

THE EFFECT OF CHINESE-JAPANESE DIFFERENCES ON TURN-TAKING IN AN ESL CLASSROOM¹

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A RELATIVELY LARGE AMOUNT of process-oriented research has been done on many aspects of ESL classrooms (for a comprehensive review of such studies, see Chaudron 1988), especially after Long (1980) called for the need to investigate the process in the "black box" called the ESL classroom. It was a reaction to the overemphasis on analysis of the ESL classroom product of the previous decade.

Several studies have been conducted of L1 minority students' classroom behaviors (Cazden et al. 1972; Philips 1972; Brophy and Good 1974; Laosa 1979; Malcolm 1986) and on different interactional styles among native speakers of different varieties of English (Kernan 1977; Michaels 1981; Labov 1972; Boggs 1972; Watson 1972; Tannen 1978; Gumperz 1978). These studies illustrate different cultural expectations for the manner of participation in and outside the classroom. Some students and speakers (e.g. blacks, some Hispanics, native Americans) tend to be less direct or aggressive in initiating interaction with the higher-status teacher.

When we turn our eyes to L2 studies, however, there are few such studies. Exceptions include Sato (1982), McLean (1983), and Doi (1988). Sato (1982) investigated two college ESL classrooms and found that the Asians as a group (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), although greater in number than non-Asians (Latin Americans, Europeans, and Middle Easterners), took significantly fewer turns. In an effort to explain these differences Sato further analyzed the turns into three types: (1) the general solicit, (2) the personal solicit, and (3) self-selection, and she reported that the Asian subjects made

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significantly fewer turns also in terms of each of the three categories than the non-Asians. Sato (1982) defined the three turn types, which are adopted from Allwright (1980), as follows:

- (1) A general solicit: a response to a request made by the teacher for a response from anyone in the class.
- (2) A personal solicit: a response to a teacher question or invitation to respond directed at a particular individual.
- (3) Self-selection: a turn taken by a student in the absence of a solicit, either general or personal, from the teacher.

McLean (1983) examined the difference in turn-taking between the Japanese and non-Japanese in two (intermediate and advanced level) university ESL classes. It was found that the Japanese learners took fewer turns overall than the non-Japanese and, when the three types of turns were looked at, the former took significantly fewer turns in all the categories than the latter.

Doi (1988) ethnographically examined one Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) classroom for three months. He was interested in the difference between the Japanese-American and the Caucasian learners in a university JFL course. The quantitative part of the ethnographic study again showed that the Japanese-Americans had fewer turns not only overall but also in terms of each of Allwright's three turn types.

Sato (1982) pointed out that it is not enough just to see differences between two big ethnic groups—Asian vs. non-Asian—and suggested that a much finer distinction be made among the Asian learners. There may be some cultural differences in turn taking patterns even among the Asians who have often been treated as a single group. Intuition and observation of ESL teachers and learners often suggest that the Chinese are more active in the ESL classroom than the Japanese. This motivates the research question for the present study: Do Chinese learners of ESL take more turns in ESL classrooms than Japanese ESL learners?

In fact, Duff (1986) found in her interlanguage study of Japanese and Chinese dyads a significant tendency for the Chinese subjects to dominate the interaction in every measure of linguistic productivity. This non-native speaker-non-native speaker (NNS-NNS) discourse pattern may be present in ESL classrooms. Based on the results in Duff, the following hypothesis will be tested in the present study: Chinese learners take more turns than Japanese learners in ESL classrooms, not only overall but also in terms of Allrights' three categories: general solicits, personal solicits, and self-selection.

This general hypothesis yields four specific sub-hypotheses:

- (1) The average number of turns taken by Chinese learners of ESL is larger than that of Japanese learners. (H1)
- (2) Chinese learners respond more frequently to the teacher's general solicits than Japanese learners. (H2)
- (3) Chinese learners respond more frequently to the teacher's personal solicits than Japanese learners. (H3)
- (4) Chinese learners take more self-selected turns than Japanese. (H4)

In the following section, these hypotheses will be tested. $\alpha=0.05$ will be used for the hypothesis testing.

Method

Subjects

Two English Language Institute classrooms at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa were observed. Table 1 summarizes the the subjects in each class.

