

“Braid Structure” Conversations: Development of Informal Triadic Conversation in Japanese

Saeko MACHI (Rikkyo University)

This study analyzes informal triadic conversations taken from a Japanese TV talk show, focusing on three prominent linguistic resources that are frequently observed in Japanese conversation: repetition and paraphrasing of another speaker's utterance, and co-construction of a sentence/story. The analysis shows that the three resources share some functional features in conversation: they connect speakers' utterances, ideas, and the speakers themselves while developing a story collaboratively. This is achieved by the participants accessing each other's utterances and 1) incorporating others' utterances in their own speech (i.e., repetition and paraphrasing) or 2) supplementing or completing others' utterances with their own words (i.e., co-construction). It is also shown that these linguistic resources often take place contiguously and synergistically to enhance the collaborative and bonding nature of casual Japanese conversation. Analysis suggests that, in animated informal conversations, Japanese speakers develop the conversations by spontaneously intertwining their utterances as if weaving strings into a braid. Developing this analogy, this study introduces a “braid structure” model to illustrate how in conversation, Japanese speakers, especially close friends, intricately connect their utterances, and by extension, themselves.

Key words: repetition, paraphrasing, co-construction, Japanese conversation, triadic conversation

日本語の親しい三者間の会話に見られる ブレイド・ストラクチャー（編み込み構造）の考察

町 沙恵子（立教大学）

本研究ではテレビのトークショーから抽出した親密な三者による会話を扱い、そこに頻繁にみられる他者の発話の繰り返し、パラフレーズ、及び協同発話（co-construction）の3つの言語実践を分析する。この3つは話者たちの発話や思考、さらに話者同士を結び付け、協調的に会話を展開させる機能を共有する。それは話者たちが互いの発話に容易にアクセスし、それを自己の発話に気軽に組み込んだり（繰り返し、パラフレーズ）、相手の未完成の発話の続きを察してそれを補うこと（協同発話）によって達成される。またこれらの言語実践は頻繁に共起・共働し、日本語の親しい者同士の会話の協調的かつ友好的（bonding）な性質を強化する。以上の分析結果から、日本語の親密な三者による会話では、特に会話の盛り上がり部分において話者たちが互いの発話を絡め合わせ、まるで三つ編み（ブレイド）を編むかのように会話を展開することを指摘する。この類似性から、話者たちの発話が密接に絡まり、つながり、話者同士も結束していく会話構造の在り方をブレイド・ストラクチャー（編み込み構造）とし、モデルを提示しながら親密な話者による日本語会話の協調的な会話展開の在り方を説明することを試みる。

キーワード: 繰り返し、パラフレーズ、協同発話、日本語会話、三者会話

1. Introduction

Conversation is, by definition, not one-sided but mutually created: what scholars term “collec-

tive activity” (Duranti, 1986), “joint production” (Tannen, 1989) or something that is “mutually constructed” (Ferrara, 1994). While these statements hold true, the positioning of speakers within a giv-

en conversation, for example, the degree of their closeness and involvement, differs markedly according to the language spoken. This often leads to intercultural misunderstanding and frustration. To prevent such misunderstanding and frustration from arising it is important to know how conversation is constructed in a given language, and what linguistic resources contribute to this process.

In this study, the conversational style in Japanese, which is often syntactically and pragmatically different from English is explored. Specifically, three prominent linguistic resources that are frequently observed in informal triadic conversations in Japanese: repetition and paraphrasing of another’s utterance, and co-construction of a sentence/story are examined. Analysis suggests that Japanese speakers, especially close friends, spontaneously access each other’s utterances and stories, connecting them to jointly develop a conversation as if they were weaving strings into a braid. This is especially apparent when a conversation reaches a phase where speakers become actively engaged in a familiar topic.¹⁾ The three linguistic resources play a critical role in allowing this weaving process not only respectively but also in a synergistic manner.

Developing the weaving analogy, this study introduces a “braid structure” model to illustrate how Japanese speakers in an informal setting converse while intricately connecting their utterances, and by extension, themselves. Three elements are presented to support the aptness of the braid structure model: 1) the use of flexible lines to represent utterances made by three speakers, 2) the three speakers’ frequent and relatively balanced turn-taking, and 3) the continuous nature of the act of braiding. Building on previous research, the study aims to present the braid structure model for a better understanding of informal conversational styles in the Japanese language.

