



ELSEVIER

Journal of Pragmatics 28 (1997) 661–693

Journal of
PRAGMATICS

The Northridge earthquake conversations: The floor structure and the ‘loop’ sequence in Japanese conversation[☆]

Shoichi Iwasaki

*University of California, East Asian Languages and Cultures, 405 Hilgard Avenue,
Los Angeles, CA, 90095, USA*

Abstract

The ‘loop’ sequence refers to successive exchanges of backchannel signals, and may be understood as a locally managed turn-taking pattern. If we consider conversation as a meaningful communication process, however, this is not a completely satisfactory analysis. In order to understand the function of the loop sequence, the present paper examines the phenomenon in a unit of conversation identified as ‘unit-floor’, and shows that the loop sequence is a pattern which provides participants with an opportunity to negotiate the next floor holder, who will subsequently control and develop the floor. A loop sequence appears when the current floor holder suggests a transfer of floor, or when the current floor supporter returns a floor which has been transferred to him inadvertently, or when participants jointly produce utterances in a rapid succession (open floor).

The current study further shows that the loop sequence is a behavioral manifestation and a contextualization cue of ‘mutual dependency’, and it is part of the ‘conceptual floor’ that participants invoke when entering into and sustaining a conversation.

The data analyzed for the purpose of this study are four dyads, each approximately 20 minutes long, in which participants recount their experiences of an earthquake. The Japanese data

[☆] I would like to thank Reiko Hayashi, whose discussions of the floor in conversation provided me with valuable information about this concept. I learned much from her writings and through personal communication with her.

I had a chance to discuss part of my research presented here in the panel entitled ‘Japanese Linguistic Ideology and Socially Situated Language Practice’ at the 49th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (Chicago, March 13–16, 1997). Suggestions and comments received from my fellow presenters, Yoshiko Matsumoto, Shigeko Okamoto, Yoshiko Takahashi, our discussant, Naomi McGloin, and people in the audience including Junko Mori, Polly Szatrowski and Haruko Cook improved the paper tremendously. My special appreciation goes to an anonymous reviewer and Makoto Hayashi who gave me invaluable comments and suggestions. The comments of Preeya Ingkaphirom Horie, Eri Yoshida, Tsuyoshi Ono, and Feng-hsi Liu have also influenced this paper. My only regret is that I may not have absorbed all the insights and suggestions offered to me. Any remaining shortcomings found in this present paper are entirely my responsibility.

* E-mail: iwasaki@humnet.ucla.edu.

is compared with comparable Thai and American English data in order to explain the cultural significance of the loop sequence.

1. Introduction

A particular turn-taking pattern identified here as the 'loop' sequence, or successive exchanges of backchannel expressions, appears abundantly in Japanese conversation. A typical loop sequence takes the following schematic shape:

<u>SPEAKER A</u> (Some utterance)	<u>SPEAKER B</u>
ee	ee (Some utterance)

Fig. 1

Speaker B responds to Speaker A's utterance with a backchannel signal, *ee*. To this signal, Speaker A in turn responds with his own backchannel signal (or back-back channel), *ee*, which initiates a transition of speakerhood to B. What I attempt to do in this paper is to first discuss functions of the 'loop' sequence by locating the contexts in which it appears in conversation and secondly to seek a culturally definable motivation for this special turn-taking behavior.

Since the publication of the seminal paper by Sacks et al. (1974), the turn-taking mechanism, a basis for the loop sequence, has been considered to be a locally managed system. This view explains many phenomena of coordination in conversation such as scarcity and brevity of speech overlaps and little or no transitional gaps between turns. In this methodological framework which is known as Conversation Analysis (or CA), instances of turn-taking are collected and presented as evidence for its structural systematicity. While the discovery and further examination of the structural (or mechanical) aspect of turn-taking has advanced our understanding of conversational structure tremendously, the structural explanation alone is not sufficient to fully explain the phenomenon of turn-taking (Maynard, 1989: 146–147; Hayashi, 1996: 29). This inadequacy becomes more acute when turn-taking phenomena are examined in a conversation in its entirety as a system. To pursue a fuller understanding of this phenomenon, I argue, it is necessary to employ a methodology that is able to adequately address the functional aspect of turn-taking. A concept that is necessary for such a functional analysis is the notion of floor which reflects the participants' interactional 'moves' within the conversation (a fuller definition of floor will be given in Section 3). A functional analysis of turn-taking will broaden and deepen our understanding of this phenomenon beyond the limits of its structural property, and it further opens up possibilities for exploration of the cultural significance associated with this phenomenon in conversation.

2. The data

The data for the present study come from my 'Northridge Earthquake Conversation Project'.¹ In this study I analyzed four dyads in which Japanese native speakers talked about their experiences in the Northridge earthquake which hit Los Angeles on January 17, 1994. The conversations were recorded approximately one and a half months after the quake. A Japanese native research assistant invited Japanese students (two at a time) to an office on UCLA campus. After she introduced the participants and asked them to talk about their earthquake experiences for about 20 minutes, she left the room. The conversation was recorded on audio and video tapes. The two participants in each dyad were unacquainted individuals, who met for the purpose of the conversation. The participant profiles in each dyad are as follows.² JEQ stands for 'Japanese Earthquake' Data. Names are all pseudonyms:

JEQ#1 Akai (Female graduate) vs. Tanaka (Male graduate)

JEQ#2 Hashimoto (Male graduate) vs. Asada (Female undergraduate)

JEQ#3 Yasumi (Female undergraduate) vs. Sayuri (Female undergraduate)

JEQ#4 Akira (Male graduate) vs. Takashi (Male graduate)

3. Floor in conversation

Since the concept of floor is crucial in the present study, a clear definition of the concept must be given at the outset. Two related but different definitions of the concept of floor are in current use. First, Hayashi describes floor as "a dynamic cognitive entity that links the interactants together socially and psychologically" (1996: 32). Floor as a cognitive entity, or a cognitive network, evolves around the participants in conversation and constitutes as part of their immediate interactional context (or "an ad hoc culture", *ibid.*). In other words, when the participants recognize a social encounter they establish a mutual mental space where they can interact. I define this aspect of floor as 'conceptual floor'. Conceptual floor assists and influences the participants' behavioral orientation in interaction and the process of information transmission. For

¹ The 'Northridge Earthquake Conversation Project' was headed by Shoichi Iwasaki in order to collect comparable conversational data in different languages. Care was taken to match up two participants who have never met before or who have little contact in the past. This is to ensure that the conversants do not rely on 'personal common ground' (Clark, 1996). Both Japanese and Thai data were collected after one month and a half, and the English data were collected approximately two years after the quake. I sincerely acknowledge the cooperation of the participants and research assistants in the project who made this project possible. Research assistants involved in the projects are, for Japanese: Eri Yoshida, Yumiko Kawanishi; and for Thai: Phensri Jenjantra, Amy Meepoe, Kanok Singkarin, Kamol Sirichan; and for English: Kathy Howard. Data collection and transcription was partially supported by the University of California's Pacific Rim Study Grant (1992–94).

² There is concern that the subjects in this project live in bilingual and bicultural settings. It is beyond the scope of the present research to consider the environmental effect on linguistic behavior within the participants' primary language, but the subjects in the present study indeed indicated the general cultural norm important for monolingual and monocultural Japanese.

example, a person may index different attitudes through choices of vocabulary or morpho-syntactic forms according to his assessment of the social context of the conversation. Or a person may employ different strategies in his attempt to understand, or be understood by, his interlocutor(s). The social and psychological aspect of conceptual floor points to its strong cultural orientation and suggests the possibility that the members of different cultures construct their conceptual floors differently.

Second, floor is defined as a unit in conversation. Although the term ‘floor’ in this sense, or ‘unit-floor’ as I call it, and ‘turn-at-talk’ are often confused, they must be clearly separated. I reserve the term ‘turn-at-talk’ as the structural notion as first used by Sacks et al. (1974); and the term ‘unit-floor’ as the semantic-functional notion in the communication process. Conversational business which very often takes more than a single turn exchange must be examined through the notion of unit-floor. Turn-taking activities known as ‘story prefaces’, e.g., ‘You wanna hear a story?’ (Sacks, 1974) and ‘preliminaries to preliminaries’, e.g., ‘Can I ask you a question?’ (Schegloff, 1980), affect the local turn-taking behaviors for the sake of more global conversational activity and they clearly show the conversationalists’ awareness of a larger unit such as floor. Even without such explicit announcements, turn-taking can be systematically regulated, resulting in non-speaker-change at a ‘transition relevance place’ (cf. Ford and Thompson, 1996). Szatrowski (1993) argues that the ‘invitation-acceptance/refusal’ sequence takes more than a single turn exchange and proposes a larger analytic unit she terms *wadan* (speech paragraph), which is similar to what we conceive of as ‘unit-floor’ in this paper. Also Maynard (1989: 146–147) discusses the importance of “the perspective of global context” in addition to the local perspective in the analysis of turn-taking. The concept of unit-floor gives a more precise meaning to the notion of global context.

