Differential Use of Reactive Tokens
in Japanese In Turn Management and by Gender

by

Kiyomi Tanaka

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DIFFERENTIAL USE OF REACTIVE TOKENS IN JAPANESE

IN TURN MANAGEMENT AND BY GENDER

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ABSTRACT

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Kiyomi Tanaka

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Doctoral Advisory Committee Chair: Dr. Noël Houck

This study investigated the distribution of Reactive Tokens in natural conversation by male and female speakers of Japanese. According to Clancy et al. a *reactive token* (RT) is "a short utterance produced by an interlocutor who is playing a listener's role during the other interlocutor's speakership" (1996, p. 355). Clancy et al. classify RTs into five types: *backchannels, reactive expressions, collaborative finishes, repetitions*, and *resumptive openers*. This study investigated the distribution of these five types of RTs. In particular, it studied their use in turn management and their distribution by gender. To identify the distribution of the five types of RTs more clearly, all five types of Reactive Tokens were divided into two levels: those that occurred at the boundary of a Pause-bounded Phrasal Unit (PPU) and those that occurred within a PPU.

The participants in this study were 82 pairs of native speakers of Japanese: 82 female and 82 male native speakers of Japanese between 18 and 22 years of age. All pairs consisted of classmates or friends in the same university.

Participants were audiotaped during 20 minutes of natural conversation. Six minutes from each conversation were extracted, and RTs were identified and coded

using WaveSurfer (Sjölander & Beskow, 2000). Frequencies of RTs per minute were then calculated for each participant.

Using principal components analysis, three coherent components were identified among the ten categories (five RT types each at two different levels). These three components were labeled *sequential RTs*, *accompanying RTs*, and *repetitive RTs*. Also, MANOVA and ANOVA revealed significant differences between Japanese male and female RT use, with females using more *accompanying RTs* than males.

These findings suggest that different types of Reactive Tokens serve different turn-taking functions in Japanese, and that factors besides language, such as gender, may affect a speaker's choice of a particular type of Reactive Token.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Impetus of the Study

Since the earliest times, biological differences between men and women have created different social expectations in terms of their social roles, which in turn have produced various types of gender norms. The use of language has comprised a part of this and has drawn the attention of a number of sociologists and linguists alike. Early feminist researchers (e.g., Fishman, 1983; Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980) identified various levels of gender linguistic differences. The most cited gender differences in language use are, for example, women's tendency to use (hyper-) correct grammar (Cameron & Coates, 1988; Labov, 1972) and tag-questions (e.g., "isn't it?" "does she?" "are you?") (Cameron, McAlinden, & O'Leary, 1988; Dubois & Crouch, 1975; Holmes, 1986; Lakoff, 1975), as well as men's dominance, competitiveness, and tendency to interrupt in conversation, especially with women (Tannen, 1994a; West & Zimmerman, 1983). Although some of these findings are controversial, gender-linked differences in language use still are widely acknowledged.

These gender-linked differences, which may be fundamentally attributed to roles or expectations for the two genders, have been studied from various sociolinguistic points of view. Some researchers such as Lakoff and Fishman argued that the differences are partly due to men's social dominance over women, and other

researchers such as Maltz and Borker (1982) and Tannen (1986) have taken the standpoint that they are due to cultural differences between men and women. The former perspective is commonly referred to as the psychological approach, and the latter is referred to as the cultural approach.

However, as Philips and Reynolds (1994) argued, the relation between gender and language use is variable across social contexts (p. 72). That is, although gender differences in language use are probably universal, the different ways in which men and women speak and behave may also be affected by social norms differing across cultures. Also, the degree to which these gender differences occur may vary across linguistic genres in one language. For example, for some linguistic features, such as final particles in Japanese, gender differences are conspicuous, while for other linguistic features, such as hedges in Japanese, differences are not clearly observed. These and other issues make gender-based language variation diverse and complex.

Background of the Problem

Over the last thirty years, a great deal of research on language variation and gender has been published. In 1975, Lakoff presented a number of linguistic forms marking certain kinds of social identities related to gender. Lakoff, whose standpoint was adopted by many later feminist researchers, argued that women's language reflects their subordinate status in society.

In contrast to Lakoff's (1975) negative approach to women's language, Kalcik (1975), Troemel-Ploetz (1992), and Johnstone (1993) adopted an affirmative perspective. They reported that women are superior to men in conversational

strategy use, which is characterized by supportive and cooperative utterances to others in conversation. Troemel-Ploetz (1992) reported that women are likely to refrain from criticism, depersonalize an attack, or modify a correction or objection, even when the high status person is speaking to the lower status person (p. 585).

