

A Pause in Conversation for Japanese Native Speakers: A Case Study of Successful and Unsuccessful conversation in Terms of Pause through Intercultural Communication

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Abstract: This presentation aims to clarify Japanese pausing systems and to reveal their functions in ordinary conversation. In order to extract the functions of Japanese pausing, this research compares four sets of four parties' conversational data and also analyzes their following-up interview. To focus on the Japanese, pausing functions as 1) 'ruminating about what the speaker is talking about,' 2) 'showing that they are listening and encourage the speaker to continue' and 3) 'waiting to be given more information or a turn'. Japanese also customarily believe that raising a new topic by oneself or asking questions to the current speaker is an offensive behavior. Therefore, pausing is interpreted as a rapport building strategies to show that listeners are considerate the speaker and encourage the speaker to talk at the speaker's own pace. In order to assess the on-going conversation and to be careful when to slot in their own turn, they need some length of pause. My claim here is that a strategy which is courteous in one language is sometimes inadequate in other languages. If there were any misunderstandings between native and non-native speakers in one language in the setting of intercultural communication, different practice of pausing might be influential keys for successful or unsuccessful conversation in intercultural communication. The result of this research can be used to raise people's awareness towards multilingual societies in which adjustments to different cultural norms are required. It therefore has application to educational purposes.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine roles of Japanese style of pauses with respect to culture-specific expectations. The other goal is to analyze pause in terms of the influence on conversation in intercultural settings. In some speech communities, people feel pause as a problem in conversation, but in other speech communities, people do not matter pause occurrences in interaction. It can be said that adequate size and frequency of pause seem to differ according to the community. Therefore, in intercultural communication, different practice of pausing might be influential keys for successful and non-successful conversation. This paper first reviews the previous studies to extract different perspective of pause and then analyze the recorded natural conversation of four sets of four participants. In Shigemitsu (2006), English conversation between native speakers and non-native speakers are analyzed in terms of pause. For this paper Japanese conversations between native and non-native speakers which are newly recorded in Toronto are included to support the data of previous studies.

2 Previous studies

In this section, definition of pause is suggested and then several findings from previous studies will be illustrated and different perspective of pause between English speakers and Japanese speakers will be discussed.

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2. 1 Definition

Some people use the term of gap, pause, silence and lap for the non-vocal part of utterance and interaction. Some researchers use different terms for the same identical phenomena. In this paper, pause is defined as a part of non vocal sound in interaction. Pause can be divided into two categories according to where it occurs in the interaction. One is intra-turn pause which is found within one speaker's utterance. This type of pause occurs either at TRP or non TRP. The other is inter-turn pause which is found at the exchange of the current speaker and the next speaker. The term of silence is also used in the several literatures. Moreover, in some researchers, silence is regarded as an intended attitude without saying any words. This type of non-vocalic part in interaction is excluded for the discussion in this paper.

2. 2 Different perspectives on pause from previous studies

Different perspectives on pause are observed in previous studies. In this section, the findings on English natural conversation and Japanese conversation will be illustrated. To the best of my knowledge, pauses have not been the main topic in the most of the researches. Consequently, the findings which will be raised in this section are a secondary subject in each literature.

Let us observe pauses from the perspective of syntactic reason and from the perspective of cultural reason. To refer to what Fox *et al.* (1996), in English, listeners are able to predict with accuracy how the utterance-under-construction will come to an end. The participants are able to plan their own utterance to start up exactly at the moment the current utterance comes to a possible completion point, with no pause between the end of the current turn and the start-up their own-turn. According to Sacks(1992), English has chaining rules and a lot of devices to prevent pauses; for example, adjacency pair, jokes, address terms, appositive, "eh" things, 'well', 'you know', or appositive question. These are cues that the speaker is still holding the turn to fill the inter-pauses. Therefore, it might be emphasized that pause is thought to be made by the participants who do not monitor the on-going conversation in English natural conversation.

On the other hand, to the Japanese native speakers, pauses are perceived differently. First, syntactically, in Japanese, listeners are not able to make such detailed predictions about the course of the current utterance. Moreover, in Japanese, one turn usually contains more than one accounting. So it is not easy to judge the end of the current speaker's turn. So what Japanese listeners have to do is to wait until they hear the last few syllables of the turn. "Pauses" function as necessary cues that the turn of the current speaker has completely finished. Second, Maynard (1989) found that Japanese speaker tend to produce Pause-bounded Phrasal Units (PPU). They are bits of talk surrounded by pauses. According to her, average length of these PPU is 2.36 words. The end of the PPU is the chance that other participants produce back-channels or sometimes it is a natural turn-relevance transition place even when the current speaker's utterance is not completely finished. They are not regarded as impolite manner.