2. Previous Studies on Japanese Conversational Style: *Kyowa* ‘cooperative talk’

One of the most widely accepted studies on Japanese conversational style is by Mizutani (1993, 1995). She introduced the term, *kyowa* ‘cooperative talk,’ to describe how Japanese speakers

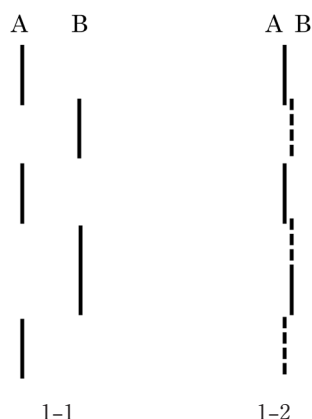


Figure 1 English *taiwa* ‘dialogic talk’ model (1-1) and Japanese *kyowa* ‘cooperative talk’ model (1-2)

converse. It was designed in contrast to *taiwa* ‘dialogic talk,’ which describes English conversational styles. Mizutani explains that in English *taiwa* style, one speaker completes his or her own speech while the other speaker listens and awaits his or her turn. This is represented by two straight lines as shown in Figure 1-1. In Japanese *kyowa* style, on the other hand, speakers frequently use back-channels to comment on each other’s utterances, and furthermore, the phenomenon of speakers’ completing each other’s unfinished sentences is frequently observed. This is why Mizutani (1993) uses two lines in close proximity which sometimes partly overlap to represent *kyowa* style as shown in Figure 1-2.

These models are convincing and effective in showing the contrasting styles of Japanese and English conversation. Although few scholars use visual models, similar views regarding the two languages—Japanese speakers are more cooperative, collaborative, empathetic, and closely relate to each other in carrying out a conversation while English speakers are rather individual, independent, or to quote Fujii (2012), “one-to-one (and) independent-minded”—have been presented (Fujii, 2012, 2016a, 2016b; Ueno, 2017; Machi, 2007, 2010, 2012; Strauss & Kawanishi, 1996; Cook, 1992; Maynard, 1997).

The present study does not dispute these previous statements about Japanese and English conversational styles. Rather, it provides conver-

sation examples that include the frequent use of repetition, paraphrasing, and co-construction of a sentence/story and shows how these devices share some features and often synergize. By so doing, the study reinforces the account of the collaborative and bonding nature of Japanese conversation, especially in an informal setting. To do so, the study introduces the concept of “braid structure” to better illustrate the way in which Japanese speakers, while being actively engaged in a topic, converse as if they interweave each other’s speech and ideas and jointly develop a conversation.

3. Data

The data for this study were obtained from a Japanese TV show called “*Bokura no Jidai*” [“Our Generation”]². This weekly talk show is shown on Sunday mornings. Three guests are invited to talk freely about what is on their minds without a set format. No host or interviewer is present to control the conversation. The three guests talk freely in a relaxed setting, sipping a cup of coffee and sometimes alcohol. For this study, three episodes were selected for analysis. The conversation in the first episode is between three young male actors, ranging in age from 28 to 30 years. The second is also between three young male actors aged from 26 to 34 years. The third conversation is between three women—two of whom are TV announcers and one a performer—all of them are 30 years of age. In all three episodes, the three participants acknowledge each other as close friends. All conversations are carried out in a very friendly atmosphere. All episodes were approximately 22 minutes in length. The conversations were transcribed by the author.

4. Analysis

In the following sections, we will see in detail how the use of repetition, paraphrasing, and co-construction of a sentence/story contribute to the braid structure of Japanese conversation. Before proceeding, it must be noted that for the purpose of this study, “conversation” here refers to “informal conversation” that is carried out by close friends in a relaxed setting, just like the data set in this study.

4.1 Repetition

The most prominent linguistic resource that contributes to the braid structure of Japanese conversation is repetition—in this case, repetition of another speaker’s utterance. The weaving metaphor for the production of a conversation and repetition’s contribution to it is also noted in Tannen (1989): “...speakers weave the words of others into the fabric of their own discourse, the thread of which is, in turn, picked up and rewoven into the pattern (pp. 58–59).” While this phenomenon can be observed in conversations in many languages to some extent, it happens frequently in Japanese conversation as a result of rich repetition in the language (Machi, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014; Fujii, 2012; Ueno, 2017; Strauss & Kawanishi, 1996).

While repetition of another’s utterances performs various functions³, in Japanese its function is primarily to connect participants’ utterances and ideas and therefore themselves (Machi, 2007, 2010, 2012). In other words, repetition connects small separate components (i.e. respective utterances and speakers) and builds a larger unified whole (i.e. story and a group of co-speakers). Our data of informal triadic conversations are richly endowed with this phenomenon, especially when the three speakers become animated and engaged. Let us see some examples. In excerpt (1) below, three women talk about their wish to marry and become mothers. See how repetition, which is highlighted in boldface, constantly takes place and how they connect one utterance to another.

(1) “Next year is coming soon”

01 Minami: *Shiranai dansee toka, ga, tomodachi ga tsurete kitari toka shita baai wa, moo kaeru mon*

‘If a friend of mine brings a male acquaintance, I just leave’

02 Marie: *Ee! Soo nano? [Nande nande? ‘What! Is that so? Why why?’*

03 Minami: *[[laughter]*

04 Minami: *Nande daroo, anmari kizutsukitaku nai no*

‘I wonder why, I don’t want to get hurt’

