

Question-Answer Sequences in English Conversation and Japanese Conversation: Suggestion for English Teaching

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study that compares verbal behavior in intercultural conversation between native Japanese speakers and native English speakers when both speak English. The research first focused on asking questions and clarifying understanding, and on emphatic responses and how much each speaker engaged in these types of speech acts. The research then looked at how each speaker dealt with topic development. The results show that Japanese speakers unconsciously employ Japanese conversational styles, which are very different from English conversational styles. Japanese speakers do not ask questions or give emphatic responses. Their verbal behavior may create some misunderstanding between speakers from different cultures. The groups that used similar conversational style between speakers had successful conversations, and the speakers established a rapport. However, the groups that went on with different conversational styles were unsuccessful in building rapport and engaging in pleasant conversation. When speaking English, Japanese speakers might consider employing English conversational styles. They should learn conversational styles explicitly when studying English.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on a study that compared the ways of topic development between native and nonnative speakers of Japanese and English in English conversations to establish what is a favorable conversational style when speaking English. The study focused on questions and emphatic responses, and ways of introducing and terminating a topic. Authentic conversational data on intercultural interaction has clarified that speakers' awareness of conversational styles in their first language and target languages is important (Shigemitsu & Iwata, 2010; Tsuda, Iwata, & Shigemitsu, 2008, 2009, 2010; Tsuda, Shigemitsu, & Murata, 2007).

For successful communication in English, Japanese speakers try to improve their English. However, some Japanese English learners who have acquired English grammar, vocabulary, and listening skills are still not very proficient at interacting in English. They struggle to overcome this problem. Some Japanese believe that studying English grammar, increasing their vocabulary, listening, and practicing pronunciation more will help. Others say that the problem is the Japanese mentality (Terauchi, Koike, & Takada, 2006). We often hear people say that the problem cannot be overcome without the speakers going abroad.

Our research group claims that the problem does not lie in the lack of vocabulary or grammar, or in the Japanese mentality. Surmising from the above problem, we assume that an investigation of conversational style can be used as an approach to overcome conversational difficulties. To prove this approach, we collected data on 40 intercultural and mono-cultural speakers. For the study, we selected four of them and focused on asking questions, emphatic responses, and topic shifts. Data from our previous studies revealed that Japanese speakers think that asking questions and changing topic is impolite. They try to avoid asking questions and

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make no exaggerated responses in order to behave politely. However, native English speakers do not always accept these verbal behaviors. They regard the attitude of Japanese speakers as rude and uncooperative, even though they are trying to be polite. Some English speakers say that they would not make friends with Japanese people. They do not enjoy talking with them because they perceive that the Japanese show no interest in their conversation. Although Japanese people believe they are behaving politely, native English speakers suspect that they are unfriendly and not interested in them (Tsuda, Shigemitsu, & Murata, 2007).

2 Previous Research

Conversational style can be observed by nonlinguists as well as linguists. Debora Tannen summarized this phenomena in her book *Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends* (1984). Sociologist Ervin Goffman illustrated that when people talk, they communicate not only information but also images of themselves. Anthropological linguist John Gumperz and others demonstrated many of the basic elements of how people talk; ways of showing that they are interested, glad, or angry; how to tell a joke or a story; and so on. However, the most important thing in terms of intercultural communication, “[T]hese and many other features of language are not normally questioned by speakers, but they can be different, depending on a speaker’s individual habits as well as such differences as gender, ethnicity, class, and regional background” (p.1).

In her discussion on turn-taking patterns and the distribution of talk, FitzGerald (2003) claimed, “There is also much evidence that different turn-taking styles and the distribution of talk are culture-bound and the source of many problems” (p.111). She added, “Differences in these aspects of communication style can have negative effects on interpersonal relations, and volubility or taciturnity can result from style differences rather than from a speaker’s intention,” claims that conversational styles are related to preference for discrete turns, simultaneous talk, length of pauses between turns, length of turn and contrasting attitudes to silence, and verbal self-expression. Other components could be preference for asking questions, remaining silent, changing topic, staying within one topic, showing interesting, or just listening.

Our research group collected 40 intercultural and mono-cultural conversations between native Japanese speakers and native English speakers to investigate elements that interfere with rapport building and maintaining intercultural communication. The research focused on several different features such as backchannels, co-construction, laughter, pause, topic shift, self-disclosure, and questions.

