RECONCILING TEXTBOOK DIALOGUES AND NATURALLY OCCURRING TALK: WHAT WE THINK WE DO IS NOT WHAT WE DO

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Compared to natural conversations, textbook dialogues 1) focus almost entirely on exchanging information, 2) are mainly made up of pairs of complete sentences, such as question-answer pairs, instead of the shorter, non-paired units found in actual speech, 3) contain too much new information in one utterance, potentially hindering communication, and 4) are notably lacking in linguistic devices speakers use interactionally to create their conversations as they present information bit by bit and negotiate the meaning of what they are saying (devices such as repetition, repair, postposing, final particles, backchannels, fillers, and lengthening). Since an ultimate goal of most learners of Japanese is to be able to participate in actual talk, we suggest that learners should be given increased opportunities for contact with level-appropriate natural conversations and that teachers and those developing pedagogical materials study actual talk in order to be able to represent it better to learners.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that textbook dialogues and other talk practiced in classrooms should resemble real talk—that language teaching should be informed by what native speakers actually do—is well accepted among language teachers these days. Most teachers are concerned about the naturalness of the model conversations, or "dialogues," they present to students and the language they have them practice. Certainly the language teaching field has improved greatly in this area over the last 30 years. Example 1 shows the first dialogue of a Japanese textbook published in 1970. The introduction to the dialogue states that the conversation takes place in a classroom. Yamakawa, a teacher, has just entered; Johnson, a student, is already there:

Example 1.

1   J: Ohayoo gozaimasu.
       Good morning.

2   Y: Ohayoo gozaimasu. Watashi wa Yamakawa desu.
       Anata wa gakusei desu ka.
       Good morning. I am Yamakawa. Are you a student?

3   J: Hai, watashi wa gakusei desu. Watashi wa Jonson desu.
       Yes, I am a student. I am Johnson.

4   Y: Jonson-san wa igirisujin desu ka.
       Mr. Johnson, are you British?

5   J: Iie, watashi wa igirisujin dewa arimasen. Watashi wa amerikajin desu.
       No, I am not British. I am an American.

(Japanese Language Promotion Center, 1970a, p. 78)

Despite the fact that this textbook is stated to contain "natural, unstrained Japanese" (Japanese Language Promotion Center, 1970a, p. 14), this encounter is bizarre in a number of ways. Some are obvious to speakers of Japanese, and others are more subtle. One problem is the use of the uncontracted negative form *dewa arimasen* "am not" (line 5) instead of the far more common *ja arimasen*. Another problem is the overuse of pronouns. The dialogue would seem far more natural without the use of the second-person pronoun *anata* in line 2, since the explicit mention of a subject is not grammatically obligatory in Japanese, and indeed, often seems quite unnatural. Similarly, none of the five occurrences of the first-person pronoun *watashi* (lines 2, 3, and 5) would be likely to occur in natural conversation. The careful inclusion of an explicit subject or topic for every sentence makes the dialogue seem like a word-for-word translation from English.[i]

Fortunately, most of the dialogues found in the Japanese textbooks in common use today avoid many of the unnatural features that were common in older textbooks, such as 1) the overuse of subjects, especially pronouns; 2) the use of uncontracted forms in casual conversational contexts (e.g., *dewa* instead of *ja, no desu* "it's that…" instead of *n desu*); and 3) the absence of final particles, which are typically located at the end of an utterance and indicate affective and epistemological attitudes (Cook, 1988; Maynard, 1989). Nevertheless, textbook dialogues often seem not to be based on careful observations of how the language is actually used. The microanalysis of naturally occurring language is a relatively new field of study, and neither linguistic/pedagogical training nor language instruction has typically included the development of skills in collecting, examining, and learning from examples of actual language use.

Given this situation, we should not be surprised to find that when we compare textbook dialogues and naturally occurring talk, we find that they are clearly different in a number of ways. Only detailed microscopic analyses can make us aware of the subtle but important differences between the two.

TEXTBOOK DIALOGUES

For this study, we compared naturally occurring talk to dialogues from a number of textbooks which are popular in the United States today (Hatasa, Hatasa, and Makino, 2000; Jorden and Noda, 1987, 1988, 1990; Makino, Hatasa, and Hatasa, 1998; Miura and McGloin, 1994; Mizutani, 1977; Tohsaku, 1999). Some of the features found in textbook dialogues are listed below:

1) Dialogues are typically short, representing very brief encounters or seeming as if they are decontextualized segments taken out of longer interactions.
2) Dialogues are primarily for the purpose of exchanging information.
3) Utterances are neatly matched into pairs, each half of which is typically a complete sentence, such as "question-answer" pairs.
4) There is a high amount of new information per utterance, to the extent that it could be difficult for an interactant to understand.
5) There is little use of the linguistic devices speakers use interactionally to create their conversations as they present information bit by bit and negotiate the meaning of what they are saying (devices such as repetition, repair, postposing, final particles, backchannels, fillers, and lengthening).
6) Examples of multiparty talk are rare.

