Speakership Holding and its Termination Cues in Japanese Conversation

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This paper analyzes the concept of speakership and attempts to clarify the part of sequence rules in Japanese. In this paper, speakership is defined as a role in which one particular speaker starts afresh and develops a topic to its climax. Other participants hold the recipient role by asking questions, making comments, and adding more information as well as listening quietly or, at most, giving minimal responses. Videotaped data from Japanese conversations by Japanese native speakers as well as Japanese and English conversations in intercultural settings are analyzed and compared. In the Japanese conversations by Japanese native speakers, it is observed that predicate components, story climaxes, and pauses cue speakership termination. Other participants give minimal responses but do not ask questions or make comments unless the current speaker cues his or her termination of speakership holding. Participants share this norm; therefore, conversation tends to continue on in the round table style, and in the conversation, interactive turn exchanges are seldom observed. Because this style is very different from that of English conversations, it should be employed in teaching English.

This paper is based on part of a symposium on "Differences in Conversational Styles Between Japanese and North American Speakers: Formal and Informal Styles, Participation Organization and Topic Development" by Sanae Tsuda, Yuko Iwata, and Yuka Shigemitsu at the 15th International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies in 2009. The topic of this paper is related to "participation organization" in the symposium and limits the discussion to speakership and its termination cues.

The starting point of our symposium was to investigate why some Japanese English learners who have acquired English grammar, vocabulary, and listening skills are weak in interaction when they speak English. In follow-up interviews, Japanese speakers indicated their feelings that English native speakers speak too rapidly without pauses, and they do not give Japanese native speakers a chance to talk. Therefore, in conversations with English native speakers, Japanese speakers cannot relax, and as a result, they simply maintain their listening roles. Conversely, English native speakers reported that the Japanese speakers do not speak or seem to enjoy the conversation. English native speakers sometimes complained that they always had to talk to fill the gap.

Japanese English learners have been struggling to overcome this problem. Some Japanese believe that studying English grammar, increasing their vocabulary, listening, and practicing pronunciation will help. Others say that the problem is due to the Japanese language or mentality. We often hear public comments reporting the claim that the problem cannot be overcome without going abroad.

Our research group has claimed that the problem does not lie in the lack of vocabulary, grammar, or mentality. Surmising from the above problem, we assume that investigating the

conversational style can be used as an approach to overcome conversational difficulties. The way people interact and react to other participants, the cues they use to start an utterance, the way they develop a conversational topic, and so on vary from culture to culture. Tannen (1984) asserts that ways of telling and responding to stories given by a speaker are an integral part of the conversational style of each person. Accordingly, she writes that "each person used a unique mix of conversational devices that constituted individual style. When their devices matched, communication between or among them was smooth. When they differed, communication showed signs of disruption or outright misunderstanding" (p. 147).

Hall (1976), Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Chua (1988), and Clyne (1994) identify culturally based conversational styles. Hall identifies high- and low-context communication:

> High context transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low context transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context. (p. 101)

Gudykunst et al. (1988) develop Hall's framework based on the culturally valued orientation of collectivism and individualism. According to Gudykunst and his colleagues, collectivists prefer indirect communication, but individualists prefer direct communication. Moreover, FitzGerald (2003) claims that "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 observes that "culturally-influenced features are preference for discrete turns, or for simultaneous talk, length of pauses between turns, length of turn and attitudes to silence and so forth" (p. 111). She warns that "differences in these aspects of communication styles can have negative effects on interpersonal relations" (p. 111).

This paper analyzes the concept of speakership and attempts to clarify the part of sequence rules in Japanese. Speakership is a role in which one particular speaker holds a pivotal speaker's role. The way one speaker holds the speakership and how the other participants behave while they are not holding the speakership is the focus of this study.