	Japanese			Chinese			Others		
	Total (%)	F/M	Age (SD)	Total (%)	F/M	Age (SD)	Total	F/M	Age (SD)
Class One	2 (10.5)	1/1	22.0 (4.2)	14 (73.7)	3/11	28.4 (6.5)	3 (15.8)	2/1	41.0 (1.0)
Class Two	2 (12.5)	1/1	26.5 (2.1)	10 (62.5)	5/5	24.9 (6.1)	4 (25.0)	2/2	22.0 (0.8)
Total	4 (11.4)	2/2	24.3 (3.8)	24 (68.6)	8/16	26.9 (6.4)	7 (20.0)	4/3	30.6 (10.8)

of subjects, Class x Ethnicity (Japanese, Chinese), $\chi^2=0.49$, d.f.=1*, $p>.05$, n.s..
 # of subjects, Class 1, Japanese x Chinese, $\chi^2=8.50$, d.f.=1*, $p<.05$.
 # of subjects, Class 2, Japanese x Chinese, $\chi^2=4.84$, d.f.=1*, $p<.05$.
 # of subjects, Japanese (total) x Chinese (total), $\chi^2=14.78$, d.f.=1*, $p<.05$.
 * Yates correction was applied since d.f.= 1.

Table 1: Subjects

The ELI at the University of Hawai'i is only for those foreign students whose TOEFL scores are between 500 and 599. They have already been admitted to the university as regular students. These ELI courses are taken, besides the regular university courses in their fields, to learn English for academic purposes. They are high intermediate level ESL learners and form a fairly homogeneous proficiency group, as evidenced by the narrow range of their TOEFL scores.

The first course (Class 1) is a listening comprehension course with 2 Japanese and 14 Chinese students. 2 Japanese and 12 Chinese students are in the second course on reading in ESL for academic purposes (Class 2). There are no non-Asian subjects. Both courses are taught by Caucasian teachers. The two classes formed intact groups for this study. None of the subjects were acquainted with the researcher. Both the subjects and the instructors were told

before the experiment that the observation was part of study. However, no further details were given to them until the end of the observation, since it was highly likely that the knowledge of the purpose of the study could affect the results.

These classes are natural classrooms and they can not be considered either as random samples or matched groups. Therefore, the external validity or generalizability of the present study may be limited to similar classroom situations.

Procedures

Three class hours for each of the two courses were observed by the researcher. However, the first classes were used to help subjects and instructors get used to being observed. For the second and third meetings, all class activities were tape-recorded.² The researcher tried to sit in the corner of the classrooms and conceal the tape recorder as much as possible. After the observations, the audiotaped classes were transcribed by the researcher.

High inference is needed to code the three turn categories (Allwright 1980). However, the previous studies (Sato 1982, McLean 1983, and Doi 1988) have not reported the interrater reliability of the coding. After about 30 minutes of training by coding a sample classroom transcript according to the above three categories, two raters—a graduate student in ESL and the researcher—achieved 100% agreement in coding. Then the data were coded independently by the two raters and 92.91% interrater reliability was achieved.

Thus, each speaking turn was quantified and recorded as Japanese or Chinese in the categories; (1) general solicit, (2) personal solicit, and (3) self-selection. The frequency totals of the Japanese and Chinese subjects were analyzed with respect to distributional differences using chi-square tests.

² Ideally the classes should have been videotaped rather than audio-taped. The third category of the turn types in this study, self-selection or self-selected turns, may or may not involve bidding, the signaling of a desire to talk by cues such as hand-raising or eye contact with the instructor. Such paralinguistic cues were missed in the analysis using the audiotaped data. However, videotaping was not possible technically. Also, the use or just the presence of a video camera in the classrooms may affect the learners' behavior and hence the results, unless videotaping is done often in class as part of learning activity and the learners are used to the presence of a video camera as in Sato (1982).

Results

1. *The average number of turns taken by the Chinese learners of ESL is larger than that of the Japanese learners. (H1)*

Total number of turns made by the Chinese and Japanese subjects were summarized in Table 2.