7) Some dialogues require the assumption of a fairly obscure context in order to sound natural, but there may not be any contextual notes to help explain them.

Looking at a representative dialogue taken from a more recent textbook, we find that a number of the problems found in example 1 have been alleviated:

Example 2.

1   A: Hayashi-san wa doko ni itta n desu ka.
        Where did Mr. Hayashi go?

2   B: Hana o kai ni ikimashita.
        He went to buy flowers.

3   A: Soo desu ka. Chin-san wa?
        I see. What about Ms. Chin?

4   B: Fuku o kigae ni, apaato ni kaerimashita.
        She returned to her apartment to change clothes.

(Tohsaku, 1999, p. 467)

This dialogue contains the contraction *n desu* (instead of *no desu*) in line 1. Line 3 ends with a sentence fragment (*Chin-san wa?*). Subjects are made explicit only when necessary, so in lines 2 and 4, no explicit subject is given when B answers A's questions. Finally, in line 3, A responds to B's answer before asking another question.

Despite the ways in which this dialogue resembles natural conversation, however, it is still a very brief dialogue that is an information-seeking sequence comprised of matching question/answer turns. There is no note to help us out by suggesting a context in which the dialogue might occur. Most of the lines are brief, which accurately mimics natural conversation, but line 4 contains a bit too much information. For example, *apaato ni* "to [his/her] apartment" would probably not occur in real talk, because simply saying *kaerimashita* "went home" is sufficient. Also, utterances this long are relatively rare in natural conversation, so this utterance might be more likely to occur as two shorter units. Another possibility is that the first half of the utterance would be "postposed"—that is, added after the main clause: *Kaerimashita. Fuku o kigae ni.* "S/he went home. To change clothes." Despite the fact that this is a far more natural dialogue than example 1, it still lacks some of the features of naturally occurring conversation that are commonly used in negotiating meaning: repetitions, back-channel responses, fillers, postposing, and repairs.

Of course, the type of conversations represented in example 2—conversations for the purpose of exchanging information—do happen sometimes. However, they are only one of the many different types of interaction that speakers engage in. Ideally textbooks would reflect more of the variety found in actual interactions.

It is also true that teachers and textbook authors may feel it is necessary to use simplified examples, especially at elementary levels, due to the learners' limited knowledge of the language and also out of a desire to introduce certain grammatical items and/or vocabulary. Dialogues

written for more advanced levels of language study vary in how natural they are. In some, we found similar problems. Others seemed closer to real interactions, however, including some which represent conversations for purposes other than simply exchanging information:

Example 3.

1 A: uchi ga chikai hito wa, ii desu nee.
  People with homes that are close by are fortunate, aren't they!

2 B: maa, tsuukin-jikan ga mijikai kara..
  Well, commuting time is short, so…

3 A: jitsu wa, kinoo kaeru no ga kanari osokatta n desu kedo ne?
  As a matter of fact, my return home yesterday was quite late…

4 B: n.
  Yeah.

5 A: tsukarete, densha no naka de guuguu nechatta n desu yo.
  Exhausted, I fell sound asleep on the train.

6 B: soo desu ka.
  You did?

7 A: sore de ne?
  That being the case…

8 B: ee.
  Yes.

9 A: hatto ki ga tsuita toki wa, moo oriru eki o dete shimatta ato de..
  When I came to, with a start, it was after we'd already left the station where I get off…

10 B: taihen da.
  How awful!

11 A: awatete tatta kedo, doa wa moo simatchatte (i)ru deshoo?
  I stood up in confusion, but the door was already shut tight—you know?

  A: hazukashikatta desu nee.
  I was so embarrassed.

12 B: soo deshoo nee.
  You must have been!

(Jorden and Noda, 1988, p. 177)

This dialogue is longer than average. It is not a question/answer exchange, though a narration such as this does provide information to the listener. The sentences are not arranged in neat pairs. Other natural touches found in this example include the use of a sentence fragment in line 2. The idea that dialogues consist of the exchange of complete and uninterrupted sentences is also challenged by the breaking of one sentence into shorter phrases such as lines 3 and 5 or the sequence we see in lines 7 through 11: lines 7, 9, and 11 are one sentence spoken by speaker A, and within that sentence we find sentence-internal back-channel responses made by the other speaker in lines 8 and 10, and also one sentence-internal particle, the *ne* that comes at the end of line 7.

