among the conversation units are some with a single code; more frequently, however, a conversation unit has more than one code assigned to it. This is because a single unit often bears more than one type of conversational significance: asking a question, for instance, serves as a way of introducing a new topic, or responding to a question commonly offers or adds information.

Codes are determined by unanimous agreement among the three collaborators, usually after more or less lengthy discussion. A tentative inventory of codes compiled on the basis of various resource materials is revised as needed, again by unanimity among the three collaborators. Since the primary objective of the present analysis is understanding the types of verbal utterances spontaneously produced by the students, no more than the minimum requisite attention is paid to pauses or gestures, which are to be dealt with separately.

Overview of the categories of codes

Resulting from the coding procedures, three major categories of conversational elements emerge: control elements, processing elements, and interactive elements. Since the first two major categories are not of immediate concern in the present paper, they are only described in broad outlines here.

The first category, the control elements, is further divided into three sub-categories: planning, monitoring and operating with cultural perspectives. While conducting a dialog, the partners plan or monitor the wording of ideas, check the extent of each other's comprehension, and assess the degree of the partner's linguistic and cultural proficiency in order to maintain smooth continuation of the dialog. All these elements in the first category occur simultaneously with the elements of the other two major categories, i. e., processing elements and interactive elements. In other words, the dialog partners keep conversing at the same time as they plan and monitor the on-going conversation. In that sense, the control elements are meta-conversational.

Items included in the first category of control elements along with

abbreviations are as follows:

I. Control Elements
  A. Planning:
    1. Language planning .....LP
    2. Conversation planning.....CP
  B. Monitoring:
    1. Conversation monitoring .....CM
    2. Comprehension monitoring
      (a) self-comprehension monitoring.....SCM
      (b) other-comprehension monitoring.....OCM
    3. Production monitoring
      (a) self production monitoring.....SPM
      (b) other production monitoring.....OPM
    4. Language assessment:
      (a) self language assessment .....SLA
      (b) other language assessment.....OLA
  C. Cultural Perspectives .....CUL

The second set of codes have to do with the processing of conversation units. Listeners frequently need to infer the intended meaning of the speaker's utterances, either on the basis of what is stated by the speaker or by referring to the listener's own previous experiences of various types. Also, in the course of a dialog, verbal expressions are sometimes paraphrased or simplified, and at other times supplemented or substituted by gestures or onamatopoeia. These processes contribute to achieving communication by supporting or supplementing the verbal exchanges. The

codes in the second or processing category include the following:

II. Processing Elements
  A. Inferencing
    1. Language inferencing.....LI
    2. Global inferencing (world knowledge, personal experience, non-verbal knowledge).....GI
  B. Substitution
    1. Paraphrasing
      (a) self-paraphrasing .....SP
      (b) other-paraphrasing.....OP
      (c) other language paraphrasing (self/other).....OLP
    2. Kinesics (substituting verbal expression) .....KN
    3. Onomatopoeia .....ONO
  C. Simplification
    1. Simplification on vocabulary/syntax level .....VS
    2. Simplification on discourse/topic level .....DS
  D. Imagery
    1. Visualization (mental process of having internal images) ...VI
    2. Gestures (supplemental to verbal expression).....GE

Interactive elements with sample passages

The chief substance of the dialog lies in the third and final category, the interactive elements. These are related to topic development, making or responding to requests, forming discourse, using formulaic expressions, and dealing with communication failure. These elements contribute to the

making of the verbal expressions in the dialogs between student interlocutors:

III. Interactive Elements
- A. Topic Development
  - 1. Topic initiation ..... TI
  - 2. Personal information ..... PI
  - 3. Additional information/explanation ..... AI
  - 4. Self-disclosure ..... SD
  - 5. Comment ..... CMT
  - 6. Turn-holding ..... TH
- B. Request
  - 1. Request for information ..... RI
  - 2. Request for confirmation/clarification/explanation ..... RC
  - 3. Global reprise ..... GR
  - 4. Specific reprise ..... RS
  - 5. Request for slowing down ..... RSD
- C. Response
  - 1. Answer:
    - (a) direct answer ..... DA
    - (b) delayed answer ..... DA
    - (c) insufficient answer ..... IA
    - (d) wrong answer ..... WA
  - 2. *Aizuchi*
    - (a) non-committal ..... NC
    - (b) acknowledgment/agreement ..... AK
    - (c) confirmation ..... CNF

(d) empathy.....EM

3. Echo

(a) question .....ECQ

(b) confirmation/clarification.....ECC

(c) emphasis/empathy/agreement.....ECE

D. Formulaic Expression .....FE

E. Discourse Formation

1. Cooperative discourse completion.....CDC

2. Description

(a) explanation.....EX

(b) narration.....NR

(c) commentary.....CT

F. Communication Failure

1. Comprehension failure/error

(a) vocabulary failure/error.....VCF

(b) syntax failure/error.....SCF

2. Production failure

(a) vocabulary failure .....VPF

(b) syntax failure .....SPF

3. Repair

(a) self-repeating.....SR

(b) other-repeating.....OR

(c) self-supplementing.....SS

(d) other-supplementing .....OS

(e) self-correction.....SC

(f) other-correction.....OC

The interactive elements, which are the major concern in this paper, are briefly explained below item by item with examples from the sixteen dialogs under study.

