

***Cultural Awareness in Teaching English:  
Analysing Intercultural Communication  
and Teaching Positive Politeness Strategies\****

**Sanae Tsuda**

*Tokai Gakuen University, Japan*

**Yuka Shigemitsu**

*Tokyo Polytechnic University, Japan*

**Kazuyo Murata**

*Ryukoku University, Japan*

This paper focuses on conversational style differences between Japanese and English and how to overcome the differences in English teaching to Japanese speakers. Using videotaped English conversations between native speakers of American English and Japanese, it analyses their differences in conversational styles. The result shows that native speakers of English interpreted Japanese speakers' verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as nodding, frequent pauses or ellipsis, and taking turns, differently from Japanese speakers' intentions and sometimes regarded them as unfriendly or unfavorable. In the second half of the paper, it reports the result of experimental English classes in which positive politeness strategies, one of the constituents of conversational strategies, were explicitly taught. It shows students' progress in conversational skills by using various strategies they learned in class. The last part summarizes the findings and discusses implications of the results in relation to

---

\* Part of this research is funded by the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research, Category C. No. 15520379 in 2003 and 2004.

cultural differences and learner identity. It points out that English teaching inevitably involves teaching the conversational strategies of English speaking societies and that it is necessary to raise awareness of both Japanese and English speakers about their different conversational styles and strategies.

**Key words: conversational style, English conversation, intercultural communication, politeness strategy**

## INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed that functions of communication are not only to convey information but also to maintain relationships between participants (e.g. Brown & Yule, 1983; Tannen, 1990). This paper focuses on the latter since conversational style difference influences the success of communication much more than grammatical or lexical mistakes or mispronunciation (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Research 1, the first part of the paper, aims to find differences in the conversational styles of native English speakers and Japanese speakers and to identify causes of miscommunication that sometimes occurs between them. The second part, Research 2 examines if it is possible to explicitly teach style difference in class to encourage Japanese learners of English to develop some strategies which are used frequently and commonly in English daily conversation. If they can master such strategies, they will be able to avoid misunderstandings that result from misuse or non use of some of these strategies.

Research 1 shows an analysis of videotaped English conversations between native speakers of American English and Japanese, focusing on their different conversational styles. Since speakers of different languages have different conversational styles, each speaker interprets the other according to his or her own norms, which often results in miscommunication (Tannen, 1984, 1986). We assume that miscommunication occurs more often if conversation participants do not share common cultural or linguistic backgrounds (Rose &

Kasper, 2001). In the analysis, we aim to identify such differences in conversational styles between native speakers of English and Japanese which may cause discomfort or miscommunication between them.

In addition to the analysis of conversational data, we interviewed the participants to find what kinds of reactions they had towards each other. Such follow-up interview data enable the researchers to obtain additional information such as participants' feelings and intentions behind particular behaviors. The amount of conversational data was limited at the time of this analysis; follow-up interviews seemed to be a valuable source of information to get further insight in our analysis.

In Research 2, we will discuss the experimental classes to teach Japanese college students some positive politeness strategies, which are one of the constituents of conversational styles that play significant roles in building and maintaining good relationships between speakers and hearers. Based on the findings of Research 1 in which Japanese speakers are found to be more conscious of reacting to status differences than showing friendliness in choosing their conversational styles, we decided to teach some of the positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101-129). These show closeness or intimacy to others and are often regarded as salient strategies in English. We picked up the target strategies focusing on hearers' responses.

We believe that the findings of this paper are valuable contributions in teaching interaction in English to Japanese speakers. Additionally, the paper also suggests the implications of these findings in relation to the issues of World Englishes and learner identity. We pose the question whether it is sufficient to teach native English speaker norms to Japanese learners of English because English is widely used as a lingua franca not only by English native speakers. The last section suggests a proposal to this issue.

## **RESEARCH 1: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS**

According to Tannen (1986), conversational styles may carry metamessages

which show speakers' attitudes toward each other, the occasion, and what they are saying (Tannen, 1986, p. 29). A metamessage might sometimes be interpreted as one which the speaker never intends to say. If participants share a conversational style, the same metamessages will be successfully conveyed between speaker and hearer. On the contrary, if the participants do not share a particular conversational style, the utterance interpretation might be different from the listener's expectation and will carry a metamessage, for example, that the speaker is too pushy or too reserved. Moreover, such metamessages can create misunderstanding about other participants' personal qualities, because people tend to judge others by their way of talking (Tannen, 1984, pp. 2-8).

