

Communicative Behavior of Japanese Students of English in an Interview Setting¹

インタビューにおける日本人英語学習者の言語行動の分析

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TOEFLの点数が500点以上、あるいはそれに匹敵する英語能力をもった日本人学習者11人に、英語のネイティブ・スピーカー2人とニア・ネイティブの日本人1人、そして学生と同じ程度の英語能力をもった日本人1人をインタビューしてもらった。インタビューでは通常インタビューする側が主導権をにぎり、トピック紹介等を通して会話の進行をコントロールする。しかしこの調査に参加した日本人学習者の場合、事前に用意した質問が尽きたあたりでインタビュー形式を大きく崩してしまい、その時点からインタビューされる側に主導権を譲ってしまった。ネイティブ・スピーカーと話している場合主導権を譲る時点が早く、インタビューされる側の英語のレベルが学習者に近いと判断された場合、学習者がインタビュー形式を保って主導権を握ろうとすることが明らかとなった。

キーワード

インタビュー (interview)、ネイティブ・スピーカー (native speaker)、会話の主導権 (directional control)、トピック紹介 (topic initiation)、フロアの管理 (floor management)

Introduction

The Double Degree Program

During the academic year 2001–2002, Kansai University, in Osaka, Japan and Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri, United States embarked upon the inaugural year of a unique and innovative “Double Degree” Program. This program allows qualified undergraduate students from either institution to matriculate in courses at the other, simultaneously earning credits towards bachelor’s degrees at both universities. Eleven students from Kansai University were chosen to participate in the program’s first year. Each of the students had a minimum TOEFL score of 500 points or the equivalent and had lived overseas in an English-speaking country for at least eight months.

In order to prepare this group of students for successful studies in the United States, Kansai University set out to create a special, supplemental English course. Although data for a detailed needs analysis were scarce, it became clear to those of us responsible for designing the special Double Degree English (DDE) course that an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum would best fit the students’ needs. We reasoned that such a course could provide students with valuable socio-cultural information about American university life, while it worked to develop the academic skills they would need to survive the transition to American university studies.

University scheduling limitations in this first year restricted available instructional times to four, forty-five minute periods per week, from 8:00 am to 8:45 am. Given this timetable, we decided to create four distinct sub-curricula, each focused on a specific academic skill set, but joined together thematically under the construct of “culture.” The skills sets for each course were the following.

- A. Academic Writing Skills
- B. Seminar Discussion Skills
- C. Academic Listening and Notetaking
- D. Research and Presentation Skills

The Research Question

During the first weeks of class, we observed that students appeared to use distinct conversational styles with different teachers. With their non-Japanese, native speaker of English instructors, students were generally more reticent, did not appear to nominate topics frequently and often used Japanese to communicate ideas. On the other hand, with their ethnically

Japanese teacher, a near-native speaker of English, students seemed to be much more assertive in their use of English, speaking for longer turns, engaging in cross-talk and often asking questions. Why did students appear more willing to use an English dominant discourse style with their ethnically Japanese teacher? Was this a product of empathy for shared ethnicity? Could the difference in style be attributed to the native speaker/near-native speaker of English status of their teachers? These questions arose often during our early term DDE staff meetings and we agreed that such issues would be interesting to explore further.

An opportunity for more focused study came with the scheduling of a special retreat for the DDE students in July. The retreat was designed to provide students with information about Webster University and the greater St. Louis area. We also wanted to promote social bonding and rapport among the students, hoping that such team-building efforts would increase their motivation to study together in our classes. In addition, the retreat provided us with a research opportunity to explore our earlier observations about our students' conversational behavior more deeply.

Outline of Research Activity

The Setting

The retreat took place over a two-day period away from the main university campus in a small, seminar facility in rural Kyoto. It was hoped that the isolated location would minimize outside distractions and help the participants stay focused on retreat activities and goals. Two work areas were created on opposite sides of a large, rectangular hall. Four smaller "interview rooms," adjoined the hall at each of its four corners. Tape recorders were placed at each work area and in all four of the interview rooms. Students were responsible for operating all audio equipment.