Previous Research

Tanaka (1999) analyzes Japanese turn-taking from a syntactic, intonational, and pragmatic view. Her research begins with the questions, "Is turn-taking a universal interactive mechanism or is its basic structure affected by variations across cultures and languages?" She continues, "If we grant that turn-taking is an activity that needs to be dealt with in any language, it becomes pertinent to ask to what extent members' concrete turn-taking practices are shared or differ from one language to another" (p. 1). According to Enomoto (2009), the turn-taking system which Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) clarify cannot apply to the Japanese conversation system because of its SOV grammatical constructions, intra-turn silences, and the roles of particles, which project the development of turn construction units.
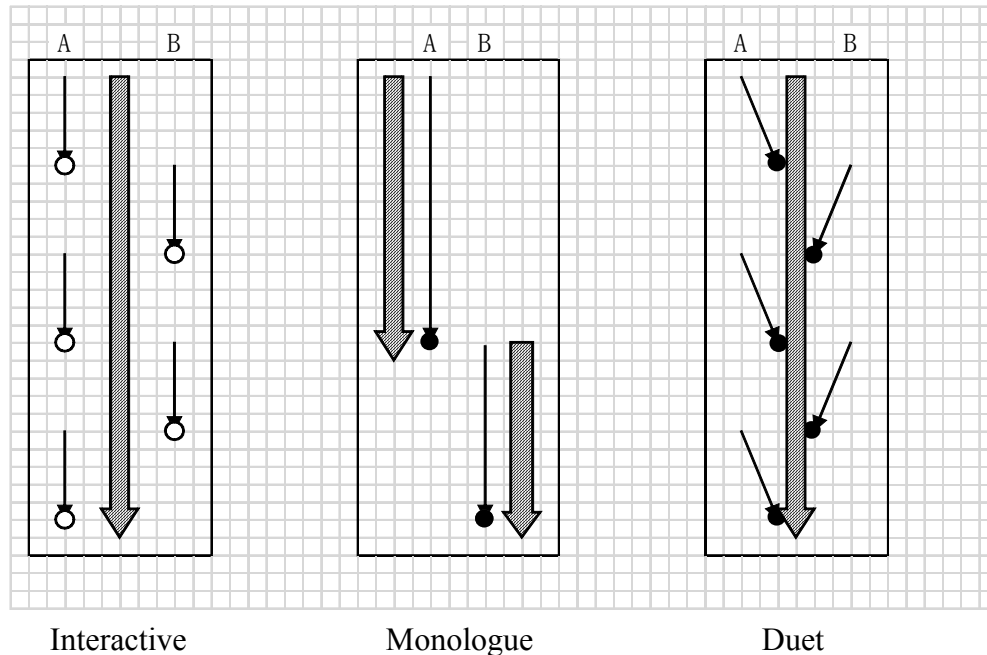
| Interactive | Monologue | Duet |

Figure 1. Model of conversational organization. Adapted from Otani (2009); modified by Shigemitsu.

For example, participants have to wait for the current speaker's sentence-final verb, which comes after inserted modifying words, phrases, and subordinate clauses.

Shigemitsu (1993) shows how the distribution of talk is uneven in Japanese conversation because of the ad hoc relationship among participants. Otani (2009) sophisticates this idea and presents three models of interaction: (a) *interactive organization*, (b) *monologue organization*, and (c) *duet organization*. Figure 1 is the modified model which illustrates the speakership concept. In this model, in order to simplify the phenomenon of conversation, we identify two participants: A and B. The solid arrows indicate utterances and the striped arrows represent topics of conversation. The solid arrows with filled circles represent a monologue.

An interactive organization can be seen more often in English native speakers' conversation, as we will see later in conversation excerpts in which all of the participants exchange turns equally and interact with each other. This organization is based on an exchange of information. In the interactive organization model, A and B talk interactively and develop one topic together. The speaker offers information, and the hearer offers backchanneling or emphatic responses.