Why cannot non-native (Japanese) English speakers communicate appropriately with native speakers of English even if the Japanese can speak English with only minor mistakes, and also read and write English well? In this section, we will show the results from our analysis of English conversations between Americans and Japanese and single out some elements of conversational style in interaction which appear to cause unpleasantness and misunderstanding.

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the differences in conversational styles between native English speakers and non-native (Japanese) English speakers?
- 2) Do the different conversational styles cause misunderstandings?

### **Participants and Procedure**

We videotaped ten intercultural conversations for our ongoing research.<sup>1</sup> Recordings A and B which are English Conversations between American participants and Japanese participants have been selected for the analysis in this paper. The participants met the following criteria:

---

<sup>1</sup> These studies are a part of a series of research projects carried out by the Politeness Research Group of the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET), to which the authors belong.

- 1) American participants were not familiar with the Japanese language, custom and culture.
- 2) American participants hardly ever had contact with Japanese people.
- 3) Japanese participants had relatively higher English skills either with English proficiency certification, a high score record of TOEIC or TOEFL test, or be a graduate of one of the top-rank Universities in Japan.
- 4) Japanese participants did not have experience of living overseas.
- 5) Japanese participants were not English-majors.
- 6) All participants had not met before.

**TABLE 1**  
**Participants' Profiles**

<b>Recording A    One American and one Japanese (30 min.)</b>
<b>J1</b> Male, 40s, works for a pharmaceutical company. Non English Major but he has been involved in numerous meetings with English speakers and undertaken many overseas business trips. He is not good at social talk.
<b>A2</b> Male, 50s, Office Clerk at a US Army Camp in Japan, has lived in Japan for two years in total.
<b>Recording B    Two Americans and two Japanese (30 min.)</b>
<b>J2</b> Male, 40s, Ph. D, Assistant Professor, teaching physical education at a University in Tokyo Suburban area, Non-English major, has written several papers in English and has presented oral and poster presentations in English in conference.
<b>J3</b> Male, 40s, Ph. D, Assistant Professor, teaching mathematics at a University in Tokyo Suburban area, Non-English major, but passed STEP 1st grade [STEP= Society for Testing English Proficiency] and has translated several English mathematics books into Japanese.
<b>A2</b> Male, 60s, school teacher in US army camp, has lived in US army camp in Japan for several years.
<b>A3</b> Male, 40s, office clerk at a US army camp in Japan. It turned out that he is married to a Japanese woman.

The participants' profiles are shown in Table 1. All these American participants were male in their 40s to 60s and had a low ability of Japanese. For their occupation, A1 was a teacher, and A2 and A3 were office workers. They all belonged to a US Army camp in Japan. They matched our criteria because they lived separately from Japanese citizens, in an enclosed area surrounded by fences. They were not heavily involved in the Japanese way of

life, culture and customs since they had been frequently transferred from one country to another.

As for the Japanese participants, J1, J2 and J3, their English reading and writing skills were fairly good. However, they complained that they had difficulties in speaking English, even though they had sufficient knowledge of grammar and a rich vocabulary. Among them, J1 was a businessman who frequently had the chance to speak English through his business trips, teleconferences and overseas phone calls. But he always experienced difficulty in social talk although he managed to undertake business meetings. The other two participants (J2, J3) were professors at a university in Japan. They wrote academic papers in English and read resources in English. However, they hardly ever had a chance to talk with native English speakers in everyday life.

All participants were meeting for the first time for the recording except J2 and J3, who worked at the same university. However, they belonged to different divisions and seldom met each other on campus.

The conversations were recorded with two digital video cameras and several audio recorders (cassette tape recorders and MD recorders). The participants were given the topic “Your Experiences of Cultural Differences”. The researchers tried to emphasize the spontaneity in the conversation, so did not give the participants any particular questions or agenda to facilitate their conversation. The researchers gave each group 30 minutes for recording and stayed in the same room in order to check the recording equipment. After the thirty minute-recording, the researchers had a follow-up interview with each participant separately about their impression of the conversation.

### **Overview from the Follow-up Interviews**

Table 2 shows what we obtained from the follow-up interviews. From the participants’ unreserved comments, it is possible to spotlight the following features. First and most important, both the Americans and the Japanese considered that the English grammatical and phonological mistakes by the Japanese participants were not a big problem which hindered communication.

Second, aspects of conversational management were not the same. It is observed that Japanese participants in both groups employed Japanese conversational style in accordance with the Japanese polite manner, especially in pausing, turn-taking management, and discourse structure. The Japanese did not interrupt nor overlap while others were talking. The Japanese participants, especially in Recording B, said clearly in the follow-up interviews that they did not change topics or raise new topics because such behavior was very rude. However, the Americans in Recording B perceived such behavior was odd rather than too polite. The Japanese participants in Recording A did not have a bad impression but he felt rushed by the introduction of new topics one after another. He pointed out that the manner of topic changing by the American gave an unfavorable impression during the conversation. Detailed conversation analysis revealed that some misinterpretations of the interlocutor's behavior caused problems in both conversations.

