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Turn-Taking and Negotiation of Meaning to Construct an Online Conversation between Two Low-Intermediate Japanese EFL Learners

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Research Article

Abstract

This illustrative case study aims to explore the use of turn-taking and negotiation of meaning between two low-intermediate female Japanese university students and consider pedagogical implications. After a voice-recorded online conversation between the participants via Zoom was transcribed by an online automatic transcription tool and the researcher, a conversation analysis was conducted based on Wong and Waring (2021). The findings illustrated that the participants utilised various negotiation strategies, especially confirmation check, clarification requests, and comprehension check, to elicit more information about the interlocutor and shift from one conversation topic to another. Furthermore, their first language communicative beliefs might play an important role in their use of negotiation and turn-taking. Therefore, language teachers may need to provide learners with many opportunities to learn and use various negotiation strategies in meaning-driven interactive activities whilst appreciating the learners' first language communication cultures.

Keywords: Japanese, EFL, turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, conversational analysis

1. Introduction

As communication has been defined as "the sequence of expression, interpretation, and negotiation for meaning" (Savignon, 1997, p. 14), turn-taking and negotiations of meaning play a prominent role in conveying and understanding messages and composing discourse. While people can communicate with each other in their first language without much difficulty, many have difficulty when speaking in an LX, defined as "any foreign language acquired after the age at which the first language(s) was acquired" (Dewaele, 2018, p. 238). Thus, second language teachers need to examine students' communicative activities and their communication patterns to encounter and overcome challenges in the target language conversations. In many Japanese EFL educational settings, especially the tertiary contexts, meaning-driven communicative activities are often utilised in order to assist students in developing their English

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abilities for communicative purposes. However, as teachers often teach 20 or more students in a class, it is usually challenging to monitor every conversation and explore their negotiation patterns and turn-taking there. Moreover, teachers might need to know conversational patterns in online settings because second language learners have recently had more opportunities to interact with others in the target language there due to COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, as an illustrative case study, the author of this paper recorded and transcribed a 20-minute English conversation made by two female Japanese EFL university students via Zoom Version 5.4.3 (Zoom), an online meeting system, in order to delve into their turn-taking and negotiations of meaning in the dialogue and consider the necessity of teaching various negotiation strategies to develop their conversational skills in an LX.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Turn-Taking

As turn-taking in conversations is both "the simplest and the most complex of mechanisms" (Hughes, 2006, p. 215), it is an important variable to examine speakers' discourse patterns and explore in-depth discourse factors in conversation analysis. The definition of turn-taking, the procedures that individuals in a conversation decide when to speak verbally, can be categorised into two main types: mechanical and interactional (Edelsky, 1981). According to Gorjian and Habibi (2015), while the mechanical definition considers a turn as an occasion to speak regardless of the content of what the speaker is saying, the interactional definition aims to appreciate the messages and meanings of the speakers. Researchers (e.g., Gorijian & Habigi, 2015; Tannen, 2012; Williamson, 2019) also mention that turn-taking strategies depend on cultures and situations. Hazel and Ayres (1998) report that while Americans often utilised self-select turn-taking patterns, other-select turn-taking patterns were employed by Japanese when they were in homogeneous groups. On the other hand, their turn-taking strategies were not significantly different when they were in mingle groups, where Japanese and American participants had conversations. In Akiyama's (2017) study, the appropriate amount and quality of scaffolding, especially negotiation of meaning, played an essential role in successful turn-taking between Japanese and American participants. However, the appropriate amount and quality of scaffolding has not fully investigated in many settings. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider the roles of negotiations of meaning to investigate turn-taking in discourse analysis.