From the cultural perspective, according to Sacks (1992), Fox *et al.* (1996), to English native speakers, pauses in conversations are apparently noticeable object and painful thing. Sacks mentions that 'every time participants stop talking, there's an issue about whether they are together.' With this statement, it is assumed that pause is regarded as a moment when human relation is breaking down in an English speaking community.

For Japanese native speakers, we can find more features of Japanese regarding with pause. Shigemitsu (1989) found that in Japanese, relationship among participants influences turn-taking. The paper reported there is usually a pivotal speaker in the conversation and he or she has controls over all the participants' turns. However, if he or she quits being the pivotal, it takes time to select a new pivotal speaker from the

other participants because of the social norms. Shigemitsu (1989) reported that average length of the pause in four Japanese family conversation was 7.3 seconds. Suwako Watanabe (1993) points out Japanese people likely to know when to talk in advance in discussion. According to these two papers, it can be said that speaker needs to check whether he or she is in the position of speakership. Shigemitsu, Murata and Otsuka (2007) found another function of pause in Japanese conversation. Japanese native speakers pause in conversation because they show rapport toward the other participants with it. For example, when Japanese participants do not understand clearly what the current speaker is saying, they do not ask question to clarify it, but wait the current speaker say more detailed information. Asking questions is sometimes thought to be offensive and impolite in Japan. So we interpret these types of pause is a rapport attitude to encourage the current speaker to continue his or her talk by giving him or her more time (Shigemitsu, Murata and Otsuka, 2006).

3 Data and Analysis

3.1 Data of the conversational groups

We obtained the following nine groups. The groups and participants are coded as shown in table 1. The conversations were recorded with two digital video cameras and several audio recorders (cassette tape recorders and MD recorders). The participants were given the topic “Your Experiences of Cultural Differences”. Researchers tried to focus the spontaneity in the conversation, so they did not give them any particular question or any agenda to facilitate their conversation. The researchers gave each group 30 minutes for recording and stayed in the same room during recording in order to check the recording equipment. After the thirty-minute recording, the researchers had a follow-up interview with each participant separately and asked about their impression of the conversation.

Table 1 (J=Japanese native speaker, E=English native speaker, C=Chinese native speaker)

Group	Language used in each conversation	Native language & no. of speakers	Total numbers	Participants in each session
1	English	Japanese-2, English-2	4	J1, J2, E1, E2
2	English	Japanese-1, English-1	2	J3, E3
3	English	Japanese-2, English-2	4	J4, J5, E4, E5
4	English	Japanese-1, Chinese-1	2	J6, C1
5	English	Japanese-1, Chinese-1	2	J7, C1
6	English	Japanese-2, Chinese-2	4	J4, J5, C1, C2
7	Japanese	Japanese-2	2	J7, J8
8	Japanese	Japanese-2, English-2	4	J9, J10, E6, E7
9	Japanese	Japanese-2, English-2	4	J11, J12, E8, E9

The participants met the following criteria:

- 1) Non-native participants in English conversations were not familiar with the Japanese language, custom and culture.
- 2) Japanese participants had relatively higher English skills either with English proficiency certification, a high score record of TOEIC or TOEFL test, or be a graduate of one of the top-rank universities in Japan.

3) All participants had not met before.

For this paper, four of the groups (Group 1, 2, 8, 9) are picked out and focused for the analysis. To support the evidence, Group 6 is also included in this analysis. After each recording session, we had a follow-interview session with each participant separately. Participants were asked what they feel during the conversation or asked whether it was a favorable or not.

Table 2 shows that conversations were favorably accepted or not by the speakers based on the comment from each participant in the following-up session.

Table 2

	Language used	J's impression	E's impression
G1	English	favorable	favorable
G3	English	not favorable	not favorable
G8	Japanese	favorable	favorable
G9	Japanese	neutral	neutral

Based on the result shown in Table 2, this paper focuses how the pauses are interpreted differently by the language background. Then, characteristics of Japanese pause will be discussed.

3.2 Pause frequency

Impressions in each conversation are compared with the frequency of pause in each conversation. In this analysis, one second pause or longer is regarded as a meaningful long pause. The Figure 1, 2, 3, 4 shows the number of times of 'pause' found in every minute in Group 1, 3, 8, and 9, respectively.