A. Topic development

The types of topics that appear in the dialogs have been dealt with in Ito and Okada (1996), from which only the list of topics is reproduced here:

1. Each other's names
2. Fields of interest
3. Year at college
4. Age
5. Where originally from
6. Name of home college
7. Current domicile
8. Family and host family
9. Language study
10. Travel in Japan and abroad
11. Doshisha campuses
12. Pastimes and extracurricular activities
13. Future plans
14. Conversation partners
15. Vacations

In addition to these topics which recur in the dialogs, there are others such as earthquakes, currency exchange rates, and experience with computers that appear in just one of the sixteen dialogs. The central concern in what

follows is how these topics are introduced and developed by the interlocutors.

The first step in topic development is **topic initiation**, i.e., presenting a new topic. Most often this is done by asking a question, usually starting with one of the interrogative words "what, who, where, when, how" and "why", although sometimes a yes-no question achieves the same goal (Examples 1) and 2) below). As in the third example below, a new topic may be introduced by an affirmative sentence with an interrogative intonation superimposed.[4] There are rare instances where Japanese speakers make a statement to present a topic, usually offering some personal information as in Example 4) below:

1) D1-S21: So, where are you from?

2) D4-F103: Do you like, do you like watching movies?

3) D3-F199: In this summer, I went to Scotland? (With a rising intonation)

4) D8-F1: I'm training *karate.*

Since the purpose of the sixteen recorded dialogs is for the partners to get acquainted with each other, there are frequent exchanges of remarks related to **personal information**. Usually, personal information is given in a brief sentence or two in response to a question. Occasionally, however, as in the following example, offering personal information develops into a stretch of explanation, while the other party intervenes with the brief utterances

shown in the parentheses.[5] In such cases, the first conversation unit is coded as personal information, and the subsequent units are numbered as **additional information** 1, 2, 3, etc.

5) D2-S7: I'm a second-year student, mm, my major is political science, mm, and some day I will go to study, especially in America, in America. (Hum.) And so, yeah, that's the reason why I take this program, but unfortunately, my partner moved, and he didn't tell his new address, so, um, I didn't meet him. (Humm.) And so my English didn't improve. (That's too bad.) Yeah. ('cause there was a lot of other students I know that wanted to have a conversation partner. It's too bad they didn't get.) Uh-huh, yeah, mm, yeah, person-to-person match or don't match, it is very difficult.

The next element, **self-disclosure**, contains varying degrees of personal feelings such as like, dislike, and surprise in addition to offering information or explanation. In the following passage, the Japanese speaker uses the verb "adore" which has just been learned from the American partner to disclose personal feelings toward the U. S.:

6) D3-S222: I am so feeling of adoring? (Uh-huh?) Adoring in Am-, United States, so, (Ah, fo, for the United States.) Uh-huh? (Really.) Adore for? (Adoration of, or "I adore the United States") Adore, yeah. So if I can have big vacation, I want to go there. But the choice is very difficult because I don't wanna go to dangerous part of United States.

In the units coded as **comment**, the speaker expresses a personal view or judgment either on the topic at hand or the statement just made by the partner.

7) D5-S137: [In Hokkaido] There is real nature. It is beautiful.

8) D6-S57: Kyodai [i.e., Kyoto University] is very, very, not clean place. (Yeah.) But atmosphere is very good, (Um) And I want to, I want to study like that kind of (Yeah) place. (Umm) Here is too clean to study. (laughs)

Of all the elements of topic development, **turn-holding** is unique in that it contains little substantive meaning, but has the function of indicating that the speaker wishes to keep the current conversational turn. It usually takes either the form of what is commonly called "filled pause" such as "um, " "ah," "mm," or silent pause. Filled pauses are meticulously transcribed in the present study, while the silent pauses are yet to be measured electronically as need for analysis arises.