05 Marie: *Demo kekkon wa shitai*

- 06 Minami: **'But you wanna get married'**
Kekkon wa shitai, komatta yo ne
 'I wanna get married, what a pain'
- 07 Marie: *[laughter] Kore dooshitara ii[no]?*
 'What can she (we) do with this?'
- 08 Mio: *[Doo-
 shitara ii kanee?]*
 'What can she (we) do, I wonder'
- 09 Marie: *Itsugoro shitai toka tteno wa aruno?*
 'When do you wanna do it?'
- 10 Minami: **Rainen**
 'Next year'
- 11 Marie: **Rai[nen]?**
 'Next year?'
- 12 Mio: *[Rainen?]*
 'Next year?'
- 13 Minami: **Rainen. [Rainen kekkon shite, ninshin
 suruno]**
 'Next year. I (want to) get married
 next year, and get pregnant'
- 14 Marie: *[Ou]*
 'Wow'
- 15 Marie: *E, moo rainen sugu da yo*
 'But it will be next year soon'
- 16 Minami: **Rainen sugu**
 'Next year soon'
- 17 Mio: *Nisen juu-nana nen*
 'Year of 2017'
- 18 Marie: **Juu-nana nen, moo sugu kuru [yo]**
 'Year of 17, it's coming soon'
- 19 Minami: *[Juu-nana nen dane, soo, rainen
 kekkon no medo ga tatsu to iina tte kanji]*
 'Year of 17, it is, yeah, it would be nice
 if a marriage is arranged next year'
- 20 Mio: *[Aa, ee]*
 'Ah, wow'
- 21 Marie: *[Aa, naruhodo, ee]*
 'Ah, I see, wow'
- 22 Minami: *Soo, pon-pon ikanaito*
 'Yeah, I have to be prompt'
- 23 Mio: **Pon-pon da yo, honto [ni]**
 'Prompt, it is, really'
- 24 Marie: *[Un, hayasugiru]*
 'Yeah, too fast'
- 25 Minami: *Mio wa ii okaasan ni narisoo dayo-
 ne[e]*
 'I think Mio will make a great mother'
- 26 Mio: *[Narukanaa]*

- 'Will I (make it)?'**
- 27 Minami: **Naruu, zettai naruu**
 'You'll make it, absolutely, you will'
- 28 Mio: *Watashi moo asu ni demo mama ni
 naritai tteyuu, [kimochi wa aru]*
 'I have this feeling that I want to
 become a mother even tomorrow'
- 30 Minami: *[Hontoo?]*
 'Really?'
- 31 Marie: *Ima sugoi omedeta rasshu da yo ne?*
 'We're having baby boom (around us)
 now, don't you think?'
- 32 Minami: **Rasshu, honto rasshu da ne**
 'Baby boom, really it's booming'

In this long excerpt, the three speakers collaboratively and empathetically unfold the story, that is, even though Minami is reluctant to socialize with male acquaintances, she wants to get married next year, but next year is approaching fast and she needs to act promptly. Note that the three women repeatedly produce repetition of each other's words and these repetitions perform various functions: for example, Minami's *nande* 'why' in 04 shows the acceptance of the previous question, but also works as a preliminary to her answer. *Rainen* 'next year' in lines 11 and 12 seek confirmation while showing surprise. *Kekkon wa shitai* 'I wanna get married' in 06, *rainen* 'next year' in 13, *naruu* 'you'll make it' in 27, and *rasshu* 'baby boom' in 32 all function as answers to the preceding question. *Juu-nana nen* 'year of 17' in lines 18 and 19 confirms and emphasizes the appointed time.

While the functions vary, what is meaningful about these repetitions is that the speakers accept and share each other's choice of words and the ideas behind them. It is especially noticeable where speakers express sympathy and/or agreement in the form of repetition as in lines 08, 16, and 23. In 08, Mio repeats Marie's apparent confusion, *Dooshitara ii?* 'What can she (we) do?,' creating empathy among the speakers. In lines 16 and 23, due to the repetition of *rainen sugu* '(it will be) next year soon' and *pon-pon* '(be) prompt,' the feeling of haste is enhanced and shared. The phenomenon of speakers' repeating each other's feelings and assessments is quite prominent in Japanese conversation, resulting in the creation

of sympathy and rapport (Machi, 2010, 2012). By means of such repetition, the speakers’ utterances and ideas are connected and shared to the degree that they see the situation from the same point of view as in excerpt (1).

Another interesting point to note is how the story develops. Once Minami’s story of wanting to get married ends in line 24, the topic shifts to Mio’s wish to become a mother, and then to the current baby boom that is happening around the participants. It is noteworthy that each time a new topic is introduced by one of the speakers, the other speaker repeats part of the introductory utterance, showing acceptance of the new topic and willingness to participate in it. This is very similar to what Tannen (1989, p. 59) calls “repetition as participatory listenership,” in which repetition functions as a way for a speaker to participate in an interchange by showing listenership and acceptance of another speaker’s utterance. In excerpt (1), line 26, Mio partly repeats the preceding utterance made by Minami, which expands the conversation in a new direction—motherhood. By so doing, Mio signals the acceptance of the new topic and follows Minami in that direction. The same goes for line 32, where Minami displays agreement with Marie’s statement about the current baby boom. This is how a new topic is accepted and developed via repetition.

