

The Need for Explicit Teaching of Interactional Skills: Cultural Assumptions Underlying English-Language Interactions

MURATA, Yasumi, Faculty of Foreign Studies, Meijo University

Abstract

This article argues that language interactions, particularly those of an interpersonal nature, are governed by many implicit rules of the community where the language is spoken. It is possible, therefore, that Japanese learners of English find it difficult to partake in interactions in English even when their reception skills and production skills are rated as relatively high on an English proficiency test, because they interact according to Japanese communal norms. Some of the features of interactions in English that became evident through comparisons with Japanese interactions are presented in this paper. It is inferred that native Japanese learners of English need to receive explicit instructions of such features before they can interact effectively in English.

Keywords: English and Japanese interaction, native Japanese speakers, interaction skills, contextualization cues, establishment of relationships

1. Introduction (Background)

In March 2017, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) issued new course guidelines (*gakushu shido yoryo*)¹⁾ for primary and secondary schools (junior and senior high schools) for all subjects, including English. The new guidelines will be implemented in 2020 for elementary schools, in 2021 for junior high schools, and in 2022 for senior high schools. Implementation means that in the respective years, textbooks that have been written in accordance with the new guidelines will come into use. At the time I wrote this paper, English textbooks for elementary schools were being produced. The inclusion of English in the primary

curriculum will have quite an impact on the overall situation of English education in Japan, as English has never been granted official school subject status at the primary level in this country. There are still concerns expressed by scholars who cast doubts on the mandatory teaching of English in elementary schools (e.g., Erikawa, Saito, Torikai & Otsu, 2014; Fujiwara, Naka & Terasawa, 2017; Torikai, 2018). Their major concerns emanate from two viewpoints: first, the number of teachers who are qualified to teach English to elementary school students is insufficient. They argue that the current elementary school teachers who will oversee teaching have never been trained to do the job and, therefore, that the mere introduction of English education in elementary schools will fail to elicit the results the government is hoping for. The second viewpoint is related to the idea of making English a school subject. A school subject mandates assessment and competition, with the implication that children will be given a multitude of tests in the subject every term. People who oppose the idea of English as a standard school subject contend that English as an elementary school subject will only discourage more children from studying English even before they reach junior high school age. The government's aim of having a legion of competent English speakers in Japan will thus be difficult to achieve. Despite receiving such criticisms from scholars, the government nonetheless has decided to go ahead with teaching English in elementary schools.

2. Purpose of research

Following the issuance of the new guidelines mentioned above, the ministry released the expository for each subject from primary to secondary education in July 2018. The expository for senior high school guidelines, *Koto gakko gakushu shidoyoryo kaisetsu: Gaikokugo-hen Eigo-hen* [Expository for senior high school course guidelines: Foreign languages, English], holds great relevance for this research. It is available as a downloadable PDF file consisting of 236 pages with detailed information on educational concepts and the aims and goals for each subject that is to be offered. It stipulates the English skills that senior high school students are expected to acquire by the end of the eight-year English education period, from the fifth-grade

primary year to the third year of senior high school. The most eminent changes from the previous guidelines concerning tertiary English education are the following two points:

1. Speaking skills are now composed of two distinct skills, the skill of presentation and the skill of interaction.²⁾
2. The guidelines proffer an integrated approach to the five language activities of listening, reading, speaking interactively (interaction), presenting, and writing, rather than teaching by singling out one skill.

The separation of speaking skills into presentation and interaction is based on the language activities described in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). It has independent descriptors that are commonly referred to as “can-do” statements for presentation and interaction.

As Torikai (2018) points out, the ministry seems to be unadvised of the fact that there has been a limited amount of research on the topic of interaction, and instead it seems to simply assume that an interaction is no more than a mere exchange of utterances by the speakers. It is true, as CEFR (2001) states, that “presentation” is unidirectional speaking and “interaction” is bidirectional exchange among two or more speakers. I, however, argue in this paper that interaction is a cultural construct filled with cultural expectations born out of tacit rules and assumptions and thus it is necessary to duly instruct learners of English in Japan (tantamount to native speakers of Japanese) how to interact in English before they can successfully take part in an interaction in English.

My argument is based on the comparative analysis of the English conversation data of English as a native language (ENL) speakers and the Japanese conversation data of Japanese as a native language (JNL) speakers. These data were taken from the two projects I was involved in from 2010 to 2017.³⁾

3. Literature review: approaches to the study of interaction

Research on interactions may be summarized from two main approaches: discourse analysis and intercultural communication. I will review studies on the discourse and intercultural communication as they are the most relevant to the current study.

3.1 Discourse perspective

In his seminal work on linguistic interaction, Gumperz (1982) explains the complex mechanisms of how communication takes place over a stretch of utterances between people. His work is a development from the 1974 work of Dell Hymes, who formed the foundation of sociolinguistics by challenging the then-prevalent rationalistic approach to language of Chomsky's transformational grammar (1965).

Gumperz introduces concepts of "frame" and "script" originally developed in the field of psychology to explain an exchange such as the one below:

A: Are you gonna be here for ten minutes?

B: Go ahead and take your break. Take longer if you want to.

A: I'll be outside on the porch. Call me if you need me.