B. Request

Requesting information, confirmation, clarification, or explanation is similar to topic development in that it is a voluntary speech act with substantive content. In fact, **request for information** offers the dialog partner a new topic, and for that reason it is at once interpretable as topic initiation unless the topic is already in place. Requesting usually takes the interrogative form, and thus, a large number of interrogative sentences in the dialogs are doubly labeled as requests for information as well as topic

initiations. Where information is requested regarding an on-going topic, requesting aims for more specific types of responses from the dialog partner for further development of the topic, in which case the reply is labeled as additional information/explanation. The following interrogatives are examples of requests for information which are, at the same time, topic initiations:

9) D4-S21: What did you do during spring vacation?

10) D5-S94: Do you like fishing?

Requests for confirmation, clarification, or explanation are interactive mechanisms for helping the partner to further expand the current topic:

11) D4-S44: Where did you go? Did you go to Mount Fuji?

12) D2-S144: Ah, which campus do you like?

Global and specific reprises are requests necessitated by failure in listening-comprehension. When the failure is total or near-total, the result is global reprise such as “eh?” or a gesture or posture implying a request for repetition or some other form of help from the partner. If the failure is partial, some verbal request may be made such as the following:

13) D1-F111: (What year are you in school?) Wha-? Hm? (Um, are you first year?) Two, second-year student.

14) D8-F139: (Water polo is uh, it's like soccer, in a pool. Do you know? Water polo.) Pond?

Repeated failure in listening comprehension may eventually lead to an explicit **request for slowing down** the pace of speech, of which there is just one instance in all the sixteen dialogs reviewed in this paper:

15) D8-F: A, um, um, a, *chotto*, a, a little slow, slow speaking, please.

C. Response

Response to the partner's utterance may be answers, *aizuchi* or back channeling, or echoing. By far the commonest and most straightforward of answers is a **direct answer**, of which there are a large number of examples in the sixteen dialogs. Direct or indirect, answers carry a certain amount of information as Grice's (1975) maxims dictate, which means that the conversation units coded as answers must also be labeled according to the types of contribution to topic development, i.e., personal information, additional information/explanation, or self-disclosure.

Response to questions or requests may at times take less straightforward forms than direct answers, resulting in round-about or **delayed answers** as in the following passages:

16) D1-S106: (So what can you tell me about *endaka*, if you're studying economics?) (Laughs) I couldn't understand umm, perfectly, but (Do you think it'll keep going?) Keep going? (Continue.) Umm, I don't think so, because some of my friends say to me, *endaka* is mm, bad for America or other countries, and also bad for Japan. (Um-

hum.) Mmm, very dangerous things.

17) D4-S54: (So, do you plan to become a lawyer?) No. (No? Why are you studying law?) Mmm, many law students in Japan, don't become a lawyer, (Um-hum) because the test for being lawyer is very, very difficult.

In the first example, D1's interlocutor rephrases the initial question while D1 delays the answer. To the rephrased question, D1 gives a somewhat direct answer by saying "I don't think so," adding, however, what ostensibly friends think, still avoiding the statement of D1's own views, which is requested in the first place. When the speaker finally says "very dangerous things," it is not clear whether this is the speaker's own view or what "some of my friends" think regarding the partner's initial question. In the latter example, the Japanese student's reply to the initial question is simply "No," which, for the interlocutor's intent is insufficient for an answer, therefore, a follow-up question is asked, to which D4 never gives a direct reply in the dialog, but offers a delayed and indirect answer by stating that many law students in Japan don't become lawyers because the law exam is "very, very difficult."

One might think *a priori* that a round-about or delayed answer is a hallmark of Japanese speech patterns. Although statistics is not the central concern of the present paper, in order to prevent any erroneous presumptions it should be pointed out that native-English-speaking students give delayed answers at least as often as, if not more often than, the Japanese partners, as illustrated in the following passages:

18) A2-S176: (So, what major?) Um, at first, uh, I was an English major. (Um) But I, I sort of fell into East Asian Studies. (Sorry?) I fell, in to East Asian, (Yeah) I just started studying Japanese, and then I started studying history and literature, too. (Ah, I see.) So now I'm East Asian Studies.

19) A7-F158: (You're, you're studying Japanese, why did you choose Japanese?) Um, in Ohio? (Um-hum) Do you know, um, there's a Honda plant. (Um-huh?) Honda? (Honda? Ah, yes, I know.) In, uh, in Ohio. (Um-hum) In the town next to mine. (Umm.) So there's many many Japanese students (Ah.) in my high school. (In your high school?) Hum. (Ooh) (laughs)

In the first example, the chronological stream of thought delays the answer to the partner's question, while in the second example, circumstantial explanation pushes the main point further and further down, and in the meantime, the topic drifts away from the starting point of why the American student is studying Japanese, to which no direct reply is ever given anywhere in the rest of the dialog.