		N	# of turns	% of turns	turns per subject
Class 1	Japanese	2	25	8.59	12.50
	Chinese	14	266	91.40	19.00
Class 2	Japanese	2	11	8.21	5.50
	Chinese	10	123	91.79	12.30
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Japanese (all)		4	36	8.47	9.00
Chinese (all)		24	389	91.53	16.21

Class x Ethnicity: $\chi^2=0.03$, d.f.=1*, $p>.05$, n.s..

Japanese (all) x Chinese (all): $\chi^2=11.24$, d.f.=1*, $p<.05$.

*Yates correction was applied since d.f. = 1.

Table 2: Relationship between ethnicity and total number of turns taken

Since the two classes were not significantly different ($\chi^2=0.03$, d.f.=1, $p>.05$), results in the two courses were then combined and the ethnicity difference (Japanese x Chinese) was examined. Results here support the first hypothesis that the average number of turns taken by the Chinese learners was significantly larger than that of the Japanese learners ($\chi^2=11.24$, d.f.=1, $p<.05$). The Chinese subjects averaged 16.21 turns each, while the Japanese subjects averaged 9.00.

2. *Chinese learners respond more frequently to the teacher's personal solicits than Japanese learners.* (H2)

Table 3 below shows the results on the relationship between ethnicity and number of responses to general solicits.

		N	# of turns	% of turns	turns per subject
Class 1	Japanese	2	3	6.00	1.50
	Chinese	14	47	94.00	3.36
Class 2	Japanese	2	2	5.13	1.00
	Chinese	10	37	94.87	3.70
Japanese (all)		4	5	5.62	1.25
Chinese (all)		24	84	94.38	3.50

Class x Ethnicity: $\chi^2 = 0.08$, d.f.=1*, $p > .05$, n.s..

Japanese (all) x Chinese (all): $\chi^2 = 4.96$, d.f.=1*, $p < .05$.

*Yates correction was applied since d.f.=1.

Table 3: Relationship between ethnicity and number of responses to general solicits

Again, while the two ESL classes were not significantly different from each other ($\chi^2 = 0.08$, d.f.=1, $p > .05$), the Chinese learners made significantly more responses to the teacher's general solicits than the Japanese learners ($\chi^2 = 4.96$, d.f.=1, $p < .05$). The Chinese subjects averaged 3.50 turns each, while the Japanese subjects averaged 1.25. This supports the second hypothesis of the present study.

3. *Chinese learners respond more frequently to the teacher's personal solicits than Japanese learners. (H3)*

Table 4 reflects a relationship between ethnicity and the number of responses to personal solicits. The two classes did not differ from each other ($\chi^2=0.36$, d.f.=1, $p>.05$). While the previous two hypotheses tested in the present study were found to be supported, as were in Sato (1982), McLean (1983), and Doi (1988), results here did not support the third hypothesis that the Chinese learners make more responses to the instructor's personal solicits ($\chi^2=2.47$, d.f.=1, $p>.05$). The Chinese subjects averaged 6.67 turns each, while the Japanese subjects averaged 4.75. This is different from the three previous studies above.

		N	# of turns	% of turns	turns per subject
Class 1	Japanese	2	14	12.07	7.00
	Chinese	14	102	87.93	7.29
Class 2	Japanese	2	5	7.94	2.50
	Chinese	10	58	92.06	5.80
Japanese (all)		4	19	10.61	4.75
Chinese (all)		24	160	89.39	6.67

Class x Ethnicity: $\chi^2=0.36$, d.f.=1*, $p>.05$, n.s..

Japanese (all) x Chinese (all), $\chi^2=2.47$, d.f.=1*, $p>.05$, n.s.

*Yates correction was applied since d.f.=1.

Table 4: Relationship between ethnicity and number of responses to personal solicits

4. *The Chinese learners take more self-selected turns than the Japanese learners.* (H4)

Table 5 represents the total for self-selected turns taken by both ethnic groups.

		N	# of turns	% of turns	turns per subject
Class 1	Japanese	2	8	6.40	4.00
	Chinese	14	117	93.60	29.25
Class 2	Japanese	2	4	12.50	2.00
	Chinese	10	28	87.50	2.80
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Japanese	(all)	4	12	7.64	3.00
Chinese	(all)	24	145	92.36	6.04

Class x Ethnicity: $\chi^2=2.35$, d.f.=1*, $p>.05$, n.s..