2.2. Negotiations of Meaning

Negotiation of meaning is defined as "an activity that occurs when a listener signals to the speaker that the speaker's message is not clear and the speaker and listener work linguistically to resolve this impasse" (Pica, 1987, p. 200). Researchers (e.g., Long, 1983a, 1983b; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Hartono & Ihsan, 2017) mention that negotiations of meaning can be categorised into nine main strategies: comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks, word coinage, use of approximation, self-repetition, other repetition, correction, and non-verbal expression of non-understanding. Samani et al. (2015) maintain that the amount of negotiation strategies depends on the LX speakers' language proficiency because the findings illustrated that confirmation check, elaboration, and elaboration request were utilised more than other strategies. Rouhshad et al. (2015) report that the participants used more negotiations of meaning in a face-to-face setting than a text-based synchronous online setting, even though few negotiations of form were detected in both modes. However, the types of negotiation strategies were not fully investigated in many oral-based synchronous online settings. Thus, it may be necessary to address these research issues in this present case study.

3. Research Questions

This research paper explores the following two research questions to examine Japanese EFL learners' discourse patterns:

1. How do two low-intermediate Japanese EFL learners manage turn-taking via Zoom?

2. How do the participants negotiate meaning via Zoom in order to maintain the conversation?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants/Sampling

Two female Japanese EFL learners, both at the age of 21, participated in the present research study on March 25th 2021. The purposes of this investigation were explained to the participants in Japanese, their first language, in order to avoid miscommunications. They consented to participate in this study with the condition of anonymity. The participants selected their own pseudonyms.

Ami (pseudonym) was born and raised in central Japan and has never studied or lived abroad. She plans to go to New Zealand to assist her mother in her business there after graduating from university. She decided to study global business at university because she would like to work in other countries in the future. As Ami has a high interest in cosmetics and fashion, she wishes to do business in such business fields. Ami's most recent TOEIC score is 600, which is equivalent to low-intermediate proficiency level in CEFR. She started to learn English at the age of seven because her mother wanted her to be a fluent English speaker. She likes listening to songs and watching films in English and has a high integrative motivation to learn English. In classes, Ami always tries to ask questions regarding the use of vocabulary and grammar which she thinks would be useful in English conversations.

Nami (pseudonym) was born and raised in western Japan and currently lives on her own in central Japan to study global business at the same university with Ami. She has never studied or lived abroad. Although it will depend on the COVID-19 pandemic situation, she plans to study in Hawaii from this September until the following December. Nami's most recent TOEIC score is 625, which is also equivalent to low-intermediate proficiency level. She started to study English at the age of 10 at an English conversation school. Similar to Ami, Nami also likes English songs and films, and always tries to improve her English receptive skills through extensive listening activities. In classes, she always tries to initiate conversations with her classmates and share her ideas and opinions regarding the assigned topics.

Ami and Nami have known each other for three years because they have been taking the same classes since they were first-year students. According to the short interview that was conducted before starting to voice-record a conversation, the participants reported that they often socialise and sometimes travel together during holidays. They also mentioned that Nami sometimes stayed Ami's house and tried having conversations this spring to improve their conversation skills in English. This background illustrates that the participants have a close relationship, and thus their possible psychological burden to converse with each other in English was low in this study.

4.2. Data Collection and Analysis

A 20-minute conversation between Ami and Nami was voice-recorded via Zoom, an online meeting application, under the condition that cameras were turned off. The author asked them to talk about their spring holidays in English for 20 minutes. The author did not interfere with the conversation until the assigned minutes passed even though the participants were allowed to ask for some help from the author in a case that they had challenges in communicating with each other. Furthermore, the author did not stop the conversation until the participants closed their conversation themselves even though a group message

was sent to the participants when the assigned minutes passed. Therefore, this collected 20-minute conversation can be considered an authentic online English conversation between two Japanese EFL students.

The recorded conversation was transcribed with an online automatic transcription tool called Happy Scribe (2019) once, and later the transcription mistakes were corrected by the author. After several attempts to check the accuracy of the transcription, the author had an online meeting with one of their research assistances and listened to the conversation together in order to recheck and confirm the correctness.

In order to analyse the transcription both quantitatively and qualitatively, the author input the data and the recorded audio into MAXQDA 2020. As the first data analysis procedure, the participants' para-linguistic features, including intonation, the prolonging of sound, and speech speed, were noted on the transcript based on Wong and Waring (2021)'s transcription key (Table 1).