The Task

We designed a simulation task to collect samples of student discourse. In this task, students were divided into two teams, A and B, and given information about an attractive, convenient, but slightly expensive rental house near the Webster University campus. Students were told that in order to secure a rental contract and pay the monthly rent, they would need to find one additional roommate to share the house with. Four candidates were present for roommate interviews. All four were speakers of English, but no candidate had met the students prior to the simulation.

The simulation was divided into five main parts.

- Part I: Working in teams, students discussed ideal roommate criteria and generated a series of questions to be used during interviews with roommate candidates.
- Part II: Each team divided itself into two smaller groups. These sub-groups went to separate interview rooms and simultaneously spent twenty minutes interviewing two of the four prospective roommates. Once the interviews concluded, students returned to their original teams and reported their findings to their peers.
- Part III: Teams divided themselves into two smaller groups again. The students went to interview rooms to speak with the remaining two candidates. After twenty minutes, the students returned once again to their teams and reported their findings to each other.
- Part IV: Teams discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate and decided whom they would like to accept as their roommate.
- Part V: Students answered a series of written “debriefing” questions. This was followed by an oral debriefing of the activity with all students present.

Audio data were recorded during the entire task, but the interview sessions in parts II and III proved to be of particular interest, as there appeared to be noticeable differences in the way students interacted with each roommate candidate. We believed that deeper analysis of these taped data might reveal more about our students’ conversational behavior.

The Students

Although all of the DDE students had studied English overseas in an English speaking country, the length of time students spent abroad and the type of studies they pursued varied. There were also some significant differences in age and life experience among the group. Some simple background information is presented in Table A. Please note that in order to maintain students’ privacy, we have used pseudonyms throughout this paper.

Student	Gender	Age	Location of Stay Overseas	Length of Stay	Type of Stay	Place of Study
Tomoko	F	23	U.K.	2.5 years	Flat/Dorm	Language school, Two-year college, and Christian college night school
Hanako	F	18	Australia	10 months	Home stay	Private high school
Ayumi	F	18	Australia	11 months	Home stay	Public high school
Naomi	F	18	Australia	11 months	Home stay	Public high school
Hiroshi	M	18	Australia	10 months	Home stay	Public high school
Takuya	M	20	Canada	2.5 years	Home stay	Public high school
Etsuko	F	23	Canada	8 months	Home stay	Private English class
Yuko	F	19	U.S.A.	12 months	Home stay	Public high school
Michiko	F	19	New Zealand	10 months	Home stay	Public high school
Natsuko	F	18	U.S.A.	10 months	Home stay	Public high school
Mariko	F	18	New Zealand	10 months	Home stay	Public high school

Table A: DDE Student Profiles²

The Candidates

In order to elicit more natural discourse from the students and to reinforce the interview aspect of the simulation, we decided against participating in the simulation ourselves. Instead, the interview candidates were people with no formal connection to the DDE program and no prior contact with the students. Four candidates, all of whom spoke proficient, conversational English, agreed to participate in the simulation. The candidates' ages ranged from 25 to 36 years. Two of them were native speakers of English and two were non-native speakers of English. Two of the candidates were Japanese and two were citizens of English speaking countries. In addition, two of the candidates were male while two were female. Background information for the candidates is presented in Table B. Here too, we have used pseudonyms when referring to the candidates.

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Native Language	Ethnicity	Overseas English Living Experience
Ken	M	36	British	English	English	NA
Brian	M	28	American	English	Japanese-American	NA
Emiri	F	25	Japanese/ Australian	Japanese	Japanese	Lived in Australia from birth to 3 years of age. 1 year high school exchange student in Australia
Kaoru	F	30	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	3 month home stay in U.K.

