Speakership initiation cues and termination cues

in Japanese and English conversation

Yuka Shigemitsu[*]

Speakership is series of sequence in which one particular speaker starts afresh and develops one topic to the end. Other participants hold recipient roles by asking questions, making comments, adding more information as well as listening quietly or at most giving minimal responses. My pilot study revealed in English conversation, while one particular speaker talks about one topic, other participants join in the topic development interactively. However, in Japanese conversation, while one particular speaker talks about a topic, other participants listen to the speaker or just give minimal responses and let the speaker talk about the whole story alone as if it were a monologue. My continuing interest has been in the way participants acquire the speakership and abandon it. In order to explore such, this presentation focuses on both the beginning and ending of the speakership. The research questions regarding English and Japanese conversation are: RQ1 When does one participant's speakership holding tend to begin? RQ2 How do speakership sequences start? RQ3 Are there any differences between Japanese and English? Through analyzing video-recorded data, it is confirmed that in English conversation, the speaker and the recipient role holders steer the topic development, interactively. On the other hand, in Japanese conversation, the speaker looks around to make sure he or she can start to talk, and other participants seldom join in the interactive topic development and wait for a speakership terminal cue to start afresh. The cues are shown by particular sentence-final particles, closing comments and tag lines. Thus, the symmetrical participation in English conversation and the asymmetrical contribution in Japanese conversation are expected to cause a considerable degree of breakdown in an intercultural setting.

1.   Introduction

The research starts with a question why some Japanese English learners who have acquired English grammar, vocabulary, and listening skills are weak in interaction when they speak English. Japanese English learners have been struggling to overcome this problem. Some Japanese believe that studying English grammar, increasing their vocabulary, listening, and practicing pronunciation will help.

The idea of speakership occurred to me from the conversational excerpt (1) which was obtained from our data collection. In this conversation, there are four participants; two Japanese and two North Americans. They are talking in Japanese. One of the North Americans, A6, is talking about his girlfriend. In this interaction, Japanese participants J(apanese)9 and J10 give minimal reactive token such as '*Aaa*,' '*hai*,' '*un*' or their combination while A6 is talking. We also notice J9 and J10 give similar reactive token together. Therefore, it is said that A6 has speakership role in this sequence. It is assumed that there should be some norms for listenership and speakership in Japanese conversation.

(1) [#8, Two Japanese and Two North Americans in Japanese: J9, J10, E6, E7]
1   E6: *Aaa, watashi no kanojo wa nihonjin desu.* (Aaa, my girl friend is Japanese.)
→2   J9:   ⌈*Aaa*、 *hai* (Uh, yes.)   ⌉

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*   Associate Professor, General Education and Research Center, Tokyo Polytechnic University
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→3   J10: └*Aaa, sakki* (Uh, before.) ┘

  4   E6: *Hai, hai, aaa, yoko san desu. An, aaa, Mie-ken kara kimashita.* (Yes, yes, well, she is Yoko san. She is from Mie Prefecture.)

→5   J9:   ┌*Aaa* (Uh.) ┐

→6   J10: └*Aaa* (Uh.) ┘

  7   E6: *Aa, aa, ni-nen mae ni, aa, Toronto daigaku de, aa, benkyou shimashite.* (Well, two years ago, I studied at Toronto University.)

→8   J10: *Un* (Yes.)

  9   E6: *Benkyo shimashita. Aa, kono-toki, aa, watashi wa aa kanojo to aimashita.* (I studied, well, at that time, I met her.)

→10   J9:   ┌*Aaa* (Uh.) ┐

→11   J10: └*Uun* (Um.) ┘

     In other conversational data, too, this type of non-interactive interaction appears during the course of conversation. I call this type of sequence 'speakership.' Speakership is a series of sequence in which one particular speaker talks and other participants give only reactive tokens or equivalents. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the feature of this type of sequences. My Research Questions are:

         RQ1 When does one participant's speakership holding tend to begin?
         RQ2 How do speakership sequences start?
         RQ3 Are there any differences between Japanese and English?