Table 1.

Transcription Key

.	(period) falling intonation
?	(question mark) rising intonation
,	(comma) continuing intonation
-	(hyphen) abrupt cut-off
::	(colon(s)) prolonging of sound
word	(underlining) stress
word	the more underlining, the greater the stress
WORD	(all caps) loud speech
◦word◦	(degree symbols) quiet speech
↑word	(upward arrow) raised pitch
↓word	(downward arrow) lowered pitch
>word<	(more than and less than) quicker speech
<word>	(less than and more than) slowed speech
<	(less than) jump start or rushed start
hh	(series of h's) aspiration or laughter
.hh	(h's preceded by dot) inhalation
(hh)	(h's in parentheses) aspiration or laughter inside word boundaries
[word]	(set of lined-up brackets) beginning and ending of
[word**]**	simultaneous or overlapping speech
=	(equal sign) latch or continuing speech with no break in between
(0.4)	(number in parentheses) length of a silence in tenths of a second
(.)	(period in parentheses) micro-pause: 0.2 second or less
$word$	(dollar signs) smiley voice
( )	(empty parentheses) inaudible talk
((word))	(double parentheses) transcriber comment
words	smaller, italicized fonts indicates non-speech activity
{*words*-words}	dash to indicate co-occurrence of non-speech and speech elements; curly brackets to mark the beginning and ending of such co-occurrence if necessary

(adopted from Wong & Waring, 2021, p. xvi)

Later, the author inductively coded the data twice and categorised them into three main themes: the negotiation of meaning, the shift of conversational topics, and the turn-taking, all of which were utilised to address the two research questions. After coding the transcription several times to estimate the intra-

coder reliability with Cohen's kappa (Cohen's k = 0.95), which can estimate "percentage agreement between/among raters" (Mackey & Gass, 2022, p. 188) the author asked one of their colleagues to code it and calculated the inter-coder reliability with MAXQDA 2020 so as to recheck and confirm the correctness of the transcription (Cohen's k = 0.91). Landis and Koch (1977) maintain that higher than 0.9 scores are considered significantly reliable estimations for intra/inter-coder reliability. In a meta-analysis research study by Plonsky and Derrick (2016), 0.87 is reported as the median of Cohen's kappa. Therefore, based on the inter/inra-coder reliability in the present study, the use of the data can be considered reasonable.

5. Findings, Discussion, and Pedagogical Implications

This section presents some illustrative cases from the online conversation between two low-intermediate female Japanese university students. Tables introduce some representative patterns of turn-taking and negotiations of meaning in the conversation. After that, the findings of the present study are discussed with relation to other studies in the field in order to provide insight related to how (English) language teachers may use them in their teaching applications and practices.

5.1. Turn-Taking Patterns and Topic Shifting

In the 20-minute conversation between Ami and Nami, there was a total of 250 turns (124 turns talked by Ami, and the other 126 turns by Nami) and 12 main conversational topics. These conversational topics were as follows: part-time jobs, strawberry picking, orange park, movies, Tokyo, Okinawa, friends, the upcoming new academic year, homestay at Ami's house, the song 'Let it Be,' the beach, and how to spend time efficiently. Based on the number of turns, it seems that each participant had relatively the same number of turns and the conversation was well-balanced, meaning one of them did not dominate the conversation. However, the more careful conversational analysis illustrates that Ami tended to ask Nami more follow-up questions and replied to her with fewer words than Nami. For example, when they were talking about the strawberry picking, Ami asked Nami several follow-up questions to further elicit Nami's spring holiday experiences (see Table 2). Ami also tried providing another topic to talk with her when she thought one conversation topic ended.

Table 2.

Transcription of a Conversation About Strawberry Picking

Summary: Ami and Nami were talking about their spring holidays. Ami asked Nami if she went to the Orange Park for strawberry picking. As a conversation continues, the topic slightly changed to a film.