Monologue and duet organization are found more frequently in Japanese native speakers' conversations. A monologue organizational pattern is when participants do not exchange

information interactively because the roles of a speaker and hearer are fixed, as we will see later. While speaker A continues his/her monologue, B gives minimal responses. After A's monologue, B starts afresh and presents his or her monologue. Then, A gives minimal responses during B's monologue. In duet organizations (or triplet, quartet, and so on, depending on the number of participants), participants contribute to a monologue story which stays within a specific shared topic. The difference between monologue and duet organization is not the length of the monologue but whether or not participants stay on one shared topic.

In Figure 1, the open circle indicates the turn-relevance place, and the solid circle refers to the speakership exchange relevance place. The turn-relevance place refers to the word, phrase, or sentence boundary according to Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). The speakership relevance place is also a word, phrase, or sentence boundary, but with more restriction. The interactive organization may not include the concept of speakership in terms of monologue. This paper focuses specifically on what happens at the speakership exchange relevance place. Hence, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: How does speakership end in a conversational exchange in Japanese and English?

Method

The data that this paper analyzes are two- and three-participant conversations from the data corpus provided by Tsuda, Iwata, and Shigemitsu (2009). Table 1 presents the participant information for the mono-cultural communication data. Table 2 presents that of the intercultural data. The data are numbered serially.

Participants

All of the participants met the following criteria:

1. No participants had met before.

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

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

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

Table 1
Mono-Cultural Data

Group	Language used	Number and background of participants	Participant codes
12	Japanese	3 Japanese	J13, J14, J15
13	Japanese	3 Japanese	J16, J17, J18
14	Japanese	3 Japanese	J19, J20, J21
15	Japanese	2 Japanese	J3, J7
11	English	3 North Americans	E10, E11, E12
17	Japanese	3 Japanese	J24, J25, J26

Table 2
Intercultural Data

Group	Language used	Number and background of participants	Participant codes
2	English	1 Japanese, 1 North American	J3, E3
3	English	2 Japanese, 2 North Americans	J4, J5, E4, E5
8	Japanese	2 Japanese, 2 North Americans	J9, J10, E8, E9

5. The Japanese participants had not visited English-speaking countries and did not meet English native speakers in everyday life.

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

Procedure

Each conversation was videotaped for 30 minutes. All of the participants agreed that their talk would be released. Researchers were interested in focusing on the spontaneity in conversation to identify their topic selection and degree of their self-disclosure. For this reason, participants were not given any particular question or agenda to facilitate their conversation. The researchers gave each group 30 minutes for recording and stayed in the same room for the duration in order 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.

Results

First, let us see how Japanese participants talk in monologue and duet organization. Excerpt 1 shows a typical conversation pattern. While the speaker speaks, other participants give feedback only. This pattern is what Otani (2009) calls monologue organization.

Excerpt 1
[#8, Two Japanese and Two North Americans in Japanese: J9, J10, E6, E7]

  1 E6: *Aaa, watashi no kanojo wa nihonjin desu.* (Aaa, my girl friend is Japanese.)
  2 J9: ⌈*Aaa、 hai* (Uh, yes) ⌉
  3 J10: └*Aaa, sakki* (Uh, before) ┘
  4 E6: *Hai, hai, aaa, yoko san desu. An, aaa, Mie-ken kara kimashita.* (Yes, yes,
      well, she is Yoko san. She is from Mie Prefecture.)
  5 J9: ⌈*Aaa* (uh)⌉
  6 J10: └*Aaa* (uh)┘
  7 E6: *Aa, aa, ni-nen mae ni, aa, Toronto daigaku de, aa, benkyou shimashite.* (Well,
      two years ago, I studied at Toronto University.)
  8 J10: *Un* (Yes)
  9 E6: *Benkyo shimashita. Aa, kono-toki, aa, watashi wa aa kanojo to aimashita.* (I
      studied, well, at that time, I met her)
10 J9: ⌈*Aaa* (Uh)⌉
11 J10: └*Uun* (Um)┘
12 E6: *Un, aan, aa kanojo kara watashi wa aa nihongo o bennkyo shitakatta desu*
      (Yes, well, well, from her, I wanted to learn Japanese.)
13 J9: *Toronto daigaku* (Toronto University)
14 J9: ⌈*Aa, hai hai* (Uh, yes, yes)⌉
15 J10: └*Uun* (Um)┘