**TABLE 2**  
**Brief Comments from the Participants after the Recording**

<b>What the Americans say</b>	<b>What the Japanese say</b>
<p><b>Recording A</b> The Japanese participant was a good English speaker although some grammar mistakes were found. The Japanese participant was polite.</p>	<p><b>Recording A</b> The American spoke very fast and jumped from one topic to another very quickly. It was very hard to follow him. While the Japanese participant was thinking what he was going to say, the American changed the topic. The Japanese participant always worried about how many minutes were left.</p>
<p><b>Recording B</b> There were problems with the Japanese participants. Both the American participants would not get friend with these people. The Americans did not mind the English mistakes that the Japanese participants made.</p>	<p><b>Recording B</b> The Americans changed the topics too frequently. The Japanese did not change topics because they felt it was impolite to change topic themselves. They were happy that the Americans sometimes gave them turns and let them join the conversation although they did not know how to respond and missed them.</p>

## Different Conversational Styles

In the following sections, we will focus on some obviously different conversational styles between the Japanese and the American participants. One of the aims of this paper is to apply the result to English Teaching. We will also point out what Japanese should pay attention to when speaking English to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication.

### *Lack of Verbal Response*

We have identified some differences in the way of responding between the Americans and the Japanese. First, the Japanese nodded more frequently and more rhythmically without any vocal sound compared to the Americans. When the Japanese were supposed to say “yes” or “no”, they just nodded or moved their heads sideways. On the contrary, according to the comments from Japanese participants at the follow-up interview, the Americans stared at conversational partners more often, and this made the Japanese felt stressed. Moreover, non-vocal nodding created a pause. There were some pauses due to the fact that Japanese did not take turns. The following is an example of the Japanese long pause:

(1) [Recording A]

A1: I have no- I just a –you know the– shirt and tie always uh – fail safe method. Okay?

J1: Safe, yes. (laugh)

A1: Yeah, so that way- you know – if if everybody is casual, then I can take off the tie. But it's a, it's a just a it's a safe, safe guard so, uh it can be- you can go

J1: **(Pause 2”75 with nodding)** Do you uh did you have experience with uh- to have a meeting or to have uh , you know- party with Japanese people?

During the pause of 2.75 seconds in (1), J1 was nodding continuously to

show his active listenership while the American seemed to expect him to talk. Otani (2005) mentioned that a longer pause is a signal that participants can change the ongoing topic in Japanese conversation. So in (1), such Japanese verbal behavior was reflected when J1 spoke English. Fortunately, A1 did not fill the pause and J1 was able to start a new topic.

Also, there was another non-verbal behavior with pauses we should notice in the following example:

(2) [Recording B]

A3: Have you both been to the United States? Visiting or working?

J3: **(Head movement showing NO)**

J2: Oh, I had been to the United States in Santa Barbar [sic].

(Several turns between J4 and A4 are omitted.)

A3: Probably sandals?

J2: Yes, very open, very very open,

A3: **(5 seconds pause. A3 was staring at J3 but J3 did not notice it).**

In (2), A3 asked “Have you both been to the United States? Visiting or Working?” Immediately after the question, J3 shook his head sideways showing ‘No.’ The videotape shows that the American did not notice it. J2 started to talk about his experiences in Santa Barbara in California. After his talk, A3 stared at J3 to give him a turn. However, J3 believed that he had already answered that question. So he did not react to A3’s gaze. But A3 did not notice J3’s earlier head movement and J3 did not look at A3 while A3 was staring at him. The way of responding had been too short and simple, so J3 was regarded as being uncooperative.

Finally, from some gestures during the conversations, it can be said that Japanese participants always sought to confirm whether they could take turns or not. This is because ordinary Japanese conversational style controls who speaks when, according to participant relationship. So the Japanese could not find the right place to start their utterances from the unfamiliar cues in the American’s conversational style. This is shown in the following example:

(3) [Recording B]

A2: (to the two Japanese) So, how did you, what, how did you learn English, or what made you want to learn English? Why did you learn English or want to learn to be able to speak?

J2: Why? (**Pause, pointing his finger to himself**) Um, I, I need English conversation because I went to international congress.

In example (3), while pausing, the Japanese pointed his finger at himself to confirm if it was his turn or not. It means that the Japanese tended to take turns only when they were given a cue.

