Function and form in procedural monologues: A pilot study towards comparing native and non-native texts

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Abstract

This paper reports on a pilot study that focuses on developing an approach to analyzing spoken texts produced when people give instructions for procedural tasks. Specifically, the study compares procedural monologues of three native speakers of English to those of three Japanese university students currently studying English as a foreign language. The paper's primary purpose is to identify salient patterns of language use in order to provide a point of departure for future investigations with a larger number of participants. Towards this goal, a mixed methodology is employed as communicative functions are qualitatively categorized and quantitative data of form frequency is extracted via corpus-based tools. A secondary purpose is to determine the viability of using the teleconference platform *Zoom* as an alternative to in-person observation when collecting data. Additionally, the paper offers preliminary findings that suggest a difference in communicative function and grammatical form found in each group of participants, as well as discussion of how future research efforts may proceed.

1. Introduction

In a wide variety of contexts in both our professional and daily lives, we are often called on to give procedural instructions to others. We might be asked, for example, for simple directions on how to purchase a train ticket from a vending machine or how to

crop a photograph on a smartphone application. Other tasks may call for more complex and detailed instructions, such as using specialized equipment in a science laboratory or throwing a bowl on a pottery wheel.

For speakers of a second or foreign language (L2), procedural discourse may be more challenging than other spoken registers due to the rigid parameters of a predetermined task, which limits the speaker's ability to strategically avoid shortcomings of their L2 proficiency. Especially when called on spontaneously, visualizing the essential steps of the procedure, while rhetorically organizing a spoken text in real time, may create an additional cognitive load on L2 learners.

For university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japan, procedural discourse may be limited to tasks that appear in functional syllabi of speaking courses and textbooks. Typically these include how to give directions on a map or how to write step-by-step instructions, such as a cooking recipe. Although such tasks might be useful, they may not fully prepare students for a wider variety of contexts, especially those relevant to the specific occupation or field that they enter after graduation. Since there are very few studies that explore the lexico-grammatical characteristics or communicative functions that are typical of procedural discourse, EFL instructors are left to their intuition when incorporating direction-giving into lesson plans or learning materials.

The paper presented here reports on a pilot study that aims to support future research efforts focused on comparing the procedural discourse of native speakers of English (NS) to those of Japanese university students in a variety of specific contexts. Specifically, the purpose of the paper is two-fold. One is to determine if there are salient patterns of language that are found when the two groups of participants give spontaneous directions for everyday common activities. Identifying such patterns may provide a point of departure for further investigations with a larger number of participants. A second reason is to prototype methods of eliciting and collecting data via the teleconference platform *Zoom* as an alternative to in-person observation in authentic physical contexts. This shift

in methodology became necessary to adjust to the limitations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic situation in Japan during the first half of the 2020 calendar year.

After describing the background of the study, key terms and a review of relevant literature are provided. A description of the methodology follows, which employs a mixed analytical approach of qualitative coding and quantitative data extracted by corpus-based tools. Focus then shifts to preliminary findings of both communicative function and grammatical forms present in each group of participants. Finally, discussion and conclusions about how future research may build on the pilot study are offered.

2. Background of the study

The current study is aligned with the goals of two on-going research projects. The first commenced in April of 2019 with a 3-year grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) for which I am the principal investigator. The project explores the genre of demonstrative artist talk in higher education contexts of the ceramic arts (Hammond, 2019). Such talks are delivered by artists while simultaneously demonstrating ceramic techniques to their peers at conferences or visiting artist lectures. The project compares talks by professional artists with native-level proficiency to ones given in English by students majoring in ceramics at universities of the arts in Japan. An analysis of the texts produced by professional artists, based on previously recorded videos from annual conferences of The National Council of Education of the Ceramic Arts, was completed in December of 2019 (see Hammond, 2020). The next proposed stage of the project was to collect original data of Japanese students giving similar talks. Although video of one case study was recorded in January of 2020, due to travel restrictions and other safety concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the original plan to visit ceramic studios of several Japanese universities was no longer feasible. This led to the idea of using Zoom as an alternative to in-person data collection.