Participants in a unit-floor will be engaged in a “speech activity” (Gumperz, 1982: 166), or “what’s-going-on” in interaction (Edelsky, 1993: 209). When speech activity involves the development of a topic as in the case of the present earthquake conversation, a unit of floor is identical to a unit of discourse topic (see Erickson, 1982). A floor unit specifies the roles of participants and is therefore dynamic in nature, whereas a topic unit is static and the participants’ roles are not considered. It goes without saying that the notion of unit-floor is a more relevant unit than a topical unit when such interactional phenomena as turn-taking and loop sequence are examined.

When one participant is found to be developing and controlling a topic in a given floor, this person is the floor holder. A floor in which one floor holder can be identified is a “single person floor” (Hayashi, 1996: 70–71). Other participants in a single person floor conversation are floor supporters, who attend to the floor holder’s talk with various degrees of verbal feedback.³ In a lecture, for example, the lecturer

³ There are several variations of single person floor. One is a floor in which more than one person become joint floor holders while talking to one or more listeners. This is observed when more than one person (e.g., husband and wife) talk to others about the events experienced together (e.g., their honeymoon trip to Hawaii). Another interesting case is an interview, in which the role of floor holder is split between an interviewee who develops a floor and an interviewer who controls the flow of the floor. These floor structure may appear during an ordinary conversation as well.

is the floor holder and those in the audience are floor supporters whose verbal participation is minimal. A person who discloses unshared information as a story-teller within a casual conversation becomes the floor holder and his interlocutors assume floor supporter roles. Floor supporters may quietly attend to the floor holder's talk, and in this situation "simultaneous talk seldom occurs, but supportive signals such as back channel cues including comments and questions ... are often observed in a fairly systematic manner" (Hayashi, 1996: 72). Floor supporters' involvement may become more active, however, and in this case short simultaneous talk and overlapping appears. When the topic of conversation is the kind of information that does not solely belong to one particular participant (i.e., shared or sharable information), the conversation may develop collaboratively. This type of conversation floor is the 'open floor', where all participants are collaborative floor developers and participate in the conversation simultaneously as floor holders and floor supporters, thus making it difficult or impossible to distinguish floor holders from supporters.⁴ Participants in floor thus take roles of floor holder, floor supporter, or collaborative floor developer, and in this context participants' moves to claim, sustain, and yield a floor become important. I will examine these conversational moves carefully in Section 6.

To summarize this section, the 'conceptual floor' is an abstract cultural notion shared by conversational participants and it guides their behavior and information transmission in conversation. 'Unit-floor' is a unit of conversation which has a coherent speech activity such as topic development (as in the case of the current analysis). A unit-floor can be developed by one floor holder in a single person floor with the floor supporters listening, or it can be developed jointly in an open floor. When the speech activity involves topic development, a floor is made coherent by topic. As will be discussed later, participants display floor managing behaviors to negotiate their floor roles. We will reconsider the relationship between the conceptual floor and unit-floor in Section 7 of this paper.

4. Backchannel expressions

Some discussion of backchannel expression at this point will facilitate a later discussion of the loop sequence. The issue of backchannel expressions (or 'backchannels' for short) has been one of the major concerns among students of Japanese conversation. This is due to the fact that Japanese speakers use backchannels much more frequently compared to speakers of some other languages (Mizutani, 1983; Maynard, 1989; Clancy et al., 1996; Iwasaki and Horie, 1996). Backchannels are defined

⁴ The phenomenon of 'co-construction' which has gained recent interest by researchers of interaction (e.g., Lerner, 1991; Jacoby and Ochs, 1995; Ono and Yoshida, 1996; Strauss and Kawanishi, 1996; Hayashi and Mori, to appear) should be studied with respect to different types of floor structure. Since a conversation by definition is a co-constructing, collaborative work, there is always a co-construction at the global level (cf. Akatsuka, 1997 (this volume) and to appear). More local and syntactic collaboration is a specific instantiation of such global co-constructing effort, which becomes prevalent when the floor supporter gets highly involved in the floor development by the floor holder or when the participants share the open floor.

here as any verbal attention whose main purpose is to respond in a supporting (i.e., non-disagreeing, non-challenging) manner to the other participant's immediately preceding or current vocalization.

Backchannels are formally classified into three types: 'non-lexical backchannels', 'phrasal backchannels', and 'substantive backchannels'. Non-lexical backchannels are vocalic sounds which have little or no referential meaning, and form a closed set. Phrasal backchannels are stereotypic expressions with more substantive meaning than non-lexical backchannels. This is also basically a closed set though occasional innovation is allowed, as recent innovation such as *usso::* 'You're kidding' or *maji::*? 'Serious?' attest to this linguistic inventiveness. Substantive backchannels, however, are not stereotypic expressions, and they are full of referential content. This type of backchannel is clearly an open class. Some examples of backchannels expressions are listed below.

Non-lexical backchannels:⁵ *nn, n::, ee, e::, aa, a::, hai, haa, ha::, hoo, ho::, he:, hn::n, etc.*

Phrasal backchannels:	<i>honto?</i>	Really?
	<i>soo desu ka</i>	'Is that right?'
	<i>usso:</i>	'I don't believe it!'
	<i>naruhodo</i>	'I see what you mean.'
	<i>sonna bakana</i>	'How ridiculous!'
	<i>maji?</i>	'Are you serious?'
	etc.	

Substantive backchannels: (any form of a sentence or a series of sentences)

Given the definition adopted here, substantive utterances such as repetition, a summary statement, or a clarifying question about the other speaker's immediately preceding or concurrent talk qualify as backchannels. In other words on the surface substantive backchannels may not differ from normal 'substantive utterances', but all utterances coming from a floor supporter constitute backchannels. This is consistent with Yngve (1970)'s original definition of backchannel expressions. Note, however, the reverse is not true and not all backchannels are floor supporter's utterances. Such non-floor supporter backchannels occur when the floor supporter gives a rather extended backchannel, and the floor holder reacts to it with 'back-backchannels' (Yngve, 1970). Non-floor supporter backchannels also occur in an open floor where no distinction can be made between floor holder and supporter.

Another aspect of backchannels must also be noted. In my earlier research (Iwasaki, 1990), I argued that participants' interactional moves are indispensable in characterizing backchannels ('some utterances may derive their character as

⁵ Non-lexical backchannels can be pronounced with two moraic length, in which case the first mora is accented. Thus, *nn, ee, or aa*, for example has the H-L pitch pattern unless the intonation alters the overall prosodic pattern (as in *ee?*). When the vowel is lengthened (as indicated by colons as in *n::* or *e::*), the accent gets lost and the intonation takes over the overall prosodic pattern.

actions entirely from placement considerations” (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 299)), and suggested that a backchannel will be treated as a ‘continuer’ (Schegloff, 1982) or as a ‘reactive expression’ by its recipient. A backchannel is treated in retrospect as a continuer when the floor holding speaker continues to talk without responding to it. On the other hand, it is recognized as a reactive expression in retrospect when he stops to respond to it. Although the interactional treatment of backchannel is essentially independent of the shape of the backchannel, there is a strong relationship between them. In the list of backchannel expressions shown earlier, non-lexical backchannels tend to be treated as continuers, and phrasal and substantive backchannels as reactive backchannels. This relationship can be understood if we notice the following facts. Many non-lexical backchannels (e.g., *nn*, *ee*, *hai*) are used as an affirmative answer token (i.e., “yes”) and inherently carry a property of the second pair-part. As such, non-lexical backchannels mark the end of an adjacency pair cycle, and its recipient does not usually need to attend to it. Consequently a non-lexical backchannel is usually treated as a continuer. News-receipt tokens such as *he::?* and *ha::?* also function as a second pair-part. On the other hand, many phrasal and substantive backchannels, especially those that take the form of a question, intrinsically constitute the first pair-part which requires a response. That is why these backchannels are often treated as reactive expressions.

The relationship between form and its interactional treatment, however, is always tentative, and can be overridden by the participants’ interactional moves. That is, although the producer of a non-lexical backchannel *nn* often uses it as a continuer and its recipient often treats it as such, the recipient always has the option to treat it as a reactive expression (we will see such examples in the discussion of the ‘loop’ sequence in the next section). Similarly a phrasal backchannel *naruhodo* ‘I see’ is often treated as a reactive expression, but in some contexts, it is treated as a continuer backchannel. The two excerpts on the following page clarify this point. Compare the expression of *naruhodo* (*nee*) in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2. (See Appendix for transcription convention.)

