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TEMPORAL ASPECTS OF JAPANESE
AND AUSTRALIAN CONVERSATION

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen a proliferation of cross-cultural studies in many areas, but the cross-cultural study of actual face-to-face interactions has been paid lip service only.

Within the study of face-to-face interaction, conversations have received most attention. Although no proper framework is generally accepted, some features of conversations are by now quite well documented, at least for English-speaking persons. In any conversation, irrespective of its purpose, contents, length, outcome or language used, participants typically alternate as speaker and listener. This provides a natural orderliness to the behavior of the participants that can be described and measured.

It remains an important task to include speakers of languages other than English into our investigations of conversational behavior. The present investigation is concerned with the general question of how the use of language employed for conversation affects the organization of it. The thesis is organized in three main parts.

The first part consists of two chapters. In the first chapter a general framework and the methodological approaches in the study of face-to-face interactions are outlined. Broad areas of special importance in comparing communication cross-culturally are discussed. Because *what actually happens during an encounter* is crucial, our focus is on observable behavior. Following the lead of interaction theory, we adopt a framework to describe what occurs in interaction in universal operations, namely temporal patterning. Concepts such as communication, interaction and movement as well as methodological approaches, traditionally employed in the area are discussed.

In chapter II, literature on selected variables - gaze-direction, speaker turns and listener responses - found to be important in conversation, is reviewed. This literature mainly deals with conversations between English-speaking persons, but some literature relevant to Japanese interactions is also discussed. The present

study investigates the temporal patterning of conversational behavior as related to whether the conversations are conducted in Japanese or in English.

The second part consists of four chapters, reporting the results of four studies of two types (film and video). As an introduction to part II an overview of the four studies and the methods and procedures used is given. The actual data part of the study commences in chapter III where a detailed study, comparing one Japanese-Japanese and one Australian-Australian conversation, is reported. In this investigation we explore whether there are any differences in the temporal patterning of conversational behavior according to whether the conversations are conducted in Japanese or in English. It is found that the Japanese conversation has a different temporal organization from that of the Australian-English conversation. All the behavioral variables investigated are shown to be closely related. Turns at talk in Japanese are briefer, other-directed glances last shorter and in general the Japanese conversationalists maintain a higher rate of response than is the case in the English conversation. It is suggested that the regulatory function of gaze-direction, in particular at the end of utterances, is possibly of varying significance for different cultural groups.

Based upon the initial isolation of this pattern, a number of hypotheses, testing aspects of it, are investigated in the second study, reported in chapter IV. Following an external variable approach, results, based on twelve conversations recorded on video, reveal shorter cycles for speech and gaze-direction and a higher number of listener responses in conversations where the participants speak in Japanese than in conversations where English is spoken.

The third study (on film), reported in chapter V, examines in detail the relationship of temporal aspects of speaking style in a bilingual participant. In the Japanese condition, interacting with another Japanese, the bilingual participant speaks in turns of shorter duration, with a higher frequency of listener responses, than in the Australian condition, interacting with another Australian. Rather than explain the results in terms of code-switching and two clearly distinct speaking styles, we found evidence that a fusion of

different aspects of speaking style in the two conditions described our results better. Some factors relevant to differences in the structure between the Japanese and the English language are briefly discussed, and further research in this area suggested.

In chapter VI, a study of nine intercultural conversations on video, in which Japanese participants converse with Australian interactants in English, is reported. This investigation explores what happens to the temporal organization of a conversation in such a situation. Following an external variable approach, the important implications of the temporal organization and its change in this condition, are discussed. The findings are explained in terms of the different functions of gaze-direction and the relationship between the variables. One interesting result is the increased use of gesticulation for Japanese participants speaking English.

The third part of the thesis consists of chapter VII. Here the main conclusions are integrated and some further lines of inquiry indicated. We restate that the temporal structure of a conversation is different according to the language that is used and point out the importance of temporal organization of conversation for any theoretical and methodological framework in the area of face-to-face interaction. A suggestion for a possible link between different child rearing practices in the two cultures and taking turns in conversation is made. Finally, on a more speculative note, to attempt to substantiate the notion of temporal or rhythmical organization, the way in which various researchers have investigated rhythms is reviewed, and further investigation on the molar rhythmical, or turn, level suggested.