2. Data

         The data I analyzed are the following six mono-cultural conversations by male participants (See Table 1). The data have been collaboratively collected by Politeness Research Group which belongs to Japan Association of College English Teachers(JACET) since 2004 and we have obtained 25 videotaped conversational data. The data are numbered serially. Group 12, 17, and 25 are Japanese conversations by Japanese participants and Group 10, 11 and 20 are English conversations by North Americans. Group 20 and 25 are dyad conversations and other four groups are conversations by three participants.

Code	participants	lang. used	relationship	age	Main topics
#12	J13, J14, J15	Japanese	first encounter	20s	Neighborhood, nature
#17	J24, J25, J26	Japanese	first encounter	20s	Study of Science and Technology
#25	J31, J32	Japanese	known face	20s	Travel Report
#10	A6, A7,	English	first encounter	40s-50s ┐	Background, jobs, family
#11	A7, A8, A9	English	first encounter	30s-40s │	Personal subject
#20	A7, A10, A11	English	first encounter	40s-50s ┘	

The participants were all males.

     All of the participants met the following criteria:
     1.   No participants had met before.

2.   The participants were all males 22 years of age or older. We examined only males to eliminate gender variables and because the Japanese people who face problems in intercultural communication are generally male businessmen.

3.   The English native speakers in the English conversations were not familiar with the Japanese language, customs, or culture.

4.   The Japanese participants had relatively high English skills either in terms of English proficiency certification with a high TOEIC or TOEFL test score record or were graduates of one of the top-ranked universities in Japan.

Group12 talked about participants' neighborhood, nature and stream dwellers such as crows, crawfish, snails and so on which live near their residence. Each participant in Group 17 major in quantum chromo-dynamics, computer science and architectural acoustics, respectively. They talked about their own research field and exchanged information on their techniques. Group 25 talked about the places they visited for sightseeing. It was found out they had known face each other. In all of the English data for this paper, participants exchange information about their personal background and disclose where they are from, their family members, their job and other personal matters.

3. Procedure

For the analysis, I distinguished a part or interactive sequences and non-interactive sequences, that is, speakership holding sequences. Excerpt (2) is an example of non-interactive sequences. From the line 460 to 465, A7 talks about a snowy day he remembers and A10 and A11 is giving only reactive token such as oh, yeah, gee. I call this type of sequence "a speakership holding sequence." It can be a component of Monologue or Duet that Otani (2009, 2010) mentioned. That is one particular participant holds a speakership. Then I identify who holds the speakership. In this excerpt, A7 holds speakership.

(2) [#20, Three North Americans in English: A7, A10, A11]

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460   A7:   Well, I certainly remember South Dakota in the 1970s; the winters they – they got a lot more snow then than they do now and I can…

461   A10: Oh, yeah.

462   A7:   I can remember huge drifts and the snow plows would actually have to – we have the V, the wedge-shaped blade in the front and they'd actually have to back up and ram the snowdrift

463   A10: Yeah.

464   A7:   and they'd go just a few feet and then they'd have to back up again and ram the snowdrift again – that was the only way they could get through.

465   A11: Gee

--- (This dotted line indicates the speakership boundary.)

In our data, the longest consists of 86 turns and shortest sequences consist of 5 turns. Now, I will show you what happened the border of the column in the data..

Table 2 shows that how much one speaker holds his speakership role and how much participants talk interactively. Again, Group 12, 17, 25 are Japanese conversations by Japanese participants and Group 10, 11. 20 are English conversations by North American participants. Group 25 and 10 are dyad conversations. Therefore, they are put at the bottom of this table.

Japanese conversation   North American Conversation

Group 12	Interactive	27.9(%)	Group 11	Interactive	52.2(%)
	J13	30.3		A7	5.6
	J14	34.3		A8	24.8
	J15	6.5		A9	17.2

Group 17	Interactive	53.2	Group 20	Interactive	81.8
	J24	32.4		A7	7.0
	J25	7.1		A10	4.4
	J26	8.2		A11	7.0

Group 25	Interactive	69.6	Group 10	Interactive	83.0
	J31	29.2		A7	10.6
	J32	1.2		A6	47.6

Table 2: The percentage of each participant's speakership holding

Table 2 indicates that in Japanese conversation, a speaker tends to hold speakership role compared with North American data. Moreover, dyad conversations tend to be interactive conversations.