In Excerpt 1, Yasumi responds to Sayuri’s expression, *naruhodo nee* (line 6), with *n::* (line 7). In this exchange then *naruhodo nee* is treated as a reactive expression. Notice that Yasumi lost a turn to speak by reacting to the non-floor holder’s backchannel expression with her own backchannel, thereby creating a ‘loop’ sequence (discussed below in Section 6). In contrast, Yasumi does not react to the same expression *naruhodo* in Excerpt 2 but simply ignores it, and thus treats it as a continuer.

In summary, a backchannel expression, which is defined as non-confrontational verbal attention to the interlocutor’s utterance, takes the different formal shapes of non-lexical, phrasal or substantive backchannels. Their interactional state as a continuer or a reactive expression is determined by its recipient’s treatment of it. In other words, the status of a backchannel is always mutative and transformable. This mutability and transformability of backchannels is exploited fully in the ‘loop’ sequence as we examine in a later section.

EXCERPT 1 (JEQ#3)

<u>Yasumi (female)</u>	<u>Sayuri (female)</u>
1 nn soo yuu koto de nigeru hitsuyoo	
2 wa nai tte yuu huu ni.	
3	nn
4 ... omotta kara.	
5 s...(0.9) soo.	
6	naruhodo nee.
7 n::.	
8	nanka soo.
9 atashitachi wa nee.	
10 (H) so uchi no .. tks< apaato mo kekkoo	
11 hurui-n desu ne?	
12 =chiku nannen ka wakannai-n desu kedo:*	

English translation of Excerpt 1

<u>Yasumi (female)</u>	<u>Sayuri (female)</u>
1 so there was no	
2 need to escape	
3	nn
4 ... so I thought.	
5 ...(0.9) so.	
6	I see what you mean.
7 n::	
8	like
9 we	
10 ... our apartment is also rather	
11 old, you see.	
12 = though I don't know how long since it was built.	

EXCERPT 2 (JEQ #3)

<u>Yasumi (female)</u>	<u>Sayuri (female)</u>
1 ...(1.0) nn ano toki sugu shoppingusentaa ni ikoo ka	
2 tte yuu.	
3	hai hai.
4 [kangae mo atta-n desu kedo [[nee?	[hai. [[naruhodo nee?
5	
6 (H) sore wa yokujitsu ni: shita-n [da ke <@ do: @>*	[@@@
7	

English translation of Excerpt 2

<u>Yasumi (female)</u>	<u>Sayuri (female)</u>
1 ...(1.0) at that time (we thought) we should go to a	
2 shopping center immediately	
3	hai hai
4 [so we thought about that, [[you see ?	[hai. [[I see what you
5	mean.
6 (H) we decided to do it the following [day.	[@@@
7	

5. The floor transition

Participants in the present conversational data generally take turns to reveal their personal experiences of the earthquake in their single person floors. In other words, the general organization of the conversations is such that one person assumes the role of floor holder and discloses unshared information to his/her interlocutor who assumes the role of floor supporter. The floor supporters' involvement as revealed in their use of various floor supporting verbal and nonverbal cues varies depending on their (real or pretended) interest in the story-in-progress. The moment when the current floor holder finishes telling one particular event (or reaches the end of a unit-floor) is a 'floor transition relevance place'.

A floor transition relevance place is a special type of turn transition relevance place as discussed by Sacks et al. (1974), but at this location a qualitatively more significant speakerhood transfer is expected to occur, and a new speaker must take an active role in making a contribution to the conversation. A current non-floor holder who misjudges a floor transition relevance place may receive a negative evaluation from his interlocutor. If he initiates a floor before a floor transition relevance place, he may be judged to be interrupting and intrusive even if he observes local turn-taking rules. If he does not initiate his floor when a floor transition relevance place is reached, he may be judged to be inattentive (Schegloff, 1993: 106).⁶

To alleviate the problem, participants display to each other various floor negotiating behaviors. These behaviors may take non-linguistic forms (e.g., gaze and hand gesture), para-linguistic forms (e.g. rhythm of talk and prosodic features) and linguistic forms. Two prevalent linguistic signs of floor initiation in the current data base are a mention of speaker referential term (often with a particle *wa* or *mo*) and a discourse marker *demo* 'but'. Among 143 unit-floors identified in the four dyads in the current data set, the distribution of floor initiation marked by either or both of these signals is presented in the following table.

Table 1
Linguistic marking of floor initiation

# of floors with speaker referential terms	# of floor with discourse marker <i>demo</i> 'but'	Total # of floors
54	27	143

Out of 143 floor initiations, 54 (37.8%) contain some kind of speaker reference terms and 27 (18.9%) contain *demo*. In the next segment from JEQ#4 four unit-floors are identified and one floor initiation contains *demo* 'but' (Floor 1) and three contain *boku wa* 'I-topic marker' or *boku no tokoro/heywa wa* 'my place/room-wa' (Floors 2,3,4).

⁶ This is an area where great cultural and subcultural misunderstanding may develop. See Tannen (1990, 1993) among others.

EXCERPT 3 (JEQ #4)

*Akira (male)**Takashi (male)*

FLOOR 1

[ee.

zenzen s< so< soko ma i< dewa nattenai to
omotta-n desu kedomo ne:*

[[odorokimashita dakara.

=<@ denki tsukete @>mitara.

o denki tte yuu no wa kaichuudentoo desu
kedo.... a **demo** sonna kanji desu ka ano:,
... taoreteru nante omowanakat .. [ta chuu.

a::[[::

FLOOR 2

boku wa mo<.

... sugu denki kiemashita yo [ne.

taoreru no ga.

... (.6) [[<x oto ga x>

[ee:

[[a wakarimashita.

oto ga shimashita?

< 24 LINES OMITTED >

[su< sugoi desu nee. @@

[<x x> sootoo yureta-n desu ne.
ppari nee.dakara tabun tatemono ga heekooshihenkee n
natteta-n ka [naa toka omou-n su kedo.
nn.

[de <x x>

yuremashita yo nee:*

FLOOR 3

(H) dakedo.

... (.5) **boku no heya wa** soo yuu huu ni koo:,
mono ga.

.. ippai taoreta-n desu kedomo.

yappa onaji:: apaatode.

...(.8) onaji::: sono kai no.

... sono: tokoro wa.

.. hotondo.

... nanimo taoretenakute:.

ano tatoeba.

.. koo yuu hondana no ni oitearu.

.. [anoo nanteiundeshoo.

[n::

<23 LINES OMITTED >

dakara.

(H) hoka no hito no heya miruto.

so higai ga sore hodo demo nai no ni.

nande <@ boku no heya dake @>.

... konna taoreta-n daroo tte omotta-n desu
kedo:*

a soo desu ka.

ee.

FLOOR 4

FLOOR 4

=boku no tokoro wa.

.. boku no heya wa.

s:o:: demo nakat::ta-n desu yo.

< FLOOR CONTINUES >

English translation of Excerpt 3

Akira (male)

Takashi (male)

FLOOR 1

[ee.

I didn't expect that the damage was that
extensive

So I was surprised,

<@ when I turned on the light. @>

uhm, I mean a flashlight.

... oh **but** that's about it? uhm

you didn't think (things) would fall [down?

a::

FLOOR 2

What I did was

... the light went out immediately, [right?.

(The sound of things) falling.

... (.6) [[<x The noise x>

[ee:

[[oh, (you could) hear?
you hear the nose?

< 24 LINES OMITTED >

so, probably the building got squashed,
[I thought.

[wh< what a story! @@

nn.

[and <x x>

[<x x> it shook very strongly.
Indeed.

It shook very hard.

FLOOR 3

(H) but,

... (.5) in **my room**, like I said,
things

came falling
 but in the same building
 ...(.8) on the same floor
 that location
 barely
 ... anything fell down.
 uhm for example,
 things on a bookshelves
 .. [how shall I explain

[n::

< 23 LINES OMITTED >

so
 (H) When I look at other rooms,
 the damage was not extensive.
 Why <@only in my room@>.
 did (things) fall down? I wondered.

Oh, is that right?

ee.

FLOOR 4

FLOOR 4

=My place,
 .. my room
 didn't receive much damage.

ee.

< FLOOR CONTINUES >

While personal reference terms and a discourse marker signal the floor initiation, other linguistic devices signal floor yielding. A question inviting the other to respond is the most obvious such device. One example is shown in the next excerpt.

EXCERPT 4 (JEQ #3)

*Sayuri (female)**Yasumi (female)*

FLOOR 1

atashi wa nec*
 uesuto rosanzerusu na-n desu ne.

[de bandii tte owakaridesu ka?

.. e[e.

aa hai hai hai hai

< 9 LINES OMITTED >

nn.
 soo na-n desu yo:*

jaa apaato mitaina.