The second project related to the study presented here commenced in April of 2020, with my enrollment in the doctoral course of the Graduate School of Human and Socio-

Environment Studies at Kanazawa University. This PhD project builds on the current JSPS funded research of artist talks, but also expands to similar genres and speech registers found in scientific, technical, and common everyday contexts. Lessons learned from this pilot study will ideally support the goals of both of these projects.

3. Procedural monologues defined

Procedural discourse encompasses a wide variety of texts in both written and spoken modes, and may also rely on multi-modal components, such as graphic illustrations, diagrams, and video recordings. In the case of spoken discourse, two sub classifications can be made based on the role of participants: a dialogue exchange between those giving instructions and those receiving them, or a single speaker producing a monologue with no interruptions. This paper is concerned with the latter.

The term, *procedural monologue* (PM), is being used here to represent texts produced by a single speaker that: focus on giving instructions for a predetermined activity, have a specialized sequence of action, involve physical objects and locations, are often accompanied with a demonstration of the activity, and can be either planned in advance or spontaneously produced. In many cases, they are delivered in-person to an individual or group of listeners, but it is also possible to give a PM to an unknown and unseen audience, as in the case of how-to videos commonly found on websites such as Youtube.

To illustrate with a simple example, consider a PM that I encountered when visiting a local eyeglasses shop. After purchasing a spray solution for cleaning glasses, I received instructions from the clerk on how to use it correctly. Her planned PM had a clear pedagogical and predetermined purpose (cleaning glasses), a specific sequence (remove glasses, wet, spray, rinse, dry, rub with chamois cloth), involved physical actions (rubbing, holding, spraying) and real objects (glasses, spray, cloth). It was also accompanied by a demonstration, as the clerk washed my glasses as she explained the procedure.

4. Review of relevant literature

In the following section, some literature pertaining to the study's design is reviewed. Issues include staged communicative events collected in fieldwork, using discourse completion tasks, and collecting data via videoconferencing platforms.

4.1 Staged communicative events

In field-based documentation of language, Himmelmann (1998) describes three distinct communicative events that can be collected. The first, *observed communicative events*, are those that researchers simply collect texts as they naturally occur. A second type are *elicitations*, which are created specifically for the sake of collecting data and are often influenced linguistically by prompts or instruments structured around specific constructions, lists of words, paradigms, or judgement of acceptability (Lüpke, 2009). The third are *staged communicative events*. These events, like elicitations, are organized strictly for the purpose of data collection, but do not involve direct linguistic influence and require the participant to freely produce text by elaborating at will. These events may employ a non-linguistic prompt, such as illustrations (de Villiers, 2004), photographs (Henwood et al., 2018) or video segments that present a situational use of the target linguistic characteristics (Majid et al., 2007). For example, an often used prompt to collect samples of narrative discourse is *The Pear Film* (Chafe, 1980), which presents a visual story absent of any spoken language. Verbal or written prompts may also be employed for staged communicative events. For example, the question, "Tell me how to pick mangoes, please" (Lüpke, 2009, p. 66), sets a parameter for possible replies that are not directly influenced by the language of the prompt.

4.2 Discourse completion tasks

Discourse completion tasks (DCT) have been widely employed as a method to elicit texts related to pragmatic competence, especially concerning speech acts and speech events (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). DCTs consist of a situational prompt that is read by the

participant, who then produces an original response. Such prompts can be used as a device to facilitate the collection of data from large numbers of participants, when resources are not available for other methods, such as interviews or extensive recording of audio or video (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). DCTs allow the researcher to narrow focus to investigate specific situational use of language, instead of searching through existing sources or collecting data on a broader scope with the hope of catching the targeted phenomenon.