In our pilot studies, we found that grammatical and phonological mistakes by Japanese speakers were not a problem that hindered communication from the native English speakers’ points of view. Native English speakers said that when they cannot understand nonnative English speakers, they can clarify by asking questions.

The components of conversational style have a different range of adequateness in each speech community. People judge adequate or inadequate based on their sociocultural experiences. For example, Japanese nod more frequently and more rhythmically without vocalizing than native English speakers do. When the Japanese participants were supposed to say yes or no, they just nodded or moved their heads sideways. Sometimes native English speakers missed seeing the head movement and they felt that the Japanese speakers did not respond and were not cooperative during the conversation.

The Japanese participants had different perspectives. They generally commented that they enjoyed conversations and that talking with native English speakers was stimulating. However, they said that native English speakers spoke very fast and jumped from one topic to another very quickly. It was very difficult to

follow the topic. One participant said that while he was thinking about what he was going to say, the native English speaker changed topics. Japanese speakers sometimes feel that they are interrupted when they start to talk. This is due to the differences of organization of narratives and perception differences in the pauses.

Follow-up interviews revealed that the Japanese speakers and the English speakers had different impressions of the conversations they had. Native English speakers said that the Japanese participants were good speakers of English, and the English mistakes were not a problem. The interviews also revealed that the Japanese participants thought that asking questions and changing topic were impolite.

Shigemitsu (2010) specifically examined Japanese conversations from the perspective of conversation-management strategies and speakership. Speakership holds subject matter, such as a complete narrative story, and is usually completed with termination cues. The speakership role is handed over by each speaker. For Japanese speakers, it is important to tell a complete story that consists of an introduction, development, turns, and a conclusion; meanwhile, the listeners wait for the speaker's story to finish. Listeners wait for the current speakership holder to give termination cues. The end of the story is marked with predicate components and a pause. If this norm is violated—for example, with questions and comments before the current speakership holder reaches the end—the holder may feel annoyed and will not feel rapport. This Japanese conversational style differs from the English norm.

We have observed in the English conversational style that the amount of talk and the turns of each speaker are almost the same. The speakers talk interactively and do not hesitate to ask questions or make comments. In Japanese conversational style, all the speakers take turns talking in monologues. They do not ask questions or make comments during these monologues in order to avoid interruption.

3 Research Questions

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the purpose of our study was to compare the ways of topic development. For topic development, we needed to introduce a new topic; construct it in a certain order (storytelling is also culturally bounded); develop it with questions, answers, and emphatic responses; and terminate the topic. Our study focused on questions and emphatic responses, and ways of introducing and terminating a topic. We designed these devices to allow other participants to get involved in the topic development.

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: Are there any differences in ways of topic development with questions and emphatic responses between native Japanese speakers and native English speakers in speaking English?

RQ2: If the differences are large or small, how successful is the interaction?

RQ3: What should be taught when teaching English? Are there any priorities?

4 Data

We selected four recorded English conversations and follow-up interviews for the analysis of this paper, as mentioned before. Each group was a mixture of native and nonnative speakers of English. Table 3 shows the list of participants and their occupations. Japanese participants are coded “J” and American participants are coded “A.” All data were recorded in Japan in 2009.

Each conversation was videotaped for 30 minutes. All the participants agreed that their talk could be released. Researchers were interested in focusing on the spontaneity in conversation to identify their topic selection and the degree of self-disclosure. For this reason, participants were not given any particular question

or agenda to facilitate their conversation. They did not receive any information about conversational style. The researchers gave each group 30 minutes for recording and stayed in the same room for the duration to check the recording equipment. Immediately after each of the 30-minute recording sessions, the researchers conducted a follow-up interview with each participant separately. Participants were asked what they felt during the conversation. All data were recorded in 2009.

Table 1

Participants' Information

Group	Japanese participants code/occupation	American participants/occupation
Group 20	J28, J29/Graduate students	A12, A13/Graduate students
Group 21	J30/Teaching assistant	A14/English instructor
Group 22	J31/Graduate students	A14/English instructor
Group 23	J32/Graduate students	A14/English instructor

All participants met the following criteria:

1. None of the participants had met each other before.
2. The participants were all males 22 years or older. In today's data, participants are in their mid-20s or early 30s. 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 native English speakers in the English conversations did not have to be 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.
5. The Japanese participants had not visited English-speaking countries and did not meet native English speakers in everyday life.