#### *Incomplete Sentences*

Japanese generally tend to believe participants share common information and know what are going to say next. Sometimes, the listener fills in a word or a phrase at the end of the speaker's sentence. Due to this custom, Japanese often make incomplete utterances as if the listener already knows what the speaker were going to say, and do not finish the utterance as it may sound redundant. In (4), J1 faded out the utterance, smiling and laughing.

(4) [Recording A]

J1: And okay and uh – we- wore, we wore a very casual style but uh American people have a shirt and a necktie and seeing our-our style for meeting- and the next day it was contrary (**laugh**), so it's (**laugh**)

A1: But I had experi- but I had that experience when I was in Italy.

By ellipsis, Japanese participants can show an expectation that the listeners share the same anticipation toward the end of the story or outcome. By laughing, the story was marked as fun and enjoyable. So “ellipsis” and “ellipsis plus laughing” had the effect of showing solidarity since they created an in-group atmosphere. The fact that the American did not laugh along with his Japanese conversational partner indicates that he did not share

the Japanese conversational strategies of showing interpersonal meaning.

*Different Discourse Organization: Inductive vs. Deductive / Opinions vs. Experiences*

Scollon and Scollon (1995) said that Americans tend to talk about opinions and they give their definite opinions at the beginning of their utterances. Shigemitsu (2003) observed that Japanese often talk about experiences and Westerners often talk about opinions in her data. These differences of discourse organization could create some misunderstanding in intercultural interaction between Japanese and Americans.

Example (5) shows misunderstanding resulted from inductive vs. deductive differences between the Japanese participant and the American participant.

(5) [Recording A]

A1: I think everybody has those dreams of having nice, no, um house, couple of cars, and um-and be able to travel. So-so **on vacation do you get to travel - do you travel a lot outside Japan or stay?**

J1: **Well-um- recently I-I don't have much time but**, yeah, I like, like to.

A1: **Where is your favorite place that you like to travel to?**

J1: Well- um in Japan, I like to um I like to go to sea, to swim, and um uh –and um go to maybe with-with my daughters-my daughters are small so, I try together with them.

In (5), the American asked the Japanese participant, “Do you travel a lot outside Japan or stay?” J1 started his answer, “Well, um, recently, I don’t have much time but” which was going to lead to the conclusion after some more words. However, the American interrupted him and asked the similar question in a different way, because the answers from the Japanese were not directly related to the questions from the American. It might be said that the American thought the Japanese did not understand his question. The American asked the question in a different expression again, “Where is your

favorite place that you like to travel to?" These consecutive questions made the Japanese feel uncomfortable.

We have several examples of this type. These kinds of misunderstandings result from the different way of discourse, i.e., inductive vs. deductive. The Japanese inductive way of discourse structure makes the other participant share in the story, showing solidarity or friendliness. However, it did not work well for the Americans because their discourse organization was opposite from the Japanese.

The following example shows another different discourse type, i.e., opinions vs. experiences. In (6), the Japanese talked about their experiences even when being asked his opinions.

(6) [Recording A]

A1: Uh so uh so do the Jap- do you like uh American style movies like-

J1: Yes uh-huh

A1: Do you like the action, or do you like the drama, or do you like the comedy.

J1: **Well-um I see many many many types, uh recently I went to see uh Chicago.**

A1: Uh-huh.

J1: That's -that's a combination. (laugh)

Although A1 in (6) expected J1 to answer "yes" or "no", J1 started with his experience rather than his opinions, after which he would be going on to conclude with "yes" or "no". This was also caused by different discourse organization between American and Japanese. The Americans expected direct responses with a straightforward opinion such as "yes", or "no", but, as the Japanese responded with a typical Japanese discourse organization such as starting with his story or experience, he failed it.

#### *Safe Topic Range Differences*

Topics related to experiences could include background and some private

matters as shown in example (7).

(7) [Recording B]

J3: **Is that a reason why your wife choose foreigner, not Japanese husband?**

A3: Um, what's that? Because of the...no, I don't think

A2: (laugh)

J3: Because of the that problem?

J3 asked "Is that a reason why your wife choose foreigner, not Japanese husband?" However, unconsciously for J3, he actually violated the safe range of topics for Americans. To J3, asking about the privacy is showing a kind of sympathetic closeness. However, the American became emotionally confused and the other American tried to make up the confusion with laughter.