Especially applicable for gathering samples with predefined parameters, DCTs can facilitate collection of language samples in situations that are difficult to predict for recording, or when comparing two groups of language users (Boxer & Cohen, 2004). For example, if a researcher was interested in marriage proposals, it would perhaps be an impossible task to collect authentic field recordings of such an intimate and rarely occurring moment. Likewise, attempts to record authentic use of imperative verbs, although they are not particularly rare, may be very difficult without providing some type of prompt.

A disadvantage of DCTs is that they may not always elicit natural use of language, as participants might offer what they think is the correct answer or what they are expected to write or say (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Additionally, participants are producing language in a contrived situation with an imaginary interlocutor. This raises the question of whether or not DCTs measure pragmatic ability or are just a symbolic action to comply as requested (Golato, 2003).

4.3 Collecting data by way of videoconferencing platforms

With advances in communication technology, researchers have increased opportunities to interact with study subjects when collecting data. Especially through the use of video and conferencing technologies, such as Zoom, it is possible to collect in a way similar to traditional face-to-face interviews and focus-groups. In a study that examined the perceptions and experiences resulting from using Zoom as a method of collecting qualitative interviews of 16 nurses in Australia (Archibald et al., 2019), both

researchers and participants expressed a high degree of satisfaction. Survey results suggested that Zoom may be preferable to alternative mediums, such as in-person interviews, written email replies, telephone, or other video platforms for several reasons. For example, the platform permits some non-verbal communication since all parties can see each other, which allows for rapport to develop. Additionally, interaction can take place at a convenient time and location, such as at one's home, which reduces the expense and inconvenience of traveling. This also facilitates collection and interaction at the international level. Moreover, some platforms, including Zoom, permit sessions to be easily recorded and stored without the use of third party software, which increases the protection of privacy and for sensitive subject matters. Zoom also supports cloud-based sharing of sessions, making it convenient for other researchers or stakeholders to share the recorded video.

Some drawbacks of using Zoom or similar platforms have been noted by Gray et al. (2020). One is that technical difficulties may occur due to unreliable internet connections, limited time and restrictions of some accounts, and issues with interruptions during recording sessions. Another disadvantage is that participants and researchers do not share the same physical space. Although faces and hands can usually be seen, the surrounding context may not always be visible. In some situations, a single front view camera may not be sufficient to cover all relevant activity.

5. Methodology of the pilot study

A total of six participants were recruited for the study: three American native-speakers of English (two males, one female), and three Japanese undergraduate students (two females, one male) at Kanazawa University. The students proficiency levels, based on the author's observation, were approximately A2 to B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (see Piccardo et al., 2018)

Prior to data collection, the project was verbally explained to all participants in English. In addition, an example PM (how to wash eye glasses) was given by the author,

also in English. Student participants were provided with a written explanation in Japanese (Appendix A) to ensure that they understood their role and the goals of the project.

The author and each participant met in a Zoom session, which was recorded using the platform's mp4 video format. A total of ten DCT prompts, focused on simple and familiar activities, were used to elicit PMs for each participant. Prompts were verbally delivered to NS participants, but only given in written Japanese form to students in order to prevent them from using the prompt itself as a linguistic resource. Prompts are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Prompts given to each group of participants.

Prompts given to native-speakers	Prompts given to Japanese students
How do you make a cup of tea using a tea bag?	ティーバッグを使ってお茶を入れるにはどうしたらいいの?
How do you brush your teeth?	どうやって歯を磨けばいいですか?
After writing a letter, what are the steps needed to send it by postal mail?	誰かに手紙を書いて、郵送するにはどうすればいいですか?
How do you photocopy a single page of a book?	本の一つのページをコピーするにはどうすればいいですか?
How do you use an ATM to withdraw cash?	ATM でお金を下ろすにはどうしたらいいですか?
How do you wash dishes by hand? For example, one plate.	どうやってお皿を洗いますか? (例えば，プレート 一枚)
How do you cook spaghetti?	どうやってスパゲティを茹でますか?
How do you wash your hair?	どのように髪を洗うのですか?
How do you purchase a drink from a vending machine?	自動販売機から飲み物を買う方法は?
How do you use a self-checkout register at a supermarket?	スーパーでのセルフレジの使い方は?