In Excerpt 1, it is noticeable that while E6 is saying utterances 1, 4, 7, 9, and 12 about his girlfriend, the two Japanese native speakers, J9 and J10, are giving only minimal responses, *aa* and *hai*. Moreover, J9 and J10 give the minimal responses at the same time (see utterances 2-3, 5-6, 10-11, and 14-15). Thus, there may be a rule that listeners give only minimal responses while the main speaker talks. The main speaker should continue to talk for a certain length of time. Therefore, it is assumed that Japanese do not take turns interactively, but they take speakership roles in turn.

Excerpt 2 is a summary of the introduction session in Japanese Data Item 12. In the data, three Japanese native speakers talk in Japanese. The conversation starts with their self-introductions. Utterances 7 to 93 represent the introduction session, and this section can be roughly divided into three parts as follows:

Excerpt 2
[#12, Three Japanese native speakers in Japanese: J13, J14, J15]

Utterances 7-47: J14's self-introduction
Utterances 49-89: J13's self-introduction
Utterances 90-93: J15's self-introduction

During utterances 7–47, the pivotal speaker is J14, and three participants take turns. J14 introduces himself, and the other two participants give only minimal responses, as we have seen in Excerpt 1. During utterances 49–89 and 90–93, the main speakers are J13 and J14 respectively, and the topics are J13's self-introduction and J14's self introduction, respectively. A similar pattern is seen in most of the Japanese data we collected. Each participant's self-introduction requires a certain number of turns to complete.

We compare this to the English data. Excerpt 3 shows what Otani (2009) calls interactive organization.

Excerpt 3
[#11, Three North Americans in English, E10, E11, E12]

1 E10: Okay. So, I think Chris—
2 E11: Uh-huh.
3 E10: You said Steve, yeah. I am sorry. What was your last name?
4 E12: Armstrong.
5 E10: Armstrong. Okay. I'm John Westby.
6 E12: John Westby, okay.
7 E11: And I am Steve Kwasha.
8 E12: Okay, nice to meet you.
9 E11: Nice to meet you.

In Excerpt 3, E10 starts to check the names of the other participants. From utterances 1 to 9, the participants check each other's names. Then they end the introduction session with a typical greeting formula, "Nice to meet you." Excerpt 4 below follows Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 4
[#11, Three North Americans in English: E10, E11, E12]

10 E10: I've seen your name all the time—
11 E11: Right.
12 E10: Of course on the, on the class list.
13 E11: Yeah.
14 E12: You teach here?
15 E11: Uh, yes, I have taught part time here for three years,

16 E12: Okay.
17 E11: but I think it is going to finish this year.
18 E10: Okay.

Excerpt 4 shows that three of the participants are trying to relate themselves to each other through questioning and answering. They emphasize their common backgrounds and knowledge, and elicit a precise description of E11's teaching.

Conversely, in the Japanese example (Excerpt 5), J21 asks about the other two participants' majors in college, and J19 and J20 answer the question. However, J21 never responds to them, and J19 and J20 do not ask about J21's major. This pattern is what Oatani (2009) calls duet organization.

Excerpt 5
[#14, Three Japanese native speakers in Japanese: J19, J20, J21]

1 J21: *Yappa, ofutari, senko wa* (See, you two, you major in…?)
2 J19: *Boku wa Chiri desu* (I major in geography.)
3 J21: *senko* (major.)
4 J20: *A, shakai gaku, kenkyu* (Uh, sociology, research.)
5 J21: *A, Shagakuka, mezurashi*, (Uh, sociology, minority.)
6 J20: [laughing] *Sore ja mazu jikoshoukai shinai to* (Then, first, we must introduce
          ourselves.)
7 J21: *Aa* (Uh.)