### **Results of Conversation Analysis**

It is found that speaking in a language is expected to cohere with a particular style. However, in our data, even when the Japanese spoke in English, they tended to transfer Japanese conversational style into English. According to the follow-up interview, to native speakers of American English, this sounded very odd. This inconsistency did not give a good impression to the American participants. Due to such bad impression, participants tended to have unfriendly feelings toward each other. On the contrary, the Japanese participants felt the Americans spoke very fast, had a rushing-away talk and sounded restless as if they were neglecting the Japanese participants. It might be hard to realize that this style belonged to a part of English. Instead, they tended to feel that the Americans were not considerate of the Japanese.

The problems both groups faced are said to be due to the difference of conversational management: pausing, turn-taking, and conversational style. In the follow up interview, the Japanese participants said that it was impolite to ask questions and give some comments because that might obstruct

conversation flow. So they did not do them. However, the lack of verbal responses and their attitude appeared to the Americans as if the Japanese participants were not interested in their conversation or they did not want to talk with them.

The core problem is that these particular conversational styles in each language may trigger some distrust among the participants and an instinctive mistrust of strangers rather than miscommunication of information. In the next section, we will discuss the ways in which Japanese could overcome this miscommunication with native speakers of English.

## **RESEARCH 2: EXPERIMENTAL CLASSES**

In the previous section, we observed that the different conversational styles, such as the non-verbal behavior and the way of responding, were the primary causes of misunderstandings in our data. It is clear that these are not related to the transactional aspect but to the interpersonal aspect of a language. As has also been pointed out in Rose and Kasper (2001, p. 62), learners' communicative success depends to a large extent on their ability to express interpersonal meanings with target-language resources. However, this ability is seldom taught to Japanese students in classrooms, because it has been believed that grammatical forms and vocabularies related to the transactional aspect of language are the most important. In order to avoid misunderstandings in English, the knowledge of how we should take part in a conversation and how we should build and maintain smooth human relationships could be important and so the interpersonal aspect of language should also be taught.

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, everyone has 'face', or basic human desires as they pertain to social interaction. 'Face' consists of two specific kinds of desires: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire to be approved of (positive face) (p. 13). While Brown and Levinson (1987) insist on the universality of these face wants, they also acknowledge the diversity of politeness strategies

among various languages and cultures. For example, in English, salient strategies are positive politeness strategies, which show friendliness or intimacy toward hearers.

In this section, we will show the results of an experiment to teach Japanese college students some positive politeness strategies, which help the students to show that they are actively engaged in conversations.<sup>2</sup> Also, from the English teaching perspective, the way to respond in English seems relatively easy to teach. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) Is it possible to teach beginners and intermediate students the socio-linguistic strategies, especially positive politeness strategies, which are often used in English?
- 2) Are positive politeness strategies effective for Japanese students to improve their English conversation?

### **Participants and Procedure**

A total of 64 Japanese students in two universities participated in this experiment. All of them were freshmen of both sexes whose majors were not English. The experimental classes were conducted in 12 sessions during one semester in 2002.

We picked up six positive politeness strategies based on the Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of positive politeness, particularly focusing on the strategies used as hearers' responses. The target strategies are using address terms, using back channelings and emphatic responses, answering a question with additional information, giving compliments to the hearer, showing interest,<sup>3</sup> and using hedges or softeners when disagreeing or refusing. Although some of the above are not explicitly mentioned in Brown

---

<sup>2</sup> This experiment was conducted by Mami Otani and Kazuyo Murata. For further details, see Murata and Otani (2003, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> This strategy is showing interest in the hearer or the topic that hearer offers, for example, by asking "How about you?" or by asking additional questions about the topic.

and Levinson (1987), they can be perceived as positive politeness strategies according to their definition. The criteria for the choices are that the strategies should be basically simple and easy for Japanese students to understand, and that they do not require difficult grammatical forms or vocabulary.

During the experimental classes, a handout that briefly explained a strategy and a model conversation was used for each strategy. The students were given a brief lesson based on the handouts and had a short conversation practice about each politeness strategy. Each session lasted 20 minutes.

In April before the sessions, and in July after the sessions, the conversations were audio-recorded. They were transcribed and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

### Quantitative Analysis of Conversations Between Students

Table 3 shows the frequency of use of target politeness strategies used in the recorded conversations. It is clear that the frequency of use of the target politeness strategies increased in July, when the total number of uses more than doubled that in April, when instruction had not been provided.

**TABLE 3**  
**Mean Frequency of Use of the Target Politeness Strategies**  
**per Pair in Recorded Conversations**

	address term	emphatic response	additional information	compliment	showing interest	hedge	total
April	0.00	5.25	0.66	0.06	5.06	0.00	11.03
July	5.22	10.38	4.34	0.47	6.78	0.06	27.25

Table 4 shows the number of turns exchanged by students in their recorded conversations. Comparing the results in July and in April, it is clearly found that the number of the turn exchanges increased.

