

Category/Sub-field: Functional/Discourse, Conversation

Title: Unit segmentations and interactive turn space in Japanese conversation:
Phrasal unit boundaries and the organization of units and sequences

Syntactic units such as sentences or clauses [noun phrase + predicate] and postpositional phrase [noun phrase + case or adverbial particle] are constituent units that should not be separated in traditional grammar. However, I will show how those syntactically constituent units are divided into sub-parts to achieve collaborative interaction. Furthermore, in terms of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Tanaka 1999), it is assumed that a turn-constructive unit (TCU) should reach completion for the next speaker to begin, but I will demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case by examining how noun phrases are treated as if they were possibly complete units (sub-units) that are operative even though syntactically they are not complete. This study reveals how some syntactically constituent units, such as noun phrases and postpositional phrases, are used as building blocks for sub-units and how these constituent units are divided to create interactive spaces for participation.

While utterances constructed in conversational Japanese are considered as fragmented or incremental (e.g., Iwasaki and Ono 1999, 2002, to appear; Maynard 1989; Ono and Iwasaki 2002; Tanaka 1999, 2000), how speakers utilize this linguistic feature of Japanese in talk-in-interaction has received limited attention (Hayashi 2001, 2003, 2004). I argue that the segmentation of units in Japanese creates permeability, which allows conversationalists to create spaces for participation. Focusing on instances where the speaker initiates a sequence of alignment-solicitation or ratification-request in the course of the unit construction, I analyze how the speaker utilizes multi-modal resources such as prosody or visual cues to create spaces immediately after the noun phrase that facilitate participation and allow the recipient to enter into the speaker's turn space. The study analyzes boundaries of segmented noun phrases at which the speaker provides a space for the recipients to intervene during the course of turn construction, including how the speakers provide spaces and how these spaces are recognized by the recipients as opportunities for particular kinds of interventions.

Analyzing video- and audio-taped interactions among Japanese speakers, this study illuminates intertwined and dynamic relationships between language and social interaction, revealing how phrasal unit boundaries facilitate the organization of turn construction in Japanese, and emphasizing that producing an utterance is not necessarily equal to gaining and producing a turn. The findings advance our understanding the ways in which the permeability of sub-units *inside* the turn are organized verbally and bodily, and explicate how utterances are constructed as collaborative products between the speaker and the recipient(s) in talk-in-interaction. This study contributes to understanding that the organization of grammar and social interaction mutually shape each other. Grammar is a way for the speaker to implement actions, and actions are achieved in the unfolding talk, but are sensitive to aspects of verbal and nonverbal reciprocity. Ultimately, these analyses demonstrate how Japanese conversationalists orient to unit segmentations and how the use of phrasal units shapes social interaction in the course of organizing units and sequences in talk.

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