The frequent occurrence of repetition not only links utterances and develops new topics, but also contributes greatly to the creation of a bond and fellow feeling between speakers. In the following example, three speakers—Osamu, Ryuta, and Kenta⁵—talk about their shared circumstances while repeating each other’s utterances.

(2) “What a coincidence”

- 01 Osamu: *Nanka, kyoodai toka mo, ne, sakki, tamatama...*
‘Like, we were casually talking about our siblings earlier,’
- 02 Ryuta: *Soo*
‘Right’
- 03 Osamu: *Suekko, suekko desu ka?*
‘Youngest child, are you the youngest?’
- 04 Ryuta: *Suekko suekko*
‘(I’m) the youngest, the youngest’

- 05 Osamu: *Suekko desu ka?*
‘Are you the youngest?’
- 06 Kenta: *Suekko*
‘(I’m) the youngest’
- 07 Osamu: *Suekko desu*
‘(I’m also) the youngest’
- 08 Kenta: *Sugoi kyootsuuten*
‘What a coincidence!’
- omission—
- 11 Osamu: *Futari kyoodai desu ka?*
‘Two boys in the family?’
- 12 Ryuta: *Aniki, futari kyoodai*
‘(I have one) older brother, two boys’
- 13 Kenta: *Futari kyoodai*
‘Two boys’
- 14 Osamu: *Futari kyoodai*
‘Two boys’
- 15 Kenta: *De, nigatsu umare?*
‘And born in February?’
- 16 Osamu: *[Nigatsu umare*
‘(I was) born in February’
- 17 Ryuta: *[Nigatsu umare, [a soo nano, sugoi na kore*
‘(I was) born in February, oh is that so, this is amazing’
- 18 Kenta: *[Zen-in nigatsu umare*
‘All of us were born in February’

This excerpt contains three sets of threefold repetitions. As soon as the three men begin to talk about their family structure, they find out that they have several things in common: they are all the youngest of two boys, and their birthdays are in February. What is notable is that in lines 04 and 06, Ryuta and Kenta answer Osamu’s question—*Suekko desu ka?* ‘Are you the youngest?’—in the form of repetition. This repetition cycle is completed by Osamu—the initiator who asks the question—in 07, also repeating the same word, *suekko* ‘the youngest,’ to emphasize their similarity. The same pattern is seen in the following two sets of question-answer sequences regarding *futari kyodai* ‘two boys’ and *nigatsu umare* ‘born in February.’ While other simpler answer options/agreement tokens such as *un* ‘yes,’ *soo* ‘right,’ or *ore (watashi) mo* ‘me too’ can be used in this context without significantly altering the meaning, they choose to employ repetition. This is partly

because answering in the form of repetition, that is, using the same or similar expressions, enables the speakers to emphasize their familiarity and convergent viewpoints in addition to answering the content of the question (Machi, 2012, 2019; Tannen, 1989; Ishikawa, 1991). In other words, by emphasizing their similar family structure and birth month, the three speakers create a bond and feel connected in the conversation. Repetition plays a critical role in this process.

Lastly, what is meaningful about this frequent repetition between three speakers is that, as mentioned above, repetition often results in triplets, even in quadruplets, and sometimes even more (e.g. lines 10 to 13 and 17 to 19 in excerpt (1) and lines 03 to 07, 11 to 14, and 15 to 18 in excerpt (2)). In other words, even after the key phrase is repeated once, speakers keep on repeating it as if one repetition is not enough. By so doing, speakers create a pattern in which all three of them can easily participate in a good rhythm so that they can collaboratively develop the conversation as well as to create a sense of connection.

As seen in (1) and (2), in our data of informal triadic conversations, repetition occurred fairly frequently and contributed to 1) connecting utterances that are produced by different speakers, 2) developing a story, and 3) creating a bond between speakers. To put it simply, repetition created connection and expansion. The way Japanese speakers, while being actively engaged in a casual conversation, frequently pick up words from other's utterances and incorporate them in their own, and the way the speakers become united resembles the image of weaving strands of thread into a single braid.

4.2 Paraphrasing

Another linguistic resource that contributes to the collaborative style of Japanese conversation is paraphrasing another speaker's utterance. As pointed out by Koch (1984), Tannen (1989), and Machi (2018), paraphrasing is a form of repetition. They are similar in the sense that they are a reiteration of the previous utterance and the only difference is the scale of fixity. In other words, unlike repetition, in which the original and repeated expressions are the same or similar in form, in the case of paraphrasing, paraphrasers use their own

words, or at least lexically modified expressions. They sometimes incorporate their own interpretation to restate statements while maintaining the original meaning and content.

