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Topic Development, Affiliative Mimesis and L1 Use in a Novice-Novice L2 English Conversation

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In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of Japanese college students' English conversational abilities, a series of videotaping sessions were conducted. These sessions were designed to capture examples of the subjects' unguided, natural use of English in a non-pedagogical environment. This article is an initial exploratory case study describing one of these videotaped English L2 conversations between three Japanese female college students. Three interactional phenomena are explicated in detail: the use by the participants of Japanese, their use of new-topic elicitation as a means of terminating long silences, and a communicative strategy based on reflexive mimicry of a preceding utterance.

Introduction

As language teachers, we traditionally use a variety of tests, reports, and presentations to ascertain the extent to which our students have learned and can produce (or reproduce) the second language (L2) materials and skills under consideration. We then use the results of these performance measures to determine appropriate feedback, which is delivered to the students in the form of grades, evaluations and constructive criticism. When relevant academic research findings are incorporated into our teaching methodologies, we perpetuate a virtuous circle of curricular and pedagogical evolution, which consists essentially of the following recurrent process: teach → evaluate (ourselves and our students) → reflect/incorporate change → teach again, and repeat ad infinitum. It is not my intent here to argue for major changes to this well-established practice, but it seems that there is a certain lacuna in the composite impression we can glean of our students' L2 abilities based on this system alone.

This gap I am referring to arises from the difficulties inherent in observing and assessing students in situ as they attempt to conduct L2 conversations under

circumstances where an expert (e.g., teacher or native speaker) participant's input or guidance is unavailable. Since the probability of this type of encounter is increasingly likely in today's world, it falls upon us to understand what our students are able and willing to do when they are using English on their own. If we are interested in understanding how our students independently deploy their English in practice, however, then our presence as they endeavor to do it creates some methodological difficulties. Labov (1973) refers to this type of situation as the Observer's Paradox; a desire to see a thing (a social behavior in this case) in its natural state introduces a variable (the observer) that can fundamentally change the state of the thing under consideration, rendering questionable any conclusions that might be drawn from the observation. Accordingly, the net result for language teachers is that our knowledge of students' "real" L2 conduct, upon which we base our teaching practices, may not be as accurate as we would like.

The goal of the current project, of which this paper is a first tentative effort, is an attempt to remedy to some extent the void this observational difficulty has created by assembling a corpus, or analyzable database, comprised of instances of learners using their L2s to conduct "natural" conversations. To this end, I conducted, over the course of an academic semester, a number of video recording sessions of small informal groups, each group consisting of three self-selected Japanese female college students. This paper is an initial look at one of those sessions, with descriptive commentary and some initial analysis concerning the following three salient features of the conversation: the participants' use of Japanese, the role of silence in developing topics, and a type of mimicking which seems to serve as a communication strategy.

To reduce the effects of the observer's paradox, I left the room while the students were being videotaped so they could freely structure their interactions without regard for the types of pedagogical concerns usually associated with classroom exercises. I attempted to alleviate feelings the students might have that the recording camera was a proxy for me by assuring the students beforehand that the videotaping was not a test of any type, nor was there any class-related evaluative component whatsoever; they were simply asked to use English for the duration of the 10-minute taping session – no other instructions or tasks were given.

Let me reiterate that this report is something of a reconnaissance mission, a 'first pass' at data collected from a single videotaping session. By pursuing a case study approach initially, I have in mind to develop further research questions to guide and inform subsequent work on L2 talk-in-interaction between non-native speakers. Of

course, as I stated at the outset, I am also keenly interested in exploring how a deeper knowledge of learners' independent use of their L2s might constructively influence future teaching practices. These potential pedagogical implications, though they form a core part of the impetus for this research, will by necessity remain speculative until a larger corpus of interaction is available for study and analysis.

In approaching the conversation under consideration here, I have followed the methodological and transcription conventions of Conversation Analysis (CA), a qualitative research methodology based on the work of Harvey Sacks and his colleagues (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Sacks, 1992). One advantage of using CA in the early stages of data exploration is that, as an inductive methodology, it eschews pre-conceived notions of participants' attributes and promotes, even demands, an ideological neutral stance (Firth & Wagner, 1998; Liddicoat, 2007; ten Have, 1999).