We distributed flyers at some universities and companies and a U.S. military base in Japan to find participants to meet the criteria. The applicants were sorted into groups.

Group 20 had four participants: two Japanese graduate students (coded J28 and J29) and two American graduate students (coded A12 and A13) who were studying at a Japanese university at the time of recording. They started with self-introductions. After that, the American participants talked about their reasons for studying in Japan. Then all the participants talked about school, the places they lived, hobbies, music, instruments that they played, sports they played and watched, and umbrellas. Group 20 went well. The Japanese as well as Americans tried to contribute to the conversation relatively equally.

For Groups 21, 22 and 23, one American participant (A14) had conversations with different Japanese participants in different slots. A14 was an English teacher at a university and in his early 30s. Group 21 consisted of A14 and J30. J30 was an assistant professor at a university. He had studied linguistics and has a doctorate. He reads and writes papers in English. He never studied and lived abroad but visited the United States several times for short trips with his family when he was very young. A14 and J30 talked about the place where J30 was from, J30's jobs, J30's trips to the United States, differences between eastern and western Japan, and Japanese politics. J31 in Group 22 was a master's student studying linguistics. He also reads and writes linguistic papers in English. A14 and J31 talked about J31's hometown, linguistics that J31 studies,

movies, J31's high school life, and why J31 was studying linguistics. J32 in Group 23 is a doctoral student majoring in linguistics, too. He also reads and writes linguistic paper in Japanese. The topics in Group 23 were the place where J32 lived; J32's trips to Vietnam, Korea, Hiroshima, and Hokkaido; and varieties of Japanese accents. Notice that in Groups 21, 22, and 23, the topics were centered on the Japanese participants. The American participant, A14, had no chance for self-disclosure in each conversation.

We held follow-up interviews immediately after recording each conversation. Participants were interviewed separately. Although Japanese participants had to speak in a foreign language, all of them said they enjoyed the conversation very much. They appreciated that they had been given an opportunity to talk with native English speakers. Talking with native speakers seemed to have been a rare experience for the Japanese participants. Even though had a good command of reading, writing, and listening, and they usually read and wrote academic papers, business letters, and business e-mails, they had not had the chance to talk with native English speakers. Although the native Japanese speakers enjoyed it, the native English speakers felt differently.

5 Procedure

Table 4 shows how many times each participant (I) asked questions for new information, (II) asked questions to clarify his understanding, and (III) gave emphatic responses.

The follow-up interviews revealed that the conversation in Group 21 was successful in a friendly atmosphere. The participants shared each topic and all of them tried to contribute to the conversation. One of the Japanese, J29, observed what native English speakers said under certain circumstances and tried to use some of the same expressions during the conversation. This worked effectively, and he felt himself letting go of tension. As for Groups 21, 22, and 23, Group 21 was the best group for A14. However, A14 did not have a good impression of Group 22. According to A14's words, J30 in Group 21 gave him new information that A14 had not known before. The topics were, for example, Japan's west area (Kansai area) and Japanese politics. The content of J31's talk was very stimulating and new information for A14. On the contrary, according to A14, the conversation in Group 23 sounded like a private English lesson. That is, the native English speaker asked questions and the nonnative speaker answered the questions through the conversation. A14 said that he enjoyed the conversation in Group 21; however, all three conversations in which A14 participated had a topic related only to the Japanese participants. A14 did not talk about himself. Therefore, the four conversations were ranked in order of most successful to least unsuccessful as Group 20, 21, 23, 22.

Table 2

Number of Each Verbal Behavior by Each Participant

Group 20

Participants	I	II	III
A12	17	31	10
A13	13	21	6
J28	12	6	6
J29	11	11	18

Group 21

A14	36	15	3
J30	2	2	0

Group 22

A14	107	19	8
J31	5	1	3

Group 23

A14	43	28	25
J32	1	0	10

I=Asking Questions for new information

II=Clarifying questions

III=Emphatic responses

Group 22 went bad from the perspective of A14. Through the conversation, J31 did not talk unless A14 asked questions. A14 had to ask questions, raise topics, and summarize J31's talk to keep the conversation going. J31 did not check his understanding even when he did not seem to understand A14. However, J31's English was good when he spoke. When J31 joined was in a mono-cultural conversation, he was not a quiet person. He talked naturally and appropriately for Japanese conversation.