B: O.K, don't worry. (p.1)

This exchange makes sense only if A and B share the same understanding of the procedure of what happens in an office situation. Such shared knowledge results from the shared experiences of A and B. This kind of accumulative knowledge resulting from one's experiences is called "frame." "Script" is similar to "frame," but it refers to a more socially fixed procedure such as ordering in a restaurant and shopping in a shop. Gumperz explains that both "frame" and "script" play an important role when people engage in interactions.

Another critical concept introduced by Gumperz is the idea of the "contextualization cue." He says "that a contextualization cue is any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions" (p.131), in which speakers signal and listeners interpret the meanings of the message from the signals. The meaning of contextualization cues, however, is implicit and not talked

about out of context. If a cue is not noticed or reacted to, interpretations may differ, and a misunderstanding may occur. Gumperz (p.173) presents a case of Indian female cafeteria workers at a British airport in which the prosodic feature of falling intonation used by the Indian female workers when asking if the customer wanted gravy was understood as a contextualization cue by the customers (ENL speakers). The falling intonation was an influence from their native Hindi language and was completely unnoticed by the Indian female workers and this unshared unawareness between the cafeteria workers and customers led to misjudgments by the customers of the Indian workers as unfriendly and surly.

Contextualization cues would be called metapragmatics in the field of pragmatics (Silverstein, 1992). Verschueren (2010) proposes that intonation, rhythm, stress, choice of register, lexical and syntactic options, formulaic expressions, strategies of openings, closing, and sequencing may all form frames of interpretation in socially defined settings.

3.2 Intercultural communication perspective

Interaction is much related to communication style, because they are both concerned with the way people talk. Different communication styles have been recognized. The classic study examines the high- and low-context styles described by Hall (1976). Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Chua (1988) developed and extended Hall's framework and identified four stylistic modes which have been adopted and have proved useful in describing the communication style of a culture. According to Gudykunst et al., the style may be direct or indirect, and elaborate, exacting or succinct, in terms of the amount of talk; personal or contextual in terms of 'I' identity; and instrumental or affective in terms of speaker-oriented or listener-oriented speaking.

FitzGerald (2003) proposed six communication styles with cultural groupings, by examining an English conversation corpus that involved four native English-speakers and 70 non-native speakers from 42 countries. She analyzed the data from the seven dimensions of discourse organization, rhetorical strategies, turn-taking patterns, talk distribution, assertiveness, disagreement, and conflict.

Contrastive studies focusing specifically on English and Japanese have also been given attention. Gudykunst (1993) applied Hofstede's dimensions to compare the communication of US English speakers to that of Japanese speakers. Yamada (1997) analyzed the recorded data collected from her own experiences while working at the US office of a Japanese bank and showed how miscommunications could be traced back to the different presupposed social values of the Japanese and American societies. Watanabe (1993) looked at the academic discourse of American and Japanese student discussions in class and explicated the differences in the beginning and ending phrases, different ways of presenting reasons, and argumentation strategies employed by American and Japanese students. More recently Hori et al. (2006) examined how ENL speakers and JNL speakers build and maintain a relationship from opposite politeness vectors. According to their analysis, JNL speakers are more likely to use negative politeness strategies while ENL speakers use positive politeness strategies.

The studies reviewed above do not escape the criticism of stereotyping. The researchers, however, seem to imply (or FitzGerald overtly states) that the benefit of understanding the general workings of communication in one language and culture outweighs the stress and resulting negative evaluations of the culture by the members of the other language and culture that otherwise would occur in intercultural situations.

4. Data

As the literature review in section 3 shows, to my knowledge, there has been only limited research, theoretical or practical, but more importantly pedagogical, that directly compares English interactions by ENL speakers and Japanese interactions by JNL speakers, thereby clarifying what would possibly hinder Japanese learners of English from actively participating in interactions with ENL speakers.

We collected 33 conversations of ENL speakers conversing in English (10 from Australia, 13 from the UK, and 10 from the US) and 10 conversations of JNL speakers conversing in Japanese, each of which was approximately 30 minutes in length. It should be noted that the English conversation data are from the Inner circle countries only. Each project member was responsible for analyzing the data from one perspective,

such as self-disclosure, question-response, backchannels, etc. The number of conversation data used for analysis varied from nine (three from each country) to fifteen (five from each country) for English, and from three to five conversations for Japanese speakers. The data were chosen to include the maximum amount of diversity to mitigate the idiosyncrasies of the speakers.

The gender and social variables of participants are made consistent, males with a tertiary degree or enrolled in a tertiary educational institution at the time of recording, excepting one person in one UK group, who only held a high school diploma. The English speaking participants were restricted to those who were born and grew up in their native countries, using English as their first language and, in the case of the Japanese groups, Japanese as their first language. The appendix shows the birth place, the age group, and the number of years of the longest residency of each English speaking participant at the time of recording.

All the conversations were in triad form, i.e. three-person conversations. The conversation timetable was carefully organized so that all the three participants were strangers to one another at the time of recording. They were instructed not to initiate talking in the waiting room prior to their conversation to ensure first-encounter conversation data. In order to present the participants with as natural a situation as possible, the setting was explained to them: they were meeting for the first time at their common friend's house party. Conversations were recorded on video and audio devices and transcribed afterwards for analysis.