Insufficient answer is illustrated above in 17) by D4's one-word reply, "No." With no intention of being blunt or abrupt, Japanese partners sometimes fall short of supplying an expected amount of information, inviting further queries from the partner:

20) D8-F189: (Do you just have one brother? Do you have one brother?) Yes. (Do you have any sisters?) No. (I have um, one sister and two brothers.) Mm. (And they're all older than I am.) (D8 tilts head

down and toward partner.) (They're all older?) Oh, yeah.

21) D3-S37: (Do you live in Kyoto?) Yes, but my home is Tokyo. (Ah, Tokyo.) A month ago, my home was Kobe. (Ahh, I'm sorry.) Ah, why? (It's okay?) It's okay. (It wasn't destroyed?) No. (Ah, you're lucky.) Yes, very, very lucky.

22) D3-S47: (Do you have your own apartment in Kyoto?) Yes. (Ah, is it nice?) Yes. [laughs] (Better than living with your parents?) [nods] Ooh.

23) D6-S69: (But outside it's really, everybody's really lively today.) Yes. (What is today?) Today is ahh, April first was ... gradu-, eh, to, not graduation, to–the *nyuugaku*–the opposite (Oh!) from–(the new students came to...) Yes, um-hum, and now every circle or club wants to get the (Aah) new students. (Ah, Okay.)

Perhaps rather surprisingly, there are only five instances of insufficient answers from the Japanese partners in the sixteen dialogs. The think-aloud[6] data collected immediately after the recording of the dialog clearly indicate that 21) is a case of simplification–a conversational tactic of avoiding detailed explanation by, often overly, simplifying the content: in 21), D3 intentionally chooses not to describe the extent of the damage her home in Kobe suffered from in the Kansai earthquake, a topic which D3 later in the dialog discusses willingly and at length with the same partner. In 23) D6's "Yes," on the other hand, calls for the follow-up request for information, "What is today?" to which D6 has a vocabulary problem in answering, as

disclosed by D6 in the think-aloud immediately following the dialog. (See remarks following 49) in Section **F** below.)

Wrong answers are even rarer than insufficient answers. The only two instances quoted below represent two entirely different cases of wrong answers: the one in 24) concerns the use of "yes" and "no" in response to a negative question, a clear case of native language transfer, and the other in 25) is caused by misunderstanding the question, a syntactic comprehension failure:

24) D2-F63: (But she wasn't a princess before?) Yeah, uh. (She was NOT...) She, she (a princess before? Before, she was just a regular person?) Oh, yeah. (But she was married and now ...) Yes, yes (she's a princess?)

25) D7-F2: (Well, what year are you here?) Uh, I ... um, Osaka. I live in Osaka.

Aizuchi, or back-channeling as it is often called, in its most casual or non-committal form, is a common verbal signal used by the listener to tell the speaker that the utterance is actually being listened to and has such forms as "mm, um, uh-hum, ah, ahh, oh, ooh." It is much like nodding in that it sends the message in a brief second that the floor is to be kept by the speaker. In addition to that basic message, again much like nodding, *aizuchi* might convey any of a number of nuances such as approval, acknowledgment, agreement, confirmation, sympathy, and the like. In addition to the non-committal type of *aizuchi* just described, the present paper recognizes three other types of *aizuchi*: (b) acknowledgment and/or

agreement, (c) confirmation, and (d) empathy. For acknowledgment or agreement, a brief but more clearly pronounced utterances than for non-committal forms are used such as “Uh-hum,” “Yeah,” “Yes,” “Oh yes,” while common forms for confirmation are even more strongly pronounced or repeated as in “Yes, yes,” “Ah yes,” “Oh, yeah,” or “Oh yes, I know.” The *aizuchi* with empathy is always marked with an emphatic intonation and takes such forms as “Yees!” “Ah!” “Yeah/Yes, really,” “Oh, really?!” “Me too!” and “AAHH!” followed by a comment “it’s very important!”[7] The demarcation between any two of the four types, however, is not necessarily clear or distinct. One type may well overlap with the next, or one may gradually slide into the next. In that sense, the four types of *aizuchi* are gradations from the communicatively neutral or non-committal floor-ceding signal to the most emotionally loaded feedback of empathy. It is commonly believed that *aizuchi* is more often used in Japanese than in English. Therefore, it is of interest to set up these separate types of *aizuchi* for further investigation as to how often the Japanese speakers use *aizuchi* while speaking English and conversely what the English speakers do with it in their conversation.

The next group of brief responses is the **echo**, an exact repetition of the partner’s utterance, often just a part of a conversation unit, as a way of presenting a (a) question, (b) confirmation or clarification or request thereof, or (c) emphasis or empathy including strong agreement. Echoing is often effectively interpreted by the partner as a request for repeating or paraphrasing what is just uttered or as a request for confirmation:

26) D7-F49: (What authors are you studying?) Authors? (Writers.) Writers?