As each participant gave directions for all ten tasks, a total of 60 PMs were collected. These were transcribed, resulting in a total of 5,103 word tokens for the three NS participants and 1,660 for student participants. For sample excerpts of the transcripts see Appendix B.

The study's analytical approach employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. All PMs were separated into lists of utterances (i.e., sentences, phrases, and words marked by a clear pause), which were then qualitatively coded by communicative function. Quantitative data was gleaned from the transcripts using the parts of speech tag set (Tree Hugger) and corpus query language tools available in the *Sketch Engine* corpus management platform (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). The 2014 version of the Spoken British National Corpus (Love et al., 2017) was used as a reference corpus, which comprises approximately 10 million words of spoken conversation. All comparisons were made after raw frequency counts were normalized at a rate of occurrence per 10,000 words of text. The concordance plot tool in *Antconc* software (Anthony, 2019) was also used to some extent to determine how lexical items were distributed among the individual participants of each group.

6. Findings

The following sections report on the findings of the study and focus on two elements of PMs of both participant groups: communicative functions and salient grammatical characteristics.

6.1 Communicative functions

After several cycles of coding at the utterance level, eight communicative functions were identified: giving instructions, explaining scenarios, describing context, offering caution and advice, clarifying, expressing lexical doubt, marking stages of procedures, and ending. Two examples of each coded function are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Communicative functions and example utterances.

Function	Example
Giving Instruction	*Move your hands with the sponge.* *You put it on the stove.*
Explaining Scenarios	*Some machines you need to pull down on the little lever.* *Usually they will ask you if you need a bag.*
Describing Context	*Once you do that it will ask you for your PIN.* *They will then weigh the letter.*
Offering Caution/Advice	*You have to make sure not to mix up those two places.* *Make sure it is on the bar code.*
Clarifying	*Not all the way you got to leave the little tag hanging out.* *You know, top left corner, bottom left corner, whatever.*
Lexical Doubt	*Lather, is that the right word?* *And you can use…. 歯磨き粉？*
Stage Marking	*So once you have scanned all of the products, it is time to pay.* *Then it's time to start brushing.*
Ending	*Then go and enjoy your beverage.* *Finished!*

An utterance was categorized as giving instructions when the speaker made reference to essential actions needed to complete the task. The code of explaining scenarios was designated for likely or multiple situations that might be encountered when engaged in the procedure. When the speaker was involved in the function of describing context they made reference to properties of objects or locations but did not give instructions. Offering caution/advice and clarifying are self-explanatory; they were often cohesively connected to the previous utterance to add more detail. Lexical doubt indicates a speaker's uncertainty in the aptness of a word or, in the case of the student participants, code-switching to Japanese. A code of stage marking was used when an utterance aimed to break down longer tasks into shorter stages. Finally, endings were used to indicate that

the PM was completed.

All eight of these communicative functions were present in the texts of NS. Only six, however, were identified in those produced by students, as there were no utterances coded as stage marking or offering caution/advice. Figure 1 illustrates how the coded functions were distributed among the total occurrences of the two groups.
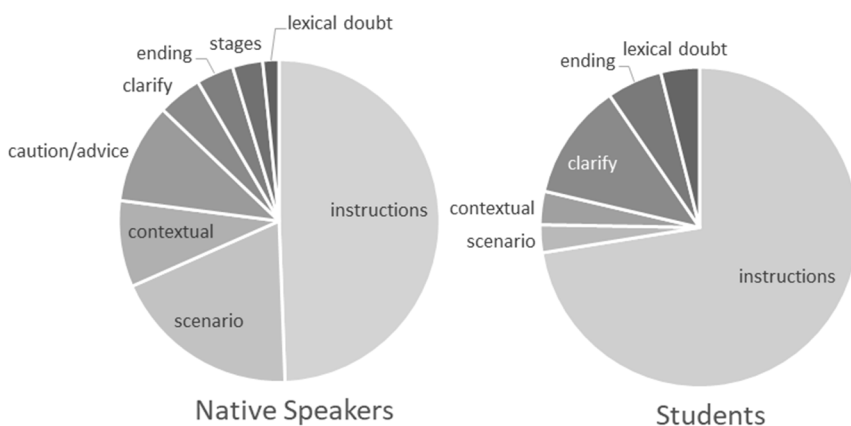