For group 21 and 23, A14 said that he enjoyed the conversation. However, as the table shows, the Japanese participants seldom asked questions, responded to show interest, or raised new topics to move the conversation on.

This behavior was due to their employment of Japanese conversational style. This behavior matches our results of the analysis of the mono-cultural Japanese conversation data. If this conversation had been in Japanese, the Japanese participants' behavior would have been natural and appropriate. I need to add that one Japanese participant said that he believes asking questions and making comments sounded impolite.

The results of the analysis demonstrated why the American participants had such different impressions. Table 2 shows how many times each research participant engaged in the following verbal behavior: asking questions for new information; checking understanding; responding emphatically to the speaker with words and phrases such as *really*, *that's interesting*, and *cool*; introducing new topics; summarizing; and ending the topic. Asking questions, checking understanding, and responding emphatically to the speaker can be signs that the listener is interested in the speaker's talk. Introducing a new topic is a way in which participants try to continue the conversation. Summarizing shows that the participants understand the speaker's talk. Ending the topic has a different perspective. From one side, ending a topic does not show that the participants try to continue the conversation, but from the other side, it works to give other participants a chance to talk about their topic.

The Japanese participant responded fewer times than the Americans did; however, they were still trying to show interest. Both the Japanese and Americans tried to check their understanding. In addition, the Japanese as well as Americans introduced new topics.

6 Does a Participant Invite the Other Participants by Asking Questions?

Comparing the Japanese participants and American participants, American participants more often asked questions during conversations. The Japanese participants in Group 21, 22, and 23 rarely asked questions

during the conversation. This phenomenon is supported by a follow-up interview and common sense knowledge shared by Japanese, which was mentioned before: it is impolite to ask questions, especially during the first meeting. However, as the table shows, native English speakers often asked questions. In Groups 21 and 23, A14 asked questions about once every minute. In Group 22, A14 had to ask questions 117 times in 30 minutes.

In Group 20, the successful conversation, each participant contributed to the conversation in a similar manner. The following excerpt shows the way that the participants in Group 20 asked questions in the conversation.

As shown following, a question is often used for introducing a new topic to allow the other participants to talk. Therefore, some of the questions are related to the topic-raising function. Moreover, asking questions can show interest in the other participants, as seen in Excerpt 1. Native English speakers used this verbal behavior more often than Japanese speakers did.

Excerpt 1

Group 20, two Japanese and two North Americans in English: J18, J19, A12, A13

01 A13: Are you guys originally from Nagoya?

02 J19: Yeah. And I lived in *Kariya* City so I came here to, to take JR line.

Native English speakers often ask brief questions to raise a new topic to facilitate the conversation. On the other hand, in Groups 22, 23, 24, the Japanese participants did not ask questions as often.

Excerpt 2 shows that the Japanese participant's answers to A14's question did not contain much information. Therefore, A14 asked questions to extract more information. In line 04-05, A14 asked, "Where is the most interesting place you have been outside Japan?" In lines 17, 20, and 23, A14 respectively asked, "Why?" "How so?" and "Like what?" Continuous questioning showed A14's interest in J32's talk. Possibly, J32's short answers did not satisfy them, and A14 wanted to clarify what J32 explained.

Excerpt 2

Group 23, one Japanese and one North American in English: J32, A14

01 J32: But, but I imagine, I imagine if, if my, my plane has crashed, crashed

02 A14: Uh-huh.

03 J32: I would be, I would die, so it's very scare.

04 A14: Yeah, try not to think about this.

05 A14: So where is the most interesting place you have been outside Japan?

06 J32: Outside Japan?

07 A14: Uh-huh.

08 J32: Aa, actually, I, I go to only four countries.

09 A14: Uh-huh.

10 J32: China.

11 A14: Uh-huh.

12 J32: United States, Korea.

13 A14: Uh-huh.

14 J32: And Vietnam.

15 A14: Okay.

16 J32: So I like Vietnam the best.

17 A14: Really? Why?

18 J32: Vietnam is, mmm, very small and very, mmm, it's a little bit similar to Japan.

19 A14: How so?

20 J32: Aa, Vietnamese, Vietnamese people's characteristics is similar to Japanese Japanese people.

21 A14: Like what?

22 J32: Aa, rather punctual character.

23 A14: Okay.

Excerpt 3 also indicates that A14 asked for more information because J31 gave minimum information.