.. aa::::

s<

FLOOR 2

... yasumi-san wa doo na-n [desu ka.

[ano paamusu.
paamusu [[no:*

[[nn nn

benisu no toori,

.. hai hai

< FLOOR CONTINUES >

English translation of Excerpt 4

Sayuri (female)

Yasumi (female)

FLOOR 1

I live in
West Los Angeles.

[and do you know where Bundy is?

.. e[e.

aa hai hai hai hai.

< 9 LINES OMITTED >

nn.
That's right.

Then, it's like an apartment?

s<

.. a: : : : :

FLOOR 2

... How about you, [Yasumi?

[[nn nn

[uhm Palms,
Palms [[and
Venice Boulevard.

.. hai hai.

< FLOOR CONTINUES >

Floor 1 is opened by Sayuri by her own floor claim turn with *watashi wa* 'I-topic marker'. At the beginning of Floor 2, Sayuri produces a floor yielding turn which asked Yasumi, *yasumi-san wa doo na-n desu ka* 'How about you, Yasumi?'

6. The 'loop' sequence

The loop sequence is another device for floor negotiation. It can either close or sustain a floor. As described at the outset of this paper, the loop sequence is a turn-taking pattern consisting of a consecutive backchannel and back-backchannel expressions, produced by different speakers. The first backchannel expression, which is directed to the preceding or concurrent utterance by the other speaker, is identified here as the 'loop-head' and the second one (back-backchannel) which is

directed to the ‘loop-head’ is identified as the ‘loop-tail’. Thus the identification of ‘loop-head’ is contingent on the discovery of a ‘loop-tail’. Let’s observe an example of loop sequence.

EXCERPT 5 (JEQ #5)

<i>Yasumi (female)</i>	<i>Sayuri (female)</i>	
Floor 1		
1 pa akaruku nattekuru to nee*		
3 nanka.	nn	2
4 ... katazu<@keyoo ka tte ki mo suru@> kara yappashi heya ni.	@@@@@@@@	5
6 <x x> kabin toka ne.	ha:::n?	7
8 (H) n:::		
	Floor 2	
	atashitachi nanka soo.	9
	ahutaashokku de:*	10
	(H) mata kuzureru kamo shirenai kara tte nanka.	11

<FLOOR CONTINUES>

English translation of Exerpt 5

<i>Yasumi (female)</i>	<i>Sayuri (female)</i>	
Floor 1		
1 When it became light,		
3 somehow	nn	2
4 ... I <@felt like cleaning@>, so indeed, in the room	@@@@@@@@	5
6 <x x> the vase and things like that.	ha:::n?	7
8 (H) n:::		
Floor 2	Floor 2	
	We	9
	Aftershocks	10
	(H) may damage (the building) again so...	11
	<FLOOR CONTINUES>	

In the first part of this segment, the floor holder, Yasumi, explains that she felt like cleaning the quake damage in the room when the dawn came. During the explanation, the floor supporter Sayuri once gives a backchannel (line 2). After Yasumi says *kabin toka ne* ‘like a vase, you see?’ (line 6) as an example of items she had to clean, Sayuri gives another backchannel *ha::n?* (line 7). The current floor holder, Yasumi, however, counters this backchannel with a back-backchannel *n::* in line 8, thereby turning *ha::n?* in line 7 into a reactive expression. Hayashi (1994) calls the type of utterance such as *n::* (*u::n* in his transcription) in line 8 above “the third-position *u::n*” and explains that: “(the third-position *u::n* and the like) occur after another participant’s minimal response to a prior talk”. He further claims that “the production of the third-position *u::n* is oriented to by participants as a display of its producer’s preparedness to shift from speakership to reciprocity”. In this view, *n::* in line 8 in the above excerpt indicates its producer’s intention to terminate the stretch of utterances, thereby indicating a floor transition relevance place. In other words, if Yasumi wants to maintain her floor, she can easily treat the non-lexical backchannel *ha::n?* (line 7) as a continuer, but instead she produced *n::* (line 8), thereby registering her intention to close her floor (see also Kita, 1996).

As seen above, the loop sequence creates a context in which participants negotiate floor structure, and in many cases actual floor holder change takes place. Among the 78 cases of loop sequence found in the data, 25 cases clearly show this pattern. ‘Prelude to floor change’ is another recognizable pattern in which the floor holder shift is not effected immediately after the loop, but the loop initiates a movement towards the shift. ‘Reconstruction’ is another observable pattern in which the first loop sequence shifts the speakership to the current floor supporter and the second loop which immediately follows returns the role of floor holder to the original floor holder, thereby maintaining the current floor structure. Finally, the loop may appear in an open floor. The distribution of these types of loop sequence is given in the next table and each type of loop sequence will be discussed in the subsequent sections in detail.

Table 2
Types of loop sequence

Floor transition	Prelude	Reconstruction	Open floor	Total
26 (33.3%)	14 (17.9%)	28 (35.9%)	10 (12.9%)	78 (100%)

6.1. Floor transition

We have already observed immediate floor transition after the loop in Excerpt 5. Here are two more such examples. In Excerpt 6 below, the loop sequence appears twice. Each time it appears right before a floor holder change.

In the first floor (lines 1–16), Yasumi is a floor holder who is explaining that she was surprised by her neighbors’ initial reaction to the earthquake: they moved their cars out of the garage and were getting ready to evacuate in them. She did not feel

EXCERPT 6 (JEQ#3)

<i>Yasumi (female)</i>	<i>Sayuri (female)</i>	
FLOOR 1		
1 ... koo yuu toki ni nani suru ka .. tte		
2 ittara.		
3 mazu kuruma o zenbu dooro ni		
dasu tte yuu no [ni odoroi.	[soo soo soo soo soo.	4
< SEVERAL LINES OMITTEED >		
5 (H) kanzen ni anzen na basho tte		
6 yuu no wa.		
7 dooro ni.		
8 ...() aru wake da kara:*		
	nn nn.	9
10 ... nn ssoo yuu koto de nigeru		
11 hitsuyoo wa nai tte yuu huu ni.		
	nn.	
13 ... omotta kara.		
14 ...() soo.		
	... naruhodo nee.	15
16 nn.		
	FLOOR 2	
	nanka saa.	17
	atashitachi wa nee.	18
	... so uchi no .. k< apaato mo	19
	kekkoo hurui-n desu ne.	20
	=chiku nannen ka wakannai-n desu	21
	kedo:*	22
< SEVERAL LINES OMITTED>		
	samukatta janai desu ka.	23
24 (H) iya samukatta samukatta.		
	soo soide nanka kuru<@ma n naka	
	<x ni ite x> <x x> @> @@	
27 a: n:::		
	n:::	28
FLOOR 3		
29 ...() iya da< ahutaashokku<		
30 ... sugu dakara rajio: o ne?		
31 kaarajio o minna ga.		
< FLOOR CONTINUES >		

English translation of Excerpt 6

<i>Yasumi (female)</i>	<i>Sayuri (female)</i>	
FLOOR 1		
1 ... Do you know what they do in a		
2 situation like this?		
3 They took out their cars to the		
street. I was [surprised.	[soo soo soo soo soo.	4
< SEVERAL LINES OMITTED >		
5 (H)The safest place		
6 is		
7 the street.		
8 ... () That's where it's safe.	nn nn.	9
10 ... nn so I thought there's no need to		
11 escape.	nn.	12
13 That's what I thought.		
14 ... () so.	... I see what you're saying.	15
16 nn.		
	FLOOR 2	
	Well,	17
	in our case,	18
	... our house .. r< apartment	19
	is rather old	20
	=I don't know how long since it	21
	was build.	22
< SEVERAL LINES OMITTED >		
	It was cold, right?	23
24 (H) Yes, it was cold.		
	So we <@ inside a car <x (we're	25
	were) staying x> <x x> @> @@	26
27 a: n:::	n:::	
29 FLOOR 3		
30		
31 ... () uhm so aftershocks<		
... so we turned on the radio.		
everyone (was listening) car radios		
< FLOOR CONTINUES >		

that was necessary since the safest place is the street in front of her apartment building. Notice that the sequence of the loop head *naruhodo nee* 'oh I see' (line 15) and the loop tail *nn* (line 16) succinctly transfers the floor holder. In the second floor (lines 17–28), Sayuri is a floor holder and explains that she moved out of the building and stayed in the car because it was cold outside. Yasumi's backchannel in line 27 was responded by Sayuri's loop tail which completes this round of loop sequence, thereby transferring floor to Yasumi again.

6.2. Prelude to floor transition

Some loop sequences are not immediately followed by floor holder shift, but initiate an exchange of turns as if it is a prelude to such a shift. In the excerpt below the loop-head is Akira's *ha::* (line 11) and the loop-tail is Takashi's *ee* (line 12).