5. Analyses and results

Since the purpose was to find out how native speakers interact in each native language and to elucidate the differences between English and Japanese speakers' interactions, we watched, listened to the conversations, and examined the transcriptions to compare the interactions in the two languages. The past findings on characteristics of the Japanese or English conversations were applied to the data as reference points to depict the ways of interaction. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted according to the needs of the objectives.⁴⁾

5.1 Self-disclosure

Jourard (1971) defines self-disclosure as revealing personal information to others, and Enomoto (1997) points out that Jourard's concept of self-disclosure has its focus on others and, as such, the significance of self-disclosure exists in making yourself known to the interlocutors. Barnlund (1975), by comparing the conversations of the Japanese university students and English speaking university students in America, pointed out that the Japanese university students disclose much less than the American students do.

This difference was clear from our data. The ENL speakers gave much more information about themselves than the JNL speakers. Iwata (2015) observed that self-disclosure began at the inception of every conversation for ENL speakers and that self-disclosure was more extensive in comparison to what was found in the Japanese data. She examined 15 English conversations, five from each English speaking region and five Japanese conversations. Excerpt 1 is the first 70 seconds taken from a US group recorded in Texas. U1, U2, and U3 are used as codes to identify the three speakers. Relevant functions to the present study are identified and shown in brackets.

[Excerpt 1]

U1 Gilbert U2 William U3 Andrew

01 U1: Oh, I'm Gilbert.

02 U2: Yeah, I'm William.

03 U3: I am Andrew.

04 U1: Andrew and William, nice to meet you guys.

05 U2: Nice to meet you.

06 U3: Nice to meet you guys.

07 U1: I'm from here. I lived here about 8 years now, 7 to 8

(self-disclosure) (self-disclosure)

08 years. I was born here.

(self-disclosure)

09 U3: Okay.

(lexical backchannel)

- 10 U1: but moved away. How about you?
(self-disclosure) (turn-directing)
- 11 U3: Ah, California. I came here for graduate school in
(self-disclosure)
- 12 advertising. Yeah, pretty much it.
- 13 U1: Where in California?
(turn-appropriating) (Q-word question)
- 14 U3: Bay Area, so up by Bay San Francisco.
- 15 U1: Okay, cool.
(lexical backchannel)
- 16 U3: Um-hum.
- 17 U2: I am from the DC area. I grew up in Northern Virginia
(self-disclosure)
- 18 and moved here a year ago for graduate school
(self-disclosure)
- 19 U1: A William & Mary shirt, I see?
(turn-appropriating)
- 20 U2: Yeah. That was, that's where I did my undergrad
(self-disclosure)
- 21 U1: Okay.
(lexical backchannel)
- 22 U3: Nice. What are you guys studying respectively?
(Q-word question)
- 23 U2: Ah, political Science.
- 24 U3: Okay.
(lexical backchannel)
- 25 U1: I, I did computer science here, but I am not
(self-disclosure)
- 26 in school anymore.

- 27 U3: Awesome.
(lexical backchannel)
- 28 U2: Cool.
(lexical backchannel)
- 29 U1: Yeah, I just started a job as a freelance web developer.
(self-disclosure)
- 30 after a summer of unemployment, and it's pretty
- 31 U3: What did you prefer?
(turn-appropriating) (Q-word question)
- all laugh*
- 32 U1: Oh, the unemployment was nice for about a month. (*laugh*)
- 33 U3: (*laugh*) Yeah, it's usually how it goes.
- 34 U1: Yeah, I've just, I did computer science and I started
(self-disclosure)
- 35 working at startups, and it's been volatile ever since.
- 36 U3: Yeah.
- 37 U1: And now I am pulling, like, like, I think I worked
(self-disclosure)
- 38 about 40 hours Thursday and Friday straight.
- 39 U3: Oh, man.
(lexical backchannel)

Excerpt 2 below shows the typical start of a conversation in Japanese that follows an exchange of 'yoroshiku ongai shimasu', which is the standard greeting that signals a start of conversation. The excerpt is 96 seconds in duration.

[Excerpt 2]

(The parts in square brackets indicate an overlap.)

J1 Ishikawa Takeshi J2 Kato Yuto J3 Ujiyama Masahiko

01 J1: *Yoroshiku onegai shimasu, a, Ishikawa desu. Ishikawa Takeshi desu.*

'Nice to meet you. I'm Ishikawa, Ishikawa Takeshi.'

02 J2: *Hai.*

‘OK.’

03 J1: *Ee, R daigakuin no, shushi no 1 nensei desu.*

‘A master’s student at R university graduate school.’

04 J3: *A.*

‘Ah.’

05 J1: *E, semmon wa, ano, hattatsu shinri toka, kyoikushinri de, chotto gengo towa*

‘Yeah, my major is, ah, developmental psychology or educational psychology

06 *chigau n desu kedo, yatteremasu, hai, yoroshiku onegai shimasu.*

and not really related to language but, yeah, nice to meet you.’

07 J2: *Yoroshiku onegai [shimaasu].*

‘Nice to meet you.’

08 J3: *[masu] to, boku wa Ujiyama Masahiko desu. Etto T dai no keisan-kogaku*

(self-disclosure)

‘And, and I am Ujiyama Masahiko. Uhm, at T university and

09 *senko de, shushi no 1 nensei o yatte imasu de maa*

majoring in arithmetic engineering, a first-year master’s student, and um

10 *sen, kenkyu wa etto baio infomatittusu to iu bunya de.*

my major research is well, in the field called bio-informatics and’

11 J1: *Aa.*

‘I see.’