Figure 1. The distribution of communicative functions in the procedural monologues of native speakers and students, based on total occurrences of all members of the group.

Giving instructions, as expected, was the most frequently occurring function. It represented 49% of NS monologues and 72% of those by students. Concerning other functions, NS often employed scenarios (19%), caution/advice (10%), and contextual description (9%), while students included 12% for clarification and 6% for endings.

6.2 Salient grammatical characteristics

In addition to the communicative functions found in the participants' PMs, the study also investigated the differences in frequency of occurrence of three grammatical characteristics: pronouns, salient verb forms, and modal verbs. These frequencies were

normalized and compared to the Spoken BNC corpus to provide perspective on the differences in the register of PM and that of spoken conversation. These differences, which will be revisited in the discussion section, are described below, starting with pronouns in Figure 2.
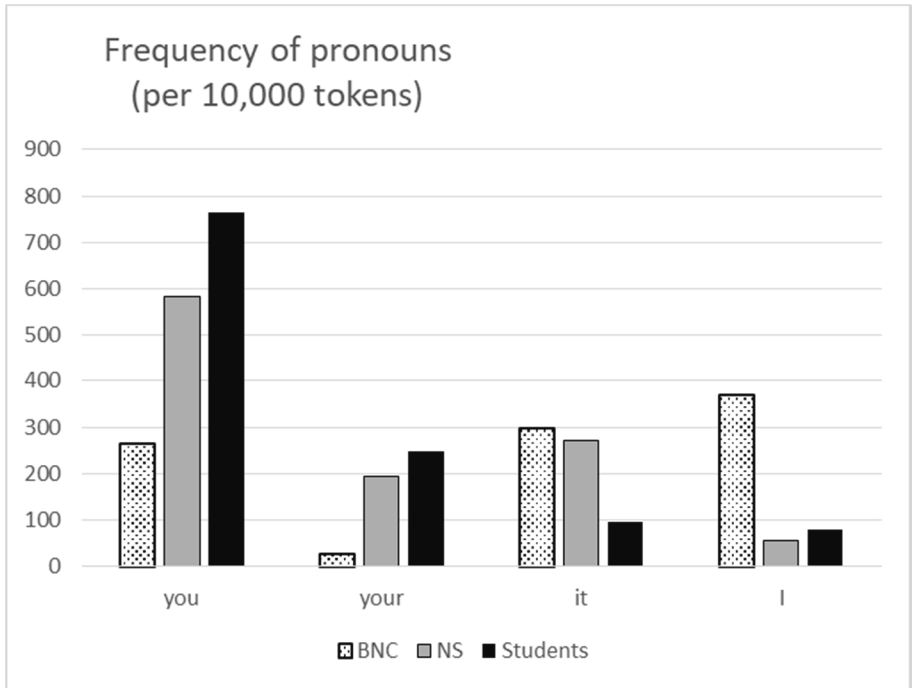

Figure 2. Frequency of pronouns per 10,000 word tokens in the BNC corpus and PMs of participants, based on total occurrences of all members of the group.

The pronoun *you* and *your*, occurred at a far greater rate in participant groups than in the BNC corpus. In contrast, *I* was present more often in the BNC than in the text produced by participants. Most notably, NS used the pronoun *it* at a similar rate (270) as the BNC, which is substantially more than the students (96).