Previous studies have shown that paraphrasing another's utterance has supportive and positive functions in conversation: for example, it allows the speakers to adopt their conversation partner's position and commit themselves to stand by it (Bublitz, 1988), to co-construct meanings in conversation (Tabensky, 2001; Vion, 1992), and to display understanding, agreement, and attentiveness (Tabensky, 2001). In addition to these findings that are based on analysis of English (and partly French in Tabensky (2001)) conversations, Machi (2018) studies the practice of paraphrasing in triadic conversations in Japanese. She states that Japanese speakers frequently and spontaneously paraphrase each other's utterances regardless of their familiarity and knowledge of the ongoing topic⁵. This feature of Japanese paraphrasing is significant because it indicates that speakers have easy access to each other's utterances and stories even if they are not actually familiar with them. Besides the frequency and spontaneity, Machi points out that, just like repetition, paraphrasing in Japanese conversation plays an important role in creating a bond between speakers. It is because, in addition to expressing agreement, understanding, and sympathy, speakers often 1) summarize and reinforce each other's statement, 2) test each other's understanding, or 3) encourage each other to clarify their points by paraphrasing. Such paraphrasing shows speakers' desire to achieve mutual understanding and even to achieve a sense of sharing, and as a result, it creates a bond between speakers. We can see this phenomenon in our data of informal triadic conversations, and its contribution to co-developing a single story as well as connecting speakers is observable.

- (3) Escape from reality
 01 Haruma: ... *Nani ga aru no?*
 'What would you do?'
 02 Kenji: "*Dorakue*"
 '"Dragon Quest"'
 03 Tepei: [*Aa, geemu da*]

- 04 Haruma: ‘Oh, a computer game’
[*Haa, yaru-da ne, geemu*
‘Ah, you play computer games’
- 05 Teppei: *Ore mo yaru*
‘I play too’
- 06 Haruma: [*Jibun mo yaru ja nai desuka, kasha ja nai janai*
‘You play too. It’s not cracking (open a beer)’
- 07 All: */laughter/*
- 08 Kenji: *Chiga(u), kasha kara no piko desho*
‘No, you first crack, and play, right?’
- 09 Teppei: *Soo, kasha kara no piko. Kasha-piko*
‘Right. First crack, and play. It’s crack ‘n’ play’
- 10 All: */laughter/*
- 11 Haruma: *Kasha-piko /laughter/, aa*
‘Crack ‘n’ play /laughter/, wow’
- 12 Teppei: *Demo, shigoto no koto kangaenakute ii-n da mon ne[, sono aida*
‘Anyway, you don’t have to think about work while playing’
- 13 Kenji: [*Soo, ikkai toohi suru tte iu no ga sa*
‘Right, **it’s about escaping once**’
- 14 Teppei: *Soo, ikkai toohi suru no ga daiji nano, /laughter/ daiji nano tsutte tsugoo ii yoo ni iukedo*
‘Right, **it’s important to escape once.** It sounds like I’m justifying myself when I say ‘important’ though’

This excerpt takes place where the three actors discuss how they spend their limited spare time between jobs. Before this excerpt, Teppei states that he would “crack” open (*kasha* is an onomatopoeia for opening a can) a beer if he has a spare hour. Then Haruma asks Kenji what he would do in 01. Kenji answers that he would play computer games, and it turns out that both Teppei and Kenji like computer games. Then Teppei describes the advantage of it in 12, saying *shigoto no koto kangaenakute ii-n da mon ne, sono aida* ‘you don’t have to think about work while playing.’ Overlapping Teppei’s utterance, Kenji immediately paraphrases Teppei’s claim to second it. Note that Kenji not only expresses agreement but also reinforces Teppei’s statement by provid-

ing a spot-on expression *toohi* ‘escape,’ as if to say, “That’s my point, exactly!” This paraphrase shows Kenji’s understanding and support, and therefore creates a bond between the two speakers. What is also interesting is that because Kenji’s choice of words, *toohi*⁶⁾, is accurate and perfectly understands Teppei’s point, Teppei repeats it in line 14 to express agreement and sympathy. This combination of the two devices significantly impacts the speakers’ connection. It is because, while each device functions to connect the speakers’ ideas and themselves alone, when they work together, however, they synergize. Therefore, due to the combination of paraphrasing (Kenji’s paraphrase of Teppei’s claim) and repetition (Teppei’s repetition of Kenji’s paraphrase of his original utterance), mutual understanding and a bond are enhanced between the two men.

As shown in excerpt (3), in Japanese, paraphrasing is often followed by an affirmative response made by the original speaker. This is not only because paraphrasers often grasp and summarize the original speakers’ ideas and thoughts accurately as in (3). It seems that the latter also wishes to respond positively to the paraphrasers’ collaborative act as well as attentiveness. In this sense, paraphrasing often works to elicit approval between speakers. Look at the following excerpts.