4. Analysis and Findings
4.1 Speakership termination cues
4.1.1 Japanese data

From Japanese data, it is found that Back-channeling from other participants (19.1%), Final predicate form of the previous speaker (18.1%), Making remarks (16.9%) are the top three of all the speakership termination cues. Interestingly, they do not occur themselves. Some of the cues are combined. For example, final predicate form is usually combined with either making remarks, or back-channeling from other participants, or both. Following that, pauses take important roles. Therefore, it can be said that the participants unconsciously negotiate to agree when one participant is able to occupy the sequences.

In the example (3), J14 talks about his surroundings in Nara city and after that from line 49, J13 starts to talk about his surroundings in Osaka in turn. In this transition, final predicate form, *'masu'* is used in 47. At the same time, line 47 conveys J14's final remarks. After that, J15 gives minimal token. That implies that he does not intend to talk to make any comments, or to ask questions. Then there occurs a pause. This pause indicates that no one intends to talk. Then after the pause, J13 selects himself as a next speakership holder. Accordingly, in Japanese conversation, unconscious agreement is required for the speakership taking.

(3) [#12, Three   Japanese in Japanese: J13, J14, J15]
45   J14   *Yappari sono nanteiuka ee zenzen mou keshikimo mou dondon yamano nakamitaini nattekite* (As was expected, that, what should I say, well, not at all, well, the landscape is changing, midst

in the mountain)

46	J15	*aa, aa、*
47	J14	*Daibu chigaunato omoi<u>masu</u>ne* (It is very different, I think.)
48	J15	Un

(pause)

49　　　J13　*Bokuwa anoo ichiban kanjitanowa ano Oosakano Tennoujino houni sunderundesukedo* (I, well, what I felt most is, well, I live near Tennouji so)

50　　　J15　*Aa、 hai hai* (Oh, yes, yes)

51　　　J13　*Kou, jissai kayouyouni natte* (Like this, after I started to commute)

52　　　J15　*A、 hai*

4.1.2 North American data

On the contrary, in English data, any turn-taking relevance place can be 'speakership roles change'; sentence boundary, word boundary and so on. As the classics, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) says that any sentence boundary is merely one choice for the one participant takes speakership role. Back-channeling from other participant can be thought to be a word-boundary, means that this person does not intended to talk something that other participants are allowed to speak at that time. Interestingly, making remarks can function as a final part of one subject matter. (4) and (5) show any turn relevance place can be speakership transition place.

(4) [#20 Three participants in English, A7, A10, A11]

276　　　A10: Uh, yeah. Uh, well, yes and no, it depends on which part of the country you are from, from the west or from the east or from Toronto.　 Toronto is the center so…（laughing）

278　　　 A7:　 Of the universe?

279　　　A10: Yeah, basically yeah and it's always a fight between the west coast and the – not the east coast, but south center, Toronto basically.

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280 A7:　 How about that divide, you know, the French-English speaking divide, do you see that, that as

(5) [#11 Three participants in English, A7, A8, A9]

120　　　A8: Right? And say what were you like when you are 18, ┐

121　　　A7:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　└Uh-huh.

122　　　A8:　 or 19, and I would say, oh, gosh.　 I was not the most dedicated student either, so it's okay. I think I know what to expect and yeah.　 I think where I teach is probably better than most places.　 It seems as far as behavior and attitude.┐

123　　　A9：　　　　　　　　　　　　　└Uh-huh.

124　　　A8:　 Yeah.

125　　　A7: You live in Nagoya there? Either of you or, in Nagoya City, or do you ┌commute from outside?

4.2 Speakership Initiation cues

4.2.1 Japanese data

As for the Japanese Data, discourse markers for starting to talk (33.3%). Discourse markers cue that the speaker-to-be is trying to start to talk. If no one interrupts or overlaps him, he can start to talk. A new speaker to-be must make sure that the previous speakership holding sequences has ended and whether he is allowed to start. Therefore, unconscious agreement of transition has important roles.