Figure 1 Group 1 English conversation

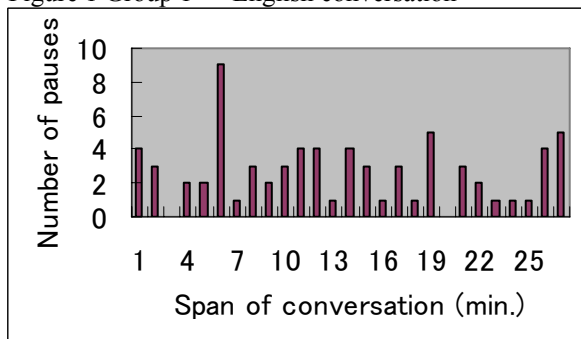
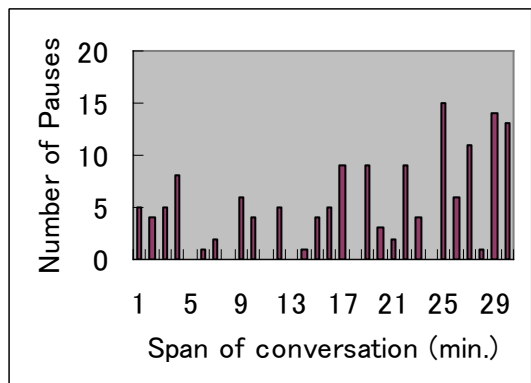
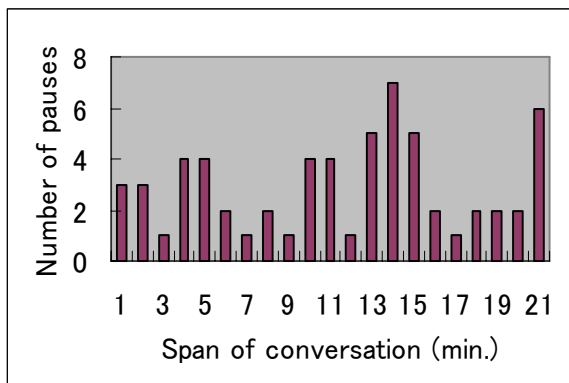
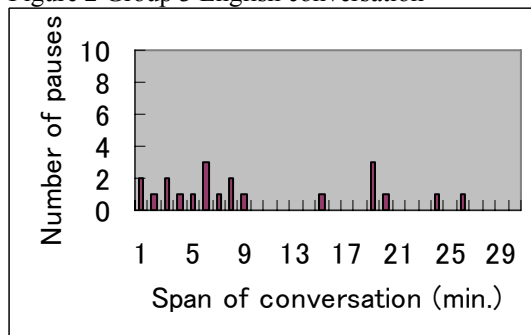


Figure 2 Group 3 English conversation



First, let us look at the English conversation. As shown in Figure 1, Group 1 had pauses which are longer than one second every minute from the beginning of the conversation till the end of the conversation. However, in Figure 2, we can see the part of no pause from 10 minute to 14 minute, from 16 minute to 19 minute, from 21 to 25 minute, from 27 till the end. According to the following-up interview, all the participants in group 1 recollected that the conversation was favorable. However, each participant in Group 3 said that the conversation was not favorable. For English native speakers, the Japanese participants were not friendly and they did not want to be their friends it was a real situation. Japanese native speakers said that English native speakers spoke too fast and the topic went and changed too quickly for them to get any chances to talk.

Next, as shown in Figure 3 and 4, Japanese conversations have several pauses almost every minute at a glance. Group 9 had a pivotal speaker or semi-pivotal speaker who participated in the conversation actively. But in Group 9, there was no participant who had a frequency of pauses increasing and the graph shows the typical pre-closing pattern of conversation. Carefully observation reveals that the Group 9 (Fig. 4), there were more pauses and the conversational break-down were found several times. During the conversation, participants are embarrassed because they could not find any suitable and successful topic.

4. Discussion

4.1 Unsuccessful conversation

In the unsuccessful English conversation of Group 3, as we have seen in the section 3, several parts of the conversation went on without any pauses. Actually, in these parts, there were several inter-pauses, but they are too short for Japanese participants to slot in any utterances. As a result, Japanese participants did not regard these very brief pauses as a turn transition relevance place. It is because English native speakers try to avoid pauses with trying to fill it. In the data, they even filled intra-pause during a turn of Japanese native speakers. Some pauses are meaningful for Japanese. But English speaker immediately filled them. Consequently, Japanese participants felt they were interrupted. English felt Japanese participants were not cooperative.