Excerpt 3

Group 22, one Japanese and one North American in English: J31, A14

01 A14: So, Yoshito, where're you from?

02 J31: I am from Tochigi.

03 A14: Tochigi? Where is that?

04 J31: Uh, it's north of Tokyo.

05 A14: How far north?

06 J31: Tochigi prefecture.

07 A14: How far north of Tokyo?

08 J31: Uh, maybe 200 kilometers or so.

09 A14: Okay. And when did you move to Tokyo?

10 J31: Uh, I come to Tokyo, um, five years ago.

11 A14: Oh, five years ago.

12 J31: Yeah.

13 A14: And so how do you like it?

14 J31: Uh, yeah, I think Tokyo is a good place, but a little

In Excerpt 3, A14 asked J31 where he is from. Then J31 answered with a geographical place name, Tochigi, which A14 did not know. Therefore, A14 asked him for details about the location. J31 answered in reference to Japan's capital city, Tokyo, and told A14 that the city is in Tochigi prefecture, which did not make sense to A14. When J31 added, "Tochigi prefecture," he overlapped A14's "How far from?" A14 repeated the question: "How far north of Tokyo?" After A14 found out where the city is, A14 continued to ask J31, "When did you move to Tokyo?" and "So how did you like it?" J31's answer was very short and did not satisfy A14. Then, A14 had to ask another question to make J31 disclose himself.

The conversation continued with the pattern of questions from the native English speaker and answers from the native Japanese speaker. However, this pattern sometimes irritated the native speaker. In the following excerpt, J31 never asked questions of A14. A14 raised the new topic in line 01, "Which movies do you want to see?" J31 did not answer immediately, so A14 specified the movie *Avatar* in the question, which was a new movie when these data were recorded. This excerpt shows that J31 did not ask questions about the movie. He could have asked A14, "Who is in the movie?" "Where did you see the posters?" "Are you going to

see the movie?" and so on. Moreover, A14 felt bad about J31's ignorance of the movie. The recording data show that A14 gradually became irritated.

Excerpt 4

Group 22, one Japanese and one North Americans in English: J31, A14

- 01 A14: My preference is different. Yeah. So there are a lot of new movies coming out. Which movies do you want to see?=
 02 J31: =Uh.
 03 A14: Did you hear about the new James Cameron movie?
 04 J31: No.
 05 A14: No? *Avatar*?
 06 J31: *Avatar*?
 07 A14: *Avatar*. It's about alien planets. *Avatar*, James Cameron, you know.
 08 J31: Yeah, yeah, James Cameron, yeah.
 09 A14: He made *Terminator 2*, *Titanic*. It's a new movie, started on December 23rd.
 10 J31: I'm sorry. I don't know.
 11 A14: No, you don't know, really? Because they have posters everywhere. It's a story about how I think Americans go to a pure, innocent planet and try to take, no, natural resources.

7 Does the Participant Ask Clarifying Questions?

Native English speakers usually ask questions when the meaning of words is ambiguous or vague. Native Japanese speakers do not clarify insistently. They sometimes check words uttered quickly or in a low voice. Excerpt 5 shows that when J19 said "tennis," both American participants asked him if he meant regular tennis or table tennis. Each of the American participants asked J19 in turn, "Not table tennis?" "Just regular tennis?" "To real tennis?" "Table tennis?" That J19 prefers table tennis to real tennis complicated their understanding. Consequently, they persisted in asking J19 whether he meant table tennis or regular tennis to clarify the meaning. This type of questioning was seen in a different group. When a Japanese participant said, "I like skiing," an American participant persistently asked him whether it is snow skiing or water skiing. The Japanese participant felt that he was interrupted.

Excerpt 5

Group 20, two Japanese and two North Americans in English: J18, J19, A12, A13

- 01 J19: But when I was at high school I, I went to the tennis school.
 02 A12: Not table tennis?
 03 J19: No, not table tennis.
 04 (Multiple speakers, inaudible)
 05 A13: Just regular tennis?
 06 J19: Regular tennis.
 07 A13: Regular tennis.
 08 A14: Okay.
 09 J19: And I love, I prefer, prefer to, prefer table tennis to
 10 A13: To real tennis?