[0:03:41.0] A: Did you went to the Orange Park? That I (.) said?
[0:03:46.0] N: Orange Park? (2.0) You said?
[0:03:48.0] A: Yeah. Yeah, the name of the, um, Strawberry Place,
[0:03:54.0] N: Ah::, Gamagori Orange Park?
[0:03:56.0] A: Oh, yes, right.
[0:03:59.0] N: Ahh, after Strawberry picking we::. (2.0) We:: would go, we would? We (2.0) have to go to Okazaki Eone and. (2.25) We already:: (2.0) reserve, reserved that movie ticket.
[0:04:20.0] A: Oh::, I see↑
[0:04:22.0] N: I yeah, we have to go. (2.0) so I
[0:04:24.0] A: What did you-
[0:04:26.0] N: I really can't go to Orange Park. (0.5) One more?
[0:04:29.0] A: What did you see? (1.25) Did you saw?
[0:04:31.0] N: Oh, *evangerion* (Evangelion)
[0:04:34.0] A: (hh) I thought that

Note. A = Ami, N = Nami

Nami also frequently changed topics with the use of signals, such as 'oh,' 'ahh,' and 'hm' (e.g., Tables 2 & 3). Furthermore, Nami tended to say more words and sentences when she replied to Ami and

commented on her experience. Due to her initiation of the conversation sharing her experiences during the spring holidays and Ami's follow-up questions, most of the conversation topics seems to have become relevant to Nami's experience even though both had the same events, such as trips to Tokyo.

Table 3.

Transcription of a Conversation About a Film

Summary: Ami and Nami were talking about a film. Then, Nami tried to change a topic about the end of the spring holidays.

[0:06:41.0] N: I really, really look forward to (1.0) talk (1.0) about movies with you.
[0:06:47.0] A: Yeah. It's good that you:: don't go (0.3) with your boyfriend.
[0:06:53.0] N: A boyfrind? boyfriend Yeah (hh).
[0:06:55.0] A: Don't. Don't go with (.) the (.) with him,
[0:06:59.0] N: OK. And he:: is not interesting in it. So
[0:07:04.0] A: All right. Really?
[0:07:06.0] N: That's very nice, (55) nice timing.
[0:07:09.0] A: Mm. (0.5) Maybe.
[0:07:11.0] N: Oh.
[0:07:12.0] A: and Almost
[0:07:15.0] A: Hm?
[0:07:16.0] N: Uh Huh. (1.1) You go
[0:07:18.0] A: like almost (0.5) the spring vacation (0.6) is ending. (.) I can't believe that,
[0:07:24.0] N: ye:::s.

Note. A = Ami, N = Nami

From these results, although each participant had the relatively equal number of turns to speak, their turn taking and topic shifting strategies were different, resulting in Nami's controlling the conversation. However, as possible factors of this result are not highlighted, it is still necessary to further examine negotiations of meaning between these two participants.

5.2. Negotiation of Meaning

Based on the nine strategy types of negotiation of meaning introduced in the previous research studies (e.g., Long, 1983a, 1983b; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Hartono & Ihsan, 2017), the participants' negotiations of meaning were investigated. As a result, five types (correction, self-repetition, confirmation check, clarification requests, comprehension check) were detected in the transcription (Table 4). Although Nami utilised negotiation strategies more frequently than Ami, the noticeable difference between them was the frequent use of self-repetition, illustrating that Nami tends to repeat her words and phrases to convey her messages clearly whilst checking her use of language and the meaning.

Table 4.