Table B: Roommate Candidate Profiles

Characteristics of Interviews

Interviews: A Distinct Type of Discourse

When we listened to the audiotapes from the retreat, we realized immediately that the students were not engaged in normal, freewheeling conversations with their roommate candidates. Instead, each of their conversations followed a similar, structured pattern of development. The interviews all began with an orderly, pre-scripted, question and answer segment, one that the students tended to dominate. This was followed by a period of halting, unscripted conversation in which long and uncomfortable silences frequently occurred. It seemed that our task design had elicited a very specific type of discourse from the students. In order to examine and evaluate variations in our students' conversational behavior, we recognized the need to understand more about the structure of interviews.

Interviews Defined

Barone and Switzer (1995:8) define an interview as, "a communication interaction between two (or more) parties, at least one of whom has a goal, that uses questions and answers to exchange information and influence one another." Since there is quite a lot of information packed in this definition, let us extract the features of an interview one at a time and relate them to the particular activity the DDE students were instructed to do. First of all, an interview is, "a communication interaction between two or more parties." Of these two parties, one is the interviewer and the other is the interviewee. In the case of the roommate activity, there were two to three interviewers for one interviewee. Usually, when there is more than one interviewer, one person is designated as the lead interviewer, but in the roommate task, no such arrangement was made for the DDE students. All the students were equal partners in the interviewing task and it

was up to them to negotiate who would lead the interview.

The second part of Barone and Switzer's definition explains that interviews are performed to attain a particular goal. The goal of an interview may vary from interview to interview, and what the interviewer sees as the goal of the interview may be different from that of the interviewee. In the case of the DDE students as interviewers, the goal of the interview was to select a suitable roommate. From the interviewees' point of view, the goal of the interview was to convince the interviewers that s/he would make a suitable roommate.

The third part of the definition mentions that the goal of an interview is achieved by means of information exchanged through questions and answers. Normally, an interviewer prepares for an interview by having a list of questions s/he wants to ask the interviewee. The DDE students did this and had a list of questions that they thought would reveal the candidate's suitability as a roommate. It is noteworthy that interviews differ from normal conversations in the way questions and answers are used. Since questions and answers in interviews are used to achieve a specific goal, topics introduced by questions may only be pursued and developed up to the point where the interviewer feels that s/he has obtained enough information to make an assessment of some kind. Thereafter, the development of a topic ceases to be of interest to the interviewer.

The final point in the definition is that in an interview, the two parties are trying to influence each other. It is obvious that in the roommate activity, the interviewees sought to favorably influence their DDE student interviewers in such a way as to be selected as their new roommate. What might be less obvious is that the interviewers themselves were also exercising influence over the interviewees by attempting to persuade the candidates of the desirability of becoming a new roommate. Thus, the two parties are not using questions and answers just to exchange information, they are using them to exercise some influence over the other's perception.

Directional Control

In the previous section, we explained that in an interview, at least one of the parties has a goal. In the case of a selection interview, the goal for the interviewer is to find a suitable candidate for a position. The interviewer normally plans the direction of the interview so that s/he can obtain enough information from the candidate to accomplish the goal of finding a suitable person for the vacant position. According to Barone and Switzer (1995:61), "the power of the interview participant to influence the substance of an interview, including what information is introduced,

what topics are covered, and what topics are omitted," is called, "**directional control**."

Directional control is generally exerted by the interviewer. The interviewer needs to have directional control in order to obtain certain information from the interviewee, and the more the interviewer spends time preparing for the interview before it actually takes place, the more control s/he is likely to have over the direction of the interview. Interviewers must also consider the amount of time that is available for the interview and the kind of questions that would yield the most amount of relevant information.

Interviewees exert directional control less frequently, but they can exert control by asking questions or raising topics that offer information which might favorably influence the perceptions of the interviewer. In our simulation, this would be information likely to make the interviewee appear to be a more attractive roommate.

Description of Data Collected

The Raw Data

The raw data from the interview sessions in parts II and III of the roommate activity consisted of four audiocassette tapes, one for each of the candidates. On each tape were two, twenty-minute interviews. After listening to the tapes for the first time, we sensed clear differences in the degree of assertiveness and directional control students seemed to exert during their encounters with the candidates. It appeared to us that in the interviews with the native speakers of English, the native speakers dominated the conversations. On the other hand, in the interviews with the Japanese candidates, particularly with Kaoru, the students seemed to exert far more directional control.