A second factor in the analysis of grammatical patterns involved verb forms. There was a substantial difference in forms, which were extracted by using the corpus query language mark-up tools of Sketch Engine. These differences are illustrated in Figure 3.
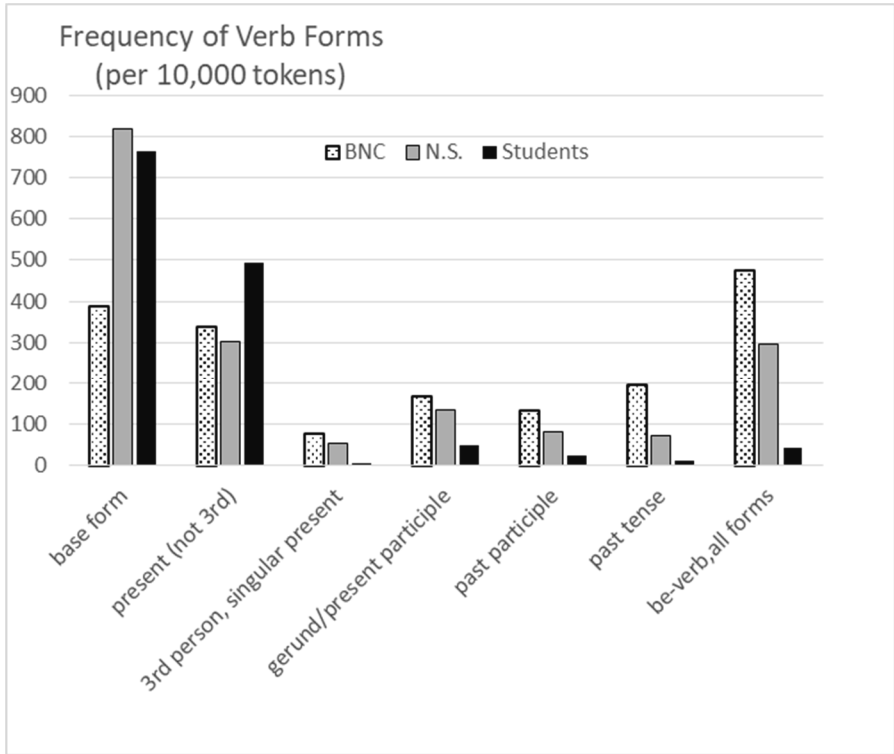

Figure 3. Frequency of verb forms per 10,000 word tokens, in the BNC corpus and PMs of participants, based on total occurrences of all members of the group.

Both the base form and the present (not 3rd person) forms were often used in given instructions as an imperative (*Put the money in the machine*), or as a simple present construction with the pronoun *you* as the subject (*You put the money in the machine*). These forms, in both groups, were used more frequently than the BNC. There are also

notable differences in the lack of gerunds, past participles, and past tense forms as used by the students, and a particularly large discrepancy in the use of be-verbs between NS (297) and students (42).