Maltz and Borker (1982) brought a new perspective to the established finding that women and men often speak differently. They suggested that differences between men and women should be attributed to cultural differences rather than to men's social dominance over women. They argued that men and women are likely to interpret each other's responses and behaviors in light of their own cultural experiences and social contexts (p. 200). Different social needs of men and women have led them to sexually differentiated communicative cultures, with each gender learning a different set of skills for manipulating words effectively (p. 200). As a result, men and women interpret language behaviors in different manners. For example, women see questions as a part of conversational maintenance, interpret overt aggressiveness as personally directed, negative, and disruptive, and discuss problems by sharing experiences and offering reassurances, while men view questions as requests for information, view aggressiveness as one conversational organizing structure for conversational flow, and regard problems as explicit requests for solutions and therefore respond by giving advice, acting as experts, and lecturing (p. 213). Their model was based on Gumperz's work on cross-ethnic communication (1982). In his view, problems of interpreting mainly stem from the different cultural upbringing of interlocutors. Gumperz noted that neither of the parties is to blame

when such miscommunication occurs. Maltz and Borker argued that this approach can also be applied to cross-gender communication (1982, p. 196). They claimed that American men and women who come from these different sociolinguistic subcultures are likely to experience cultural miscommunication, even if both parties are attempting to treat one another as equals (p. 200).

This dual culture model was followed by Tannen (1991), who argued that the meaning of conversation for men differs from that for women. She asserted that for men, conversations are negotiations in which one individual confronts the other party and promotes himself, while for women conversations are negotiations in which the goal is to attain closeness with confirmative and supportive talk (pp. 24-25).

One of the main criticisms of the dual cultural model is that it is based on an inter-ethnic model. That is, although these researchers extended gender differences from lexical choices to interactional styles, they paid little attention to how gender differences in interactional styles has been shaped in relation to other factors such as cultural context. In Japanese, for example, it is generally observed that women are likely to produce the sentence final particles *ne* or *wa*, and refer to themselves using specific subject pronouns such as *watashi* or *watakushi*, while in English such differences are not so clearly marked. Also, although gender differences in the language may be observable across other linguistic spheres of language use such as turn-taking or backchannel behaviors, very little attention has been paid to them.

A final impetus for this research comes from the work of Clancy, Thompson,

Suzuki, and Tao (1996) who proposed the use of the term *reactive token* (RT) for minimal verbal responses, which are brief comments like "umhm" and "yes" that occur frequently in conversation. They defined *reactive token* (RT) as "a short utterance produced by an interlocutor who is playing a listener's role during the other interlocutor's speakership" (p. 355). Although they investigated the differences in Reactive Token use across three languages, English, Mandarin, and Japanese, they did not indicate how gender affected the use of use of Reactive Tokens in the three languages. Although they suggested that Reactive Tokens are part of a distinct set of turn-management strategies, they did not clearly indicate how Reactive Tokens function in turn-management. They noted, "One obvious question for further research relates to the factors underlying the variation in Reactive Token use across conversations within one language" (p. 387). This suggestion inspired the present investigation of how Japanese Reactive Tokens function as a turn-management strategy and how gender affects their use.

Statement of the Problem

The present study was designed to examine functions of Japanese Reactive Tokens in relation to turn-management and gendered differentiation in Reactive Token use. Audio-tape recorded data obtained from 162 Japanese students aged from 18 to 21 who were attending a university located in eastern Japan were analyzed.

In Japanese, the most commonly observed gendered differentiations are the use of specific lexis, such as polite forms of nouns, specific subject pronouns, and syntactic forms such as sentence final particles. While these differences are heavily

5

emphasized as gender-related variation, little attention has been paid to other Japanese linguistic features that may be potentially gender-linked. One of them concerns the use of minimal responses, which are the nods and brief comments like "umhm" and "yes" that occur in conversational interaction (Freeman & McElhinny, 1996). Although some researchers (Furo, 2000) have reported gender differences for Reactive Tokens, which are short utterances produced by a non-primary speaker (Clancy et al., 1996, p. 355), emphasis was placed on various forms and the frequency of Reactive Tokens used by different genders. However, previous researchers have not fully investigated Reactive Token use at the level of functions related to the turn-management system. Also, though the frequency was measured in terms of percentages in earlier research, whether the finding was significant or non-significant was sometimes left to be verified (i.e., Clancy et al., 1996; Furo, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The overall goal of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the fundamental issues directly related to this study by examining the following topics: (a) turn-taking, (b) backchannels, (c) turn-taking and backchannels in the Japanese language, (d) gender differences in conversational interaction styles, and (e) gendered differences in Japanese conversational interaction styles.