Offering other examples of the current topic (24.7%) is also an initiation cues. In (6), J25 has been talking about his laboratory. Then in turn, J 24 starts to talk about a laboratory he belongs to.

(6) [#17 Three Japanese participants, J24, J25, J26]

((J25 has been taking about his laboratory.))

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400   J24   *Bokura, bu, bunyaga chigau u a bunyaga isshona hitotte* (We, research area, the researchers in different research area, no, in the same research area)

401   J25   *hai* (yes)

402   J24   *Zenzen chigau senkoni barabara irundesuyo* (research in the different laboratory)

Questions (16.1%) is also one of the top three of the triggers for speakership holding sequences (See excerpt (7))

(7) [#25 Two participants in Japanese, J31, J32]

27   J32   *Ma, nanka kurumao shiyoto omottesa itumo bachintte narundayone* (Well, it's kind of, when I want to drive a car, I am always shocked by static electricity)

28   J31   *kurumawa narimasune* (Car I have experienced.)

29   J32   *naruyo ne* (I have experienced)

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              kuruma unten suruno saikin (Do you drive recently?)

30   J31   *Menkyo mottemasu kedo shinai desune* (I have my drivers's licence but I don't drive.)

31   J32   ⌐*a shinaino* (don't)

32   J31   └*Tokyo dato yappari densha bakkade zenzen* (In Tokyo, as you know, I always take trains, so not at all).

33   J32   *Aa aa,*

4.2.2 North American data

On the contrary in English data, questions from the other participants are frequently seen. For triggers for starting speakership roles, Questions (40%) and Offering related topic (13.5%) are often used. So interactive sequences are base for English communication.

(8) [#10, Two North Americans in English, A6, A7]

125   A6: So what brought you to Japan?

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127   A6: Okay do you still scuba dive?

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163   A7: So how about recently, have you traveled anywhere within Japan?

 (9) [#11 Three participants in English, A7, A8, A9]

381   A7:   Very frustrating for me.
382   A8:   You are forced to use it.¬
383   A7:   └ Forced to use it.
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384   A8:   It does not really cater to the students' needs¬
385   A7:   └ Right.
386   A8: and it is too difficult.   Actually, I mean anyone had probably experienced that I had a
textbook that was chosen for me, here a couple years ago and the listening was…¬
387   A7:   └Beyond?
388   A8:   Well, it was ESL-oriented and it had British accents from a variety of regions.   That is
what they are trying to teach.   It was challenging for me, and I like British dramas,¬
389   A7:   └ Right.
390   A8: television, but I mean okay, that is Scottish,
391   A7: (laugh)

4.3 Other cues

Finally, other cues for Japanese and English exclusively were found. For Japanese conversation's cues for starting new speakership sequences are found. They are: Negotiating who starts first, Adding related information to the previous speaker's talk, Pre-announcing what they are going to talk when they start their speakership role.

Cues in English conversations for starting new speakership sequences are Exchanging clarifying questions and answers, Opinions on the ongoing topic from other participants, repeating the fragment of the previous utterances. Strategies for Starting speakership: Transition from interactive talk to speakership holding. That is while talking interactively, one participant wins a speakership role.

5. Conclusion

Thus, cues are different from Japanese conversation and English conversation. In this paper, some prominent differences between Japanese and English are picked up. Sequences organization has complex structure, so it is required to clarify the feature one by one and it also related topic organization what they are doing. It is concluded that one participant holds speakership occurs much frequently in Japanese and talking interactively is much common in English. Moreover, Japanese people are unconsciously making agreement for the speakership holding transition because self-select as a new speakership holding is much frequently used, whereas English speakers tend to involve each other during the conversation in the very first-meeting.

The way to participate in conversation and to keep talking is thus different in Japanese and English. Other data which are already collected too should be analyzed to confirm these tendencies and analyze what makes conversation interactive and non interactive.

Transcribing Symbols

Symbol	Gloss
…	section of transcript omitted
(laughing)	indicates laughter only by the person currently speaking
⌈ ⌉ ⌊ ⌋	simultaneous speech
---	Speakership boudary

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