- (4) Friends or a couple
- 01 Ryuta: *San-nen-han, a, shiriatte kara sugoi nagakatta kedo [ne, un*
‘Three and a half years. Although, it had been really long since we got acquainted with each other, yeah’
- 02 Osamu: [*A, soo, soo desu yo ne*
‘Oh yeah, that’s right’
- 03 Ryuta: *Tsukiatte kara...*
‘Since we started dating...’
- 04 Kenta: [*Aa, naruhodo ne, tomo-dachi toiu [ka, sooiu kikan ga atta, aa*
‘Oh I see, **there was some time that you two were, like, just friends, or something like that**’
- 05 Ryuta: [*Sore wa sugoi nagakatta, un*
‘Very long time, yeah’

- (5) Brown eyes
 01 Minami: *Ato wa, me ga chairoi hito ga suki*
 ‘And I also like men with brown eyes’
 02 Mio: *[Me ga chairoi hito?*
 ‘Men with brown eyes?’
 03 Marie: *[Ee, sugoi [komakai*
 ‘Oh, that is really detailed’
 04 Mio: *[Chotto shikiso usui,*
[mitaina hito?
 ‘Men with less pigment (in his iris) or something?’
 05 Minami: *[Soo soo soo soo*
 Right right right right’

In excerpt (4), three men talk about how long Ryuta and his wife had been dating before getting married. When Ryuta mentions that they had known each other for a long time before they started dating in 01, Kenta paraphrases the statement in 04, clarifying that they had been friends for a while before they became a couple. Notice that while paraphrasing, Kenta incorporates his own interpretation, which consequently makes Ryuta’s explanation easier to understand for everyone. As soon as Ryuta hears Kenta’s interpretation—*tomodachi* ‘friends,’ he quickly gives an affirmative response. The same goes with excerpt (5), where the three women—the same group as in excerpt (1)—discuss Minami’s ideal man. When Minami confesses that she likes men with brown eyes, which is a little puzzling since brown eyes are not common for Japanese people, Mio produces a paraphrase using the scientific term *shikiso* ‘pigment’ to clarify and confirm Minami’s thought. These paraphrases are typical examples in which a paraphraser is both attentive and collaborative to the speaker so that they can achieve better mutual understanding. Consequently, it can be assumed that the original speaker naturally wishes to respond with an affirmative answer which often includes agreement tokens such as *un* ‘yeah’ (as in (4)) and *soo* ‘right’ (as in (5))⁷, or sometimes repetition of the paraphrase (as in excerpt (3)). This is how paraphrasing plays a role in connecting speakers’ utterances and ideas in the collaborative story-telling style, creating a bond between speakers.

The frequent occurrence of paraphrasing,

along with repetition in informal Japanese conversation, endorses the fact that speakers have easy access to each other’s utterances and stories and are allowed to freely comment on them or incorporate them in their own utterances. Paraphrases, especially ones that accurately grasp and summarize the original ideas and thoughts, elicit affirmative responses including repetition. When this happens, it allows the speakers to make sense together and to create a high level of mutual understanding. It seems as if they are co-speakers rather than individual speaker(s) and listener(s). How the speakers’ utterances are intertwined with each other by means of paraphrasing and how they unfold a single story collaboratively is, as mentioned in 4.1., associative of braiding strings.

4.3 Co-construction of a sentence/story

In addition to repetition and paraphrasing of another speaker’s words, co-construction of a sentence/story is frequently observed in Japanese conversation (Hayashi & Mori, 1998; Hayashi, 2003; Strauss & Kawanishi, 1996; Fujii, 2012; Ueno, 2017; Machi, 2019; Mizutani, 1993, 1995). Our data of triadic conversations between close friends also show many cases of this practice, which plays a crucial role in the creation of the braid structure. In this study co-construction is defined as a practice in which multiple speakers jointly produce a single sentence or a sequence of sentences which maintains propositional relevance and coherence. This is made possible by a speaker anticipating what another speaker is going to say, and smoothly inserting—often partly overlapping with the latter—a supplementary utterance. This concept is similar to “co-construction” defined by Hayashi & Mori (1998), “joint utterance construction” by Hayashi (2003), “joint-production” by Ferrara (1994), “collaborative finishes” by Strauss & Kawanishi (1996), “mono-clausal/multi-clausal co-construction” by Fujii (2012) and “take-over” by Ueno (2017). Mizutani (1993, 1995) also refers to this practice of multiple speakers’ completing each other’s story as one of the prominent characteristics of *kyowa* ‘cooperative talk’—the concept that encapsulates Japanese conversational style.

As pointed out by these previous studies, in Japanese conversation co-construction takes place

frequently and connects the speakers’ utterances and hence creating a sense of unity and a bond between them. Look at the example below.

(6) Love strategy

01 Minami: *…Acchi kara itte morau no, dakara sono, sukidatte kimetara[*a*, kono hito ni kokuhaku shite moraitai tte omou no*
‘I get the man to tell me that he likes me, I mean, when I fall in love, I want the man to confess his love for me’

02 Mio: *[Un*
‘Yeah’

03 Marie: *Soo, sore[*, sono hassoo ga mazu sugoi**
‘Yeah, that. That idea is very extraordinary’

04 Mio: *[laughter]*

05 Mio: *Un*
‘Yeah’

06 Minami: *Suki ni natte moraeru yoo ni doryoku suru no, ato mawari ni, sugoi suki nanoo tteno o, moo=*
‘I make efforts so that he falls in love with me. **Also, to the people around me, the fact that I love the man**