11 A12: Table tennis?

In the next excerpt, A14 asked J32 about “slow nature.” “Slow nature” may be a literal translation from the Japanese *sure neicha*, which seems to be borrowed from English. First, A14 repeated the word to clarify that it was “slow nature.” After that, he paraphrased again what J32 said until A14 said, “You mean people go at their own pace?” “They don’t rush too much?” and “You think Machida people go very slowly?” Machida is a town near Tokyo. A14 tried to clarify what J32 wanted to say to compare with the town that both of them know very well.

Excerpt 6

Group 23, one Japanese and one North Americans in English: J32, A14

- 01 J32: And Vietnam’s city, the structure of Vietnam, Vietnamese cities are similar to Japan, so how to, how to build city, how to, how to build buildings.
- 02 A14: Uh-huh.
- 03 J32: How to, and very small and slow, slow nature.
- 04 A14: Slow 〔nature? 〕
- 05 J32: 〔Slow nature 〕 and slow characteristics to Vietnam, in Vietnam I like.
- 06 A14: You mean people go at their own pace?
- 07 J32: Yes.
- 08 A14: They don’t rush 〔too much? 〕
- 09 J32: 〔Slow, slow pace. 〕 No, slow, slow, very slow pace.
- 10 A14: You think Machida people go very slowly?

Japanese people hardly ever ask questions to try to check their understanding during conversation; however, they do ask different types of questions. Excerpt 7 shows that the Japanese participant deduced the word that A13 was going to say. When A13 said, “I listen to jazz, but as far as listening, I like to, I like.” Then J19 said, “Classical music?” This pattern is called co-construction and is often found in Japanese conversation. Two or more participants make up one sentence together. To Japanese speakers, it is not interruption. By co-constructing the utterance with the speaker, the listener shows cooperation because they create the idea together, or the listener shows curiosity about what the speaker is going to say by inferring what the speaker is going to say. In lines 11 and 14, J19 repeats A13’s utterance. This might have been an act of checking his understanding.

Excerpt 7

Group 20, two Japanese and two North Americans in English: J18, J119, A12, A13

- 01 J19: What, what, what kind of music genre do you, do you like best, jazz or
- 02 A13: I listen to jazz, but as far as listening, I like to, I like
- 03 J19: Classical music?
- 04 A13: I like some, but I listen to a lot of rock, and I listen to a lot of
- 05 J19: Rock?
- 06 A13: Hip hop.
- 07 J19: Rock?

- 08 A13: Yeah. Yeah.
 09 J19: What kind of band do you like?
 10 A13: My favorite band is, I think, the Beatles.
 11 J19: Beatles?
 12 A13: Yeah, Beatles.
 13 A12: Yeah. Older rock.
 14 J19: Ah, older rock.

8 Does the Speaker Respond with emphatic responses (“really,” “that’s interesting”)?

Emphatic responses are used to show interest in the current speaker and to establish good rapport. In general, native English speakers make emphatic responses more often than native Japanese speakers do, as demonstrated in Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8

Group 20, two Japanese and two North Americans in English: J18, J19, A12, A13

- 01 J19: But when I was at junior high, I played the horn in the orchestra.
 02 A12: Yeah?
 03 J19: And next I am, I am playing the electric guitar by myself, yeah.
 04 A12: That’s cool.
 05 A13: Yeah, cool and yeah.
 06 A12: Yeah, I can play some, a lot of, I kind of played the trombone for a while, jazz and
 07 J19: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
 08 A13: That’s cool.
 09 A12: That’s cool.
 10 J19: And now I have moved on to like, oh, I can play like a little bit of acoustic and that’s
 about it but mostly the trombone.
 11 A12: I want to learn to play bass guitar. I can’t play anything yet or but.
 12 J19: I play trombone.

In Excerpt 8, J19 talked about his skill with musical instruments. He was in an orchestra and can play the horn. A12 responded to him saying, “Yeah.” Then J19 said that he can play the electric guitar. At that time, both A12 and A13 responded, “That’s cool.” In line 05, A13 responded, “Yeah, cool and yeah.” In line 06, A12 said that he also could play a musical instrument. He said that he could play the trombone. J19 responded by repeating “yeah.” In line 09, A13 said, “That’s cool.” Here, A12 repeated, “That’s cool.” A12 said it for himself, but he may have meant it as a compliment to J19. Notice that J18 did not respond in this excerpt at all. The expression “That’s cool” may be just a set expression, but it sounds more emphatic than just responding with “yeah.”