12 J3: *Eeto maa, seimei jo, seimei no joho o keisanki o tsukatte, nanka*

(turn-maintaining)

‘uum, well, I analyze the information of life with computers, so to speak

13 *soitta shuho no kaihatsu suru nari, sore o tsukatte, kaiseki o shitari datoka*

I develop an analyzing method and apply it to analysis

14 *maa, sonna kanni no koto o yatte masu hai.*

Uum, that is the sort of thing I do, yes.’

15 J2: *Hai, yoroshiku onegai shimaasu.*

‘OK, nice to meet you.’

- 16 J1: *Yoroshiku onegi shimasu.*
 ‘Nice to meet you.’
- 17 J2: *Eeto, Kato Yuto to moshi masu. Eeto M bijutsu daigaku no hode, e*
 (self-disclosure)
 ‘Mmh I am Kato Yuto. Uum, at M art university
- 18 *dezain joho gakka*
 design informatics’
- 19 J1: *Un.*
 ‘Uha.’
- 20 J2: *Toyu toko de iru n desu kedo, ano, intarakushon dezain te iu*
 (turn-maintaining)
 ‘the place called, uh, interaction design
- 21 *so ho ko no dezain dattari toka komyunikeshon dezain*
 that’s the place, bi-directional design or communication design’
- 22 J1: *Un.*
 ‘Uha.’
- 23 J2: *nitsuite ichio benkyo shiteimasu, hai.*
 (turn-maintaining)
 ‘studying about these things, yeah.’
- 24 J1: *Dezaintte yuto*
 ‘When you say design
- 25 J2: *Hai.*
 ‘Yes.’
- 26 J1: *Doyu dezain nan desu ka, sore wa*
 (Q-word question) (turn-maintaining)
 What sort of design is it?’
- 27 J2: *A, waknnai desu yo ne.*
 ‘Ah, not intelligible, right?’
- 28 J1: *Hai.*
 ‘Yes.’

- 29 J2: *Ano, boku mo hairu made ammari wakatte nakattan desu kedo, sono,*
 ‘Well, I myself did not understand until I started, that,
- 30 *kekko dezain te iu to, sono, panhuretto dattari toka, posuta dattari toka,*
 when you talk about design, you think of pamphlets, or posters,
- 31 *ato wa, hontoni nandaro, kokoku mitaina*
 also, really, what can I say, advertisements like
- 32 *[kanji o] chotto ukaberu to omun desu kedo*
 sorts of things, you think of, but
- 33 J1: *[Uuun]*
 ‘Yes’
- 34 J2: *sonoo, soyu dezain mo mochiron arukeredomo, ano pasokon dattara*
 (turn-maintaining)
 mmh, that kind of design of course exists, but mmh, say for a computer
- 35 *intafeisu tokade, botan o oshitara, nanka, uindo ga hiraitari toka,*
 by interface, if you press a button, a window will open, or’
- 36 J1: *U [Un]*
 ‘Yes’
- 37 J3: *[Un]*
 ‘Yes’
- 38 J2: *soyu hito no te o kuwaeru koto ni yotte muko no dezai no hoo kara*
 (turn-maintaining)
 ‘by adding such a human touch, from design
- 39 *[hanno shitari 1] toka suru dezain toka aruja nai desu ka.*
 it reacts, you know.’
- 40 J1: *[Uuu[n 2] 1]*
 ‘Mmmh’
- 41 J3: *[Un? 2]*
 ‘Mmm?’
- 42 J1: *[A, sore dake ja nai?]*
 ‘Oh, that is not all?’

43 J2: [Hai]

‘No.’

In Excerpt 2, the only self-disclosure is restricted to their names and their fields of study. J2 elaborated on the explanation of his major of “design informatics.” He took approximately half of the first 118 seconds to complete his explanation. As Iwata points out, in the Americans’ interaction, even some negative information (which presumably is not honorable to oneself) is given, as in lines 25, 26, and 30 in Excerpt 1. Such negative information was not found in the Japanese interaction.

5.2 Question-response

It has been pointed out that response-seeking questions in Japanese interactions are relatively few, as JNL speakers consider asking direct questions threatening to the interlocutors (Shigemitsu, 2005, 2013). Shigemitsu (2015) categorized seven response-seeking utterances using morphosyntactic, phonological, and functional criteria. The following includes the seven types of response-seeking utterances identified and examined by Shigemitsu in order to compare the response-seeking behaviors of ENL and JNL participants:

1. Yes-No questions

e.g. Do you think travel is terribly expensive?

2. Q-word questions

e.g. What are you guys studying respectively?

3. Alternative questions

e.g. Was it a personal choice, or was it something that was recommended to you?

4. Tag-questions

e.g. Yeah, that’s still poly, isn’t it?

5. Turn-directing questions

e.g. What about you? How about you?

6. News mark questions

e.g. Really? Is it?

Such questions uttered with a rising tone show surprise and function as backchannels, but they may also be used to seek a response from the interlocutor and those which received a response are included in her analysis.

7. Implicit response-seeking questions

e.g. I have no idea.