Transcription Methods

In order to extract empirical evidence that might support our initial impressions, we needed to decide on a convenient, but effective method of transcribing the audiotapes. We decided that a broad transcription that paraphrased the gist of participants' utterances was sufficient enough to analyze how successfully the students managed to control the flow of topics in their interviews. We identified the speaker of each turn, the duration of each turn taken and paraphrased what each speaker asked or stated.

In identifying a speaker's turn, we disregarded all interjections, exclamations and back

channeling except in the cases where these utterances initiated a change of speaker. We measured the length of each turn using stopwatches and rounded the times up or down to the nearest second. We also recorded the occurrence and duration of “uncomfortable silences” and noted who took the responsibility to break them.

Our transcriptions of silence made no distinction between pauses (intra-turn silence), gaps (silence after initial completion of a point), or lapses (extended silence after the completion of a point) (cf. Sarks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). We were less interested in how speakers used silence to manage their conversations and more interested in how silence was an indicator of weak directional control. We relied on our own judgments as native speakers to determine when silences became awkward and impeded the students from attaining their interview goal. Once an occurrence of silence was classified as uncomfortable, we did, however, record its length.

Data were also collected on the amount of laughter recorded on the tapes. Laughter being, obviously, neither talking time nor silence, nevertheless took up a significant amount of tape time. We decided to include the occurrence and duration of laughter in the transcripts to provide a fuller and more accurate record of how time was spent during the interviews.

Data Extracted for Analysis

Data were extracted and tabulated under the following categories.

For each interview:

- ◆ The duration of each silence
- ◆ The total number of silences
- ◆ The total duration of silent time
- ◆ The total duration of time recorded on the transcription

For each individual participant in each interview:

- ◆ The duration of each turn
- ◆ The number of turns taken
- ◆ The total duration of speaking time
- ◆ The number of questions asked
- ◆ The number of topics introduced
- ◆ The number of silences broken

Breakdown Point

We also measured the total speaking time of each interview and recorded the transitional point when students moved from scripted questions to more free conversation. We labelled this point in each transcript as the **breakdown point**, indicating that students were ceding directional control of the interview to the interviewee. In each interview, this point was indicated clearly, by an unambiguous transitional comment or question. Nearly every time this was an appeal for questions from the interviewee. Some typical examples were... "*Uhm, I think that's it. You wanna ask something?*"; "*Do you have any questions for us?*"; and in one unusual case, "*Is there any question you want to be asked?*" We used these utterances as markers for dividing our data into pre and post breakdown segments.

Discussion

Sifting Through the Data

We started sorting out the data by examining who broke silences most frequently, assuming that this action was an indicator of the interviewers' directional control. However, since the number of incidents was not even across interviews, it was difficult to make comparisons. We then tried to pinpoint what might be giving us the impression that the native speakers were dominating the conversation.

First, we measured the total speaking time of each of the interview participants and tried to compare the speaking times of interviewers and interviewees. However, we soon ran into difficulty again because there were two to three interviewers speaking in turns to a single candidate, so the total time the interviewers were speaking could not be compared to the total time one interviewee was talking. In fact, in terms of actual speaking time, the total time that the interviewers were talking was actually equal to or more than the total speaking time of the interviewees, even in the sessions where the native speaker candidates seemed to dominate the interviews. So it was not the actual speaking time that gave us the impression that the native speakers were controlling the conversation.

What seemed more significant was the amount of time the students were able to conduct their interviews before reaching a breakdown point and what happened after this loss of control occurred. So we decided to examine and analyze these portions of our data set more closely.

A Closer Look at Breakdown

From the transcripts, we were able to identify the breakdown point in each interview. Table 1 shows at what point in the interview the breakdown took place. Since each interview differed slightly in length, we adjusted the total transcribed time of the interview to become 100% and calculated the percentage of the total that was occupied before and after the breakdown.