The Japanese participants in Group 20 used these expressions, as well as the native English speakers. However, they selected the words from a small range of similar expressions such as *really* and *wow* as in Excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9

Group 20, two Japanese and two North Americans in English: J18, J19, A12, A13

- 01 A13: Yeah that's, I kind of did that in Argentina.
 02 A12: Argentina.
 03 A13: I took
 04 J19: Argentina?
 05 A13: Yeah, I took a school trip to Argentina.
 06 J19: Oh, really?
 07 A13: Buenos Aires for three weeks and we got some credit and we learnt some Spanish.
 08 J19: Wow!
 09 A13: Yeah. I know. It's really cool there. Yeah. It's huge.

In Excerpt 10, the conversations began with a set pattern of questions from A14 and answers from each Japanese participant. Therefore, A14 did not show much of an emphatic mood in the conversation. He often used expressions like “okay” and “uh-huh”; however, he used “that’s impressive,” which showed his interest in the talk. He also said, “Really? I didn’t know that.” Clearly, they are not different from the “uh–huh” uttered by A14.

Excerpt 10

Group 24, one Japanese and one North Americans in English: J32, A14

- 01 A14: Do you speak Vietnamese?
 02 J32: A little bit.
 03 A14: Okay.
 04 J32: Because I have, I have a kind of girl, girlfriend, no (laugh).
 05 A14: (laugh) Kind of girl?
 06 J32: Kind of girlfriend.
 07 A14: Okay.
 08 J32: In Vietnam, I had, and I wrote a letter to her.
 09 A14: Uh-huh. In Vietnamese?
 11 J32: In Vietnamese.
 12 A14: That's impressive.
 13 J32: Very dif, difficult language.
 14 A14: I heard it's a difficult language.
 15 J32: But, but Vietnamese, Vietnamese language use the alphabet Ro, Roman A, B, C, D
 ㄱalphabet. ㄱ
 16 A14: ㄱReally? Oh, I didn't know that. ㄱ
 17 J32: Yes, so easy to write.

Japanese participants often used response expression as they do in Japanese conversation. In the following excerpt, J30 used the Japanese backchanneling “Un” and the exclamation “Aa.” They are italicized in the excerpt. He also used “Aa” when he sought the appropriate English words but used “Aa” as he would in Japanese. Notice how often he used the backchanneling “Un.” In Japanese, the more often one says something

or the louder ones says it shows a strong interest. However, the Japanese style might annoy native English speakers not accustomed to this way of backchanneling. Most of the un's uttered overlap A14's utterances.

Excerpt 11

Group 21, one Japanese and one North Americans in English: J30, A14

- 01 J30: They are doing like that. But I am, I think the change of the government is a kind of a symbolic event.
- 02 A14: Uh-huh.
- 03 J30: And it was aa, aa, meaningful in that respect and so, aa, without, without, aa, that kind of event
- 05 A14: Uh-huh.
- 06 J30: Japan, aa, couldn't, it would be, it would be, it would have been impossible for Japan to become a two-party politics, politics or
- 07 A14: Uh-huh.
- 08 J30: Two parties. So, aa, aa, although what they are doing are not so different
- 09 A14: Uh-huh.
- 10 J30: But, aa, the event itself was very important.
- 11 A14: Uh-huh.
- 12 J30: And had an important, more powerful impact
- 13 A14: Uh-huh.
- 14 J30: On what Japanese people will do in the future.
- 15 A14: Okay, yeah I mean, in America now, I don't know if you know about this, but there is a breaking of the Republican party
- 16 J30: =Un.=
- 17 A14: =Which was Bush's party=
- 18 J30: =Un.=
- 19 A14: =Into a tea bag movement=
- 20 J30: =Un.=
- 21 A14: =inside their own party.=
- 22 J30: =Un.=
- 23 A14: And it seems very stupid to me=
- 24 J30: =Un.= (laugh)
- 25 A14: Because they are infighting. =
- 26 J30: =Un, yes.=
- 27 A14: So they can't unite and do more things. =
- 28 J30: =Un.=
- 29 A14: In Japan, it seems that system has been going on for a long time. =
- 30 J30: =Un.=
- 31 A14: =Like there was the Mori faction =
- 32 J30: =Un.=
- 33 A14: ㄱAnd the Hashimoto faction. ㄴ
- 34 J30: ㄴYes, yes, yes . ㄴ

35 A14: And it's, you think that will continue?

36 J30: Aa, I think it will be, it will continue (laugh). So, aa, un, yes.

9 Conclusion

The frequency of asking questions and the selection of words for response are different for native Japanese speakers and native English speakers when speaking English. Considering that the participants in the study had high levels of English grammar, vocabulary, and listening skills, the differences are due to the influences from the Japanese conversational style.

