

33 Vicious cycles of turn negotiation in video-mediated telecollaboration: interactional sociolinguistics perspective

Yuka Akiyama¹

Abstract

To examine how participants' different eTandem experiences could be attributed to the way they co-constructed turns, this study analyzed turn negotiation practices of one dyad who engaged in video-mediated interaction between Japan and America. This dyad was chosen for analysis because they expressed the greatest frustration and required a pedagogical intervention. It was found that silence, which was used by the Japanese learner of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a contextualization cue for linguistic help, triggered the American student's hyperexplanation to get the Japanese partner involved in conversation. Such a high-involvement strategy, however, only resulted in producing fewer opportunities for the Japanese partner to contribute to the conversation (i.e. vicious cycle). I conclude that 'missed communication' (Ware, 2005) in an autonomous, long-term eTandem project may entrench attribution of negative personal traits unless appropriate scaffolding/intervention is provided.

Keywords: conversational style strategies, contextualization cues, listener responses, silence, recipient design, complementary schismogenesis.

1. Georgetown University, Washington DC, United States; ya125@georgetown.edu

How to cite this chapter: Akiyama, Y. (2016). Vicious vs. virtuous cycles of turn negotiation in video-mediated telecollaboration: interactional sociolinguistics perspective. In S. Jager, M. Kurek & B. O'Rourke (Eds), *New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education* (pp. 277-282). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.telecollab2016.518>

1. Introduction

While numerous benefits of telecollaboration have been reported, the field is also characterized by its willingness to document failure, investigating “conflict as object of research” rather than regarding it as “accidental finding of research” (Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010, p. 3). For instance, previous studies on telecollaboration revealed that tensions might arise due to dissimilar styles of negotiation between two groups of learners (Ware, 2005). These studies revealed that differences in interactional norms and expectations might result in failed communication because “an emotional reaction [to cultural differences in communication styles] is often the major factor responsible for a deterioration of rapport and for the mutual attribution of negative personal traits which, in turn, effectively prevent any recognition of real differences in cultural values and norms” (House, 2010, p. 147).

Interactional sociolinguistics is a branch of discourse analysis with a long history of research analyzing communication between different cultural groups. Previous studies have identified conversational styles (Tannen, 2005), listenership behaviors (Erickson, 1986), and contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1977) that are culturally shaped and impact conversational participants’ turn-taking practices. For instance, although Japanese people have the reputation for using frequent *aizuchi* (listener responses) to demonstrate active listenership, they are also known for using silence to achieve communicative goals. Without knowing how Japanese speakers use silence in accordance with *aizuchi*, Japanese speakers’ silence may give a wrong impression that they are reticent and passive. Adopting an interactional competence view of language learning, the current study examined the turn negotiation practices of one dyad whose interactional outcomes were considered least successful.

2. Method

The participants in the current study were a dyad, Edwin and Hiroyuki. Their data were drawn from 30 dyads who participated in the current eTandem project

between English learners in Japan and Japanese learners in the U.S. This focal dyad was considered least successful based on the following three criteria: (a) degree of satisfaction, (b) discontinuity beyond the curricular requirement, and (c) the necessity of the coordinator's intervention. These two participants' initial proficiency, intercultural competence, and motivation, as measured via a questionnaire, were similar to the group average. These participants engaged in nine weekly English-Japanese tandem sessions via *Google Hangout*. For each week, participants engaged in an open-ended information exchange task called visual-based conversation.

The English part of Session 2 was selected for analysis because it was considered the peak of missed communication; it was before the coordinator intervened with the unsuccessful dyad. After watching the whole video of Session 2, a conversation segment that was considered most representative of the session was selected. Silences lasting longer than one second were also indicated in parentheses.

3. Results

In the following conversation (Table 1), Edwin and Hiroyuki are talking about a party scene in the U.S. Hiroyuki asks Edwin questions regarding how American college students party. The dyad faces challenges in how to negotiate turns because (a) Edwin misinterprets Hiroyuki's silence as a lack of engagement, when in fact, Hiroyuki uses silence to seek linguistic help, (b) Hiroyuki's lack of listener responses leads to Edwin's hyper-involvement strategy of hyperexplanation, and (c) both prospective and retrospective recipient design starts to malfunction.