Space does not permit a full articulation of the tenets of CA, but briefly, the predominant unit of analysis is the turn-at-talk (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), of which the elemental component is the turn construction unit (TCU) (Schegloff, 2007). Turns-at-talk can then be organized into larger groups of utterances known as adjacency pairs, which consist of first and second pair parts, the first pair part making relevant, or "sequentially implicating" the second. The movement of turns betweens participants takes place at transition relevant points (TRP), and in conjunction these discourse features provide, through what may be characterized as the "machinery" of talk-in-interaction (Sacks, 1984), a means through which order arises in conversations as an emergent property (Psathas, 1995). CA has at its core, then, a desire to identify and understand the underlying knowledge that is deployed by participants as they endeavor to "produce social action" (Silverman, 2005 p.19). CA for SLA extends this program to explore interactions which include novice L2 language users.

Conversational order, the product of this machinery, is thus a function of the participants' interpretation of and orientation to social actions exhibited by the participants themselves (Liddicoat, 2007). The particular area I am interested in investigating is how this same machinery operates for novice second language participants in conversations where there is no model provided by the presence of an L1 or expert interlocutor. In other words, by looking at how novice speakers structure an "empty" social space using their L2, we may gain a better understanding of what they perceive to be iconic, or "real" English conversation. Firth and Wagner (1998)

succinctly capture the rationale motivating the CA for SLA program when they note that, "the study of foreign language interaction in a variety of natural, social contexts — outside the formal educational environment — must be regarded as centrally relevant for the study of acquisition" (p. 91). In the following sections I will detail three of the features which arose during an L2 English conversation conducted in just this type of context.

Use of Japanese

In this section I will discuss the use of Japanese by the participants. Despite my instructions, consisting of one simple guideline, "speak English," the first utterances by the participants were spoken in Japanese. They used their native language to conduct some pre-L2 talk about how they should open the conversation. Excerpt 1 shows the interaction between the three participants, Junko, Asami, and Kaori after I left the room where the taping session had just begun.

Excerpt 1 (lines 1 – 6 are barely audible – whispered)

1 Jun: nani shaberou?
What should we talk about?
2 Asa: jiko shokai . . .
Self introduction . . .
3 Jun: jiko shokai?
Self introduction?
4 Kao: aheh ((burst of laughter)).
5 Asa: kino mita terebi toka.
Something like what we watched on TV yesterday

Why do the participants begin the conversation in Japanese? And why do they whisper instead of speaking to each other at a normal conversational volume? There is evidence, provided moments after this interaction, and throughout the rest of the conversation, that the syntactic and lexical complexity of their English is perfectly adequate to handle the simple openings they are undertaking to accomplish here. Immediately after the exchange shown in excerpt 1, Kaori asks Asami about what she did the previous day, and the reply, *I watched Ainori,* is delivered using virtually the same lexical items we see in line 5, except in English. This argues against an account

claiming the use of Japanese may be compensation for an inability to adequately express the proposition in English.

The Japanese utterances appear to serve two distinct functions during the course of this conversation. First, the Japanese clearly delineates two social spaces, English and Japanese, and seems to provide a frame (Goffman, 1974) within which the English conversation is conducted. Tannen (2006) describes frames as providing the interpretive means through which participants in a social context gain "a sense of what activity is being engaged in, [and] how speakers mean what they say" (p. 334). Lantolf (2008) refers to frames as, "a set of shared expectations on the part of the participants as to what the interaction ought to entail" (p. 90). In the conversation here, a distinct separation exists between the initial Japanese and subsequent English utterances, and there is a sense that the three participants are involved in a social situation that they are not confident to navigate. Under this interpretation, they do not possess a working frame for "English conversation with other L1 Japanese speakers." As a result, they compensate by creating an ad hoc frame, the novice use of which may account for some of the subsequent non-humor induced laughter that occurs. Watching the video, the L1 Japanese framing of the English conversation delineates an almost physical space, as if the participants are counting "1,2,3, jump!" before entering a cold pool. Illustration of this comes in line 4 of excerpt 1, where Kaori emits a burst of laughter that is not a response to humor – it comes after both of the other participants suggest self-introductions as a possible opening topic. I surmise that this type of laughter token, which Kaori especially uses throughout the conversation, is a normative attempt to relieve the tension resulting from their uncertainty about how to proceed without an operative English frame within which to construct the interaction.