27) D5-F39: (... we're staying with host family.) Host family. (Um-hum. So,) Host family is a father, mother? (Um-hum. I have my mother, father, and then two sisters.) Two sisters. How old?

28) D6-F68: (Do you know the word amusement park?) Musement park? A-musement park?) Ah, oh. (It's like Expo Land in Osaka?) Ah, yes, I know.

D. Formulaic expression

Formulaic expressions are idiomatic phrases and sentences of greetings, gratitude, apology, and the like that are commonly used by native speakers and memorized as part of basic foreign language learning. These are repeated either *in toto* or in part by the foreign language speaker. In the dialogs under study, there are only three instances, two of them by the same speaker D3, of formulaic expressions probably because circumstances do not call for any more:

29) D3-S6: What is your school name? (Middlebury.) Middlebury? (Mi-do-ru-be-ri.) Middlebury, thank you.

30) D1-S171: (But I, I sort of fell into East Asian studies.) Sorry? (moves head forward toward the interlocutor).

It is to be noted that the Japanese speakers are using "thank you" and "sorry" in connection with communication failure, while native English speakers use these expressions to thank for a favor (A8-S187), apologize for

having forgotten something (A3-S6), or for expressing sympathy for a major earthquake (A4-S29 in 21) above). In 30) above, D3 has difficulty capturing the name of the school until the American student pronounces it in a Japanese fashion, for which D3 thanks the partner; 31) is a case of global reprise, where comprehension failure is total or near-total and a request is being made for either repetition or paraphrasing.

E. Discourse formation

Discourse formation is a category of codes applicable to a group of conversation units produced either interactively by both dialog participants or in solo by one of the interlocutors. If both interlocutors stay on a certain topic for more than a few short exchanges, a passage of conversational discourse is developed cooperatively, which is coded as **cooperative discourse completion**. The unique example of cooperative discourse completion observed in the sixteen dialogs is the following:

31) D6-F165: (... they know how to say “Pleased to meet you” but they don’t know how to say, uh, they don’t know how to a, uh,) More? (they don’t know how to really converse, y’know?)

In this passage, the native-English-speaking partner tries to find a verbal expression for an idea, and in the meantime, the Japanese partner attempts to supply a word to complete the sentence. This differs from other supplementing, which is among the measures of overcoming communication failure (See Section **F** below). The cooperative discourse completion does not involve language failure in either of the dialog participants, while other supplementing is supplying language elements,

most notably a vocabulary item, to assist one of the parties to complete an utterance otherwise not likely to be completed due to proficiency limitations.

If, on the other hand, one of the interlocutors does most of the talking for more than several sentences with the other party largely just nodding or acknowledging, the stretch of discourse is considered as **description**, which includes explanation, narration and commentary. Given the overall circumstances of the sixteen dialogs under analysis, instances of discourse are relatively short. For one thing, the dialogs are only 10 minutes long and do not go beyond casual self-introductory encounters. Besides, the interlocutors are equal partners in an interactive frame of mind, so that they are not in a situation where one is to talk more or less extensively to the other as in an interview or briefing session. There are only several brief cases of explanation attempted by the Japanese speakers, of which two have been quoted above in sample passage 5) of D2's self-introductory remark and 16) where D1 tries to talk about the appreciation of the Japanese currency referred to as *endaka*. Two other examples follow:

32) D7-F72: ([In *monogatari*] Are there *kanji* that aren't used now?) Ah, in old days, they don't use *kanji*. (They don't?!) (both laugh) *Hiragana*? *Kanji* change *hiragana*. During Heian time, they don't use it so much. Only men use *kanji*.

33) D1-S154: (Isn't it a problem to miss two months of school?) I think so, so, um (both laugh) after English class, uh, usually, I ended English class and physical class (physical? Physic, Physical?) Physical, uh, gymnas- (Physical education? OK) Education, in

> Tanabe. (Uh-huh.) So I am a third-year student. (Oh, wow.) So I will go to Imadegawa. So only major, (laughs) economic classes, so I must to, (laughs) I must go to Imadegwa campus three days a week, (Um-hum) so I planned.