When a person lacks knowledge on the topic, he or she can utter a sentence like the above as if it were a soliloquy. Since it is not in an explicit question form and has no rising tone, the other participants can safely (that is, without being rude) opt for giving no response. Such a statement, however, is sometimes answered. When the statement was answered with relevant information, it was counted as an implicit response-seeking question for the current analysis.

The number of occurrences of each response-seeking question type in the data of 15 ENL conversations, five each from the UK, the USA, Australia, and five JNL conversations, was counted. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the ratio of occurrence of the seven question types in the entire corpora of questions from each country.

Table 1

Response-seeking question types (mean %) by country

	yes-no	Q-word	alter- native	tag	turn- directing	news mark	implicit
UK	42	24	2	19	2	11	0
USA	48	32	5	5	3	6	1
AUS	44	34	7	4	2	9	0
JP	39	14	1	20	0	7	19

There are three important findings that Shigemitsu's analysis presents to our understanding of the interactional behavior of ENL and JNL speakers. First, the type of response-seeking questions most frequently employed across the English and Japanese conversations was "yes-no" questions. Second, while the next most frequent question type is Q-word questions in the ENL data, Q-word questions in the Japanese data are far fewer. Third, implicit questions are negligible in the ENL data, but nineteen

percent of the questions in the JNL data are implicit questions; not only is the percentage of implicit questions relatively high, they are found in every conversation of the five examined, according Shigemitsu. These observations show that the obvious tendency to avert explicit information-seeking of JNL speakers' linguistic behavior suggests a strong possibility that in an intercultural setting, JNL speakers may be misunderstood as being disinterested in the conversation or the interlocutor. Such a negative reaction on the part of the interlocutor is likely to interfere with rapport-building.

5.3 Backchannels

According to Otsuka (2015), the backchannels called '*aizuchi*' in Japanese have been extensively researched within the field of Japanese linguistics. Contrastive studies on backchannels have also drawn attention (e.g. Maynard, 1993 and Clancy et al., 1996). Otsuka adopted Horiguchi's (1997) definition of '*aizuchi*' for an analysis of our English and Japanese conversations. She examined nine ENL conversations, three from each country, and three JNL conversations. Table 2 shows the mean number of backchannels used in each country.

Table 2

Number of backchannels by country

	<i>N</i>	mean	<i>SD</i>
UK	9	28.67	23.24
USA	9	43.78	22.82
AUS	9	38.78	31.08
JP	9	74.56	48.08

Otsuka further tested the data for the language difference by applying an independent *t*-test to the English and Japanese data. The acquired result of ($t(34) = 3.00, p < .01$) indicated that the JNL speakers used more backchannels than the ENL speakers. This finding statistically confirmed that in Japanese interactions, backchannels are more frequently used than in English speakers' interactions (Maynard, 1993; Yamada, 1997).

In order to obtain a more accurate picture of the use of backchannels in English and Japanese interactions, Otsuka divided the backchannels into lexical and non-lexical and examined the occurrences of each kind of backchannel in the data. Lexical backchannels are those in which words can be identified such as “yeah,” “right,” “nice,” and “excellent” in English and “*Hai*,” “*Naruhodo*,” “*Sugoi desu ne*,” and “*Tashikani*” in Japanese. Non-lexical backchannels refer to those which are composed of serial sounds such as “Uh-huh” and “Mmh” in English and “*Uun*,” “*Aaa*,” and “*Ee*” in Japanese. Table 3 and Table 4 show the mean number of lexical and non-lexical backchannels found in the English and Japanese conversations.

Table 3

Number of lexical backchannels by language

	<i>N</i>	mean	<i>SD</i>
English	27	26.85	23.07
Japanese	9	18.89	11.38

Table 4

Number of non-lexical backchannels by language

	<i>N</i>	mean	<i>SD</i>
English	27	10.11	9.56
Japanese	9	55.67	40.30

Although Japanese speakers used both lexical and non-lexical backchannels more frequently than the English speakers, an independent *t*-test showed statistical differences only for non-lexical backchannels ($t(8.3) = 3.36, p < .01$).

Otsuka also noted that the locations of backchannels differ between English interactions and Japanese interactions. The Japanese speakers used backchannels in the middle of an utterance without waiting for the interlocutor’s utterance to finish. Table 5 shows mid-utterance backchannels in the English and Japanese data.

Table 5

Number of backchannels in mid-utterance positions

	<i>N</i>	mean	<i>SD</i>
English	27	17.22	16.02
Japanese	9	55.89	36.83

An independent *t*-test result indicated that the JNL speakers gave more mid-utterance backchannels than the ENL speakers. ($t(34) = 4.43, p < .001$)

These analyses depict a typical JNL speaker as giving frequent non-lexical backchannels in the middle of the interlocutor's speech, with a typical native English-speaker giving full lexical backchannels at the end of the interlocutor's speech.

5.4 Turn-taking

Turn-taking was examined by Murata (2015a) in order to find out whether any differences could be observed between the way ENL and JNL speakers managed turn-taking behaviors. The data used in the analysis included twelve ENL conversations (four from each country) and four JNL conversations. We first looked at how turns are distributed among the participants, as some previous research (Murata, 2010; Shigemitsu, 2011) indicated a stronger tendency for an equal distribution among the participants in ENL conversations.