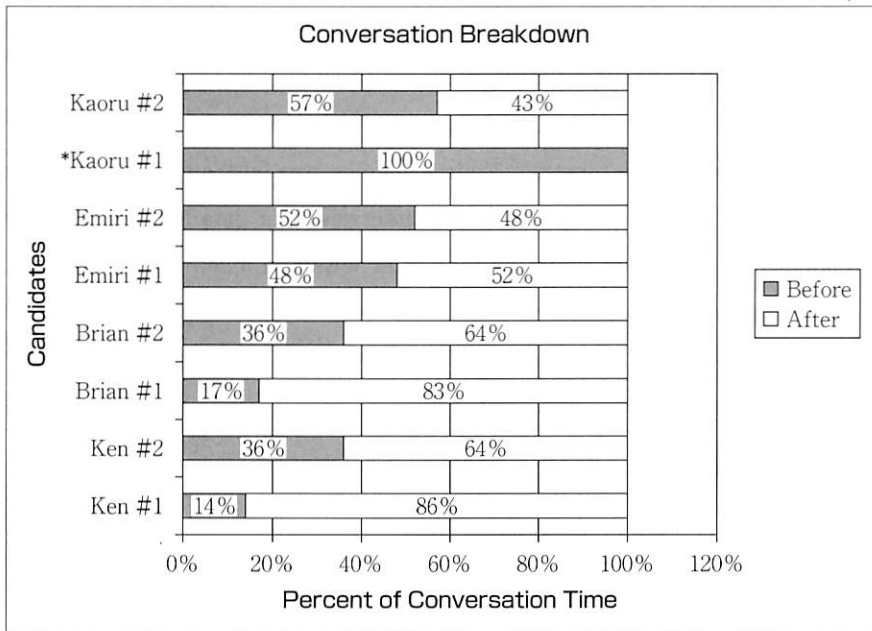


Table 1: Conversation Breakdown
 *No breakdown point recorded due to taping error

In the first interview with Kaoru, the students mistakenly turned off the tape recorder in their interview room and did not record their post-breakdown conversations, so no clear inferences about directional control can be drawn. In Kaoru’s second interview, however, students maintained control of their interview agenda for 57% of the total interview time. In Emiri’s case, she took control of the conversation after 48% of the first interview was over, spending 52 % of the interview exerting directional control. In her second interview, the students held control slightly longer for 52% of the total interview time.

When we examine the interviews with the native speakers, the amount of time the native speakers control the conversation is more striking. In Brian’s first interview, the students have control over the interview process for only 17% of the total interview time. The second group of students perform slightly better, and exert control for 36% of the time. In Ken’s case, the

students relinquish their control even earlier. In the first interview with Ken, the students hand over control at a very early stage, only after 14% of the total interview time has lapsed. Ken's second group of students performs in exactly the same way as Brian's second group, handing over control after 36% of the interview time.

Table 1 clearly shows that breakdown occurred earlier in interviews with native speakers of English than with the two non-native speakers. Breakdown patterns for Brian and Ken are remarkably similar. The average breakdown point for Brian was 26.5% and for Ken it was 25%. On the other hand, for the non-native English speakers, Emiri and Kaoru, their breakdown points were also clustered very close together. Emiri's average was 50% and Kaoru's one recorded breakdown occurred 57% of the way through her interview. Our data indicate that on average, students relinquished directional control in their interviews at a much earlier stage with native speakers than with non-native speakers. In fact, our student interviewers were about twice as quick to cede control to native speakers as they were to the non-native speakers in our simulation.

Topic Introduction

We saw in the previous section that breakdowns in normal interview structure took place earlier when the students were interviewing native speakers of English compared with when they were interviewing non-native speakers of English. This breakdown of the normal interview structure was manifested in the way students handed over directional control to the interviewees. A clear indication of this process is shown in the percentage of topics the interviewees introduced after the breakdown compared to the percentage of topics they introduced before the breakdown. Table 2 shows 100% to be the total number of topics