Excerpt 7 (JEQ #4)

<u>Akira (male)</u>	<u>Takashi (male)</u>
	Floor 1
	<SEVERAL LINES PRECEDE>
	ima mo .. tashika ni sono. 1
	hibi:< 2
	hokano apaato ni kurabete. 3
4 ... hibi ga sugoi desu ka.	
6 [ha:.	[aru kara. 6
	a uchi no apaato tte chotto. 7
8 ... nanka chotto ko<@wai@>@@	
	@@@koozoojoo mondai ga atta no 9
	kana to omotte. 10
11 ha::	
	... ee. 12
13 <x soo x>	
14 .. sore wa chotto kowai desu nee.	
15 .. denwa toka wa.	
16 nani?	
17 .. daijoobu deshita ?	
	ee. 18
	denwa ... wa, 19
	ichinchi:: gurai. 20
	...(7) dame dat ... [ta dakede. 21
22 [a zenzen.	
23 ... zenzen tsunagarimasen.	
	<=ee. 24
Floor 2	
25 e boku-n toko wa.	
26 mochiron chokugo ni wa	

27 tsunagannakatta-n desu kedo:*

<FLOOR CONTINUES>

English translation of Excerpt 7

<u>Akira (male)</u>	<u>Takashi (male)</u>
	Floor 1
	<SEVERAL LINES PRECEDE>
	Now we have certainly 1
	more cracks 2
	compared to other apartment 3
	buildings.
4 ... you have many cracks.	
	6
6 [ha:.	[we have many. 7
	so (I thought) our building
8 ... That's a little <@ scary @>@@	
	@@@ had structural problems, 10
	I wondered.
11 ha:.	
	... ee.
13 <x so x>	
14 .. That's scary.	
15 .. How about phones?	
16 umm	
17 .. Did it work?	18
	ee. 19
	The phone ... 20
	for one day 21
	didn't work [that's all.]
22 [at all.]	
23 It didn't work at all.	
	ee.
Floor 2	
25 uhm at my place	
26 of course it didn't work right after	
27 the quake but	
<FLOOR CONTINUES>	

This segment is an ending phase of a single person floor developed by the floor holder, Takashi, who has been explaining the extent of damage at his apartment building. From lines 1 through 7, he explained that his building has more cracks compared to others in the neighborhood. In lines 4 and 8 Akira offers substantive backchannels and in line 6 a non-lexical backchannel. In lines 9/10 Takashi ponders whether the building had structural problems prior to the earthquake. To this statement, Akira gives a backchannel expression *ha:.* (the 'loop-head'). To this

backchannel expression, Takashi responds with *ee* (the ‘loop-tail’), thereby turning Akira’s previous backchannel *ha::* into a reactive expression rather than a continuer. Now the pressure to continue the conversation is on Akira, who repeats (or ‘recycles’) his earlier utterance (line 14) and proposes a new topic, i.e., the condition of the telephone (lines 15–17). Takashi’s response to this new topic is minimal (lines 18–21) and despite Akira’s renewed attempt in lines 22 and 23 to encourage Takashi to continue his floor, Takashi responds with a backchannel (line 24) and finally the floor transfers to Akira at line 25. Notice that this last exchange from 22 through 24 constitutes another loop sequence, since Akira’s utterances in lines 22/23 are a rephrasing of Takashi’s utterance in line 21 and therefore constitute a substantive backchannel.

For Takashi the current floor is terminated at his utterances 9 and 10 and the loop-tail is a way of signaling this new state of floor structure to Akira. Despite Akira’s effort to restore the structure of the floor (see next section), in which he is a supporter and Takashi the floor holder, this floor does not further develop. Maynard (1989: 157–158) notes that “at the point where a current theme of conversation comes to a close and participants have not yet identified the next theme” prolonged halting occurs, and during such a halting period, fillers, uninterpretable noises, laughter tokens, and metacomments are found. The loop sequence is also found in this environment and gives time for participants to negotiate both the topic and the person who will develop the topic in the floor.

6.3. Floor reconstruction

There are times when a loop sequence seems to move the floor to a close despite the participants’ intentions. In this situation, the second round of loop sequence appears to restore the proper floor structure and allows the current floor holder to continue to develop the floor. This situation happens frequently when a backchannel expression takes the form of a phrase or substantive utterance. Observe Excerpt 8 below.

Excerpt 8 (JEQ #1)

<i>Akai (female)</i>		<i>Tanaka (male)</i>	
1 demo ano: ryoo ga anmari higai ga nakatta			
2 to yuu-no wa sugoi desu [ne:*			
		[n:::	3
4 = mukashi no ta[[temono to [yuu-no wa		[[(((sniff))	4
5 yoku kangaete tsukutte aru-no ka ne:*			
6 (HH) are wa (HH) ... anmari ano: hoshoo			
7 no nai tatemono na-n desu tte ne:*			
8 =atode kiitara.			
		a soo na-n desu ka:.	9
10 n::.			
		n:::.	11
12 .. de hokano ryoo wa nanka (HHH) ano:			

13 *yuushiieruei kijun ga aru rashii desu*
 14 *yo.*

English translation of Ecerpt 8

Akai (female)

Tanaka (male)

1 but that the dorm didn't get much damage
 2 is something great [isn't it?]

[°n:::°.

3

4 = old bui[[lding]]

[is well [[((sniff))]] [n:::.

4

5 designed, I wonder.

6 HH That one HH ... doesn't have much

7 guarantee.

8 =I head that later.

Is that right?

9

10 *n::.*

n:::.

11

12 .. and other dorms

13 follow the UCLA standards,

14 it seems, you see?

The floor holder, Akai, is saying, "It was great that the dormitory building didn't have much damage" (lines 1/2), and is pondering if "older buildings are well designed" (lines 4/5), and telling Tanaka, "(the dorm) didn't have any guarantees (against earthquakes)" (lines 6–8). To this stretch of talk, Tanaka responds with a phrasal backchannel *a soo na-n desu ka:*. 'oh, is that right?' As discussed earlier, a phrasal backchannel like this one often solicits a response as a first pair-part, and indeed Akai responds with *n::* in line 10. This backchannel assigns the slot of speakerhood for Tanaka, and Tanaka could have taken this opportunity to start a new floor, but he opts not to take it and instead returns the floor to Akai. Notice that the loop is cyclically applied. That is, in the first cycle, Akai responds to Tanaka's phrasal backchannel, i.e., the loop-head (line 9), with a non-lexical backchannel, the loop-tail (line 10). And to this backchannel which is now treated as the loop-head, Tanaka produces the loop-tail *n:::* (line 11). The loop sequence appearing in this type of situation clearly shows mutual floor negotiation by the two participants.

The excerpt on the next page contains a substantive backchannel. In this segment, Takashi is the floor holder in his single person floor. In lines 1 through 14, he explains that due to gas and water leaks in his apartment building he could not live normally for one week after the quake. Akira sends his backchannel in line 8 which is reacted to by Takashi's 'back-back channel' (line 9). Notice this sequence could have developed into a loop sequences, but Takashi instead follows up with his own utterance.⁷ This shows clearly that treatment of backchannel is determined each time by the participants, and it is up to them whether or not they develop a loop sequence.

⁷ Though there is a pause between *ee* (line 9) and *chitto koo* 'a little' (line 10), it is a normal length pause between two intonation units as indicated by three dots (approximately 0.3 seconds). I thus interpreted that Takashi continues to talk without a break. If the pause were more significant in length, Takashi would be responding to a 'null-loop-head' as discussed immediately below.