**TABLE 4**  
**Mean Number of Turns Exchanged by Students per Pair in Recorded Conversations**

April	July
36.28	46.78

These two findings indicate that the students made progress in the use of the target politeness strategies through instruction and that they produced those strategies in their conversations. By using these strategies, their turn exchanges became more active and their conversations sounded more natural.

### **Qualitative Analysis of Conversations Between Students**

In April, students were asked to introduce themselves to each other and their conversations were recorded. The following example is a typical pattern found in conversations before the instruction.<sup>4</sup>

(8)

ST1-1: Hello.

ST2-1: Hello.

ST1-2: *Eetto*. My name is Mika Arita. You. (Pause 5''00) My birthday is February 10. And you?

ST2-2: My name is Tomoko Kojima. My birthday is February 8. What, where is your hometown?

ST1-3: My hometown is Shimane, Matsue. Shimane. Your? You?

ST2-3: My hometown is Miyazaki. (laugh)

As demonstrated in (8), only a minimum of necessary information is exchanged. From a transactional point of view, this type of conversation is adequate to exchange basic information with each other. From an interpersonal point of view, however, it is insufficient for expressing consideration toward a hearer.

The following conversation is by the same students in July. The topic of the conversation was the summer vacation. The boldfaces indicate target strategies, namely, (a) using address terms, (b) using back channelings and emphatic responses, (c) answering a question with additional information, (d)

---

<sup>4</sup> In example (8) and (9), ST stands for a student. The numbers after ST1 or ST2 stands for each participant's utterance number in the example.

giving compliments to the hearer, and (e) showing interest.

(9)

- ST1-1: Hi, (a)**Tomoko**. How are you?  
ST2-1: Hi, (a)**Mika**. I'm fine, thank you, too. *Aa*. (e)**And you?**  
ST1-2: Oh, I'm fine, too. (d)**Oh, it's a cute shirt. Is that a new shirt?**  
ST2-2: Oh, thank you. (c)**I bought this last weekend.**  
ST1-3: (d)**Oh, it's very cute.**  
ST2-3: Thank you. I hear. (c)**I glad to hear that.**  
→ST1-4: By the way, what are you going to do this summer, (a)**Tomoko?**  
ST2-4: I have games of *Kyudou* in summer vacation every Sunday. I'll go to Nagoya, Kobe, and on so. (c)**I guess it will very hard but I'll do my best.**  
ST1-5: (b)**Really?** It's a very hard. I hope do your best.  
ST2-5: Thank you. And when I come back to home, my Miyazaki, I want to go to sea and swim in the sea and do *Suikawari* by the sea.  
ST1-6: (b)**Oh, great.** (c)**I like to swim in the sea and I want to do Suikawari, too.** (e)**Are you good at swimming?**  
ST2-6: I belong to swimming club. (e)**And you?**  
ST1-7: Oh, me, too.  
ST2-7: (b)**Oh good.**  
ST1-8: Let's go to the sea together.  
ST2-8: (b)**Oh nice.** Go together.  
ST1-9: Yes.  
→ST2-9: How about you, (a)**Mika?** (e)**Do you have any plan?**  
ST1-10: Yes. I want to. I'm going to go to driving school in Shimane.  
ST2-10: (b)**It's great.**  
ST1-11: I want to get a driving license.  
ST2-11: (b)**Hm.**  
ST1-12: I'm looking forward to going to school.  
ST2-12: Do your best. (laughing)  
ST1-13: Thank you.  
ST2-13: Have a good time, (a)**Mika.**

ST1-14: Thank you, (a)**Tomoko**. You too.

ST2-14: Oh, thank you. Good bye.

ST1-15: Good bye.

The first finding is that the target strategies were used all through the conversation and the students spoke more dynamically and naturally.

The second finding is that, compared with the conversation before instruction, in the July data, much more information about one topic was exchanged between the students. The arrows show the beginning and ending of one topic: ST2's summer plan. ST1-4 asked ST2 about her plans for the summer vacation and the answers to the question continued to ST2-5, not by providing a single piece of information, but by supplying more detailed information. ST2 also replied by using emphatic response and adding questions, which not only asked more, but also expressed interest in ST1's answer. Then, ST2-9 asked about ST1's plans for the summer vacation, and their conversation made progress. It can be said that such strategies as "answering with additional information" and "showing interest" contributed to the result.

The third finding is that, after the instruction, both at the opening and at the closing of conversations, those expressions that express consideration for interlocutors were seen. In the first two lines, ST1 started the conversation with a greeting, then in the third line, she gave a positive remark to ST2 before reaching the main topic. In other recorded conversations, some students had small talk about the weather before the main topic. Greetings and small talk at the opening of the conversations served as effective icebreakers and also positive politeness strategies, which can negotiate solidarity.