Turn-taking

Conversational interaction is distinguished from other forms of discourse activities by the alternation of speaking from one participant to another, which is commonly referred to as turn-taking. A turn is a period of speech in which only one person ideally talks at a time. In addition, a turn organizes conversation between at least two people. The speaker does not start an utterance at random; he/she generally begins when it appears that the sender has finished his/her utterance. The analysis of this turn-taking has given rise to several questions:

1. How does the participant gain an opportunity to become the next speaker?
2. Does the receiver insert utterances into the end of the sender's speech at random, presuming that the sender has finished the utterance at a certain point?
3. How does a participant know who is supposed to speak next in the conversation?

The ways in which such matters are regulated in conversational interactions have

been a topic of interest to researchers, and significant work in this area has produced a wealth of interesting results. Turn-taking is regulated by the use of vocal cues and gestures (Duncan & Fiske, 1977; Jaffe & Feldstein, 1970; Kendon, 1967). The current speaker signals when he intends to renounce or hold the turn, and auditors monitor signals for the timing of turn-transition. Kendon (1967) asserted that gaze functions as a monitor to probe interlocutors' intentions and expectations for the turn. Looking away for a moment by the speaker is observed before long utterances and the speaker's sustained gaze at the listener is observed before the end of the his/her utterance (pp. 47-48). Jaffe and Feldstein (1970) noted that a speaker change in English usually occurs without any overlap of utterances following a brief pause. The utterance of each speaker is presumably terminated by a signal of "end of message" that enhances the subsequent response (pp. 10-11). Duncan and Fiske (1977) emphasized that signals such as gesticulation that are produced by one or two interlocutors act as a device used to regulate turn-taking. Thus, interaction rules within the turn system comprise permissible sequences of action such as current active signals and certain preceding moves by one or both participants (pp. 182-185). However, one of the problems from the perspective of researchers who emphasize signals is that gestures such as gaze, which they regard as one of the most important cues to yield or retain turn-transition, are limited in generalisability across contexts. It is commonly acknowledged that, without visual cues such as gaze, people in telephone conversations yield smooth turn-transitions in spite of the fact that no special prosodic or intonational cues make up for the lack of visual signals (Levinson,

1983). Furthermore, these researchers' arguments are based on studies conducted within a particular culture. For example, Hall (1974) reported that visual cues such as gaze are not likely to be used by some people in non-Western cultures.

The pioneering work advanced by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) described a set of rules of turn-taking that is well accepted as the means by which interlocutors regulate conversation. A summary of those rules is as follows:

1. Speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs.
2. Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time.
3. Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief.
4. Transitions (from one turn to a next) with no gap and no overlap are common. Together with transitions characterized by slight gap or slight overlap, they make up the vast majority of transitions.
5. Turn order is not fixed, but varies.
6. Turn size is not fixed, but varies.
7. Length of conversation is not specified in advance.
8. What parties say is not specified in advance.
9. Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance.
10. Numbers of parties can vary.
11. Talk can be continuous or discontinuous.
12. Turn-allocation techniques are obviously used. A current speaker select a next speaker (as when he addresses a question to another party); or parties may self-select in starting to talk.
13. Various 'turn-constructional units' are employed; e.g., turns can be projected 'one word long,' or they can be sentential in length.
14. Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations; e.g., if two parties find themselves talking at the same time, one of them will stop prematurely, thus repairing the trouble.

(pp. 700-701)

These rules specifically focus on the point of utterance transition between the interlocutors, which is known as the Transition Relevance Place (TRP). TRPs at

9

which turn-transfer possibly occurs are indicated by interlocutors by means of syntactic factors such as completion of sentences, paragraphs, or phrases, as well as prosodic features such as intonation, tone, and pitch (Sacks et al., 1974, pp. 702-703). The following is a basic set of rules governing turn construction proposed by Sacks et al. (1974).

1. For any turn, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit:

(a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then the party so selected has the right and is obliged to take next turn to speak; no others have such rights or obligations, and transfer occurs at that place.

(b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, be instituted; first starter acquires rights to a turn, and transfer occurs at that place.