The Frequency of Using Strategies to Negotiate Meaning

		Ami	Nami
Negotiation of Meaning Strategies	Correction	3	6
	Self-Repetition	7	21
	Confirmation Check	11	13
	Clarification Requests	8	7
	Comprehension Check	8	10
Total		37	58

Note. The Data based on the Conversation between Ami and Nami on March 25th 2021

The participants also often negotiated for the meaning of some vocabulary and confirmed their understanding of the conversation, regardless of the assigned themes. When they had difficulty in explaining the meaning of words in English, albeit it did not frequently occur, they utilised the Japanese

meaning. For example, when Ami requested Nami to clarify the meaning of the word enrichment, Nami just said the Japanese meaning of the word, jujitsu (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Transcription of the Conversation about a Tokyo Trip

Summary: Ami and Nami were talking about some memorable events in their spring holidays. Nami talked about a Tokyo trip and used a word enrichment. However, Ami did not know the meaning of the word, so Nami said the Japanese meaning.

[0:10:47.0] N: So I can't choo::se, but. hm::, recently, we went to Tokyo, right?
[0:11:01.0] A: Right.
[0:11:02.0] N: That's so memorable, right?
[0:11:03.0] A: *Un* (yeah)
[0:11:04.0] N: And so:: (0.8) like, so satisfied?
[0:11:09.0] A: Like (1.0) satisfied to what?
[0:11:14.0] N: Not satis, satisfied. Eeto. (5.0) Please (.) wait (.) for a minute. Enrichment, enrichment (0.5) days.
[0:11:28.0] A: Enrichment (0.5) day?
[0:11:29.0] N: >*jujitsu*<, enrichment day.
[0:11:34.0] A: Hahaha
[0:11:36.0] N: >I didn't say Japanese<, Japanese. ［A: Hahahahaha］
[0:11:38.0] A: Oh::, enrichment, OK.
[0:11:42.0] N: ◦enrichment◦

Note. A = Ami, N = Nami

Similarly, when Ami struggled to find suitable words and expressions to make herself understood, she also changed codes from English to Japanese in order to clarify the meaning of her message that it was necessary to make some time to be mentally stable even though she also used an English word, heart, as soon as she used the Japanese word for it, kimochi (see Table 6).

Table 6.

Transcription of the Conversation About a Way to Use Time Efficiently

Summary: Ami and Nami were talking about their mental growth during the spring holidays. Then, Ami tried to find an appropriate English word for *kimochi*, namely feelings in English. However, she did not come up with the word, so she said a Japanese word and used a word, heart, instead.

[0:15:04.0] N: Yeah↑ Well, we were changed (3.0) ［A: Ah huh?］ from spring vacation.
[0:15:13.0] A: We change? you mean?
[0:15:15.0] N: Yeah, we were changed.
[0:15:17.0] A: Oh were, OK.
[0:15:19.0] N: <Befo:re I (2.0) thought, I:: li::ke being busy:, too.>
[0:15:28.0] A: Ahuh
[0:15:30.0] N: But. (3.0) Now, I (2.0) didn't, (1.5) I don't think so.
[0:15:38.0] A: Yeah,
[0:15:40.0] N: I (1.5) I think (1.0) my (0.8) time. (2.0) My time? The time? for me: is so important a:::nd (1.5) I have to make my time.
[0:15:55.0] A: Yeah.
[0:15:57.0] N: Yeah.
[0:15:59.0] A: Like.(1.0) We need (0.5) more (0.2)space (1.0) to like (1.5) heart?
[0:16:06.0] N: Heart?
[0:16:07.0] A: Yeah.
[0:16:09.0] A: We can't we can't? Be (1.5) it's not good for us to be (2.0) busy.
[0:16:15.0] N: being busy? Ye::s.
[0:16:17.0] A: Being busy. ［N: yes yes yes yes. Hm::.］ (2.0) Like we're not *nani*?(1.0) *nanka*. *kimochi*, (what? what is called, feelings) heart. Heart, like(hh)

Note. A = Ami, N = Nami

The para-lingual features, such as the tone of voice and the speed of the utterance, were not considered negotiation strategies in this investigation. However, both Nami and Ami often changed the tone of voice, especially raised the tones and prolonged the sounds, when they spoke in order to express their feelings and possibly describe the uncertainty of their use of language. In the former case, Nami and Ami seem to have understood each other's feelings and impressions of their comments and replied to them (e.g., Table 7).

Table 7.