07 Marie: *=Iu n da=*
‘(You) tell them (that)’

08 Minami: *=Minna ni iu*
‘I tell everyone’

09 Mio: *Shintoo sasete*
‘You spread it’

10 Marie: *A, de kyooryoku taisei o tsukutte*
‘Oh, and you have others’ cooperation’

11 Minami: *Soo, torarenai yoo ni*
‘Yes, so that he won’t be taken’

This excerpt is between the same three women as in excerpts (1) and (5). While it is Minami’s love strategy that is being talked about, note that the other two women participate in creating the proposition, that is, when Minami falls in love with someone, she informs others of her feelings so that she will have their cooperation and prevent the man from being approached by others. In 07, Marie completes Minami’s preceding statement by supplementing the predicate *iu n da* ‘(you) tell them (that)’⁸⁾. It is followed by Minami’s repetition, *minna ni iu* ‘I tell everyone.’ By this repetition,

Marie’s anticipation of what Minami was going to say is approved, and it is indicated that Marie’s contribution was successful. Next, Mio paraphrases Marie and Minami’s statements by providing a perfect expression, *shintoo sasete* ‘spread it’ both to show and promote understanding (Machi, 2018). Other examples of co-construction occur in subsequent turns. In 10 and 11, Marie and Minami continue to talk about Minami’s love strategy, stating together that by telling others about Minami’s feelings, she gains their cooperation and it helps prevent others from approaching the man.

This practice of supplementing and completing each other’s sentences/stories reminds us of a relay race, where several runners take turns in completing the race. Fujii (2012), in her comparative study of problem-solving conversation, uses the term “relaying co-construction” to describe a similar phenomenon, where participants collaboratively relay small pieces of proposition to complete a single storyline. The metaphor of relay is also presented in Machi (2019), where she illustrates the phenomenon of “repetition relay” in triadic conversations, that is, three speakers pass key words in the form of repetition as a ‘baton’ and connect their sentences. Although Machi’s focus is on repetition, we can see a similar co-constructing/relaying process of a sentence/story. Look at (7).

(7) Part-time jobs⁹⁾

01 Kenta: *Ano nanka okane harau toki ni[*, a kore kinoo no, [sanbun no,**
‘Like, when you pay money, you think it is yesterday’s three…’

02 Ryuta: *[Un*
‘Yeah’

03 Osamu: *[Sanjikan bun toka*
‘Like, “(it’s) the same as three hours (of work)”’

04 Ryuta: *Soo, nan jikan bun tte yuu kangae kata suru yo ne [laughter]*
‘Right, we tend to think it’s the same as how many hours (we work), right?’ {laughter}

05 Osamu: *[Soo [laughter]*
‘Right’ {laughter}

06 Kenta: *[Soo soo soo, shindokatta mon, da[*tte**
‘Right right right, because it was

- 07 Ryuta: **tough'** [Nn
'Yeah'
- 08 Osamu: *Kinoo wa toku ni, konda, mise ga, mitaina*
'Like, "the store was especially busy yesterday"'
- 09 Ryuta: *[/laughter/]*
- 10 Kenta: *[/laughter/]*
- 11 Osamu: **Kinoo no ichiman yen wa**, *soo*,
'Like "10,000 yen (I earned) yesterday is," right,'
- 12 Kenta: [Shindokatta,
kinoo no ichiman yen ni wa kachi ga aru mitaina
'Like "that 10,000 yen (I earned) yesterday is precious because it was tough"'

Here, the three speakers discuss the importance of experiencing working part-time. Before this excerpt, they mention an hourly wage system as one of the advantages of part-time jobs because its concept is simple, and their part-time job experiences made them realize the value of money. Note that the three men take turns in leading the conversation, or relaying, while supplementing and completing each other's utterances. Specifically, co-construction of a sentence takes place between 01 and 03, and 11 and 12. In the first case, in 01, Kenta states how they often convert the money they earn into their workload, saying, *okane harau toki ni, a kore kinoo no* 'when you pay money, you think it is yesterday's...' As soon as Osamu hears the phrase *kinoo no* 'yesterday's,' he anticipates and completes the rest of the sentence, saying, *sanjikan bun toka* 'Like, "(it's) the same as three hours (of work)," overlapping Kenta's utterance¹⁰. Osamu's completing utterance is then paraphrased and developed by Ryuta—*Soo, nan jikan bun tte yuu kangae kata suru yo ne* 'Right, we tend to think it's the same as how many hours (we work)'—in the subsequent turn in a tone of agreement. It is followed by Kenta's affirmative response *soo soo soo* 'yeah yeah yeah.' This response shows Kenta's approval of Osamu's completing utterance in 03 (also Ryuta's paraphrasing/development of it in 04). The second

case in lines 11 and 12 is similar. The speakers continue to recall the feeling of spending the money that they earned, and Osamu and Kenta jointly construct a sentence which is roughly summarized as "the harder the work is, the more precious the money feels."