In the last four lines (from ST2-13 to ST1-15) the students ended their conversation with a farewell. Other pairs also finished their conversations with farewells such as "Have a nice vacation," "Have a good summer vacation" and also "Thank you," "You, too."

Although not explicitly taught, various expressions that illustrated speakers' consideration toward hearers were found at the opening and the closing of

conversations. This may be because the instruction on the six target politeness strategies increased learners' attention to consideration toward hearers in order to negotiate solidarity. Given these greetings and farewells were also used in Japanese, it may be also because their pragmatic knowledge in Japanese was transferred when speaking English.

### **Results of Experimental Classes to Teach Politeness Strategies**

Results of experimental classes to teach politeness strategies

Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the recorded conversations revealed the following five advantages.

- 1) The total number of utterances increased.
- 2) The frequency of each politeness strategy increased.
- 3) In regard to politeness strategies, various expressions shown on our handouts were also seen in the data.
- 4) Much more information about one topic was exchanged between the interlocutors.
- 5) The frequency of turn taking increased. As a result of these changes, students' conversations improved dramatically, and they were able to speak much longer and more naturally.

This study shows that it is very effective to instruct positive politeness strategies to beginners and intermediate students in Japan.

## **DISCUSSION**

Analyses of the conversational data and follow-up interviews in Research 1 have illustrated examples of miscommunication between Japanese and English native speakers caused by their different conversational styles. Most of these misunderstandings resulted from the fact that the English and Japanese speakers used the conversational styles of their own native languages.

Even though the conversations were conducted in English, Japanese speakers often used conversational strategies, which are perfectly appropriate when speaking Japanese. English speakers who are not very familiar with such Japanese conversational styles interpreted them based on their own criteria.

The results show that Japanese learners of English may be misinterpreted by native English speakers and, presumably, by speakers of other languages, if they use their Japanese conversational styles when they speak in English. In order to avoid such miscommunication, it is necessary for them to realize that their Japanese conversational styles may be misinterpreted and to use the conversation styles of English speech communities.

Research 2 reported an experimental class that succeeded in teaching positive politeness strategies. The results show that the students benefited from such instructions and felt more at ease in carrying out conversation in English. These strategies facilitated their conversational interaction and enriched their conversations. As the result of the experiment shows, it is useful to teach positive politeness strategies in conversation to raise awareness towards conversational strategies that the Japanese speakers are not consciously aware of or that are less frequently used in Japanese conversations.

The results of the conversational analysis and the experimental classes suggest that it is important to employ conversational styles and strategies commonly used in English speaking societies in order to carry out communication smoothly. There may be a question whether it is right to teach native speakers' conversational styles or politeness strategies from the viewpoint of English as a lingua franca or World Englishes. From such viewpoint, it is pointed out that English is so widespread that it can be used without involving any native speakers in areas where English is used as a means of international or intra-national communications. In such situations, it is not realistic for the learners to acquire native speakers' norms (Honma, 2003).

If such consideration is incorporated into teaching communicative strategies of English, what kinds of instruction will be possible? Does it mean that the learners do not have to know the communicative styles of English native

speakers or those of other language speakers but should follow their own norms in interacting with the speakers of other language?

As an answer to such dilemma, Boxer (2002) stresses the importance of the study of cross-cultural pragmatics in the present world, where people of different cultures experience miscommunication and misperception caused by the “differing norms of interaction across societies and speech communities” (p. 150). She explains the difference between cross-cultural pragmatics and inter-language pragmatics, a sub-field of second language acquisition theory. While learners are assumed to progress toward the norm of the target language in inter-language pragmatics, in cross-cultural pragmatics the learners experience their learning process as “a two-way communication phenomenon with the burden of understanding falling on *both sides*” (p. 160). By “a two-way communication”, she means that the learners need to understand the socio-linguistic differences of the target language but at the same time the speakers of the target language must also be aware that there are different norms from theirs when they interact with the speakers of other languages. In the case of English learning, there is “the crucial issue of power”, which is related to the inherent power of the native English-speaker as “owner” of the world’s current lingua franca (p. 161).

Following Boxer’s classification, the idea of two-way interaction between native and non-native speakers in cross-cultural pragmatics can serve as the basis for the teaching of socio-linguistic strategies of English in Japan. It is important to know “different norms of interaction”. It is also important to provide learners with cross-cultural pragmatic information and give instruction about this information as illustrated in this paper. At the same time, native English speakers must also be willing to understand that they cannot expect the same cultural norms from the learners with different cultural backgrounds. That is, it is necessary for both the learners and the native speakers of the target language to be aware of each other’s cultural differences in order to become good communicators.