All the cases of description by the Japanese speakers are in the subcategory of explanation, although D1's remark on *endaka* in 16) above may be categorized as commentary. Since the three subcategories of description concern the content or subject matter, they may not be perfectly distinct but overlap with each other. Also, these remarks are interspersed with brief utterances from the partner due to the fact that the dialogs are in an informal conversational setup and not an interview situation. The reason that these are considered single stretches of discourse is that the partner is in no way intending to interrupt or take over the turn, and the speaker is operating securely within the current turn. Thirdly, it may be argued that these passages are not substantial enough to be categorized separately as discourse formation. The judgment is made, however, in relative terms. The fact that there are only several instances observed in 160 minutes of recorded conversation proves that these passages stand out in length and coherence. If the dialogs deal with more involved topics at higher levels of language proficiency, these same passages may no longer be so noticeable or need to be separated from the rest of the conversation units. Discourse formation is a relative notion.

F. Communication failure

The last category of interactive elements deals with communication failure or error of various types. The category is divided into

comprehension failure or error, production failure or error, and devices of repair.

Comprehension failure/error is further divided into those concerning vocabulary, syntax, and entire utterances. Vocabulary comprehension failure or error are relatively rare, reflecting the fact that the Japanese students are fairly strong in basic vocabulary comprehension. There are, however, five cases of failure in understanding vocabulary items in the given conversational contexts, of which two are in the passages quoted in 28) regarding the word "amusement park," solved by the partner's extra-clear pronunciation of the first syllable, and in 16) where the phrase "keep going" proves to be a problem, for which echoing of the phrase brings forth paraphrasing by the partner, "continue." Two other cases are as follows:

34) D5-F138: (And my high school was a boarding school?) (laughing) Boring school?! (In the United States.)

35) D4-S80: (Do you want to become a professional, then?) Professi-? (Uh, someone uh, *senmonsya*, I think?) Ahh, a law profession-al? (Any kind.) Ah, umm, umm, I don't decide.

In 34) the misunderstanding remains unnoticed until after the replay of the video when the phrase is explained by the think-aloud interviewer. In 35), on the other hand, a partial echo by D4 somehow saves the communication and in the process proves that the word "professional" is not entirely unfamiliar to D4.

Syntax comprehension failure concerns the failure in understanding sentences, of which there are five instances observed in the sixteen dialogs

under study. Interestingly, all the five cases are related to a single sentence type: “What year are you?”

36) D4-F10: (Uh, what year are you?) Uh, major? (First year?) Oh, I am second year student.

37) D4-S29: (What year are you?) Hum? (Are you in your third year?) Ah, yes.

38) D5-S14: (What year are you?) Hum? (What year are you?) I am twenty. (Ah. Oh. What grade? What is your grade?) *Eeto*, third, *aa chigau*, sophomore. (Sophomore. Oh wait, third is junior, actually.) Junior? (Junior.) Ah. (Freshman, sophomore, junior.) Oh, I see.

The two other instances of this kind are in passages 13) and 25) above where the interlocutors’ paraphrasing of the question saves communication. There is no other sentence in the sixteen dialogs that causes syntax comprehension failure. Two different types of paraphrasing are observed in these five cases, one involving “first year,” “second year,” or “third year” as in 36) and 37), and the other, using the word “grade” as in 38). The fact that the paraphrased question is readily understood by D5 in 38) as well as the question asked by D3 in 39) below suggests the background of the confusion caused by the words “year” and “grade”:

39) D3-S133: May, um, may I ask you? What grade are you in? (I just finished my third year, so I’m a fourth year, senior.)

Most Japanese participants state, in the remarks made on the dialogs immediately afterward, that they have greater difficulty retrieving the needed vocabulary items from memory than they actually indicate verbally in the dialogs. Just how many of the extremely frequent pauses are related to vocabulary **production failure** or delay is not clear. The following examples are more or less clearly indicated cases of vocabulary production failure or error:

40) D5-F70: But so you can discriminate? Discriminate, eh? (Mm? Disc-um, maybe not. Not disc- How can I say, distinguish?) Ah. (laugh)

41) D5-F178: I can't hold the (gestures as if holding a rail) hold the ... (the side? Um-hum?) so it is difficult (Ahh) for me.

42) D1-S155: I ended English class and physical class. (Physical? Physic, physical?) Physical, uh, gymnas- (Physical Education? OK.) education, in Tanabe.

43) D2-S105: My friend didn't go. (Um) So my plan absolutely um, break (laughs).

When communication fails, some recovery device has to be employed including what is commonly called **"repair."**[8] In the category of repair are included repeating, supplementing and correcting either by the speaker, in which case the procedures are called self-repeating, self-supplementing and self-correcting, or by the listener which result in other-repeating, other-

supplementing, and other-correcting. Illustrative samples follow except for other-correcting, of which no instance is observed in the dialogs under analysis:[9]

44) [Self-Repeating] D2-F101: I very, I very like her, like her.

45) [Self-supplementing] D1-F172: He is thirty-four . . . years old.