Now, let us examine the speakership termination cues in Japanese. It is revealed that the Japanese participants' conversational style has three main speakership termination cues: (a) predicate components, (b) pauses, and (c) a climax of the conversational topic. The reason that the speakership holder can complete his or her talk without being interrupted is that the other participants wait for these cues before they ask questions and give comments or start afresh.

Predicate components are attached to the verb phrases, which come at the end of each sentence because the standard Japanese syntactical order is SOV. The center of the components is *desu* and *masu* of the formal form of the copula or casual form of *da*. Final particles such as *yo* and *ne* are sometimes added to the predicate; they do not have any particular meaning but convey modality with some attitude toward the information. Excerpt 6 shows how the predicate component functions as a speakership termination cue.

Excerpt 6
[#15, Two Japanese in Japanese: J3, J8]

57 J3: *Aa, nanika, nandakedo* (Well, it is like <u>but</u>)
58 J7: *Ee* (Uh-huh.)

59 J3: *Mukoowa hokooshaga . . . . Ikenai toka* (There, pedestrians do wrongly and so on.)

60 J7: *Soo* (Right)

61 J3: *Sooiuno kiitakoto arimasu* (I heard of that.)

62 J7: *Sooka demo yokode . . .* (I see but besides . . .)

Kedo in utterance 57 and *toka* in 59 are conjunctions attached to the auxiliary verb *nanda* and the verb *ikenai*, respectively. J3 might continue his utterance after the conjunctions, but actually he stops there, using the conjunction instead of the sentence final predicate component, *masu*. J7 gives only minimal responses after conjunctions. J3 finally says a predicate component, *masu*, in utterance 61. Then J7 is able to gain speakership and starts to tell his own story.

Now, let us examine Excerpt 7. In utterance 47, J14 uses *masu ne*, which shows speakership termination. However, in utterance 48, J15 shows that he does not intend to take speakership by giving minimal backchanneling. The pause after utterance 48 confirms J14's speakership has ended. Moreover, it also confirms that J15 does not intend to take speakership. Therefore, J13 perceives he is able to start afresh.

Excerpt 7
[#12, Three Japanese in Japanese: J13, J14, J15]

47 J14: *daibuchigauna to omoi masu ne* (It is very different, I think.)

48 J15: *Un* (Uh-huh.)

[pause]

49 J13: *Boku wa ano- ichiban kanjita no wa Osaka no tennouji ni sunderu n desu kedo* (What I felt that most is . . . , actually I live in Osaka—)

50 J15: *Aa hai hai* (Uh, yes, yes.)

51 J13: *Kou, jissaini kayou youni natte* (It is like, well, actually, when I started to commute—)

52 J15: *A, hai* (Ah, yes.)

53 J13: *Sono, ma, kocchini kite, sorede kaerujanai desuka. Ano, kayotteru node, honara, nioitoka monosugoi, ano, ano, Osakano sono machitteiunowa mou hontoni sugoi ano ishuuga surutteiukotoni kizuitan desuyo* (Well, well, I live here, but I go home, as you know. Well, I commute, so, because, the smell is very strong, well, well, Osaka, well, the town smells really, very, well, strange smell comes somewhere, I noticed it, you know?)

54 J15: *Aa* (Uh.)

55 J13: *Sono, zutto sundetara wakaranakatta koto nan desuyo* (That, I have lived there for a long time, so I did not noticed [sic] the smell before, as you know.)