However, generally, Japanese native speakers do not always feel that they must say something in the conversation. They do not feel being isolated even when they are just listening. So in our data, even when a Japanese participant, J5 in Group 3 was given a chance to talk, he did not say anything without any eye contact. In the data, E5 asked "Have you both been to USA?" to Japanese participants. J4 had, so he started to answer. At the same time, J5 moved his head sideways but other participants did not notice it. Later, J5 was given a turn, but he did not notice that he is given a turn and he is not saying anything because he had already answered that question with nodding. Nodding is not satisfactory responding for English. So to English native speaker, Japanese speakers appear to be very rude. They do not talk, they do not answer the questions and their attitude irritates them. On the contrary, English native speakers think generally that the all participants should participate in the conversation equally. For this reason, English speakers had a feeling of unfairness of participation in the conversation. They might have felt guilty because they talked too much compared with Japanese native speakers. In unsuccessful Japanese conversation, when an English native speaker finished talking, there are some cases that no one started to speak immediately after the Transition Relevance Place and there occurred a long pause. Sometimes all participants laughed to fill the pause.

In terms of pause, the following characteristics were found. First, all participants show reticence about being the pivotal speaker. So all of them always waited and saw who had the right to speak at each time of speaking. Second, Japanese native speakers relied too much on English native speakers for the progression of conversation. But English speakers showed reticence about being the pivotal role because they feel of inequality with regard to fair amount of talk. Moreover, Japanese native speakers do not use any chaining devices in order to take turns or continue their speakership. They participated in conversation often as listeners by responding with a kind of backchannelings, 'hee', and laughing. In addition, Japanese native speakers sometimes gave chance for English speakers to encourage them to continue their talk. Then this rapport attitude brought frequent pauses. Japanese native speakers did so as a polite and showing rapport attitude but English native speakers did not take the attitude as was. As a result, an unfavorable atmosphere was brought in the conversation.

4.2 Successful conversation

In both of successful English conversations, Group 1, and Japanese conversation, Group 9, it was observed that there was a pivotal speaker in each conversation. Moreover, question-answer adjacency pairs chained the turns. As for the successful Japanese conversation, the pivotal speaker, J who might be taking a role of speakership, often laughed and gave emphatic responses.

4.3 Roles of pause for Japanese native speaker

Assuming pause occurs at the Transition Relevance Place, it is just a inter-pause between the current speaker and the next speaker. However, there are five possibilities for the listeners to do in Japanese conversation:

- 1 To take a turn without pause, for example, asking questions, and answering questions.
- 2 Immediate laughing
- 3 to support the current speaker at the end of phrase-bound unit with co-construction
- 4 to give immediate back channeling, showing a signal of 'go on! It's interesting.
- 5 Pause is also acceptable because they are meaningful.

As you see 5, pause is acceptable and meaningful in Japanese conversation. Analyzing the data, pauses are found especially when they did not comprehend what the current speaker was saying. In such situations, they did not ask questions to clarify what the speaker had just said, but they expected to be given more information and waited the speaker to add more information. According to the following-up interview, Japanese native speakers felt that asking questions is discourteous manner.

Functions of pause are categorized as follows. First, there is a PPU pause (a pause-bounded Phrasal Unit pause) which is found between PPU and a non-vocal space for listeners to give back channelings. Second, there is a turn-boundary pause which is for all the participants to agree the end of the current speaker's turn. Third, there is a topic boundary pause, which is for all the participants to agree the current speaker's turn has finished and the current topic has finished. Next, a speaker is given an amount of time by the other participants to take time to think of words. We will call it 'thinking pause.' The thinking pause is also regarded as a rapport pause from the listeners. Finally, there is a polite pause. Polite pause here means the pause which the participants have to have based on the norms of their speech community. It can be said that unsuccessful conversation occurs when the Japanese speakers observes Japanese norms even in English conversation which has different norms. Intercultural conversations involve such style differences, and it is important for both language speakers to be aware of such differences and the danger that they

might be misunderstood because of their language styles.

5 Conclusions

This paper examines conversations in which native and non-native speakers participate in one language. The paper specifically looks into English and Japanese conversations from a conversation management strategy perspective, highlighting how much transfer from one's native language has taken place when speaking in a second language and the overall effect such transfer has on the conversation in terms of rapport building among the participants. Pause can be a strategy of listener responses. Listener responses include the phenomena of back-channels, pauses, laughter and co-constructions. Since these phenomena are often linked and may be inseparable in terms of their conversational function, they are aggregated under the common heading of listener responses. An analysis of pause length will indicate how tolerant each language speaker is towards pause in conversation. Thus, pause is culture specific phenomena. English native speakers try to avoid it and they have strategies and chaining rules to avoid pause. On the contrary, a pause for Japanese native speakers has several functions. So pause is acceptable conversational device in Japan.

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Appendix

This paper is based on the presentation ‘Function of Japanese pauses: A case study through intercultural Communication’ between Native and Non-native Speakers’ presented at a panel “Japanese and English Conversation Management Strategies and Rapport Development” (Organized by Sanae Tsuda) at The 10th International Pragmatics Conference, Göteborg, Sweden, 8-13 July 2007.