The turn distribution and talk quantity of the participants are shown in Table 1. The distribution ratio of turns and talk quantity among the three participants (from the least to the most involved) was similar within the three Inner circle" regions. A very similar distribution pattern was also observed in the Japanese conversations. More equal distribution of turns and talk among the Japanese speakers is consistent with Yamada's (1997) finding that the turns and talk are more equally distributed in her Japanese business discourse data when the participants are at more-or-less the same level of social status, as they were in our data.

Table 6

Turn and talk distributions of three participants (mean %) by country

	turn			talk		
UK	25.9	33.6	40.5	23.1	28.1	48.8
USA	25.9	34.4	39.7	20.1	33.7	47.6
AUS	24.9	34.1	41.0	20.1	34.0	45.8
JP	26.6	33.6	39.9	21.9	33.3	44.5

Following Clyne (1994), turn functions were also identified. The number of turns that worked to appropriate, direct, and maintain was counted. Examples of turn-appropriating, turn-directing, and turn-maintaining are underlined below.

- (1) 01 U2: And now I think I worked about 40 hours Thursday and
 02 Friday straight.
 03 U3: Oh man...
 04 U2: And...
 05 U3: And here you are Saturday morning.
 (turn-appropriating)

U3 in line 05 finishes U2's utterance, the result of which is an appropriation of U2's turn; (2) is a Japanese example of turn-appropriating, wherein J39's turn is appropriated by J33.

- (2) 01 J39: *Demo yuchubu toka chotto mirerukanaa*
 'But you can see YouTube
 02 *guraide nannka sonna*
 that's all maybe that'
 03 J33: *E demo kekko chizu mitari toka benri*
 (turn-appropriating)
 'Uh, but you can see the map and it's rather convenient'

Turn-directing is a turn which functions to give another person a chance to speak. Typically, it is done by asking a question.

- (3) 01 B2: I'm doing a PhD. My PhD is in the British Modern
02 history of, specifically, the Left Book Club.
03 You've heard of that?
(turn-directing)
04 B4: All right. Yeah.
- (4) 01 J39: *Sotsugyo suru tokit tokatte sotsugyo sakuhin*
'When you graduate, a graduation work
02 *toka no tsukurun desu ka.*
(turn-directing)
or something like, you make?'
03 J33: *Ichio sotsugyo sesaku tteyu huna mono mo arun desu kedo*
'There is a task called a graduation creation, but'

Turn-maintaining refers to a turn that is continuing despite a disruption by another speaker. The disruption may or may not be intended to appropriate a turn.

- (5) 01 B5: Okay. I am B5. I work for Aviva, which is a transport [group]
02 B2: [Uhuh]
03 B5: finished university some time ago. But
(turn-maintaining)
- (6) 01 J33: *De nanka eigo no bumpo no kenkyuutte*
'And, sort of, English grammar and'
02 J39: *Oo[oo]*
'Oooh'

03 J33: [kanji] nan desu kedo

(turn-maintaining)

‘like that sort of, but’

Table 7 shows the number of turn types that appeared in the conversations.

Table 7

Number of turn types by country

	turn- appropriating	turn-directing	turn- maintaining
UK	147	135	343
USA	78	146	413
AUS	43	127	438
JP	32	172	727

Note: The number of turn types is a total of the four conversations from each country.

In order to examine whether there is a statistical difference among the three ENL countries, two-way ANOVA was applied. The results of the analysis of turn-directing were $F(2,9) = 0.17$, $p < .05$ and for turn-maintaining, $F(2,9) = 0.51$, $p < .05$, both of which indicated there was no statistical difference in the occurrences of the two types of turns.

A regional difference among the three ENL varieties was found for turn-appropriating. UK conversations included 147 cases, which is almost twice as many as found in USA conversations; Australians had 43, almost half of those in the US conversations. The result of two-way ANOVA of turn-appropriating was $F(2,9) = 9.37$, $p < .05$, as shown in Table 8, indicating a statistically significant difference among the three countries.

The Japanese conversations included the fewest turn-appropriating cases, and thus it is reasonable to hypothesize that not appropriating a turn may be one element that stops a JNL speaker from getting more involved in an English interaction.

Table 8

Results of ANOVA regarding turn-appropriating

	mean	SD	F
UK	36.8	13.8	9.37*
USA	19.5	2.5	
AUS	10.8	5.2	

N=4

*p<.05

6. Discussion

There are four categorical differences extracted by analyzing the first-encounter casual interactions of ENL (English as a native language) speakers and comparing them with the first encounter casual interactions of JNL (Japanese as a native language) speakers. First, the ENL speakers showed deeper self-disclosure, giving more personal details than JNL speakers. ENL speakers seem to provide information about themselves often, with little prompting. Other participants also provide their information by continuing the speaker's topic and equally disclosing themselves. Iwata has identified the following line of speech taken on by the person in the next turn as a "second story." (Schegloff, 1972) and argues that "second stories" are appropriate responses and contribute to a successful interaction between the ENL speakers. A relatively deep self-disclosure is evidenced in the commonly observed phenomenon across Australia, UK, and US data that even information that is not too flattering, such as being unemployed at the time of the conversation and having trouble in job hunting, is freely given. The negative information, however, was given with a positive evaluation on themselves or positive connotations: Being unemployed for instance, is presented as a result of keeping one's principles. It was also quite normal for the ENL speakers to express their opinions, which are often backed up by their own personal experiences. The JNL speakers in our data, on the other hand, avoid expressing opinions and tend to adhere to topics depicting a state where personal involvement is minimal.