56 J15: *Aa* (Uh)

57 J13: *De, kuuki mo mono sugoi waruishi, ano, kocchidattara, ano, ikimo shiyasui,*
   mou sugoi, ano, iroiro, karadani sugoku yosasoudana toiu kannjiga (Then,
   air, too, is very bad, well, if you come this area, you breathe easily, but very
   good, well, the air is very good for our health.)
58 J15: *Aa* (Uh.)
59 J13: *Shimashita ne*   (That's what I experienced.)
60 J15: *Aa* (Uh.)
61 J14: ⌈*Yappari* (I know.) ⌉
62 J13: ⌊*Hai souiuno o kanji mashita* (Yes, that is what I felt.) ⌋

In utterances 49, 53, and 55, the predicate component *desu* is used, but it does not
function as a story ending. From the viewpoint of story development, J13's talk has not
reached its climax yet. For this reason, the other participants wait for the climax. J13 says that
he lives in Osaka and then proceeds to describe Osaka City. In utterance 57, he reaches the
climax of his talk but does not use any predicate components. Then J15 gives only
backchanneling. After that, in utterance 59, J13 uses only the predicate component, which is
continued from 57. By saying the predicate component, he marks that his story comes to an
end at this point. It is interesting that J14 perceives utterance 59 as J13's speakership
termination cue. J14 starts his speakership in 61, but his utterance overlaps with that of J13,
who feels he must impress his speakership termination again because J15 gives only
backchanneling and does not take speakership. Then J13 repeats his conclusion using a
different expression in 62. Although overlapping the utterance, J14 seems to perceive J13's
termination cue in 62. Therefore, J13 is able to abandon his speakership role then.

Now let us look at Excerpt 1 again. This is another example showing how English and
Japanese conversational styles are different. Excerpt 1 is a Japanese conversation between
two Japanese and two North American speakers. One of the North Americans is talking about
his girlfriend. Let us look at the final part of each utterance. E6 uses predicate components at
the end of every utterance due to the final position of each sentence. Although E6 uses
predicate components in every utterance, the story is just about beginning the stage. Therefore
the predicate components do not cue his speakership termination. The Japanese participants
expect his talk will continue so they only give minimal responses. The English speaker
expects one of the Japanese participants to take a turn, but neither of them does so. Thus, he
thinks that the Japanese participants are not showing interest in his talk, as he expressed in the
follow-up interview.

Excerpt 1
[#8, Two Japanese and Two North Americans in Japanese: J9, J10, E6, E7]

1 E6: *Aaa, watashi no kanojo wa nihonjin desu.* (Aaa, my girl friend is Japanese.)
2 J9: ⌈*Aaa、 hai* (Uh, yes.)   ⌉
3 J10: ⌊*Aaa, sakki* (Uh, before.) ⌋
4 E6: *Hai, hai, aaa, yoko san desu. An, aaa, Mie-ken kara kimashita.* (Yes, yes,

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well, she is Yoko san. She is from Mie Prefecture.)

5 J9: ⌈*Aaa* (Uh.) ⌉
6 J10: ⌊*Aaa* (Uh.) ⌋

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

8 J10: *Un* (Yes.)

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

10 J9: ⌈*Aaa* (Uh.) ⌉
11 J10: ⌊*Uun* (Um.) ⌋

12 E6: *Un, aan, aa kanojo kara watashi wa aa nihongo o bennkyo shitakatta desu*
   Yes, well, well, from her, I wanted to learn Japanese.)

13 J9: *Toronto daigaku* (Toronto University.)

14 J9: ⌈*Aa, hai hai* (Uh, yes, yes.) ⌉
15 J10: ⌊*Uun* (Um.) ⌋

Excerpt 8 below exemplifies a conversation in which two Japanese participants cannot say anything because, from the perspective of the Japanese participants, E4 never stops or pauses. E4 starts to talk about the very beginning of a particular event that he experienced. The Japanese participants, J4 and J5, wait for climax of the story politely before they start to talk.

Excerpt 8
[#3, Two Japanese and two North American speakers in English: J4, J5, E4, E5]

546 E4: When we're talking about cultural differences, [inaudible], we're discussing Japan, uh, I have been here a number of different times as part of the American military and now as a professor. So uh, uh, my first introduction to Japan was when I was with the American Green Corps at Atsugi. And I found it interesting at the train, train stations used to have at Atsugi Yamato train station. Yamato train station was a little one room wooden depot in the middle of the rice fields. As I walk across the rice fields, the farmers had their honey buckets like a fertilizer for their rice fields and this little bit, the train station. Now the same place is all express way, concrete, or the houses, a big train station. Um, the, at that time, it was very reasonable living there, the area we had. My wife and I had a house forty-two *tatami*, gardener, maid, utilities, and we paid them about seventy-five dollars a month.

