



Editorial

Introduction to the special issue, “Nodding, *aizuchi*, and final particles in Japanese conversation”

Cross-cultural variation in the organization of conversation is a topic that has drawn the attention of many researchers in linguistics. Though basic principles of turn taking such as management of overlapping turns may not vary cross-culturally (Sidnell, 2001), clear cross-cultural differences in the use of head nods and short utterances such as “uh huh” and “yeah” in conversation have been noted in the comparison of English, Mandarin, and Japanese conversation (e.g., Mizutani, 1984; Maynard, 1986, 1990; Clancy et al., 1996; Kita, 1999). This special issue focuses on the use of head nods and these short utterances as well as how they are elicited in Japanese conversation.

Short utterances such as “uh huh” and “yeah” have been studied intensively, as they reveal some important organizational principles of conversation (e.g., Schegloff, 1982; Goodwin, 1986; Bangerter and Clark, 2003). Various terms have been used to refer to such utterances, depending on the theoretical framework: back-channel (Yngve, 1970), continuers (Schegloff, 1982), or reactive tokens (Clancy et al., 1996). As becomes clear in the articles in this special issue, analogous utterances in Japanese conversation are sometimes used in a way incompatible with the theoretical frameworks that underlie the conventional terms. Consequently, the Japanese word “*aizuchi*” will be used to refer to these utterances, in order to remain free from preconceived notions of the functions of these utterances in Japanese conversation.

It has been noted that there are specific ways in which *aizuchis* and head nods are elicited in conversation. For example, final particles, frequently used in Japanese casual conversation, play an especially important role in eliciting *aizuchis* from the addressee (Maynard, 1986; Tanaka, 2000). Furthermore, final particles themselves can be used as a form of *aizuchi* (see Kita and Ide, this issue). As final particles and *aizuchi* are in a symbiotic relationship, it is important to take into account the functions of both *aizuchis* and final particles in order to understand their distribution.

The goal of this special issue is to bring together studies on nodding, *aizuchi*, and the final particles, and to reveal how these conversation management devices jointly shape Japanese conversation in its characteristic way. These articles will also discuss how the use of these devices may be motivated by what the Japanese culture considers to be important in communication and social relationships.

This special issue consists of the following papers. Kita and Ide’s paper sets the scene by giving an overview of the phenomena of nodding, *aizuchis*, and final particles that are typical of Japanese conversation. It also discusses possible sociohistorical motivations for these

phenomena. Miyata and Nishisawa's paper is the first report in the literature on the development of *aizuchi* and final particles as *aizuchi*-eliciting devices among Japanese children. Kogure's paper brings non-verbal behaviors into the picture by demonstrating that head nods and *aizuchis* can be exchanged one after the other, and create a "loop sequence" (Iwasaki, 1997). He also demonstrates that gaze plays an important role in how the loop is resolved. Saft's paper discusses the role of *aizuchi* in a debate with a relatively large number of participants. He argues that *aizuchi* can be used by participants to select themselves as the specific dyadic recipient to whom the speaker must pay attention and with whom the speaker must interact. Katagiri's paper contributes to the analysis of final particles by considering their interaction with prosody.

It is hoped that this special issue will inspire readers to describe phenomena that have been neglected in other languages so far, and to compare conversational phenomena across languages. This will contribute to further development of descriptive and theoretical frameworks for the comparison of various conversational phenomena across cultures, and eventually to a deeper understanding of the inter-relationship between language and culture.

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