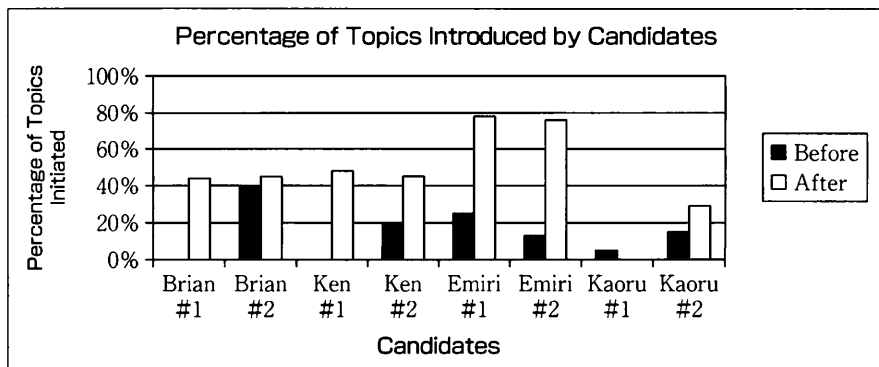


Table 2: Percentage of Topics Introduced by the Candidates

introduced in the course of any one interview. The bars indicate the percentage of the topics introduced by the candidates before and after the breakdown. Table 2.1 shows the same information in numbers.

	Percentage of Topics Introduced	
	Before Breakdown	After Breakdown
Brian #1	0%	44%
Brian #2	40%	45%
Ken #1	0%	48%
Ken #2	20%	45%
Emiri #1	25%	78%
Emiri #2	13%	77%
Kaoru #1	6%	N/A
Kaoru #2	15%	29%

Table 2.1: Exact Percentage of Topics Introduced

Table 3 shows the rate at which the candidates introduced new topics after the interviews broke down. In the middle column, we can see how many topics each candidate introduced in the total number of minutes after breakdown. The third column shows, on average, how many topics each candidate introduced in every five-minute interval.

Conversation	Topics Introduced/ Seconds of Time in "After Breakdown" RAW RATIO	Equivalent Ratios
Brian #1	12 topics in 15.9 minutes	3.8 topics every 5 minutes
Brian #2	10 topics in 11.9 minutes	4.2 topics every 5 minutes
Ken #1	10 topics in 13.1 minutes	3.8 topics every 5 minutes
Ken #2	9 topics in 9.9 minutes	4.6 topics every 5 minutes
Emiri #1	7 topics in 9.6 minutes	3.7 topics every 5 minutes
Emiri #2	10 topics in 9.8 minutes	5 topics every 5 minutes
Kaoru #1	N/A	N/A
Kaoru #2	2 topics in 2.8 minutes	3.6 topics every 5 minutes

Table 3: Rate of Post-Breakdown Topics Introduced

The data show that after the breakdown point, on average, Ken introduced 4.2 topics every five minutes, Brian introduced 4 topics, and Emiri introduced 4.35 topics. No figures are provided for the number of topics Kaoru introduced in her first interview because students prematurely stopped recording that session, but in her second interview, Kaoru introduced 3.6 topics every 5 minutes. It is possible that there might be consistent differences between the number of post-breakdown topics introduced by native speakers and non-native speakers, but such differences

were not clearly manifested in our data set. What is more important here is that while the candidates were introducing new topics, the interviewers were not doing so. Despite the fact that in all cases student interviewers outnumbered interviewees by as much as three to one, the students did not attempt to influence the substance of the interviews by introducing more topics.

In the first interview with Brian, the students provided all the topics before the breakdown point. That is, while they still had pre-prepared questions, they were in full control of the interview. However, as soon as they ran out of questions, they virtually handed over directional control to him. In the second interview, Brian seems to have learned from his first interview that if he leaves the initiative up to the interviewers, the conversation is not going to go smoothly, so he starts to introduce new topics right from the start. A similar pattern is seen in Ken's case. When we turn to Emiri, we see that she is extremely generous in supplying new topics. It is clear from listening to the tape that Emiri took on the responsibility to ensure that the conversations progressed well. Kaoru, too, felt a need to supply new topics more so after the breakdown than before the breakdown.