547 E5: When was this?

548 E4: This was between Cuba and Vietnam.

549 E5: Oh.

550 E4: Ha-ha, as I said, the, the, the yen was three-hundred-sixty to the dollars and
         the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong was three-eighty-five to the dollar
551 E5: Wow! That was little bit.
552 E4: Yes, we had to convince our wives that the yen was money. We didn't think
         it was real money, ha-ha!
553 E5: I still think that is true in case, because I spend yen faster than I would
         spend dollars.
554 E4: Yes, well when we came here, our American joke used to be—we went
         broke saving money; everything was so reasonable we'd spend, spend,
         spend because they're so reasonable. Shop at Motomachi-cho, um. have a,
         had furniture made in Isezaki-cho. Everything is so reasonable. The
         customs! We didn't find the customs that they uh, that different. We were
         very impressed by Japanese honesty. When I lived in Tsuruma, we went
         shopping one day, and the lady owning the store chased us down the street
         because we forgot the change for one yen. So, yeah, in America, that would
         be a, ha ha so it was, yeah.

As you see, E4 talks about his past experience without stopping. In utterance 547, E5, another North American, makes a clarification question. The Japanese participants are not able to participate interactively in this excerpt. This is because A4 is still talking about the background of his story and it is inappropriate and impolite to say anything before he reaches a climax. For this reason, they remain silent. In the follow-up interviews, the Japanese participants provided a reason for their silence. They said that asking questions and making comments before the speaker finished his talk was rude and against good manners.

Conclusion

This study specifically examines Japanese conversations from the perspective of conversation management strategies and speakership. Speakership holds some subject matter, such as a completed narrative story, and it is usually completed with termination cues. The speakership role is handed over by each participant.

For Japanese speakers, it is important to tell a completed story that consists of an introduction, development, turns, and a conclusion; meanwhile, others wait for the current 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. Hence, this Japanese conversational style differs from the English norm. We observe in English conversational style that the amount of talk and the turns of each participant are almost the same. The participants talk interactively and do not hesitate to ask questions or make comments. In Japanese conversational style, all the participants take turns talking in monologues. They do not ask questions or make comments during these monologues in order to avoid interruption.

These research findings have important implications for English language teaching and learning, as well as for intercultural communication. Japanese people and some researchers have believed that the problem of Japanese native speakers not being able to assume an active role in English interaction is caused only by a lack of vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. Interestingly, Terauchi, Koike, and Takada (2006) conclude that one major cause of this problem is the Japanese personality trait of shyness. The results of this study indicate that differences in cultural conversational styles affect speaker interactions. If Japanese participants know the differences between Japanese and English conversational styles, including that it is not rude to ask questions and make comments at turn-relevance places in English conversations, their language behavior may become more appropriate in conversations with English speakers, which will reduce difficulties and misunderstandings.

This study represents the early stages of a larger research project aimed at exploring other conversational cues characteristic of Japanese exchanges. Future research should focus on complex cues and combinations of cues that occur in Japanese conversations, such as sentence final particles, pauses, stopping mid-sentence, story line, and topic constructions. This type of research can contribute to a deeper understanding of English teaching and learning for Japanese speakers and the conversational strategies to be taught in an English learning context. Poor conversational fluency in English is not due to a lack of vocabulary, grammar knowledge, or shyness but to the difference in the conversational styles of Japanese and English speakers. This, in turn, prevents people from engaging in effective conversations in intercultural communication contexts.

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Appendix: Transcribing Symbols

Symbol	Gloss
…	Section of transcript omitted
[laughing]	Indicates laughter only by the person currently speaking
⌈ ⌉ ⌊ ⌋	Simultaneous speech