NATURALLY OCCURRING TALK

Despite the relative naturalness of examples 2 and 3 when compared to the older example 1, when we turn to naturally occurring talk, we still find a number of other features not represented in textbook dialogues. Example 4, taken from a tape recording of natural conversation, is similar to example 3 in that it involves the narration of a past experience. Speaker C is talking to her friend about a part-time job she had in Japan:

Example 4. (C and A have been discussing how living in the United States sometimes makes Japanese people stuck-up. C then tells about her experience working at a Japanese Subway Sandwich to which celebrities often came. Square brackets indicate overlapping speech. @ signs indicate laughter or, in some cases, bracket utterances spoken while laughing.)

1   C: … dakara nanka saa, ... kotchi ichinenkan kitee,
            so, umm, I came here for one year and

            .. nihon ni kaetta no ne. natsuyasumi.
            I went home to Japan, you know? (For) summer vacation.

2   A: .. nn.
            Uh huh.

3   C: .. hajimete kita toki ni. .. nde, sankagetsu, zutto nihon ni iru aida ni,
            The first time I came. And, for the whole 3 months, while I was in Japan,

            … sabu<@ wee @> .. sandoitchi?
            Subway Sandwich?

4   A: .. nn,
            Uh huh.

5   C: asoko de watashi baito shiteta no ne.
            I had a part-time job there, you know?

6   A: a sabuwee?
            Oh, Subway?

7   C: nn [nn].
      Uh-huh, uh-huh.

8   A: [nn] nn.
        Uh-huh, uh-huh.

9   C: akasakaa .. mitsuketen?
      The Akasaka, -mitsuke branch?

10   A: aa, hai hai hai,
      Oh, yes yes yes.

11   C: [de, sugoi ironna hito ga ki-]
      And, an amazing variety of people ca-

12   A: [ja tii bii esu, me] no mae [da ne].
      so, it's right in front of TBS, right?

13   C: [so so] so [so].
                       Right right right right.

14   A: [nn].
                             Uh-huh.

15   C: dakara, sooyuu hitotachi ga, ippai kite saa,
      So, that sort of people, a lot of them came you know

16   A: nn,
      Uh-huh.

17   C: .. futsuu no anaunsaa tachi wa, sugoi teenee na no.
        most anouncers, are really polite.

18   A: a soo nan[n da].
      Oh really.

19   C: [mono] no iikata toka ga.
          The way they say things and all.

20   A: nn. .. a nantoka irete kudasai.
      Uh-huh. Oh, please put in something-or-other.

21   C: so so [so].
      Right right right.

22   A: [re]tasu oome de [toka@@@@].
            Heavy on the lettuce, and so on.

23   C: [so so so]. nanka sugoi n da kedo[o],
                                          Right right right. Somehow, it's amazing buuut,

24   A: [nn],
                                                              Uh-huh.

Clearly, this is a very interactive conversation. The utterances are short and contain relatively little information. Meaning is negotiated by devices such as the sentence-internal questioning intonation that the speakers use to check whether they are talking about the same thing (two examples are in lines 3 and 9). There are numerous back-channel responses, often very animated ones and ones that are repeated. Similarly, overlapped speech is common. Another interactive aspect of the story is the way A actually helps C tell the story. She chimes in in line 12 to comment that the Subway shop where C worked is "in front of TBS" (the Tokyo Broadcasting System television station), and in lines 20 and 22 she contributes some imaginary quotes to illustrate C's point about most announcers speaking quite politely. Compared to the textbook narrative seen in example 3, example 4 is more interactive and collaborative, rather than an example of one person giving information or telling a story to another.

One explanation for the differences observed between examples 3 and 4 could be that they are mainly due to differences in formality. Example 3 is in a relatively formal speech style, and example 4 is a very informal conversation between friends. However, example 5 is an example of an equally interactive—perhaps even more interactive—style of narrative from a conversation in which participants Y and N are speaking in a relatively formal register, using the more distant *desu/masu* style:

Example 5. (R is asking Y and N, who are friends, how they got to know each other. "X" indicates an inaudible section of the tape.)