## THE AUTHOR

Sanae Tsuda is a Professor at Tokai Gakuen University in Nagoya, Japan. Her research interests are in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. She was a JACET Chubu Chapter Chair from 1996 to 1998, and is a board member of the Japanese Association for Asian Englishes and the Editor-in-Chief of its journal.

Email: [tsuda@tokaigakuen-u.ac.jp](mailto:tsuda@tokaigakuen-u.ac.jp)

Yuka Shigemitsu is an Associate Professor at Tokyo Polytechnic University, Japan and teaches English. She received her M.A. in linguistics from Japan Women's University and M. A. TESL from Georgetown University. She also teaches English at Japan Women's University and Intercultural communication at Aoyama Gakuin University.

Email: [yuka@gen.t-kougei.ac.jp](mailto:yuka@gen.t-kougei.ac.jp)

Kazuyo Murata is an Associate Professor at Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Japan. Her research interests include sustainable intercultural communication from the politeness perspective. She is currently doing research as a member of the Language in the Workplace Project of Victoria University of Wellington, focusing on the discourse of business meetings.

Email: [murata@law.ryukoku.ac.jp](mailto:murata@law.ryukoku.ac.jp)

## REFERENCES

- Boxer, D. (2002). Discourse issues in cross-cultural pragmatics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics. Volume 22. Discourse and Dialogue*. 151-170.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Honna, N. (2000). Some remarks on the multiculturalism of Asian Englishes. *Asian*

- English Studies, Monograph Series No. 1. 11-20.
- Hori, M., Shigemitsu, Y., Otani M., Tsuda, S., Murata, Y., & Otsuka, Y. (2003). *Universality of face and expression of politeness in discourse: An analysis of recorded English conversations between Japanese and English speakers*. Workshop at the 21st Conference of English Linguistic Society of Japan, Shizuoka, Japan.
- Hori, M., Tsuda, S., Murata, Y., Otsuka, Y., Shigemitsu, Y., Otani M., & Murata, K. (2006). *Poraitonesu to eigo kyoiku [English education in Japan: Politeness perspectives]*. Tokyo: Hituji Syobo.
- Murata, K. (2004). *Advantages and problems of explicit instruction of positive politeness strategies to Japanese students*. Paper presented at the 2nd Asia TEFL, Seoul, Korea.
- Murata K. (2005). Dainigengo goyou noryoku ni ataeru eikyo to kouka—pojithibu poraitonesu sido wo toshite [The influence of teaching politeness strategies on developing L2 pragmatic competence]. *Studies in Pragmatics*, 6, 57-70.
- Murata, K., & Otani, M. (2003). *Politeness and communicative competence: The effect of teaching positive politeness strategies to Japanese students*. Paper presented at the 1st Asia TEFL, Busan, Korea.
- Murata, K., & Otani, M. (2005). Nihonjin eigo gakusyusya eno pojithibu poraitonesu sutorateji ishikika no kokoromi [The effects of teaching politeness strategies to Japanese university students]. *The Language Teacher*, 29(2), 3-7.
- Otani, M. (2005). Interpretations of topic change: A case study of Japanese, Americans, and Chinese. In M. Hori (Chair), *Discoursal problems in cross-cultural conversations*. Symposium conducted at the 9th International Pragmatics Conference, Riva del Garda.
- Otani, M., & Shigemitsu, Y. (2003). *Features of face and FTA: Case of success and case of failure in English conversation by Japanese*. Paper presented at 42nd National Conference of Japan Association of College English Teachers, Tokyo.
- Pan, Y., Scollon, S. W., & Scollon, R. (2002). *Professional communication in international settings*. Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Rose, R. K., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (2001). *Pragmatics in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (1995). *Intercultural communication*. Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Shigemitsu, Y. (2003) Analysis from the perspective of question and answer and opening and closing in English conversation between Japanese and American. In M. Hori (Chair), *Universality of face and manifestation of politeness*. Workshop conducted at the 21st Annual Conference of The English Linguistic

Society of Japan, Tokyo.

- Shigemitsu, Y., & Murata, K. (2005). An effect of positive politeness strategies in English conversation class. *The Conference Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Asian Conference on Language Teaching at FEELTA*. 140-142.
- Spencer-Oatey, Helen, ed. (2000). *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across cultures*. London: Continuum.
- Tannen, D. (1984). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Tannen, D. (1986). *That's not what I meant! : How conversational style makes and breaks relationships*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Ballantine Books.