Excerpt 9 (JEQ #4)

<u>Akira (male)</u>	<u>Takashi (male)</u>
	... boku mo honto 1
	tokuni 2
	... uchi no apaato. 3
	gasu ga. 4
5 ee.	
	... morete. 6
	suidoo morete. 7
8 aa hontoni.	
	ee. 9
	... chitto koo. 10
	i< 11
12 [ee.	... jishin kara isshuukan gurai [koo:. 12
13 [[a::.	.. seekatsu dekiru:: .. [[jootai 13
14	janakatta-n desu yo. 14
15 tsu< tsuujoo no are ga okurenai::	
16 ... jookyoo datta.. -n desu ne.	
	ee. 17
18 n::.	
	are de nanka seekatsu no peesu o 19
	midasasrete. 20
21 a:::.	
	... de mo[o nanka. 22
23 [soo yuu no ookii desu yo [[ne.	
	[[ee. 24
	torimodosu no ni::, 25
26 [<xx>	... [n dondon tamacchaimasu yo 26
27 [[ee	[[ne. 27
	shukudai nante. 28
29 tashikani.	
	... ee. 30
	are de moo. 31
	...(9) n nanka koo. 32
	torimodosenakute. 33

English translation of Excerpt 9

<u>Akira (male)</u>	<u>Takashi (male)</u>
	I really 1
	especially 2
	... at our apartment building 3
	gas 4
5 ee.	
	... leaked and 6
	water leaked and 7
8 oh really.	
	ee 9
	... a little 10
	one< 11
12 [ee	... one week after the quake, [like, 12

13	[[a:::	we couldn't .. [lead a normal life,	13
14		you see.	14
15	you couldn't lead a normal life		15
16	...that was the situation, right?		16
		ee.	17
18	n::.	That disturbed the routine of my	19
		life.	20
21	a::.	...so[o somehow	22
23	[That really affects [[you.		
	ee	[[ee.	24
26	[<xx>	In order to get back ...	25
27	[[ee	... [uhm It accumulates,	26
		[[right?	27
		homework and so forth.	28
29	Indeed.	... ee.	30
		so	31
		...(9) n somehow like	32
		I couldn't get back.	33

To continue to examine Excerpt 6, to the last statement made in lines 12–14, Akira makes a substantive backchannel by summarizing what Takashi has just explained (lines 15/16). To this backchannel, Takashi responds with a back-back channel, *ee*. Now the floor is open for Akira to develop, but he produces a loop-tail to return the floor to talk to the current floor holder. After the loop sequence here, Takashi continues to develop the floor.

The loop sequence can be constructed with null loop-head/loop-tail as well. In Excerpt 10 the non-floor holder does not take up the invitation to claim the floor created by the loop-tail. When Akai's loop-head (line 4) is responded to with Tanaka's loop-tail in line 5, Akai does not respond, thereby producing a noticeable lapse of 1.2 seconds (line 6). Lapse in this environment may be heard as Akai's intention to pass the turn, i.e., as a null-loop-tail. Tanaka pushes Akai one more time by producing another non-lexical backchannel, which meets with another non-response (a 0.7 second lapse as a null-loop-tail) from Akai. Tanaka finally resumes his talk. Even though there was no actual floor holder shift in these cases, the loop sequence's force of moving the conversation towards that direction is obvious. In other words participants show their sensitivity towards their interaction with the loop sequence.

6.4. The loop sequence in the open floor

The loop sequence examined in the previous three sections appear in a single person floor where one floor holder is identifiable. The loop sequence to be examined in this section appears in the open floor, which is constructed by both participants collaboratively. While the topic in a single person floor is generally accessible only to the floor holder, the topic in an open floor is shared or sharable among the par-

Excerpt 10 (JEQ #1)

<i>Akai (female)</i>	<i>Tanaka (male)</i>
1 dare ni kaku-n desu ka?	
2	daigaku-n toki no tomodachi ga ooi desu
3	yo.
4 a:::.....	
5	nn.
6 ... (1.2)	
7	n:::..
8 ... (0.7)	
9	daigaku-n toki no tomodachi: .. n:::.. ga:
10	hotondo de kookoo no toki no
11 [n:::..	tomodachi ga ikunin ka de roonin [toki
12	no tomodachi ga ikunin ka,
13 n:::..	
14	tsk sono kurai desu yo ne:*

English translation of Excerpt 10

<i>Akai (female)</i>	<i>Tanaka (male)</i>
1 Who do you write to?	
2	Mainly to the old friends from college.
3	
4 a:::.....	
5	nn.
6 ... (1.2)	
7	n:::..
8 ... (0.7)	
9	Friends from college .. n:::.. are
10	the majority and the friends from high
11 [n:::..	school are
12	several and the friends from the [time of
13 n:::..	prep school are a few.
14	
	tsk that's about it.

ticipants. Such topics in our earthquake conversation data include: a general description of Americans' emotional reaction to the earthquake, people's general attitude towards disasters, a description of the dorm both participants are familiar with, dorm residents' reactions reported in the student newspaper, earthquake damage to the area known to both participants, earthquake prone areas in Japan, time of the earthquake (early morning), news of the quake reported in Japan, social and natural problems in Los Angeles, emotional aftermath of the quake, people in the hard hit areas, damage to buildings on campus, and so forth. Some loops appearing in the open floor are used to negotiate floor structure as has been observed, but some others are used to co-develop a topic. Observe the next excerpt, in which two loops are found.

EXCERPT 11 (JEQ 2)

*Asada (female)**Hashimoto (male)*

Floor 1 (open floor)		Floor 1 (open floor)	
2	[anmari:,	.. hokkaidoo nante no mo nee*	1
		... [kekkoo.	2
		anmari<	3
		... izu ga: o< .. su<	4
		kuru-n janai ka na: to omotta kedo.	5
		hokkaidoo ni ookina no ga	6
		kiteshimatte nee*	7
8	soo desu nee.	nn	9
10	= demo.		
11	(H) ano. hokkaidoo no.		
12	.. chuushinbu toka ni wa anmari nai		
13	deshoo?		
14	.. kitto.		
16	<= [kiita koto [[nai desu yo nee: ?	...(0.4) anmari kiita koto nai nee*	15
17	ano kushiro toka. aa yuu:,	[nn [[nn	16
		<= ee ee.	18

< SEVERAL LINES OMITTED

19	(H) oosaka wa amari jishin nai tokcro	
20	desu yo nee?	
21	[[kihontekini.	[[nn.

Floor 2			
22	(H) de atashi wa:		
23	...(0.5) aru-n desu kedo:*		
24	.. anoo.		
25	.. nanteiundaroo.		

<FLOOR CONTINUES>

English translation of Excerpt 11

*Asada (female)**Hashimoto (male)*

Floor 1 (open floor)		Floor 1 (open floor)	
2	[not really,	.. Hokkaido	1
		... [often	2
		not really<	3
		... Izu uhm< .. uhm<	4
		would be hit, I thought, but	5

	Hokkaido was	6
	hit unexpectedly	7
8 That's right.		
	nn	9
10 = but,		
11 (H) uhm Hokkaido's		
12 ... central region is not hit often,		
13 right?		
14 ... probably.		
	...() I haven't head that.	15
16 <= [Never heard, [[right?	[nn [[nn	16
17 For example, Kushiro and		
	<= ee ee.	18

< SEVERAL LINES OMITTED >

19 (H) Osaka is not an earthquake prone	
20 area, right?	
21 [[in general.	[[nn.
Floor 2	
22 (H) and I	
23 ...(0.5) have an experience	
24 ... uhm	
25 ... how shall I explain?	

<FLOOR CONTINUES>

In the first floor of the above excerpt, the participants talk about earthquake prone areas in Japan. Hashimoto begins this open floor by mentioning Hokkaido as the place of the recent earthquake in Japan. The first loop sequence (lines 8–9) shifts the speakerhood to Asada. This is a familiar type of exchange except that strictly speaking this speakerhood change is not a floor holder shift because the both participants in an open floor are floor holder and supporter simultaneously. Of special interest is the second loop sequence in the excerpt (lines 15–18). This sequence consists of two loop cycles. The first loop-head is a substantive backchannel (line 15) and its substantive backchannel loop-tail recycles the loop-head (line 16 by Asada). This loop-tail is treated as the loop-head for the second round by Hashimoto's second *nn* in line 16. All these activities happen very rapidly as indicated by overlaps, creating a lively impression of the interaction as if the two participants are becoming one floor creator psychologically as well as temporally. This type of loop sequence encourages the other to contribute to the topic under joint development. Although the impressions received from this type of loop sequence in an open floor and the other more canonical ones are different, the motivation is the same, namely, to encourage the other to contribute to the floor.

7. Discussion

The loop sequence, an exchange of backchannel and back-backchannel, exploits the local turn-taking system which allocates the next speaker in conversation. Treating this phenomenon simply as a local turn-taking management system, however, does not answer the question of why there are so many loops employed in Japanese conversation (78 instances found in the current data). To approach this question, we must broaden our perspective from the local level of turn-taking to the level of floor. As seen in the previous sections, within the organization of floor the loop is used primarily to allocate, not simply the next turn holder, but the appropriate person who should hold the floor. More importantly, we should note the significance of the loop sequence as a device which provides an opportunity for participants to negotiate the floor structure, rather than that which deals with the actual floor holder shift itself. This type of floor negotiation is, of course, not an exclusive phenomenon of Japanese conversation, as the phenomenon of ‘terminal exchanges’ in English conversation (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) seems to address similar interactional needs.⁸ The frequency with which the loop sequence appears in Japanese conversation, however, demonstrates its particular significance for its participants. This assessment is supported by the fact that occurrences of loop sequence are very infrequent in comparable Thai and American English data. In the Northridge Earthquake Conversation

⁸ The next is an example of ‘terminal exchanges’ cited in Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 318).