Transcription of the Conversation About a conversation about the participants' recent activities

Summary: Nami and Ami were catching up about their recent activities during the spring holidays. Ami told Nami that she was teaching English as a part-time work.

[0:00:23.0] N: Yes (hh), that's right (hh). How are you?
[0:00:28.0] A: I::'m↑, I'm so happy to talk with you.
[0:00:32.0] N: $Yea::$, me too::. I'm so happy↑.
[0:00:34.0] A: Oh, hey↑. I'm gonna start. Ah:: Teaching, Ah::-
[0:00:44.0] N: English?
[0:00:45.0] A: Ah:: teaching English. Ah:: At my home from-
[0:00:48.0] N: Oh really↑?
[0:00:50.0] A: yeah, next week, next next week? next month, I mean.
[0:00:55.0] N: ◦Next month◦, oh April?
[0:00:56.0] A: Right.
[0:00:59.0] N: Wo:::w↑ That's good ne::::::ws.
[0:01:01.0] A: Yes, right.
[0:01:04.0] N: Congratulations↑
[0:01:06.0] A: Thank you::↑. I hope you could too.

Note. A = Ami, N = Nami

Conversely, in the latter case, although both indicated their uncertainly of the use of words and grammar with para-lingual elements, they did not correct each other's mistake but maintained the conversations (e.g., Table 8).

Table 8.

Transcription of the Conversation About a Way to Use Time Efficiently

Summary: Nami and Ami were talking about the importance of using time efficiently. In the interaction, Nami was sometimes uncertain about her use of grammar and words. Thus, she tried to change her voice tones to indicate the uncertainty. Ami also tried to ask for clarification.

[0:17:28.0] N: And (1.0) that (1.0) I think it is important to (1.5) <u>important</u> how to use the time.
[0:17:38.0] A: Uh huh?
[0:17:39.0] N: So:::(1.0) For example, I have a free day.
[0:17:46.0] A: Uh huh?
[0:17:48.0] N: And. (2.0) I (2.0) woke. (2.5) I, hm? I wake up so; (1.5) la:te and (1.0) lazy (1.5) and (2.5) Watching Netflix.
[0:18:05.0] A: Uh huh?
[0:18:07.0] N: all day and go to bed, it's not (1.0) good. (1.5) It's not good and,
[0:18:12.0] A: yeah,
[0:18:13.0] N: it's (1.5) wrong, hm? It's wrong way to use the time, but. (2.0) Like, you know (hh)
[0:18:24.0] A: what? (hh)
[0:18:26.0] N: So I. (2.0) I want to say (1.5) that. (2.5) The way of using time is important.
[0:18:36.0] A: Yeah, it i:s.

Note. A = Ami, N = Nami

Based on these findings, the tone of voice and the speed of the utterance might be able to be perceived as negotiation strategies to maintain a conversation in this context. Accordingly, the effective use of para-lingual elements also needs to be considered as pedagogical implications.

In the conversation regarding spring holidays, Ami and Nami frequently changed topics, such as part-time jobs, a trip to Tokyo, and films. Although they seem to have followed the conversation flow somewhat smoothly, the use of meta-discourse markers to change topics, including 'by the way,' or 'anyway,' was rarely detected in the transcription. Instead, they sometimes made noticeably long pauses before shifting one topic from another, which might illustrate breakdowns in the conversation, and asked each other some follow-up questions to maintain the conversation and shift to another topic smoothly. This finding might support part of Hazel and Ayres' (1998) findings that Japanese people utilised other-select turn-taking strategies because both Ami and Nami rarely interrupted each other's turn but tried to elicit their messages through questions and verbal reactions. However, as Nami often changed the topics with her own story when she had a turn, the conversational topics were based on her experience during the spring holidays. Therefore, in this specific setting, Nami might also employ self-select turn-taking strategies, which Hazel and Ayre (1998) reported was a typical characteristic of American participants in their investigation. Accordingly, this finding might indicate that teaching self-select strategies to Japanese leaners is useful.