In addition to providing a mutually familiar and accessible frame, Japanese is also used to negotiate the "business" of conducting and commenting on the conversation itself. The type of information conveyed by Japanese is markedly different from that exchanged via English, with English communicating topical utterances (e.g., What did you do? Where did you go? And their responses) and Japanese providing an alternate channel through which meta-conversational information is carried. An example is provided in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2

1 Kao: I (1.8) want to speak French too.

2 Asa: doshiyo watashi shitsumon zenzen shitenai.

What should I do? I haven't asked any questions at all.

3 Asa: (1.0) e::to what did - (0.6) did you eat this morning?

In line 2, Asami is fretting because she feels she has not done her share to support the conversation thus far. Her question in line 2 is rhetorical, and refers not to the topic that came before it (countries visited), nor to her subsequent new-topic initiating question in line 3 (Button & Casey, 1984; Button & Casey, 1985), but to the conversation as a whole, and an assessment of her performance in it. This clear distinction between English and Japanese is even more striking considering that whenever Japanese occurs throughout the videotaping session, it is voiced in a subdued whisper. So meta-conversational information is not only carried in a different language, it is also conveyed at a different volume, where it literally operates on a "sub"-channel. The participants' unspoken agreement and mutual orientation to Japanese, and the whispered volume level, indicates that their need to use the L2 sub-channel trumps, at least at the outset, the directive to speak English.

The content of the Japanese opening segment is informative in another respect. Since the participants have not been provided with a topic or task to orient to, their deliberations allow us to infer how they think an English conversation *should* start. They reveal, albeit in Japanese, what they think an English conversation consists of. Additionally, their consideration of the self-introduction as a legitimate potential opening subject is pragmatically intriguing. As members of the same English class, these students are well known to each other, and additionally, they have self-selected to group together for this conversation. Their choice to open with a self-introduction indicates that they may consider this situation a "task," despite my attempts to convince them otherwise.

Another perspective is that the participants use Japanese strategically to co-create, and sustain throughout the videotaping session, an "escape hatch", or safe haven of sorts, which, when necessary, provides a private interactional resource. This resource is available when L2 conversational difficulties arise, and it allows for effective communication and repair of troubles before returning to the "public" channel of English. Under this view, the sub-channel, operating at an almost inaudible level, allows the participants to exchange information outside the English interactional space defined by the instructions. In other words, if they began speaking Japanese at normal conversational levels, it could be construed as blatantly flouting the one simple rule governing the conversation: speak English.

A further possibility is that these students, when they use their L1, may be

emulating behavior they witness in English classes conducted by Japanese teachers. The language used to conduct pedagogy, talk about language, and evaluate student performance, may be Japanese, while English usage may be restricted to producing examples of the things talked about and conducted in the L1. This would produce precisely the behavior we see in this conversation. This group of students, then, and the teachers they are modeling, conduct class or interactional "business" in Japanese, and then proceed with English, which they continue with until they require the "meta-channel" again.

The final possibility I will explore here to account for the use of Japanese in this conversation hinges on the notion of "face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). By speaking Japanese at the outset of the interaction, there is no chance, or risk, that one student will appear "better" or more skillful by assuming that the default language of interaction will be English. By organizing themselves initially with the help of their Japanese, and agreeing on how to start, they can assume, or perpetuate the "unreality" or "fakeness" of this new and unfamiliar social/conversational environment. In other words, by starting in Japanese, they have removed the risk inherent in "reality" from the environment and freed themselves to speak English, at whatever level, without risking face. This freedom may allow them to speak English without fear of diminishing themselves or exposing the others to embarrassment.