Japanese (all) x Chinese (all), $\chi^2=5.16$, d.f.=1*, $p<.05$.

*Yates correction was applied since d.f.=1.

Table 5: Relationship between ethnicity and number of self-selected turns

There was no significant difference between the two courses ($\chi^2=2.35$, d.f.=1, $p>.05$). However, the Chinese students took significantly more self-selected turns than the Japanese students, which supports the fourth hypothesis of the study ($\chi^2=5.16$, d.f.=1, $p<.05$). The Chinese subjects averaged 6.04 turns each, while the Japanese subjects averaged 3.00.

As has been noted, no difference was found between the two qualitatively different courses—a listening comprehension and an academic reading courses—with two different instructors. Apparently, the results here overrode the course content and instructor differences.

Figure 1 summarizes the principal findings.

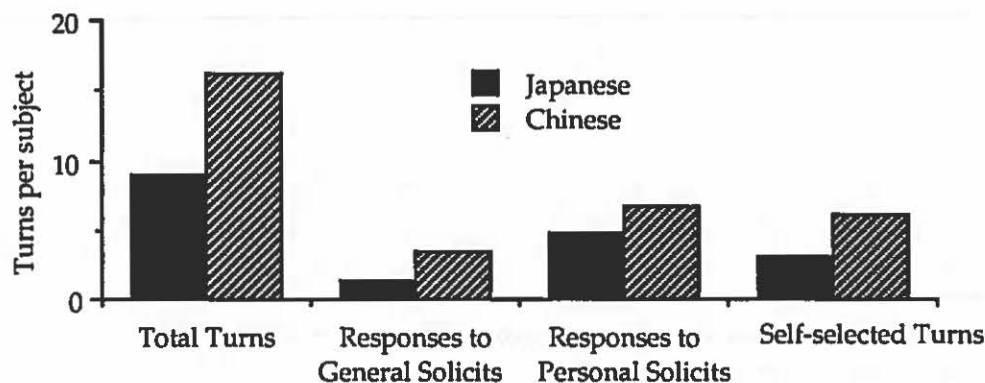


Figure 1: Differences between Chinese and Japanese in turns taken

Discussion

Despite the course and instructor differences, the results in the present study support three of the four hypotheses presented. The Chinese learners of ESL took more turns overall (Hypothesis 1), responded more to the teacher's general solicits (Hypothesis 2), and made more self-selected turns (Hypothesis 4) than the Japanese learners. These are in agreement with the results reported in Sato (1982), McLean (1983), and Doi (1988). In contrast to these previous studies, however, the third hypothesis that Chinese learners make more responses to personal solicits was rejected in the present study. What does this suggest?

Since the choice of using or not using the general solicits and self-selected turns is controlled by the learners, while responses to the personal solicits are by the instructor, it can be concluded that when the choice of taking turns is up to the learners, the Chinese learners take them more often than the Japanese. However, the Japanese learners take as many turns as the Chinese only when they are given a chance to do so by the instructor, as in the case with the personal solicits. Even among Asian classmates, Japanese learners need to obtain a "go ahead" from the teacher before speaking.

Bailey and Galvan (1979) suggested the existence of "cushioning." That is, the ESL teacher's perception of unwillingness to talk among Japanese learners may induce him/her to call upon them less often. Such is not the case with these two instructors in this study. They seem to be equally allocating opportunities to speak to both groups. This may be because all the learners in this study are Asians who "look alike", while the other studies involved non-Asians as well as Asians who "look different." However, such a claim, of course, has to be tested empirically in a further study.

Chaudron (1988) pointed out in his discussion of the results obtained by Sato (1982) that such variables as age, personality, and the proportion of an ethnic group in a class could influence their degree of participation. Although these factors are impossible to control in a natural classroom situation, an *ex post facto* examination of them was conducted and the results are presented below.

Difference in age is not significant not only between the two classes ($F=1.04$, $d.f.=1/24$, $p>.05$) but also between the two ethnic groups ($F=0.55$, $d.f.=1/24$, $p>.05$). The ANOVA shows no significant interaction between the two factors (class \times ethnicity: $F=1.43$, $d.f.=1/24$, $p>.05$). Thus, the age factor did not affect the results in this study.