(c) If the turn-so far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then current speaker may, but need not continue, unless another self-selects.

2. If, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit, neither 1a nor 1b has operated, and, following the provision of 1c, current speaker has continued, then the rule-set a-c re-applies at the next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected.

<div align="right">(p. 704)</div>

Rule 1 above may be paraphrased as follows.

a. The current speaker chooses who speaks next.
b. If the current speaker does not choose anybody, the next speaker can self-select.
c. If nobody self-selects, the current speaker can continue.

When a turn is given to a participant, the participant controls the length of the turn by means of completing or prolonging sentence, paragraph, or phrase, as well as prosodic devices, such as falling or raising intonation, change in pitch, and pausing, and at the first TRP, the alternation of speakers potentially occurs. Also, interlocutors must eliminate any gap and overlap at the TRP so as to accomplish smooth turn-transfer (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 704).

Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's analysis, however, has been challenged by some researchers. Edelsky (1993) defined a turn as an on-record "speaking" (which may include nonverbal activities) by which an interlocutor's referential and functional message is conveyed (p. 207). Edelsky defined the *floor* as "the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space" (p. 209). It can be developed or controlled by one person at a time or by several simultaneously or in quick succession (p. 209). She also distinguished between a turn opportunity that is open to all in multiparty speech, where a joint answer to a question or collaboration on developing ideas is built, and a turn that is open to a single speaker, where an answer or idea is developed by a single speaker. She termed the former *collaborative floor* and the latter *singly-developed floor*. Though she initially intended to examine gender role differences by examining floor types in mixed-sex conversations in university committee meetings, she had difficulty analyzing who had the floor and what constituted a turn in such multiparty informal conversations. Consequently, she found it difficult to apply the turn-taking rules presented by Sacks et al. (1974) to such conversations. In her view, Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn-taking system, which is

11

premised on one-at-a-time talk, sees conversational behaviors in terms of overly objective mechanical systems and, therefore, is neither universal nor essential for the communication of messages (p. 201).

Goffman (1981) defined turns as "an opportunity to hold the floor, not what is said while holding it" (p. 23). He claimed that the talk during two different turns could function as one unit, combining two different parties' contribution to the dialogue in one turn at talk. He argued that the organization of turns and the sequence of interaction should be discriminated. He also proposed two types of constraints that affect turn-taking management, *ritual constraints* and *system constraints*. In *ritual constraints,* talk does not always coincide with a sentence or a speaker's talk but features an orientation to answering and replying to other parties' intent, not to their sentences. For example, Japanese have a conversational interaction style, in which a speaker reduces, formulates, and obscures the message and a listener decodes it with conjecture to fit the effect of the speaker's intent sometimes without the provision of the speaker's complete sentences (Ishii, 1984). Therefore, *ritual constraints* are likely to function as one way to control turn-taking management, the means of which may vary according to culture or context. *System constraints,* which fundamentally have the same basis as Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn-taking system, is the fundamental system involved in controlling the structural mechanism of conversation (pp. 24-27). This constraint is built on the basis of the proposition of sentences and may be obvious in conversational interactions such as assertions followed by direct denials, questions by questioning the questioner, accusations by counter-accusations, and disparagement by

insult. In Goffman's (1981) view, both ritual constraints and system constraints affect the turn-taking system.

Philips (1976) also noted that some non-western cultures have ways of taking turns that challenge Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn-taking rules. She examined the Warm Spring Indians' turn-taking rules and reported that their conversational interaction style was such that speakers did not influence who would speak next because as they spoke, both speakers and hearers spent more time looking away from their partner and used less arm and hand gesturing than Anglos (p. 89). Also pauses were not likely to be immediately filled by the Indian listeners, a conversational feature that sometimes resulted in long silences, which implied that Indian listeners did not control who would be selected as the next speaker (pp. 88-93).

Ervin-Tripp (1979) also noted that Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn-taking rules could not always apply to Indian-English colloquial conversations. She reported that in Indian-English colloquial conversations, interruptions were not regarded as offensive but as an attitude of cooperative talk, a kind of way to supply more information and to indicate attentive listening. Interlocutors interrupted each other and expected to be interrupted when they were speaking in some cases (p. 395).

O'Connell, Kowal, and Kaltenbacher (1990) also criticized Sacks et al.'s turn-taking management system, arguing that their analysis did not adequately account for cultural differences, temporal organization, the relationship of interlocutors, and contractual determinations varying across different contexts. In their view, Sacks et al.'s mechanical turn-taking management system "excluded

13