After B offers a summary of the previous talk (‘topic-bounding technique’, 1973: 306) in lines 1 through 3, C sends a series of backchannel expressions (‘Hmh’ and ‘Ehyeah’), to which B in turn responds with his ‘Yeah’ in line 6. A place is offered for C to propose a new topic to develop. Instead of proposing a topic, C produces another backchannel ‘Yeah’, which allows B to continue. At this point B produces a closing remark (‘Alright. Well I’ll give you a call before we decide to come down. O.K.’), which is followed by exchanges of short turns to lead to the final ending. In the terminal exchanges participants are checking each other to determine whether the conversation should be pursued or dropped.

Excerpt A

<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>
1 Well that’s why I said ”I’m not gonna say	
2 anything, I’m not making any comments //	
3 about anybody”	
4	Hmh
5	Ehyeah
6 Yeah	
7	Yeah
8 Alright. Well I’ll give you a call before we	
9 decide to come down. O.K.?	
10	O.K.
11 Alrighty	
12	O.K.
13 We’ll see you then	
14	O.K.
15 Bye bye	
16	Bye

Project Data there were only ten instances found in the four English conversations and only two instances in the four Thai conversations, compared to 78 loop sequences found in the four Japanese earthquake conversations.⁹

I propose that the frequent use of the loop sequence is a consequence of the Japanese conversationalist's preference towards 'mutual dependency', a concept held to be important in Japanese interaction. Terms such as *omoiyari* 'empathy', *amae* 'dependency', *enryo* 'self restraint', and *wa* 'harmony' which are often used to describe characteristic Japanese behaviors (inter alia Nakane, 1970; Doi, 1971; Lebra, 1976; Reischauer, 1977; Matsumoto, 1988; Wierzbicka, 1991) all point to the value for 'mutual dependency', which contrasts sharply with the value for 'independence' and 'individualism' found in some other cultures. Thus when two or more people meet in the Japanese context, they try to psychologically depend on each other by understanding the other's feeling (*omoiyari*), restricting one's actions to avoid encroaching on others (*enryo*), relying on the other's reciprocal kindness (*amae*), and keeping a harmonious atmosphere as a group (*wa*).

In actual conversation, the working of mutual dependency can be observed in different dimensions. First, since conflict must be avoided to preserve mutual dependency, participants in Japanese discussion sessions, for example, often pre-arrange the order of talk to avoid possible conflicts in interaction before they set out to discuss the items on the agenda (Watanabe, 1993); they also use a long pause to avoid premature topic closure before moving on to a new item for discussion in business meetings (Yamada, 1992: 81–83). Second, to sustain mutual dependency, 'empathy' must be valued. Lebra (1976) notes "(empathy) is manifested in the conventional form of communication where Ego tries not to assert himself unless Alter is found to agree with him". As specific cues to contextualize this concern, she mentions conversationalists' behaviors such as leaving out the predicate from a sentence, soliciting agreement from a listener with a pragmatic particle *ne*, and signaling with backchannels to indicate one's attention to the communication process (see also Hinds, 1978: 107–116; Maynard, 1989: 219–220).

An important thing to note here is that mutual dependency is a cultural specific norm which escapes the universal politeness principle of Brown and Levinson (1987). Matsumoto (1988: 410) explains that mutual dependency is established and preserved by behaviors of "acknowledgment of interdependence". As Matsumoto (1988) demonstrates, acknowledgment of interdependence is epitomized in a greeting expression of the initial encounter, *doozo yoroshiku onegaishimasu* 'I ask you please treat me well'. Taken superficially, this expression is a direct request, and thus an imposition on the addressee because it violates negative politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The reason why this expression is not considered to be a face threatening, non-polite expression is because the members of the Japanese culture understand that acknowledging one's position vis-à-vis his interlocutor is a culturally encouraged pattern of behavior. The above greeting expression, on the one hand,

⁹ The bases (data) of frequency comparison is rarely comparable. The Northridge Earthquake Conversation Project Data has remedied this difficulty since all the data were collected uniformly (cf. Schegloff, 1993).

reveals the utterer's helpless and submissive position, and on the other, it acknowledges his addressee's powerful, higher, or privileged position that could render a help and protection. Being regarded by others as having such a celebrated position is a positive experience, not an imposition.

The loop sequence which transfers speakerhood creates exactly the same effect as the greeting expression in question. The producer of the loop-tail reveals his helpless and submissive position ("I cannot contribute to the floor now. Help me out".) and at the same time his trust in, or dependency (or *amae*) on, the other who he believes can provide a help. In other words, a loop-tail has the same functional significance as the greeting of *doozo yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. The recipient of the loop-tail may either take up his responsibility and become the floor holder, or he may show his own helpless stance and counters the other's loop-tail with his own loop-tail. That is, taking a floor in conversation is sometimes more of an obligation that a more powerful party must fulfill at a given moment in interaction rather than a right that he is entitled to ("we share the floor and the interaction, and we also share the burden of having to talk" (Yamada, 1992: 83)). Similarly when a loop sequence appears in an involved open floor, the producer of the loop-tail may show his strong dependency (*amae*) on his interlocutor, trusting that the interlocutor will exhibit alignment with his stance, thereby creating psychological unity and 'common ground' (see Strauss and Kawanishi, 1996, for this notion; see also Akatsuka to appear). This explanation will also clarify why there were much fewer loop-sequences in Thai and American English earthquake data. In the Thai and American cultures, a norm of independence and individualism figure more prominently than mutual dependency (Horie and Iwasaki, 1995).

The loop employed to reconstruct the floor structure has a slightly different motivation, but still shows the loop-tail producer's weaker position and his request for assistance. This type of loop appears when the violation to the current floor structure and a threat to mutual dependency are noticed by the offender. Causing a threat to the mutual dependency puts him in a weaker position in Japanese cultural setting so the offender immediately remedies this problem. In order to regain the equilibrium of mutual dependency he appeals to the other to continue his floor ("Please forgive my intrusion and continue"). In summary, all types of loop sequence exhibit loop-tail producer's concern towards mutual dependency by acknowledging his weaker (lower) position and his interlocutor's stronger (higher) position.

Let us pose a question at this point regarding the relationship between the two notions of floor, namely the 'conceptual floor' and 'unit-floor', as explained in Section 3. In the preceding discussion, the loop sequence has been examined as an interactional behavior within a unit-floor which contextualizes a culturally significant principle of mutual dependency. This means that the unit-floor is sensitive to cultural norms, and as such it is closely related to the conceptual floor. When entering into an interaction, participants immediately evoke a culturally specific conceptual floor so that they can construct unit-floors which regulate appropriate behavior and transmit or receive information effectively. The conceptual floor is thus similar to the 'frame' as a concept which provides participants with the ground for action and interpretation (see Tannen, 1993), especially at the initial phase of interaction. How-

ever, the conceptual floor is self-renewing as Hayashi (1996: 34) notes: “(conceptual floor is) self-productive and self-operative, dynamically building up new structures while providing new situational knowledge”.

In sum, throughout their interaction Japanese participants continually form and reform the conceptual floor which guides their behavior toward each other. In particular, the conceptual floor encourages Japanese interactants to employ loop sequences which contextualize, and signal to each other their understanding of, the culturally important notion of mutual dependency.

8. Conclusion

I have examined the loop sequence, a behavioral pattern often exhibited by Japanese conversational participants, in a framework of functional analysis of conversation which examines a conversational activity as a meaningful communication process. Thus the loop sequence whose structural property can be explained by Sacks et al.'s (1974) model of local turn-taking rules was investigated for its functional aspect in the conversational floor. The current research has clarified that the ‘conceptual floor’, a culturally defined abstract construct, leads interactants to proper behavior and facilitates information exchanges within a ‘unit-floor’. In particular, the cultural notion of mutual dependency leads Japanese conversationalists to an interactional behavior of the loop sequence in negotiation of the next appropriate floor holder. The loop-tail simultaneously encodes its producer's powerless position (either because he has nothing to say or he blindly trusts his interlocutor to agree with him or because he has just violated the code of mutual dependency) and his interlocutor's assured ability to rescue the situation.

“(S)peaking ... shows cultural patterning” (Hymes, 1974: 446) and both the content and the pattern found in various speech activities are constrained culturally (Gumperz, 1982: 166) because conversation is a fundamental socio-cultural activity in which people engage throughout their daily lives. Our survey of loop sequences has provided evidence that Japanese speakers constantly breathe life into an abstract notion such as mutual dependency in real conversational activity. It is through this and other similar activities that the notion of mutual dependency will continue to be regarded as an important concept affecting the ethos of Japanese communication and culture.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

The transcript is presented in a two-column format (see Ochs, 1979). English translations provided should be taken as a ‘rough’ semantic approximation of corresponding intonation unit in Japanese. It should be noted especially that overlapping materials shown in English translation do not always reflect exact morphemes in overlap in the Japanese original due to structural dissimilarities between the two languages. Non-lexical backchannel expressions (e.g., *nn*, *ee*, *hai*) are not ‘translated’ into English. Punctuation symbols in English translation are used for syntactic information not for prosodic information (see 2 below.)