1   R: … nande shitten no?
             How did you get to know (each other)?

2   N: … X-
                 X

3   Y: .. ano, .. oniichan too,
             Um, my big brother and,

4   R: .. nn.
             Uh-huh.

5   Y: u- .. watashi no oniichan too,
             my big brother and

6   N: ... atashi no oniichan gaa, .. onaji kookoo de,
                 my big brother, went to the same high school,

7   R: .. [aaa].
            Oh.

8   N: [de oya ga] nakayoku nattee,
              And, our parents got to be friends,

9   Y: ... de, .. chuugakkoo moo, .. issho dattan desu yo. ... dee, .. sonomama-
            and, they were together in middle school too. And, in that way, for three

            … sannenkan, .. issho no kurasu dee, .. de mata issho no kookoo ittee,
              years, they were in the same class, and then, went to the same high school,

10   N: ... [oniichan ga ne].
            Our big brothers did.

11   R: [aaa],   a oniichan ga ne.
              Oh, oh your big brothers.

12   N: nn.
            Uh-huh.

13   R: .. hnn[n].
            Hmmm.

14   N: [sore dee],
                  And soo,

15   Y: [naka ga ii] ... [tte].
                  (they) were good friends.

16   N: [nn]. .. de, kookoo mo, onnaji kookoo itta karaa,
                            Uh-huh. And, they went to the same high school too, soo

            .. nandakanda itte,
              somehow or other,

            oya ga, .. issho ni, .. iku ja nai desu [ka].
            the parents go along too, you know.

17   R: [aa] aa aa [aa aa].
                                          oh oh oh oh oh

18   N: [ne]. .. ano,
                                              You see. Um,

bunkasai da no, [taiikusai da no].
(to) school festivals and (to) field days.

19   R: [aa aa], sorede aa aa [aa aa],
                         oh, oh, and so oh oh oh oh

20   Y: [de, sotsu]gyooshi-
                                          and,   graduat-

21   N: [sorede],
                                          and so

22   Y: .. saigo no, .. sotsugyooshiki nii,
          at the final, graduation

23   N: nn.
          Uh-huh.

24   Y: ... ma,
           well,

25   N: ... [haji]me demo,
             at the beginning, but,

26   Y: [n-]

27   N: .. imooto, .. da kara ttee, .. naka yokatta wake, ja nai n desu yo. ... ota[gai],
          it's not that we were good friends with each other, just because we were
          their little sisters,

28   R: [nn].
                                                                    Uh-huh.

As was example 4, this stretch of talk is extremely collaborative. The speakers use short phrases with pauses in between, so there is relatively little information in each utterance. The pauses are often filled by back-channel responses. Again we find a high amount of overlapped speech. Y begins the story, then by lines 5 and 6, the two speakers are collaboratively producing an utterance about how their brothers met. N takes over the story in 6, then Y resumes in 9. In line 10, we see some negotiation of meaning, as N clarifies what Y has said, probably because line 9 was potentially ambiguous—Y's utterance could be taken to mean N and Y were classmates instead of their brothers. They continue taking turns telling the story.

When we have discussed this example at conferences, some colleagues have suggested that even though this conversation was somewhat more formal, in that it contained a lot of *desu/masu* forms, it might still be atypical, because the speakers are young and are very good friends. However, when examining naturally occurring data, it quickly becomes apparent that interactive conversations like this are extremely common in Japanese among people of all ages,

and even between people who do not know each other well. Example 6 is a conversation between people some of whom do not know each other that well:

Example 6. (T is a graduate student in a department at an American University. I is a scholar visiting the department for a short time. K and O, whose contributions in this section are limited to minimal responses, are the wives of T and I, respectively.)

1   I: ... shinpusonsan ga hijooni,
          Ms. Simpson, really,

2   T: .. nnn.
         Uh-huh.

3   I: .. kyandiisan desu ka?
         Candy, is it?

4   T: .. [nnn]. hoontoni. .. ano [hito wa kami]sama desu wa hon-
         Uh-huh, really. ..she is a god. Real-

5   K: [nn].
          Uh-huh.

6   I: [nnn].
                           Uh-huh.

7   @@@@@[@@@@ .. nan]kaa .. [soo .. mitai] desu ne. pamu mo itte mashita kedo.
         well, it seems like it, doesn't it. Pam was saying (that).

8   O: [nnn .. XXXXX].
                 Uh-huh.

9   T: [honntoni ne].
                               Really.

10   .. moo zenzen. .. hi no uchidokoro ga nai desu yone.
         She doesn't have a single flaw, you know.

11   .. mo[o .. kichitto shi]teru[shi],
         She's really "together."

12   I: [nn nanka],   [... hijooni] [watashi-]
         Uh-huh, well,   really   I

13   O: [hnnn].
                 Uh-huh.

14   T: [shidooryoku] mo aru shi.
                                                        She's good at directing students too,
                                                        and…

15   I: .. watashii .. mo ne, .. koo .. bijitingu sukaraa nanka mo,
            I too, you know, a visiting scholar like I am, too,

16   ... hijooni kii tsukatte itadaite masu yone.
                she is really being considerate (of me), you know.