46) [Self-correcting] D4-S118: (Where do you live?) Umm, do you know Daimaru Department Store? (Uh-huh) I live near here. (Oh!) Near there.

47) [Other-repeating] D3-F173: (So there's many many Japanese students) Ah. (in my high school.) In your high school? (Hum.) Ooh. (laughs) Um, maybe they can speak only English. (Japanese.) No? Japanese?

48) [Other-supplementing] D7-F21: Whose name, do you know whose name of writer in Japanese? (Um, uh, a few. I read um, Murakami ... oh.) Haruki?

The fact that efforts towards repair do not always succeed as intended is not necessarily obvious from the transcribed text without the speaker's explanation later on the background. The following passage involves one such instance regarding the vocabulary production difficulty on the word *nyuugaku* (entering university):

49) D6-S: (What is today?) Today is ahh, April first was ... gradu- *eeto*, not graduation, to, the *nyuugku*, the opposite (Oh!) from, (The new students came to ...) Yes, um-hum. And now every circle or club wants to get the ... (Aah.) new students. (Ah, OK.)

During the thinking aloud session conducted immediately after the dialog, it is explained that, in the passage 49), D6 is looking for help from the American interlocutor for the English word corresponding to "*nyuugaku(shiki)* (entrance ceremony)" and never gets it. This vocabulary failure is saved, not by supplying a vocabulary item as expected, but by an incomplete but sufficient conversation unit, "The new students came to ...."

This concludes the item-by-item illustration of the interactive elements, the building blocks of the sixteen dialogs. How these elements are combined into actual flows of conversational exchanges is to be the next step in the analysis and the subject matter for a forthcoming paper.

Discussion

From the coded data, it becomes clear that, despite more or less limited proficiency, conversation units are well enough realized to sustain the 10-minute dialogs in English. In the September dialogs, the ten students experienced, practically for the first time, a "real" communication situation in English, real in the sense that their utterances were to serve, first and foremost, communication purposes, and not part of language practice or drills. In these speakers' reflexive remarks which are also recorded and transcribed along with the dialogs, the awareness of the communication aspects is variously expressed.

In a real communication situation, what the students tend to consider separate language practice tasks such as listening-comprehension, vocabulary retrieval, pronunciation, morpho-syntactic processes, and the like all occur at once and at a certain speed. Reflecting on the September dialog in comparison to the April conversation, D6, for instance, states that:

50) D6-April: Last time [i.e., in the September dialog] I was conscious of using English, the fact that I was speaking English, more than the fact that I was talking with someone .... This time I was less worried about whether I can understand [what my partner was saying] and I could say more of what I wanted to say.

This is one way of expressing the perception that the dialog situation is initially viewed as language processes rather than a setting for communication. In fact, evidence both in the dialogs and think-alouds indicates that the subjects' greater concern is initially over details of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. For instance, regarding the self-corrected answer "Two, second-year student" to the question, "Are you first year?" quoted above in 13), D1 explains that since there is no such form as "two-th" for the numeric 2 corresponding to "fourth" for the numeral 4, for instance, "cardinals and ordinals get confused." Such minute details seem often to be getting in the way of conducting the dialogs. Frequent remarks are also made regarding grammar acquisition and especially efficient retrieval of vocabulary items:

51) D2-September: I understand the general meaning because of context. I realize I must learn, not necessarily specialized words, but more

"big" words such as "heterogeneity."

The realization, however, that conversation is more than just a set of language processes quickly comes with the experience of having to choose or decide on the topics and topic development. When asked about one of the more noticeable pauses in the dialog, D7 for instance, explains that, at that point, both parties are running out of topics, and after a few more minutes of conversation, another pause is again explained:

52) D7-September: Here, too, I was feeling there is nothing much to talk about.

This is probably, at least in part, due to the fact that attention has to be paid to the language processes themselves, and not enough thought goes into topics or topic development as illustrated in the following remark:

53) D4-September: While I am thinking of how to say things, topics change.

D7 also mentions the apprehension that topics might develop beyond the language proficiency level, which must also be a considerable hindrance. Somewhat related to this is a remark made by D6 to the effect that topics are limited by language ability:

54) D7-September: When I have a chance to talk with people from English-speaking countries, we tend to talk about such things [as English and Japanese], and I don't like it.... I don't want to talk about

English or Japanese, but something beyond, something like ways of thinking, values, what books are interesting, something more universal, but my language ability is still too limited.

Reviewing the video recording of their own dialogs, some of the Japanese students realize that they actually talk less or pause more frequently than they previously imagined:

55) D4-September: I thought I was doing more talking, ... [but] watching the video, I realize I was just listening and nodding much of the time.