The third grammatical form included in the study, modal verbs, also showed salient differences in the rate of occurrence, as shown in Figure 4.
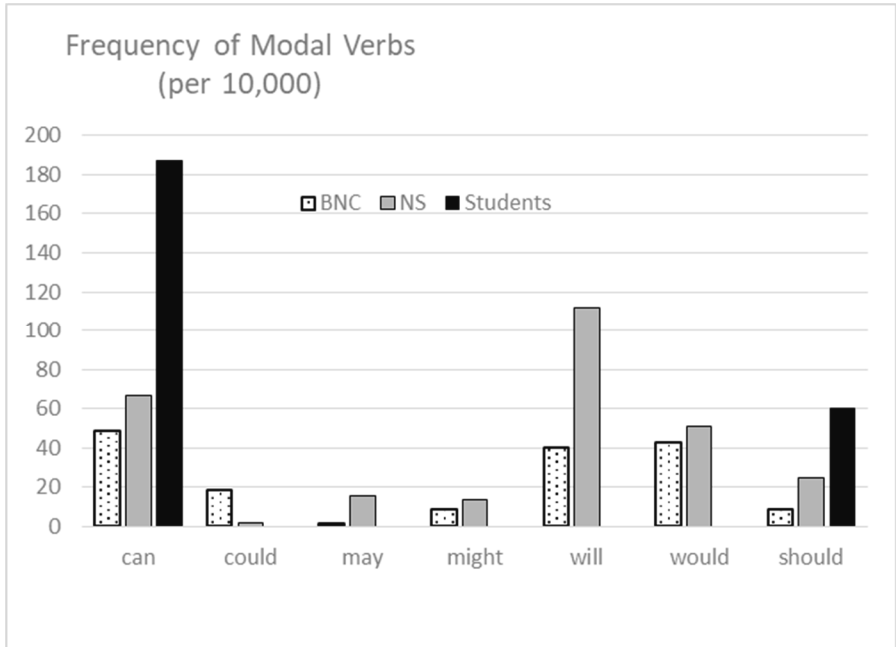

Figure 4. Frequency of modal verbs per 10,000 word tokens in the BNC corpus and PMs of participants, based on total occurrences of all members of the group.

Students used only two modal verbs: *can* and *should*. A single student, however, accounted for 78% of all occurrences. In contrast, a wide variety of modals was found in NS texts, with *will* (112) being employed most frequently, followed by *can* (67) and *would* (51). Surprisingly, students did not produce a single utterance using *will* or *would*.

7. Discussion for future studies and conclusion

Although intended as a pilot study, three limitations to the research presented in this paper should be acknowledged. The first concerns the qualitative coding of communicative functions, which was exclusively made by the author as a single rater. In future investigations, the reliability of coding could be strengthened by including additional raters and a statistical test to confirm validity. A second limitation is that NS participants were American, yet a corpus of British English was used as reference. This was done to save time, as it allowed the use of the readily available copra integrated within the Sketch Engine platform, for which an American corpus is not included. A third and more significant limitation is the small amount of data used in the study. As frequency was normalized to a rate per 10,000 words, the 1,660-word student corpus may be difficult to interpret by frequency alone. As described in the students' use of modal verbs, in such a small data set, anomalies caused by a single text affected the outcome of the overall analysis. Increasing the number of participants may provide a richer analysis that more accurately represents the overall characteristics of texts produced by each group. In addition to these limitations, it is also worth acknowledging that five of the ten prompts involved the use of water. Although this may not be relevant to the grammatical characteristics reported here, caution should be used if the same prompts are employed to research the frequency of lexical items in future studies.

Concerning the study's data collection methodology, the Zoom platform was easy to use for both the researcher and participants. No technical problems were encountered and the video recording function provided clear audio for transcription. Additionally, prompts given to students in written Japanese successfully generated texts with no linguistic influence.

The findings of the study clearly show that there is a salient difference in the way the two groups approach giving instructions. Students tend to limit their monologues to a narrow focus on the essential steps of the procedure. Compared to NS, they placed very little emphasis on describing context or pointing out likely or multiple scenarios that may

be encountered when engaged in the task. There is also a complete lack of offering caution or advice, which suggests that students may not have had an imaginary interlocutor in mind in the same way that NS did. In addition, although 12% of students PMs involved clarification, in some cases these utterances did not add relevant information but merely rephrased a similar meaning, for example, *Firstly my hair wet*, followed by *First I wet my hair.* This was different from clarification by NS, such as *Put the tea bag in the cup*, and then *Not all the way you got to leave the little tag hanging out*.