Turn Development and Silence

L1 conversations, in any language, flow from speaker to speaker and topic to topic, with participants structuring current turns in light of what has come before (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). In any conversation, then, "a turn's talk will be heard as directed to a prior turn's talk" (Sacks et al., 1974 p. 728). In this section I will comment on the topical movement of the conversation at hand, focusing on how participants use, or fail to use resources made available to them by the sequential implications of prior turns.

Upon completing the negotiations detailed above about how they should start the conversation, Junko, who also initiated the Japanese framing event with *nani shaberou*, begins speaking English when she utters *good morning*. As shown in Excerpt 3, the other participants all join in this greeting.

Concerning CA transcription conventions: the numbers in parentheses indicate, in seconds and tenths of seconds, the duration of a pause or silence. If the pause

occurs during a speaker's production of an utterance, that speaker "owns" the silence and the pause length number will appear in the current speaker's line of transcription as part of her turn. When the pause happens between turns, or after the second pair part, and there are no "open" implications, the pause length number is transcribed on its own line, where it is owned by all the participants to the conversation.

Excerpt 3

(2.2)
1 Jun: good morning.
2 Kao: good morning ((burst of laughter))
3 Asa: good morning ((slight laugh))
(5.5)
4 Kao: what did you do yesterday?
(1.3)
5 Asa: I watchedu: (0.7) un *Ainori*.

Kaori and Asami both orient to Junko's opening, evidenced by their repetition of it, which they do while laughing. Again we have a laughter token that is not the result of humor intended by Junko. In this case, the laughter may be a response to Junko's decision to flout the maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975). On the day of this taping, the students had already been in contact with each other for some time, so the opening move of "greeting," while appropriate in the newly opened English frame, may seem pragmatically strange to the other participants – hence the laughter. This issue of laughter is important and requires additional analysis, but the feature with which I am concerned here is the 5.5-second silence after Asami's *good morning* in line 3.

This extremely long silence (Jefferson, 1989) is notable in that it illustrates how the participants, in their opening utterances, do not provide a topical opening for further turns, or, in CA terms, they fail to "project a range of possible 'nexts'" (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984). The English part of the conversation is thus stillborn, resulting in the 5.5 second unfilled pause that belongs to the entire group. Kaori finally recovers and attempts a second start when she utters the first pair part of the question *What did you do yesterday?* in line 4. This question implicates a second pair part, which is provided by Asami in line 5 when she explains what she watched on television.

To summarize, excerpt 3 illustrates an instance of a long silence following a

terminal non-implicating sequence. Under these circumstances, the conversational floor is clear and open for new topics, but since there are no open implications, there is no clear indication as to who should take the next turn. Kaori ultimately takes responsibility to restart the conversation with her line 4 question about yesterday's activities and thus ends the silence and opens a potential new topic. Long silences followed by a new-topic nominating utterance (Button & Casey, 1985), are not, however, found only under circumstances where previous utterances fail to implicate further turns. There are a number of times during the conversation where patently open topics are not taken up or continued by the participants. Excerpt 4 illustrates one of these cases. The topic leading up to this excerpt has focused on how the students are going to spend their Christmas holidays. Junko initially opened the topic and Kaori offered that she would be going to Canada for seven days, and then Kaori asked where Asami was planning to go "during winter vacation," leading to the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4

(5.4)

1 Asa: un I will go to: (1.4) Karuizawa.
2 Jun: u:::n.
3 Asa: o:::.
4 Jun: mmmm.
5 Asa: un.
6 Asa: how about you?
7 Jun: I will go to (2.4) grandfather's house.
8 (25.0)
9 Asa: (whispered Japanese – unhearable).
10 Jun: (whispered Japanese – unhearable).
11 Asa: wakaranai.
I don't know
12 Asa: do shiyo.
What should I do?
13 Jun: Have you (0.4) ever (.) been (.) to (1.7) another country?
14 Asa: yes I ha(ve) – yes I have.

First, note that although Asami's line 1 utterance concerning her trip to

Karuizawa elicits some minimal discourse marker assessments (Schiffrin, 1987), there are no additional turns initiated by the other participants which capitalize on that comment as a potential area for topic development. Asami responds to Junko's weak assessments (in lines 2 and 4), which she may feel responsible for, then asks Junko the first pair part question in line 6, which implies "Where are you going?" Junko accepts the question and responds in line 7 that she will go to her grandfather's house. This response is followed by a silence of twenty-five seconds, which is an astronomical duration in conversational time (Jefferson, 1989).