1. Intonation Unit: Each line corresponds to one intonation unit (see Du Bois et al., 1992, 1993; Iwasaki, 1993). When one intonation unit is too long for one line, it is broken into separate lines with the second line indented.

2. Tail pitch movements: Each intonation unit is concluded by one of several pitch movements (see Nagahara and Iwasaki, 1995).

Three major movements:

Period (.) = a natural falling intonation contour

Question mark (?) = a rising contour with various degrees of rising

Asterisk (*) = a rise-fall contour

Two minor movements:

Comma (,) = continuing contour

A greater than sign (<) = sudden cut off with a glottal stop

3. Pause length: Three different lengths are identified.

.. short break in timing

... a short pause (about 0.3–0.4 seconds)

... () a longer pause (longer than 0.5 seconds); the actual length of a pause is indicated when it is significant (e.g., ... (0.7))

4. Overlap: The beginning of an overlap is indicated by a square bracket ([). Overlapping and overlapped materials are found on the same, or adjacent, line across two columns. Where there are several overlaps in a short span of time, a double square bracket ([[] is also employed to avoid confusion.

5. Vowel lengthening is indicated by colons (:).

6. Other symbols used in the transcripts are as follows:

= latching to the previous utterance by the same speaker

<= latching to the previous utterance by a different speaker

@ laughter token

(H) inhalation

(.H) exhalation

<x words x> uncertain hearing

((explanation)) transcriber's comment

tsk a click of the tongue

References

- Akatsuka, Noriko, to appear. Towards a theory of desirability in conditional reasoning. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*, Vol. 7. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Akatsuka, Noriko, 1997. On the co-construction of counterfactual reasoning. *Journal of Pragmatics* (this issue).
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson, 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clancy, Patricia, Sandra A. Thompson, Ryoko Suzuki and Hongyin Tao, 1996. The conversational use of reactive tokens in English, Japanese and Mandarin. *Journal of Pragmatics* 26: 355–387.
- Clark, Herbert H., 1996. Communities, commonalities, and communication. In: J.J. Gumperz and C.S. Levinson, eds., *Rethinking linguistic relativity*, 324–355. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Doi, Takeo, 1971. *Amae no koozoo* [The structure of amae]. Tokyo: Kobundo.
- Du Bois, John, Susanna Cumming, Stephan Schuetze-Coburn and Danae Paolino, 1992. *Discourse transcription*. Santa Barbara, CA: UC Santa Barbara.
- Du Bois, John J., Stephan Schuetze-Coburn, Susanna Cumming and Danae Paolino, 1993. In: J. Edwards and M. Lampert, eds., *Outline of discourse transcription. Talking data: Transcription and coding in discourse research*, 45–89. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Edelsky, Carole, 1993. Who's got the floor? In: D. Tannen, ed., *Gender and conversational interaction*, 189–227. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Erickson, Frederick, 1982. Money tree, lasagna bush, salt and pepper: Social construction of topical cohesion in a conversation among Italian Americans. In: D. Tannen, ed., *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk*, 43–70. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Ford, Cecilia E. and Sandra A. Thompson, 1996. Interactional units in conversation: Syntactic, intonational, and pragmatic resources for the management of turns. In: E. Ochs, E. Schegloff and S. Thompson, eds., *Interaction and grammar*, 134–184. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gumperz, John J., 1982. *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hayashi, Makoto, 1994. Toward a proper characterization of the minimal vocalization *U::n* and the like in Japanese conversation. Unpublished ms., University of Colorado, Boulder.
- Hayashi, Makoto and Junko Mori, to appear. Co-construction in Japanese revisited: We *do* 'finish each other's sentences'. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*, Vol. 7. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Hayashi, Reiko, 1996. Cognition, empathy, and interaction: Floor management of English and Japanese conversation. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Hinds, John, 1978. Conversational structure: An investigation based on Japanese interview discourse. In: J. Hinds and I. Howard, eds., *Problems in Japanese syntax and semantics*, 79–121. Tokyo: Kaitakusha.
- Horie, Preeya Ingkaphirom and Shoichi Iwasaki, 1995. Nittai no gengo-higengo koodoo ni mirareru tai-jin ishiki koozoo no sooi ni tuite: naze Tai-jin wa 'doozo yoroshiku' to iwanai no ka ['Why don't Thais say 'doozo yoroshiku'?]: A comparison of Thai and Japanese psychological attitudes towards human relationships as seen in verbal and nonverbal behavior.] *Nihongo Kyooiku Gakkai Spring Meeting* (May 28, 1995), Gakushuuin University.
- Hymes, Dell, 1974. Ways of speaking. In: R. Bauman and J. Sherzer, eds., *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*, 433–451. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Iwasaki, Shoichi, 1990. Cohesive force in Japanese conversation. Presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of Association of Asian Studies.
- Iwasaki, Shoichi, 1993. The structure of intonation unit in Japanese. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*, Vol. 3: 39–53. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Iwasaki, Shoichi and Preeya Ingkaphirom Horie, 1996. The 'Northridge earthquake' conversations: Floor management and turn-taking behaviors in Thai and Japanese. 5th IPra Conference, Mexico City, July 4–9, 1996.
- Jacoby, Sally and Elinor Ochs, eds., 1995. Co-construction, Special Issue, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kita, Sotaro, 1996. Aizuchi to unazuki kara mita nihonjin no taimen komyunikeeshon. *Nihongo-gaku* 15: 58–66.
- Lebra, Takie S., 1976. *Japanese patterns of behavior*. Honolulu, HI: The University Press of Hawaii.
- Lerner, Gene H., 1991. On the syntax of sentence-in-progress. *Language in Society* 20: 441–458.
- Matsumoto, Yoshiko, 1988. Reexamination of the universality of face: Politeness phenomena in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 12: 403–426.
- Maynard, Senko K., 1989. *Japanese conversation*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Mizutani, Nobuko, 1983. Aizuchi to ootoo. In: O. Mizutani, *Hanashikotoba no hyoogen*, 37–44. Tokyo: Chikuma Shoboo.
- Nagahara, Hiroyuki and Shoichi Iwasaki, 1995. Tail pitch movement and the intermediate phrase in Japanese. Unpublished ms., UCLA, Los Angeles.
- Nakane, Chie, 1970. *Japanese society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Nakano, Yoshiko, 1995. Frame analysis of a Japanese – American contract negotiation. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University.
- Ochs, Elinor, 1979. Transcription as theory. In: E. Ochs and B.B. Schiefflin, *Developmental pragmatics*, 43–72. New York: Academic Press.
- Ono, Tsuyoshi and Eri Yoshida, 1996. A study of co-construction in Japanese: We don't finish each other's sentences. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*, Vol. 5: 115–130. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Reischauer, Edwin O., 1977. *The Japanese*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

- Sacks, Harvey, 1974. An analysis of the course of a joke's telling in conversation. In: R. Bauman and J. Sherzer, eds., *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*, 337–353. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gale Jefferson, 1974. A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation. *Language* 50: 696–735.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1980. Preliminaries to preliminaries: 'Can I ask you a question?'. *Sociological Inquiry* 50(3/4): 104–152.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1982. Discourse as an interactional achievement: Some uses of 'uh huh' and other things that come between sentences. In: D. Tannen, ed., *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk*, 71–93. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1993. Reflections on quantification in the study of conversation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 26(1): 99–128.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. and Harvey Sacks, 1973. Opening up closing. *Semiotica* 8(4): 289–327.
- Strauss, Susan and Yumiko Kawanishi, 1996. Assessment strategies in Japanese, Korean, and American English. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*, Vol. 5: 149–165. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Szatrowski, Polly, 1993. *Nihongo no danwa no koozoo bunseki: Kanyuu no sutoratejii no koosatsu* [An analysis of Japanese discourse organization: An investigation of invitation strategies]. Tokyo: Kuroshioshuppan.
- Tannen, Deborah, 1990. *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tannen, Deborah, ed., 1993. *Framing in discourse*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University.
- Watanabe, Suwako, 1993. Cultural differences in framing: American and Japanese group discussions. In: D. Tannen, ed., *Framing in discourse*, 176–209. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, Anna, 1991. Japanese key words and core cultural values. *Language in Society* 20: 333–385.
- Yamada, Haru, 1992. *American and Japanese business discourse: A comparison of interactional styles*. Norwood: NJ, Ablex.
- Yngve, Victor H., 1970. On getting a word in edgewise. *Chicago Linguistics Society, 6th Meeting*: 567–578.