As for the personality variable, Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978) showed that there was no correlation between the personality variables—extroversion, sensitivity to rejection, and empathy—and participation behaviors. Although such a claim has to be further tested empirically, this variable might be assumed not to have affected the results in this study.

As shown in Table 1, the two ESL courses in the present study are not significantly different in terms of the proportion of Japanese and Chinese subjects in each class (# of subjects, class \times ethnicity, $\chi^2=0.49$, d.f.=1, $p>.05$, n.s.), but there are statistically significantly more Chinese subjects than Japanese subjects in each course (Class 1, Japanese \times Chinese, $\chi^2=8.50$, d.f.=1, $p<.05$; Class 2, Japanese \times Chinese, $\chi^2=4.84$, d.f.=1, $p<.05$). The proportional difference (11.4 % for Japanese and 68.6% for Chinese) might have influenced the results presented in this study. Kocher and Potter (1985) analyzed data on different ethnic group response rates in secondary ESL classrooms which support the idea that the proportion of an ethnic group in a class could influence their degree of participation. Perhaps being the majority ethnic group in a class gives its members greater confidence to participate.

Thus, it can be assumed that the differences shown in the present data may be *partially* due to the independent variable of this study, ethnicity. The influence of the proportion differential, however, should be examined in a further study.

Conclusion

Previous studies of the relationship between ethnicity and turn-taking behavior in ESL classrooms have shown that Asian students take fewer turns than non-Asian students. The present study shows that among the Asians, Japanese learners of ESL take still fewer turns than Chinese learners unless they are given turns personally by the instructor.

According to the output hypothesis (Ellis 1980, Swain 1985, Naiman et al. 1978, Strong 1983, Peck 1985), the more comprehensible output second language learners produce, the more they acquire. If this is correct, Japanese learners have less chance to acquire a language than other learners just because they are Japanese.

Although this may be impressionistic account, the researcher as a Japanese learner of ESL in Japan has never learned how to actively take turns or even ask questions in classrooms. Learners in Japan seem to have been trained in their education just to listen to teachers—authorities in the field—in all subjects unless they are given personal solicits. Questions, if any, are to be asked probably after class in the faculty room. Of course the implications of this impressionistic explanation have to be studied further.³

Therefore, it may be important to provide opportunities in ESL classrooms for the Japanese as well as other ESL learners to learn how to take turns properly in academic courses. If not, they may be thought to be less proficient in the target language and their grades may be underestimated just because they are quiet. This could be especially true of liberal arts courses, where student grades are based in part on the participation in classroom discussion.

The present study was classroom *process* analysis of the turn taking differences between Japanese and Chinese learners of ESL. Long (1987) called for the transition from "second generation classroom research" to "third generation classroom research." This refers to the change from classroom process analysis which followed first-generation research on classroom product analysis, to process-product classroom analysis. The process-product version of the present study, both longitudinal and cross-sectional, needs to be done to discover whether the cultural differences in turn-taking lead to

³ An anecdotally reported event which might support the speculation here happened when a British SLA researcher, a Japanese-American researcher, and the author, a Japanese, attended a lecture at a university in Tokyo, Japan. The 60+ audience at the lecture given in English were mostly Japanese although there were several native English speakers. The lecturer set aside some time for questions a few times during the lecture, but questions were asked only by a Japanese gentleman and the British SLA researcher. As the former's questions were to ask for the information he missed, one question raised by the latter was the only substantial one during the lecture which lasted for three hours. The Japanese-American scholar and the author thought that there was nothing strange about the fact that almost all the audience did not raise any questions, because that is usual in Japan. Also, they knew that the audience kept quiet because the audience did not want to lose face by asking what they thought might be simple, obvious, or "stupid" questions. On the other hand, the British scholar, who had been in Japan only for two weeks by then, was puzzled to find the audience quiet, because he thought that it was not polite not to ask any questions if the lecture was meaningful to the audience at all. He thought the lecturer must have been embarrassed as only a few questions were asked. His company, however, did not agree on this point.

differences in second language acquisition. Such a study, if done in the English as a foreign language (EFL) situation, where the influence of variables outside the classroom are minimal, may also resolve the input generation controversy between Seliger (1977) and Day (1985), in which similar categories of classroom participation were used to analyze classroom processes.

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