These differences in the communicative functions used by the two groups are reflected in the grammatical characteristics of their texts. Notably, the pronoun *it* is used far more frequently by NS since they construct utterances that make anaphoric reference to the contextual objects (*It will come down below*; or *Make sure it is on the bar code*). In addition, NS used verb forms much more dynamically, such as the 3rd person singular present form in utterances that have objects as subjects (*The pot needs to be large enough*.), the gerund as a modifier (*soaking wet, running water, boiling hot*), and be-verb forms for both conditionals (*If it is a thick letter…*) and temporal reference (*While you are doing that…*). As previously mentioned, modal verbs were not equally used by the three student participants, so meaningful conclusions are a bit elusive. However, NS showed frequent occurrences of six modals (*can, could, might, will, would, should*), which covered a wider variety of communicative functions than the two (*can, should*) used by students.

Overall, the pilot study suggests that the methods of data collection, which were designed as an alternative to pre-corona virus plans, are feasible and may support the development of an analytical framework for future research. A clear difference in how participants gave directions for simple everyday tasks was found. Moving forward, the identified patterns can provide a starting point for larger scale studies to investigate if similar characteristics exist across a wide variety of contexts.

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Appendix A

Written description given to student participants.

　この研究プロジェクトは、人々がどのように指示を与えるかについてです。目的は、ネイティブスピーカーと日本人大学生の英語を比較することです。参加者は 10 の質問に答えます。質問は「何かをする方法」についてです。例えば「カップラーメンはどうやって作るの？」基本的な手順を教えてください。また、実行の方法や、アドバイスや提案について話すこともできます。硬い言い方ではなくてもいいです。友人にやり方を教えるように話してください。英語のテストではありませんから、文法などの間違いは気にしないで構いません。

Appendix B

Excerpts of transcribed texts: How do you make a cup of tea using a tea bag?

Native speaker text:

Ok so first you get a cup.

You put some water in a pot or a tea kettle.

You put it on a stove.

Turn the stove on.

And you heat the water until a boil.

Then you turn the stove off.

You let the water sit for a few seconds to cool down.

You take the bag, or I guess you take it out of the box, most of the time out of a box.

Uh, you unwrap the wrapper.

And you take the bag and I don't know what it's called when you take the top of the tea bag.

You, uh, I like to put the tea bag in first.

Not all the way you got to leave the little tag hanging out.

Pour the water in.

And then I like to take the teabag after the water is filled up almost to the top.

I take the teabag.

I lift it out of the water and dip it back in a few times.
And then I let it sit for usually two to five minutes.
And then after that I take a sip to make sure it's not too hot.
And then if it is to your liking take the teabag.
Throw it away.
And then enjoy your tea with a nice biscuit or cookie.

Student text:
First open the teabag pack.
And then put out teabag, yes.
And boiling the water.
And wait a minute.
You put teabag on, in cup, tea cup.
And pouring the hot water.
Yes and you, you wait a minute.
Put out the tea bag.
And throw away.
And let's drink.

手続き的独話の機能と形態：
英語母語話者テキストと非英語母語話者テキストの比較に向けたパイロット研究

マーク・ハモンド

要旨

　本論文では、手続き的作業の指示を与える際に生成される音声テキストを解析する手法の開発に焦点を当てたパイロット研究について報告した。具体的には、3 人の英語母語話者と、外国語として英語を学んでいる 3 人の日本人学生の手続き的独話を比較した。本論文の主な目的は、より多くの参加者を対象とした将来の研究の出発点を提供するために、言語使用の顕著なパターンを特定することである。この目標に向けて、伝達機能を定性的に分類し、形態頻度の定量的データをコーパスベースのツールを介して抽出する複合的な方法論を採用した。第 2 の目的は、データを収集する際に、対面での観察に代わるものとしてテレビ会議プラットフォームの Zoom を使用することの可能性を見極めることである。加えて、本論文は、参加者の各グループで見出されたコミュニケーション機能と文法形式の違いを示唆する予備的知見を提供し、今後の研究がどのように進むかについても論じる。