Second, differences have been found in the question types used in the conversations of ENL and JNL speakers. In the ENL conversations, Q-word questions

such as “What did you do your master’s in?” or “Why did you choose Korean?” are more frequent than in the JNL conversations. Shigemitsu attributes the more extensive use of Q-word questions to the expectations that ENL speakers have of an enjoyable conversation with someone they have just met. According to Shigemitsu, many EFL participants consistently stated in the post-recording interviews that a conversation in the context set for our data recording, that is, having a friendly chat with someone they are meeting for the first time at the common acquaintance’s house party, is an opportunity to learn something interesting and new, including who the participants are and what they think about different topics. The JNL speakers, on the other hand, do not actively seek personal information. It seems clear from our data that as far as self-introduction goes, knowing the other person’s affiliations and field of studies is enough for JNL speakers. A consistent pattern was observed throughout our data that the JNL participants waited for the information to be spontaneously given by their interlocutors, rather than reaching out with Q-word questions.

The third difference is found in the common types and places of occurrence of backchannels in the ENL and JNL interactions. Otsuka, by applying quantitative analysis, concluded that the JNL speakers employ backchannels significantly more frequently than the ENL speakers, a result consistent with previous findings on Japanese backchannels (Mizutani, 1984; Kurosaki, 1987; Clancy et al., 1996). Otsuka’s further analysis that the Japanese use significantly more non-lexical backchannels and use them in midst of a sentence, rather than at the completion, has potential applications for English education.

The fourth difference is concerned with the turn-taking behavior of appropriating a turn when a participant has not finished. This kind of turn-taking sometimes is realized as an overlap if the interrupted speaker does not stop but keeps talking. According to Tannen (1984), this happens sometimes to indicate support and sympathy with the speaker, but if too frequent, could be construed negatively as the interrupter hogging the floor. The JNL interactions in our data showed far fewer instances of turn appropriating compared to the ENL interactions. Some comments in the post-recording interviews shed light on the governing principle at work for the JNL speakers. Asked

what they take heed of so that the first-encounter conversation develops successfully, some JNL speakers answered “listening to the interlocutor carefully by not interrupting” or “listening to the interlocutor properly, by not asking a question or stating an opinion while he or she is still talking” (Shigemitsu, 2015: 29). To JNL speakers, when having a social chat with a person they have just met, being a good listener is likely to be considered polite, and this way of thinking naturally leads to relatively fewer instances of appropriating of turns in the Japanese data.

The differences found among the four aspects of self-disclosure, Q-word questions, backchannels, and turn-taking may be accounted for by the conversational style differences proposed by Yamada (1997). By studying the naturally occurring business discourse of American and Japanese employees, Yamada propounded two polar conversation styles for American and Japanese speakers. She has termed the American style of business discourse as “speaker talk” and the Japanese style as “listener talk” and says “The ploy between American ‘speaker talk’ and Japanese ‘listener talk’ gives rise to mutual accusations in cross-cultural interactions ranging from comical to caustic” (p.40).

On such an occasion, as set in our data, where people are required to start building a relationship and rapport with the interlocutors, people consciously or unconsciously attend more to the norms of their culture, or what is considered a pleasant way of talking and interacting for that purpose. For English speakers, imparting information about themselves and finding out about the others is crucial to establishing a relationship, thus they volunteer information; if not sufficiently given, they seek it by asking Q-word questions. This process, as a result, leads to a higher level of self-disclosure in English interactions than is found in the Japanese interactions. The lower level of self-disclosure in the Japanese interactions is in accordance with the listener-oriented style of the Japanese where rapport building starts with listening to the others little by little and adjusting oneself so that one does not stand out by behaving differently or being too different from the rest of the group.

The reason for the more frequent use of non-lexical backchannels that are uttered during an interlocutor’s speech is further evidence of “listener talk,” precisely because

such backchannels are used to signal the message, “I’m listening.” They indicate the attitude of a good listener. Non-lexical backchannels are non-committal, and in this sense, they are used to avoid the risk of possibly appearing different from the interlocutor.

As Yamada observed, being the same as the rest in terms of talk quantity is common in the Japanese interactions, when a more-or-less equal status is presumed among the participants, as in our data. The Japanese seem to build rapport through establishing the sameness of themselves to the rest of the group and a sense of connectedness by being a part of the group. Such ways of thinking inevitably shun appropriating the turn in the middle of someone else’s speech. Our Japanese data consistently included fewer appropriating turns in comparison to the ENL data from the three regions of the UK, the USA, and Australia.

The level of self-disclosure, Q-word question use, use of lexical backchannels, and turn-taking patterns may function as contextualization cues. As such, the differences could potentially create negative impressions in the interlocutors. In a situation where ENL speakers and JNL speakers meet for the first time and engage in a social chat while trying to establish rapport, the JNL speakers who listen without imparting much information about themselves and refrain from asking questions will not only miss out in the interaction, but they may give the erroneous impression to the ENL participants that they are not interested in talking to them. On the other hand, the JNL speakers may feel that the ENL speakers ask too many questions and are too inquisitive.