Table 1. Conversation between Edwin and Hiroyuki

	Edwin	Hiroyuki
1	Like um (1.49) the thing about the partying that I don't like as much is that (1.12) it's not very personal.	
2		(2.83)

3	You just you you go inside the the house (1.16)? You (1.35) you um (2.28) like you you you drink a little bit. [um] and for us it's it's not yet legal? so I think it's more exciting because of that?	[Ah huh]
4		(3.76)
5	Um and then I mean (1.22) I guess you just hit on people.	
6		(1.72)
7	Do you do you do you know what "hit on" means?	
8		(2.60) hidon?
9	HIT ON?	
10		(1.81) No no.
11	Ok ok cuz it it doesn't mean like it's not like like that (punching gesture) It's like.	
12		Un=

This conversation demonstrates an extreme case of complementary schismogenesis where the American participant resorted to even more high-involvement strategies because he was not comfortable with silence, while the Japanese participant, who is used to receiving knowledge rather than questioning the authoritative figure (i.e. native speaker of English) (Nakane, 2006), used more silences to indicate comprehension difficulties, hoping that the American participant would use *sasshi* (guesswork) and offer help. In other words, while Hiroyuki resorted to silence as a rapport management strategy to avoid potentially face-threatening interactions, it was interpreted as an impolite conversational move that places “high inferential demands on the addressee” (Sifianou, 1997, p. 73). As such, Edwin, not knowing what to do with the silence, resorted to his first language high-involvement strategy, hoping that his partner would show more engagement. However, his using faster pacing, less wait time, and limited turn nomination, led to hyperexplanation, which only resulted in depriving Hiroyuki of the time to process Edwin’s utterances and indicate comprehension difficulties. Also, Hiroyuki’s use of silence reduced Edwin’s chance to adjust his recipient design based on Hiroyuki’s linguistic output. Hiroyuki’s use of more frequent clarification requests, for instance, might have allowed Edwin to assess Hiroyuki’s knowledge schema (Tannen & Wallat, 1987) and establish better recipient design. That is, frequent silences and lack of collaborative turn negotiation prevented the dyad from sharing their respective underlying conversational rules and establishing effective recipient design. In the end, this vicious cycle only aggravated the lack of co-construction of talk.

4. Conclusion

Ultimately, we may wonder how the two geographically distant groups of eTandem participants should engage in intercultural negotiation of turns. Should they follow the conversational rules of the target language community (e.g. adopting Japanese conversational rules during Japanese interaction and English rules during English interaction)? Or should they take a balanced approach, adopting a hybrid form of conversational rules that apply to both languages (e.g. mutually agreed-upon rules that integrate both English and Japanese rules)? Whether participants decide to choose one way or the other, practitioners should support learners by providing ample opportunities for the scaffolded exploration of situated turn negotiation practices, so they can maximize the institutional nature of telecollaborative arrangement.

References

- Erickson, F. (1986). Listening and speaking. In D. Tannen & J. Alatis (Eds.), *Languages and linguistics: the interdependence of theory, data, and application* (pp. 294-319). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Gumperz, J. (1977). Sociocultural knowledge in conversational inference. *Linguistics and Anthropology*, 76, 785-98.
- House, J. (2010). Impoliteness in Germany: intercultural encounters in everyday and institutional talk. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 7(4), 561-595. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iprg.2010.026>
- Lamy, M. N., & Goodfellow, R. (2010). Telecollaboration and learning 2.0. In S. Guth & F. Helm (Eds.), *Telecollaboration 2.0: language, literacies and intercultural learning in the 21st century* (pp. 107-138). Bern: Peter Lang.
- Nakane, I. (2006). Silence and politeness in intercultural communication in university seminars. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(11), 1811-1835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.01.005>
- Sifianou, M. (1997). Silence and politeness. In A. Jaworski (Ed.), *Silence: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 63-84). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Tannen, D. (2005). *Conversational style: analyzing talk among friends*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tannen, D., & Wallat, C. (1987). Interactive frames and knowledge schemas in interaction: examples from a medical examination/interview. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50(2), 205-216. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786752>

Ware, P. (2005). Missed communication in online communication: tensions in a German-American telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 9(2), 64-89.

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
Dublin, Ireland; Voillans, France, info@research-publishing.net

© 2016 by Editors (collective work)
© 2016 by Authors (individual work)

New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education
Edited by Sake Jager, Malgorzata Kurek, and Breffni O'Rourke

Rights: All articles in this collection are published under the Attribution-NonCommercial -NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Under this licence, the contents are freely available online as PDF files (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.telecollab2016.9781908416414>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.



Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover design and cover photos by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
UNICollab logo – Harriett Cornish, Graphic Designer, KMi, The Open University

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-40-7 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-41-4 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-42-1 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

Legal deposit, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, The Library of Trinity College, The Library of the University of Limerick, The Library of Dublin City University, The Library of NUI Cork, The Library of NUI Maynooth, The Library of University College Dublin, The Library of NUI Galway.

Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: novembre 2016.