Floor Management among Japanese Speakers

What could the students have been doing during this time when the interviewees were feeling pressured to lead the interview? In her study of the ways Japanese speakers manage the floor, Hayashi (1996) provides us with some insight. According to Hayashi, there are major differences in floor-managing behavior between Japanese speakers and English speakers. By floor, Hayashi means "a right to begin to talk or to make a first statement." Hayashi writes that in the case of a conversation between Japanese, a distinct role relationship exists among the participants and this role allocation, once established, is maintained throughout the conversation.

"In spite of the fact that all participants were thought to be equal partners in the conversational exchange, the participants let their role relationships become unbalanced. This participation status was established at the beginning, as if by mutual agreement, and was not broken until the end of the session. The individual who accepted a role of leadership bore the responsibility for the uniformity of other participants' roles and for the progress of the conversation". (Hayashi 1996:180-181)

Hayashi gives the following description as a stereotype illustration of the kind of person who would be allocated the role of leader.

Male 1: single primary speaker floor holder; oldest or distinct in social status; a major speaker; floor initiator, holder and yielder.

Hayashi writes that once the leader is established, the chances for other members of the conversation to become a primary floor holder are few, and even if they did hold the floor, their time span would be short. On the other hand, according to Hayashi, Americans exchange their right to begin talking much more frequently than Japanese

“...each participant took a turn at initiating a new floor, sometimes with a new topic, and sometimes by continuing the current topic. The participation was thus well balanced and the role relationships were understood to be temporary. The American participants’ interdependence in interaction may be characterized as horizontal interdependency as opposed to the Japanese participants’ hierarchical interdependency”. (Hayashi 1995:185)

Although Hayashi was analyzing a normal conversation where people were talking as a form of sociability, we may be able to see if a similar pattern emerged in the interaction that took place between the interviewers and the interviewee after the breakdown point.

Analysis of Post-breakdown Behavior

If interviewers and interviewees, like our DDE students, fail, for some reason, to fulfill their expected roles and cease attempts to influence each other during their interaction, it is possible that their goal-driven discourse might evolve into a conversation whose purpose was strictly social. In such a situation, might we assume that after the interview structure breakdown, our students, having evaluated the status of the interviewees, allocated the role of leadership to them?

Many variables come to mind when we consider what criteria the students may have used to evaluate the interviewees’ status. The most obvious was age. All of the interviewees were older than the DDE students. The stereotype of the primary floor holder presented by Hayashi shows that Japanese speakers expect the older party to lead the conversation. However, if the older age of the interviewees leads the interviewers to hand over leadership, we would expect it to happen uniformly across the interviewees.

The second variable was gender. Our data show that the students gave up directional control earlier with male interviewees compared with female interviewees. However, the data also show that one of the female interviewees, namely Emiri, exerted more directional control by supplying more new topics than anyone else.

The third and most interesting variable was that two of the interviewees were native speakers and the other two were non-native speakers. Ken and Brian are, of course, native speakers of English and were perceived by the students as such. Kaoru, on the other hand, had had only about the same amount of exposure to English as the DDE students, and it is highly possible that the students noticed this during their evaluation of her. Emiri was an unusual case in that her background, strong fluency and natural use of colloquial speech may have led students to perceive her as someone between a native speaker and a non-native speaker.

Both the data on the time of break down in the interview and the percentage of topics initiated by the interviewees show a difference between native speakers and non-native speakers. On the one extreme is the case of the native speakers, Ken and Brian. In their interviews, breakdown of interview structure took place early in the process. On the other extreme, in Kaoru's interview, the breakdown occurred more than half way through the interview. The breakdown point in Emiri's interviews was slightly earlier than that of Kaoru's, but at 48% and 52% of the way into the interview time, her breakdown point was still significantly later than the native speaker's average breakdown points near 25%. In terms of topic initiation, native speakers Ken and Brian both introduced more topics than non-native speaker, Kaoru. Curiously, however, Emiri bested them both by introducing more topics than any of the other interviewees.