17   T: ... nnn.
             Uh-huh.

18   I: ... ano, .. nakanaka, ... rippana kata desu nee.
              Um, she's a really splendid person, isn't she.

19   T: .. eee. [honto]ni ne.
             Yeah, (she) really (is), isn't she.

20   I: [nn].
                     Uh-huh.

21   .. ma gyooseki mo .. [sugoii] .. desu kedo ne.
              Well, her accomplishments too, are amazing.

22   K: [nn].
                                 Uh-huh.

23   nn.
            Uh-huh.

24   I: .. anna kata ga, anna .. ronbun o ne, .. sugoi ronbun o iroiro kaite [rasshai
            masu] ne.
            Someone like her, articles like that, you know, she's written some amazing
            articles, hasn't she.

25   T: [ee ee ee].
                                                                Yeah.

T and I use primarily *desu/masu* forms and there are even a couple of instances of honorific forms in discussing a professor who is not present.[ii] When this example begins, I had just been asking about financial aid for students in the department, and T had commented that his department takes good care of its students. In line 1 of this example, I then mentions a specific professor in the department, and begins to say something about her. In line 3, he rephrases and uses her first name, perhaps because he is aware that T and T's fellow graduate students refer to

their professor by her first name. T then steps in with evaluative comments about the professor in lines 4, 9-11, and 14. Line 14 ends with a non-final form, *aru shi* ("is and…"), and I then contributes his own evaluation, based on the kindness that the professor has shown to him, a visiting scholar. Although this conversation has a slightly stilted feel to it, as though the unfamiliar participants are working hard to make conversation with each other, they are still collaboratively advancing the topic. And of course, in addition to the collaborative nature of the talk, we can see a number of the other features of natural conversation that were mentioned above, including short utterances, many and animated back-channel responses, overlaps, postposing, contractions and particle ellipsis.

CONCLUSION

We hope that the examples discussed in this paper demonstrate convincingly that textbook dialogues do not reflect the ways in which real talk is produced in actual interactions. What we think we do when we talk is often quite different from what we actually do, and the differences can be hard to notice because we are not used to paying attention to the details of how we speak. Teachers and developers of pedagogical materials should examine real talk so they can continue to create ever more realistic dialogues, thus helping students to learn how the target language is actually used and to attain the goal of becoming able to participate in interactions.

All this is not to say that we should do away with the use of constructed dialogues in textbooks. Students would be overwhelmed if we presented them with dialogues like examples 4, 5, and 6. But some features of naturally occurring talk would be easy to incorporate. For instance, although textbook dialogues tend to consist of neat pairs of complete sentences, it would be a simple task to create dialogues with more sentence fragments and postposing, and with fewer neat pairs of utterances. Repetitions, pauses, fillers, sentence-internal final particles, and back-channels are also all easy to incorporate. None of these changes should make textbook dialogues difficult for students to understand and learn from. Another change would actually make textbook dialogues easier for students: where there is currently a high amount of new information per utterance, we could instead use shorter sentences with no extraneous information. Long sentences could be broken up into short phrases with pauses between them, more accurately reflecting the way interactants actually talk and process information.

In addition to incorporating these features in textbooks, we believe that language students—and prospective language teachers, for that matter—should be exposed to naturally occurring language. We can play language students audio or video tapes of natural conversations and design activities around those tapes. Pedagogy students should collect and analyze naturally occurring talk. We should then insist that they think about the naturalness (or lack of naturalness) of the language that they write into their lesson plans. Exposure to real talk will help both teachers and students develop their intuitions about what Japanese speakers actually do in real interactions, and show them how to effectively contextualize and use existing materials. This will help our students make an easier transition to understanding real language as it is spoken outside the language classroom, by authentic speakers of the target language, in a myriad of interactional contexts.

Conference on Practical Linguistics of Japanese, and a talk we gave in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona in Spring 2000 for their help in completing this project. A much more thorough discussion of the linguistic aspects of a similar set of data is found in Ono and Jones (2001).

1.   Ironically, this textbook contains a description of Japanese pronouns that warns: "Their use is less frequent in Japanese than in English; excessive use of pronouns will either brand your speech as that of a gaijin (foreigner), or in certain cases, make it sound too familiar." (Japanese Language Promotion Center, 1970b:38)

2.   Honorifics used of absent third parties, although "required" in a prescriptive sense, are almost non-existent in casual conversations (Yamaji, 2000).

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