If the differences in conversational style are small, the interaction will be successful. Group 20 was the most successful group in this study. Each participant's contribution was similar. Although native English speakers used felicitous expressions and a vocabulary richer than that of the Japanese participants, during the ongoing turn-taking, similar attitudes about participation in the conversation created a relaxed atmosphere and rapport in the conversation. However, in Group 22, the least successful conversation in this study, the native English speaker became overloaded with asking questions and raising new topics. Moreover, the Japanese participant just answered the questions and added no new information. This Japanese participant joined the other research conversation research, which was in Japanese. The Japanese participant's attitude was different from what the native English speaker expected. When A14 asked questions to J31 and J31 did not know the answer, J31 said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I do not know." When asked, J31 answered only the question. He did not add any other information.

The English conversational style should be taught explicitly when studying English. Some English learners could acquire the English conversational style by accumulating a certain amount of English-speaking experience. However, learning through experience depends on the learners' language sensitivity, in which learners should be acutely aware of the differences in conversational style. When speaking in English, employing the English style is advisable.

I found that Japanese learners, and even teachers, are not aware of such a conversational style when I visited an English class at an elementary school in Japan. Although native English speakers use emphatic responses and add more information, which are features of the English conversational style, the Japanese English learners were not aware of this and concentrated on the targeted question-and-answer practice of yes and no. The Japanese teachers were not aware of this feature either, and they did not point out that the Japanese learners should not employ their conversation style when speaking English. We are not aware that these features are being taught in English-language classes.

The results of this study indicate that differences in cultural conversational styles affect speakers' interactions. If native Japanese speakers know the differences between Japanese and English conversational styles, including that it is not rude to ask questions and make comments at instances of turn-relevance in English conversations, their language behavior may become more appropriate in conversations with English speakers, which will reduce difficulties and misunderstandings.

Transcribing Symbols

(laughing)	Indicates laughter only by the person currently speaking
=	no laps
□ □	Simultaneous speech
┌ ┐	

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Interpretation of the Goals of the Tasks by the Learners in the Classes Based on the Content-Based Approach

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Abstract

The main foci of the research were to know the attitude of the subjects toward the content-based approach, the use of group discussion and the effects of the approach perceived by the subjects. As the results of the analyses showed, in order to make a content-based classroom effective, the learners' interest in the contents should be the precondition in addition to the understanding of the philosophy and procedure of the class by the students. As a content-based classroom in regular English courses would be their first experience, where they are forced to learn English implicitly by discussing the contents of the topics set without being explained the grammar or structure of the target language as are expected in the usual English classes, some students would feel stressed. The teacher of a content-based classroom should be very careful about this point and explain about the philosophy and the procedure of the approach when necessary.

Introduction

In the study by Tanabe (2008), the general attitude and the problems in using the content-based approach in regular English courses in a university were investigated by analyzing a questionnaire. As the results of the analysis, the use of the content-based approach in the regular English courses in universities was found generally welcomed, the contents in the specialized fields were motivating, and the use of the grammar-translation method was accepted where it was necessary.

In this paper the same questionnaire was used with the same contents and the format to compare the results for the subjects who took the courses for 2 semesters in 2011 and those who took the same courses for 1 semester in 2012. The main foci of the research were to know 1) the interpretation of the goals of the tasks by the learner in the classes based on a content-based approach, 2) the attitude of the subjects toward the content-based approach, and 3) the interpretation of the group work as a main procedure of comprehending reading the contents.

Method

Two types of questionnaires were given to the students who were taking the regular English course at Keio University. The first one was given in the first class in 2012, just after the philosophy and the approach and the method of the classes and the introduction of the syllabus were explained, in which the basic motive of choosing the class was asked. The second one was given at the last class of the same two classes in 2011 and after the first semester in 2012. These results were compared with the results in 2008 for the discussion. The major difference of the classes in 2011 and 2012 was the use of group work for comprehending the contents of the courses in 2012, which was not at all used in one class in 2011.

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