Another variable was that the students conducted interviews with candidates twice. Though in each interview they were interviewing different candidates, in some cases, both the students and the candidates were, no doubt, adjusting their behavior according to what they had learned from the first interview. An example of this can be observed in Brian's first and second interviews. In the first interview, he largely left directional control up to the students until it became clear that they were incapable or unwilling to maintain control. When the interview broke down, he offered to take charge. However, in the second interview, he took it upon himself to offer new topics right from the start. This was probably because he had learned from the first interview that the students appreciated him for taking an active role in the conversation. A similar tendency can be observed in all four interviewees. All of the interviewees offered more new topics after the

breakdown in their second interview than in their first interview. On the other hand, the students also become better in their second interview at prolonging the onset of a breakdown. The onset of the breakdown time in the second interview took place, in every case, at a time slightly to significantly later than the breakdown in the first interview. The difference between native speakers and non-native speakers, however, was still apparent. Even though the students were uniformly prolonging the onset of a breakdown in their second interviews, the breakdowns took place earlier in interviews with native speakers compared with interviews with non-native speakers.

Preliminary Findings

An analysis of the data presented above leads us to conclude that during the initial stages of the interviews, the students were not only obtaining necessary information for selecting a suitable roommate, but also evaluating the interviewee's qualifications as someone who might be able to take over directional control of the interaction. With native speakers of English, the students quickly assumed that since they are more fluent in the language, the native speakers should exert leadership. With Emiri, who looks Japanese, but whose English is very fluent, they took a little longer to surrender control. In Kaoru, the students saw a less confident speaker of English and took the opportunity to exert control for a much longer period than they did with the native speakers.

When the students handed over directional control to the interviewees, the interviewees became responsible for initiating new topics. Emiri took this task most seriously and provided the most number of new topics. There was still a significant difference between the native speakers and the least confident English speaker, Kaoru. In the interviews with Kaoru, the interviewers kept directional control by providing most of the new topics before the breakdown, and about 3/4 of the new topics even after breakdown. On the other hand, with the native speakers, close to half of the topics were introduced by the native speaker interviewees. Here again, the student interviewers seemed to assume that the native speakers, or those who were more fluent in the language should be responsible for providing new topics.

Relating the above observation to Hayashi's analysis of floor management among Japanese speakers, our data reveal that the Japanese students in our research used the level of English fluency of the interviewee to establish the status of all the participants in the interviews. Although the students followed the normal interview structure by exerting directional control

during the initial stages of the interview, once they ran out of scripted ideas, they quickly assigned the role of leader to the person whose English they deemed most fluent. This assignment of status appeared to over-ride the need to maintain a normal interview structure. Once the fluent English speaker accepted the leadership role, s/he became responsible for providing new topics in order to keep the conversation going.

Conclusion

In an interview, directional control is normally exercised by interviewers. Our data suggest that the DDE students were not able to maintain effective directional control of their interviews. In every case, regardless of the roommate candidate's identity, normal interview structures broke down. Initial assessment of this data indicates that students gave up directional control in their interviews very easily. How quickly they ceded control seemed to be related to the students' evaluation of their interviewee's English proficiency. The onset of the breakdown was much earlier with native speaker interviewees, versus non-native speakers, on average 25% of the way through the interview. The onset of breakdown was also slightly earlier with the non-native speaker who was a more fluent speaker of English, (on average 50% of the way through the interview), than the interviewee who was perceived as less proficient (57% of the way through one interview). The frequency with which speakers initiated topics also seemed to be an indicator of directional control. When students nominated topics more frequently, they were better able to maintain control over the flow of information exchanged in their interviews. However, they were more reluctant to take charge when faced with a native speaker roommate candidate as compared to a non-native English-speaking candidate. Although the results of this study remain preliminary, we may conclude that in interview situations such as our DDE simulation, students' performance correlated most highly with their perception of the interviewee's fluency. We may speculate that the ethnicity of the interviewees may also play a role in students' conversational behavior, but can point to no conclusive evidence of such in this study.

End Notes

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- ² The students in this study were informed that their interviews were being recorded and gave oral consent for the use of these data.

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