Consider that Jefferson (1989), in her initial analysis of conversational silence, comments that there is an "interactional 'metric' in which 'approximately one second' operates, where that metric has as one artefact, a 'standard maximum tolerance' for silence of more or less one second" (p. 170). This means that in most L1 conversations (Jefferson considered English and Dutch), participants will usually terminate silences after a duration of about one second. Jefferson does detail some instances of silence that are longer than one second, but they usually correspond to times when participants are focused on non-conversational tasks, such as looking at a map. The striking feature of excerpt 4, however, is that the twenty-five second silence occurs despite two "open" topics – "Karuizawa" and "grandfather's house" – neither of which initiate any conversational activity while the silence is endured. The weak non-verbal assessments of Asami's trip to Karuizawa in lines 2-5 have certainly not exhausted that topic, nor were any assessments offered in response to Junko's line 7 utterance about going to her grandfather's house. What interactional imperative is operating here that renders such a long silence preferable to picking up and developing one of the available open topics?

Termination of this silence comes as the participants engage in a whispered exchange in Japanese, where Asami attempts to work out a way to "escape" the tension of the long silence. This anxiety is evident from her Japanese comments in lines 11 and 12. Surprisingly, the next topic, initiated by Junko's question in Line 13 about Asami's foreign travels, results in the well developed sequence of adjacency pairs shown in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5

1 Jun: where?
2 Asa: w – where?
(1.3)

3 Jun: w – where.
4 Asa: un ah e:to I went to Australia.
5 Jun: o:n.
6 Kao: how – how long have you been there?
7 Asa: u:n I have been two weeks.
(1.1)
8 Kao: un.
9 Jun: o:.
10 Kao: to study?
11 Asa: yes and homestay.
(1.9)
12 Kao: o:h.
13 Kao: when?
14 Asa: (1.1) a (2.0) (laughs) u:n I was junior high school student.
15 Jun: o:h.
(20.7)

The turns in excerpt five present a continuation of the utterances transcribed in excerpt four. After Junko and Kaori learn that Asami has traveled abroad, they begin an intense information gathering session, asking Asami "when," "where," "how long," and "why" about her Australian homestay visit. This inquisitive flurry of conversational activity is in stark contrast to the preceding and subsequent interactions. Another long silence, this time lasting almost 21 seconds, begins immediately after Junko's weak assessment in line 15. These long silences can be found throughout the conversation, always followed by direct questions which elicit entirely new topics, or in one case return to a previous topic. The longest between turn silence found in this conversation is 42.8 seconds. The question, asked by Asami, which terminates this long silence is, "When is your birthday?" Again, the question arises, why is silence preferable to taking up open topics? Regardless of the answer, this problem seems open to pedagogical intervention.

A full analysis of the interactional function of these long silences remains to be fully articulated, but the behavior in question hinges partly on the value of turns-at-talk for these participants. Specifically, "turn-avoidance" seems to be an operating principle guiding this talk-in-interaction, rather than "turn-acquisition." In L1 conversations, turns are valuable resources which are allocated and exploited by

participants within the scope of the relevant conversational conventions. During the interaction under consideration here, however, the participants seem to be playing a game of conversational "hot potato," where the object is to end one's turn as quickly as possible. Under this metaphor, the long silences that occur between turns provide an interactional "safe zone" where no specific participant is responsible for contributing an utterance, thereby accounting for the extreme pause durations. An illustration is found in excerpt 5, line 14, when Asami laughs as she responds to Junko's question about when she (Asami) visited Austalia. It is apparent when watching the video that Asami is uncomfortable with the excessive attention being paid to her by the other two participants, and under this low turn value interpretation, her laugh is an expression of her discomfort at having so many turns in quick succession. Further illustration of this turn avoidance principle appears throughout the conversation in the form of minimal responses, such as in excerpt 4, line 14, where Asami responds to Junko's question about whether she has been abroad with the minimal "Yes, I have." Further research will attempt to determine if this operating principle is prevalent among L2 conversants in general, or if this conversation represents a deviant case. In any event, turn avoidance, whether in light of face concerns or other reasons, is another area where pedagogical intervention may successfully improve L2 conversational ability.