56) D3-April: While watching the video, I realize it's unpleasant to hear "un, un" ... The sound like "uu" while thinking.... I know I do it a little bit, but I didn't think I did it that much.

The Japanese subjects seem to agree that the change or improvement over the seven-month period between September and April is not so much in the language skills per se but in the attitude toward speaking English.

57) D7-April: Difference, well, I think I am not so nervous now when I talk with foreigners.... I think, today, compared with the previous session, the conversation went along the line I wanted.... My proficiency hasn't improved, though. (laughs)

58) D6-April: (Interviewer: This time, you felt you talked about something more substantial?) Yes, yes. This time I wasn't as

> guarded as I used to be [in speaking English], and um ... I managed to express what I wanted, and ... I enjoyed our conversation, and I felt good about it. It was good.

To conclude this overview, it might be interesting to look at a passage as an illustration of what D6 feels so good about:

> 59) D6-S226: (Are you interested in architecture?) Oh, yes, I like Gaudi's architecture. Spanish architecture. (Oh, Spanish.) Yes. (Oh, wow.) Now I'm very interested in Spanish, in Spain, and I love Spanish movies, and Spanish foods, (laughs) and Spanish pictures, and architecture, and Picasso? (Um-hum) Dali, everything.

True, the passage testifies no particular complexity either in content or language, but if Lennon (1990) is right in that:

> ... fluent delivery ... is ... the overriding determiner of perceived oral proficiency. Other features, such as accuracy are of lesser importance, and thus easily become subsumed under fluency criteria in assessment. (p. 391)

then, in the sixteen transcribed dialogs under study is more or less clear evidence of greater improvement in "perceived oral proficiency" than the modest self-evaluation by the participant D7 might indicate.

(May 1998)

Acknowledgments

*This is the third in a series of reports on the joint research project by Tae Okada, Jill Robbins and Hiroko Ito. The collaboration involves recruiting and interviewing the subjects, and recording, transcribing and coding twenty English and Japanese dialogs and think-aloud texts. The readers are referred to the list of references for two earlier studies in the series, one by Jill Robbins (1996), and the other by Hiroko Ito & Tae Okada (1996).

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Notes

1. See Ito and Okada (1996) for general analysis and discussion on the framework of the dialogs.
2. According to Ito's evaluation in terms of the ACTFL-OPI standards, all the students' proficiency levels in September range from Novice High to Intermediate Mid in September-October. See Ito and Okada (1996) for details. Regarding the ACTFL-OPI and critiques thereof, see Bachman (1988), Byrnes (1987), Byrnes & Canale (1987), Canale & Swain (1980), Child (1987), Dandolini (1987), Galloway (1987), Hiple (1987), Lantolf & Frawley (1988), Raffaldini (1988), and Valdman (1988).
3. The conversation unit is much like Halliday's "information unit" in that it "does not

correspond exactly to any unit in the clause grammar. The nearest grammatical unit is in fact the clause; ... a single clause may be mapped into two or more information units; or a single information unit into two or more clauses." Halliday (1994), pp. 295f.

4. In comparison, native-English-speaking partners seem to ask as many yes-no questions as wh-questions to initiate a topic. Since numerical comparison is to be dealt with elsewhere, statistical details are discussed in the present paper only occasionally where some general idea might serve the purpose of clarifying the subjects' conversational skills.
5. In all subsequent passages quoted from the dialogs, the partner's remarks are shown in parentheses.
6. Regarding the method and critique of the elicitation techniques of thinking aloud, see Feedle (1996), Long & Bourg (1966), and Whitney & Budd (1966).
7. "Wow!" and "Oh, wow!" which are frequently used by native-English-speaking partners do not appear in the speech of the Japanese students at all.
8. Repair may actually be defined in such a way as to cover all the communication recovery procedures including global and specific reprise, and request or echo for clarification. In the present categorization, "repair" is more narrowly defined to include only repeating, supplementing, and correcting either by the speaker or the listener.
9. Other-correcting does not seem to be a favored conversational procedure, not only in the dialogs under study in this paper but elsewhere as well. See Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks (1977).

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大学生の英語会話分析：「会話単位」のコード

岡田　妙

本稿は、日本人大学生10名が、米国からの留学生10名と二人一組になって約10分間に交わした16組分（10名中の６名は、一回目の会話から約７ヶ月後に第２回目を収録）の英語会話文を分析したものである。談話上、有意の語句を「会話単位」として、それぞれの「会話単位」の果たす談話上の機能をコード化し、談話の流れや運び方を把握しようと試みた。会話収録直後に、当事者双方による対話背景の説明を個別に採録して、英語による意思伝達をはじめて体験する日本人大学生の「話す」能力の解明を目指している。