In this study, Ami and Nami had successful turn-taking during the conversation through various strategies of negotiation of meaning, particularly confirmation check, clarification requests, and comprehension check. In Nami's case, the frequent use of self-repetition, or possibly considered repair, was also detected. Moreover, both the participants often changed tones as confirmation checks. That is, they seem to have relied on their para-lingual elements for negotiations of meaning in their conversation. As a result, they seem to have provided and received sufficient quality and amount of scaffolding with/for each other (Akiyama, 2017). However, it might also be necessary to reconsider other possible factors of the successful turn-taking and negotiation of meaning. Samani et al. (2015) state that the second language learners' language proficiency level plays a significant role in the amount and type of negotiation strategies. In this investigation, both Ami and Nami had relatively the same language proficiency level. More importantly, both are Japanese, sharing a high-context communication culture, and have known each other for three years. Therefore, their cultural communicative beliefs and other factors might also have helped their negotiations of meaning in order to make online interactions. Based on this finding, language teachers need to appreciate learners' first language communication cultures and teach them how to use negotiation strategies, such as the use of self-repetition and para-lingual elements, when learners have difficulty in negotiating meaning in the target language.

To sum up, although Ami and Nami interacted with each other in English while changing topics and negotiating meaning in various ways, the close relationships between them and their shared cultures might have played indirect roles in their discourse. These results might highlight that second language teachers need to not only provide students with many opportunities to utilise various negotiation strategies in meaning-driven communicative activities to facilitate their language learning (Pica, 1996), but also raise their awareness of students' first language cultures and their self/other-selected turn-taking patterns so as to assist them in developing their conversational skills to negotiate for meaning and appreciate their turns to speak.

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This illustrative case study aimed to examine two female intermediate Japanese EFL university learners' conversation pattens in an online conversation, especially their negotiations of meaning and turn-takings, though a 20-minute conversation about their spring holidays. The transcribed dialogue and the

conversation analysis illustrated that the participants utilised clarification requests and confirmational questions to gain mutual understanding of the topics and clarify the meanings when necessary. These findings may implicate that language teachers can help learners to develop their conversational skills whilst teaching how to use negotiation strategies and appreciating their first language cultures. However, it is still necessary to consider limitations and future research, especially regarding the personal relationships between the participants, data collection methods, and research design.

In this investigation, the participants had already known each other and had a positive rapport. While the setting and their conversational patterns can be considered authentic, their shared information as friends might have played an important role in their negotiations of meaning indirectly. That is, although they might have understood each other smoothly without negotiations of meaning thanks to their background knowledge and their close relationships, outsiders, including the author or the paper, would have encountered some difficulty in the conversations. In order to further explore the roles of their friendships on conversational discourses and negotiations of meaning, oral protocols can be possible data collection and analysis instruments in future research. Likewise, studies with non-friends and non-females would be required.

In the transcription, the significant roles of para-lingual elements, especially intonations, and pauses, on the discourse were detected. However, as videotaping a conversation was not permitted in this investigation, the roles of non-verbal languages, such as gestures and facial expressions, on negotiations of meaning and other discourse features could not be examined. Since research reports that non-verbal language plays an important role in communication (e.g., Capper, 2000; Wigham & Chanier, 2013), observing and analysing the participants' gestures and other non-verbal languages would explore their conversational signals and negotiations of meaning more extensively. Future research findings concerning the roles of non-verbal languages in English conversations might enable second language teachers, especially those who teach conversation courses, to reconsider and redesign their conversational activities.

Since the present research study observed one conversation between two Japanese EFL learners, qualitative research methods were mainly used. However, as the findings just illustrated one case of a conversation between two female Japanese university students, it is not very generalisable. Therefore, future research would need to be conducted with a higher number of participants. Furthermore, mixed methods combining various research methods can further delve into conversations, discourses as well as other relevant topics and validate the findings (Paltridge, 2022). Accordingly, more quantitative and qualitative research methods would address the limitations of this illustrative case study for future research.

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