Reflexive Affiliative Mimesis

In their investigation of non-native/non-native speaker conversations, Varonis and Gass (1985) include "echoing" as one type of indicator deployed by interlocutors to "signal that an utterance has triggered a non-understanding." Echoes are usually uttered with a rising or falling intonation and they serve as repair initiators which pinpoint for the recipient the word or phrase causing the learner's comprehension problem. Below are some examples Varonis and Gass provide to illustrate this phenomenon.

Examples of indicators (Varonis & Gass 1985, p. 76)
a. Echo
Rising intonation
ULS: What is your name?
120 S: My name?
ULS: yeah

Falling intonation

140 S: But he work with uh uh institution

140 J: institution

140 S: Do you know that?

In the conversation under discussion here, a communication strategy is exhibited, predominantly by Asami, which is similar to "echoing," but appears on closer inspection to be an independent phenomenon, which I will call "reflexive affiliative mimesis." By this term I mean to describe an interaction where one participant automatically repeats, or mimics the final element of an utterance produced by another participant in a previous turn, This repetition, unlike echoing, however, does not signal a misunderstanding. Rather, in an overeager attempt to display understanding, or affiliation, this behavior seems designed to increase the harmony of a particular social context by feigning normalcy. Below I will describe, using examples from the same conversation, further instances of this interactive behavior. The first instance occurs near the beginning of the conversation, shown below as excerpt 6. To help elucidate the following comments, I have aligned the utterances in lines 3 – 6 in a way that roughly displays their timing relative to each other.

Excerpt 6

1 Asa: I watchedu: (0.7) un Ainori.
(1.0)
2 Kao: u::n ((laughs)).
3 Jun: o::h
4 → Asa: o::h
5 Jun: o(h)! me too!
6 → Asa: me t(oo)!

The discourse marker "oh" has a number of conversational functions. It is often used as a change of state token (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001), which means that its utterance signals receipt by a hearer of some new information. "Oh" can also be used as backchannel or assessment device that operates to provide a means for a listener to display attentiveness to another speaker without having to take the floor for a bona fide turn. In line 3, Junko utters a backchannel "oh," in the same vein as Kaori's 'u::n' in line 2, but in line 5 it suddenly becomes a change of state 'oh!' as

she realizes that she has watched the same television show as Asami. Although it is interesting to note how Junko's assessment changed as she realized that she had seen the same show, an event that would have happened only the previous day, my focus here is on Asami's utterances in lines 4 and 6. Since Asami originally mentioned that she watched "Ainori," her "o::h" in line 4 is markedly out of place in this context, as it is an assessment of her own comment. A pragmatically appropriate utterance would state or imply "Yes, it's true," or a comment directly relevant to lines 2 and 3. Asami's utterance in line 4, however, has the same intonational contour as Junko's "o::h" in line 3, making it an exact replica – the effect of which is that she appears to be assessing her own line 1 comment, flouting the Gricean maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975).

When Junko realizes that she has watched the same program as Asami, and revises her assessment accordingly, Asami instantly mimics Junko's new assessment, again producing a response with the identical intonational contour as Junko's *me too!* in line 5. In this case, however, there are lexical and contextual clues that Asami's line 6 is a reflexive response rather than an echo deployed to signal misunderstanding. Asami's exclamation of *me t(oo)!* also compounds the pragmatic oddity of her line 4 utterance. In line 6 Asami conveys, on a literal interpretation, the notion that she, too (along with Junko), has just realized that she (Asami) watched the television program that only moments earlier she informed the other participants that she had watched. This cannot truly be the case, and the other participants do not take it as such, so an alternative explanation must be offered to account for this behavior.