7. Conclusion

The CEFR 2018 descriptor scheme has revised the three language activities of understanding (listening and reading), speaking (interaction and production), and writing, as proposed in 2001, to include four language activities of reception, production, interaction, and mediation, which reflects the results of the project undertaken between 2014 and 2017. What is relevant in the 2018 companion volume to the current study is that “conversation” is explicitly explained as the following:

Conversation concerns interaction with a primarily social function: the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships. Key concepts operationalised in the scale include the following:

- ▶ setting: from short exchanges through maintaining a conversation and sustaining relationships to flexible use for social purposes;
- ▶ topics: from personal news, through familiar topics of personal interest to most general topics;
- ▶ language functions: from greetings etc. through offers, invitations and permission to degrees of emotion and allusive, joking usage. (p.84)

One of the new additions to the “can-do” descriptors of B2 includes specific reference to “establishing a relationship” with interlocutor(s).

B2 Can establish a relationship with interlocutors through sympathetic questioning and expressions of agreement, plus, if appropriate, comments about third parties or shared conditions.

Can indicate reservations and reluctance, state conditions when agreeing to requests or granting permission, and ask for understanding of his/her own position. (p.85)

Our comparative studies of Japanese native-speaker interactions in Japanese and English native-speaker interactions in English in the first encounter revealed that the strategies of establishing rapport and relationships are very different. Even when the native Japanese learners of English reach a level where producing intelligible English utterances is possible without obvious difficulty in terms of grammar and pronunciation, differences in self-disclosure level, a lack of Q-word questions, lexical back-channels, and turn-taking style induced by the culturally defined norm may result in unsuccessful relationship building.

Since the cultural norm is unconsciously learned in the course of the first language acquisition process, explicit teaching of interactional strategies in the foreign language with a goal, such as establishing a relationship, is vital. How the explicit teachings of these strategies tangibly improve the Japanese native speakers’ English output awaits future research.

Notes

- 1) Romanization of the Japanese follows the Hepburn system issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (<https://www.ezairyu.mofa.go.jp/passport/hebon.html>)
- 2) The following is an excerpt from the new guidelines in the original Japanese.
「英語学習の特質を踏まえ、以下に示す、聞くこと、読むこと、話すこと〔やり取り〕、話すこと〔発表〕、書くことの五つの領域（以下この節において「五つの領域」という。）別に設定する目標の実現を目指した指導を通して、第1款の(1)及び(2)に示す資質・能力を一体的に育成するとともに、その過程を通して、第1款の(3)に示す資質・能力を育成する。」(第2節 英語コミュニケーション I, p.26)
- 3) The data collection was supported by JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) Grant Number JP22520595.
- 4) The findings included herein are a brief summary of our analyses. Refer to Tsuda et al. (2015) for more details.

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Appendix

Age band	Birth place	Place of longest residency	Length of residency	Degree
Australia				
20s	Sydney	Sydney	29	BS
20s	Camden, NSW	Campbell town	18	BA
20s	Fiji Island	Sydney	22	BA
20s	Port Huron	Uki	15	BA
20s	Australia	Australia	16	BA
20s	Australia	Wyong, NSW	23	BA
20s	Adelaide	Adelaide, SA	23	BA
20s	Sydney	Glebe, Sydney	23	BS
30s	Australia	Nowra, NSW	18	BA
20s	Sydney	Springwood, NSW	9	BA
20s	Sydney	Sydney	22	BA, BS
20s	Australia	Australia	21	BS
30s	Sydney	Sydney	28	BA
20s	Sydney	Sydney	26	BA
20s	Sydney	Sydney	25	PhD
30s	Sydney	Sydney	24	BS
30s	Sydney	Newcastle, NSW	24	BA
UK				
20s	unfilled	unfilled	unfilled	BA
20s	Reading	Reading	8	BA
20s	Macclesfield,	Knutsford,	20	BA
20s	Manchester	Surrey	11	BA
20s	Liverpool	Liverpool	18	MA
30s	Oxford	Oxford	15	MA
20s	Reading	Wokingham	11	BA
20s	London	London	18	BS
30s	Inverness	Oxfordshire	28	high school diploma
20s	Cambridge	Cambridge	18	BA
30s	Harlow	Marlow Bucks	9	BS
40s	London	London	18	BA
40s	Manchester	Manchester	46	BA
30s	Oldham	Oldham	20	BA
30s	Manchester	Manchester	20	BA
30s	Ciattsbridge	Wirror	20	BA
30s	Sarford	Eccles	25	BA

30s	Chorley	Adlington	5	PhD
40s	Manchester	Manchester	20	MA
20s	Ipswich	Oxford	15	BA
50s	Oldham	London	26	BA
40s	Swaziland	London	20	BA
40s	Cardiff, Wales	London	25	BA
20s	Lambeth	Bormonery	13	unfilled
USA				
20s	State College, PA	California	9	MA
20s	Austin, TX	Denton, TX	13	BA
20s	San Francisco, CA	Virginia	25	BA
20s	San Diego, CA	Utah	7	BA
20s	Wisconsin Rapids, WI	Wisconsin	18	BA
20s	Kennett, MO	Kennett, MO	18	JD
20s	Dallas, TX	Dallas, TX	15	MA
20s	New York, NY	Oyster Bay, NY	18	BA
30s	Houston, TX	Dallas, TX	15	MA
20s	Durham, NC	Lexington, KY	10	BA
20s	Detroit, MI	Detroit, MI	22	BA
20s	Austin, TX	Austin, TX	27	MA