As a first attempt at providing this explanation, I suggest that Asami is deploying a communicative strategy designed to feign fluency. As I have displayed with the chronological alignment above, line 6 is uttered instantly upon Junko's completion of line 5 – so quickly that the pronoun "me," which correctly refers in line 5 to Junko, is now used by Asami to refer to herself, creating a pragmatically untenable proposition. From an interactional perspective, however, abstracting away from the content, line 6 appears to be a fluent and appropriate response. In other words, as a communication strategy, Asami's behavior perpetuates the interaction effectively, it looks like a "real" response, and the other participants treat it as such; it is only upon close analysis that it appears anomalous. Excerpt 7 and 8 provide additional examples of the affiliative "me too" element of this strategy.

In excerpt 7, lines 1 and 2, Asami says that she wants to go to Italy and France.

Then in line 8 she makes another implausible reference when she agrees with Junko, who, when asked the same question by Kaori in line 6, utters "me too," which is, of course, referring to Asami's line 1 statement. Although most of the examples of mimesis are found in Asami's utterances, there is another case, shown in Excerpt 8, which is uttered by Junko in line 4. Here Junko says that she watched a television program, and then when Asami observes that she also watched the same program, Junko agrees. Evidence that this is a reflexive response is again provided by Junko's replication of Asami's line 3 intonation contour. If Junko had intended to change the pronoun of this utterance to comment on her and Asami's similar viewing habits and utter "You too?" in line 4, there should be a rising intonation at the end of line 4.

Excerpt 7

1	Asa:	u:n (1.8) <I want to go> (1.2) e:t(o) (0.9) >Italia< (1.5)
2		and France.
3	Jun:	o:n.
4	Asa:	un.
5	Kao:	a::h.
6	Kao:	how a(bout) (you).
7	Jun:	me too.
8 →	Asa:	me too.

Excerpt 8

1	Jun:	(2.1) this morning (2.0) I - (8.7) I - (2.5) I watched
2		(1.7) mezamashite.
3	Asa:	ha::i (0.6) me too.
4 →	Jun:	me too.

The following excerpt includes three additional cases of mimesis, which I comment on below.

Excerpt 9

1	Kao:	(1.2) u:: (2.0) I (1.8) u:::n (0.5) I was headache (0.9) so
2		(1.3) I - (3.5) I went to (0.8) bed early.
3	Jun:	0.
4	Jun:	(1.5) that's too bad.

5 →Asa: that's too bad.
6 Asa: e:: (1.6) u::n (.) did you eat ((pause includes laughter)) (2.0) din – dinner
7 Asa: ( ).
(2.5)
8 Jun: I ate (2.8) shogayaki?.
(0.8)
9 →Asa: ¥shoga(yaki)¥.
10 Kao: hhh hhh.
11 Jun: (4.0) last dinner.
12 Asa: last dinner.

Briefly, in line 5, Asami's gaze is directed at Junko, *not* Kaori when she utters "That's too bad." Junko, in line 4, is providing an assessment of Kaori's line 1 comment, while appropriately gazing at Kaori. This shows that although Asami's line 5 utterance has the "shape" of an assessment, it is not directed towards its logical recipient, which indicates that it is serving an interactional function, namely as the communication strategy which I have described as affiliative mimesis. In line 9, Kaori repeats the Japanese word *shogayaki*, which, as a native speaker of Japanese, she obviously knows (the yen signs in the transcript indicate a slight rising intonation). Nevertheless she repeats it, again pointing to this repetition as a reflexive behavior rather than as confirmation or an indicator of non-understanding. There are many further issues relevant to this strategy and its prevalence in other L2 conversations that must be addressed in future research. In this section, however, I have provided a number of illustrative examples of this mimetic phenomenon and attempted to lay the groundwork for an initial analysis which might begin to account for it.

Conclusion

In this paper I have detailed, with an eye towards future research, an initial case study investigation into a single L2 English conversation by three Japanese female college students. Although there are numerous potential areas available for exploration, even in this short conversation, I focused on the following interactional phenomena: the use by the participants of Japanese, their use of new-topic elicitation rather than returning to or recycling "old" topics as a means of terminating long

silences, and a communicative strategy that I termed "reflexive affiliative mimesis." All of the analyses here are tentative, but point to productive areas for future work.

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