The connection between 04 and 06 is a different kind of co-construction. While Ryuta's sentence in 04 is syntactically sufficient, in 06 Kenta adds a rationalizing sentence which contains a conjunction *datte* 'because' to make Ryuta's sentence more convincing—this is what Ueno (2017) calls "addition"¹¹.

All these practices of co-construction are made possible because the three speakers share the same perspective, or to use Strauss & Kawaniishi's (1996) term, they have a high level of mutual awareness. Due to the three sets of co-construction, the three men's point, that is, the importance of part-time job experience, is collaboratively and empathetically reinforced. The bond between the speakers is also enhanced along the way.

As in the previous excerpt, (7) also shows the process by which the three speakers co-construct a single story by relaying different parts of it. Especially noteworthy is that in both excerpts, the triad does not actually share the content or experience. In (6) the three women talk about Minami's practice, which is something personal, and in (7) the three men had part-time jobs separately. Regardless, the speakers spontaneously try to contribute by completing or adding to each other's utterances as if they had shared knowledge and experiences, and to quote Fujii (2012, p. 656), as if "they had one mind." This spontaneous behavior of Japanese speakers shows that the goal of co-construction or relay is not only that the speakers relate a detailed, accurate story, but also—and probably more importantly—that they develop a story together from the same points of view so that speakers can reach a state of connectedness and create a bond.

This section again shows the high accessibility of Japanese informal conversation, that is, speakers readily supplement and complete each other's utterances to co-construct a sentence/story. It is even the case when speakers do not directly share the content or experience that is

being talked about. Interestingly, what co-construction accomplishes in Japanese conversation is the same as repetition: it 1) connects utterances that are produced by different speakers, 2) develops a story, and 3) creates a bond between speakers. Moreover, as mentioned in the section on paraphrasing, when co-construction takes place, participants become co-speakers rather than individual speaker(s) and listener(s). Not only do these devices share some features but they also often work together and synergize. Both excerpts (6) and (7) show this synergistic combination, which enhances the three speakers’ feeling of connectedness while they are making sense together. Consequently, it creates better mutual understanding and stronger rapport in the triad.

Along with repetition and paraphrasing, co-construction plays a crucial role in the collaborative story-telling style of Japanese. The process by which the speakers spontaneously supplement and complete each other’s stories again bears some resemblance to weaving strings to make a unified whole.

5. Braid Structure of Informal Japanese Conversation

The previous sections demonstrated how the practices of repetition, paraphrasing, and co-construction of a sentence/story perform in informal triadic conversations and how they contribute to the characteristic conversational style of Japanese. Examination of these practices revealed that the three linguistic resources share some features in terms of their function in conversation: they connect speakers’ utterances, ideas, and themselves while developing a story collaboratively. This is achieved by accessing each other’s utterances and 1) incorporating them in their own speech (i.e., repetition and paraphrasing) or 2) supplementing or completing them with their own words (i.e., co-construction). As observed in the excerpts, these linguistic resources often take place contiguously and synergistically in an animated conversation and enhance the collaborative and bonding nature of Japanese conversation. It seems that speakers spontaneously intertwine each other’s utterances and stories, and that is where the image of braiding¹²⁾ emerged to illustrate informal, friendly con-

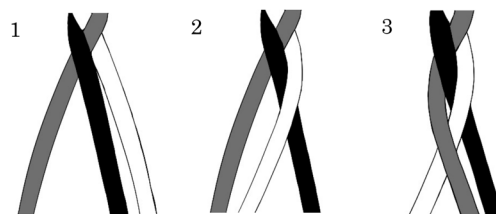


Figure 2 How to weave a braid

versation in Japanese.

While Mizutani’s (1993, 1995) model of *kyowa* ‘cooperative talk’ effectively represents the process of two speakers’ joint production of a single sentence/story as well as their closeness, it is insufficient in terms of representing how intricately and closely those utterances are intertwined. Rather, examination of conversations between three speakers, where words and utterances are joined, crossed, and intertwined through repetition, paraphrasing, and co-construction, revealed that informal Japanese conversational style shows a striking resemblance to a piece of braid. Instead of two (or more) parallel straight lines as seen in the English *taiwa* ‘dialogic talk’ model (see Figure 1-1), flexible lines that cross over one another and fit together as if woven seem to offer a better representation.

Besides the flexibility of lines, another element that supports this braid analogy is the three speakers’ frequent and relatively balanced¹³⁾ turn-taking. As shown in the excerpts (1) to (7), three speakers regularly take turns talking, sharing the floor of a conversation, and each speaker’s utterance, which incorporates and/or builds on the other’s words, is integral to the process of conversation development. Moreover, the duration of the act of braiding also supports its resemblance to informal triadic conversation. Unlike one-time actions, such as tying a knot, braiding is continuous and usually goes on for a certain length of time to create a stream. Figure 2 shows how a simple braid is woven with three strings of thread. See how the three strings take turns to come to the surface, crossing over the previous one. By repeating this process, the three strings make a thicker, stronger single stream of braid. Japanese speakers, as they become actively engaged in a conversation, often converse in this manner.

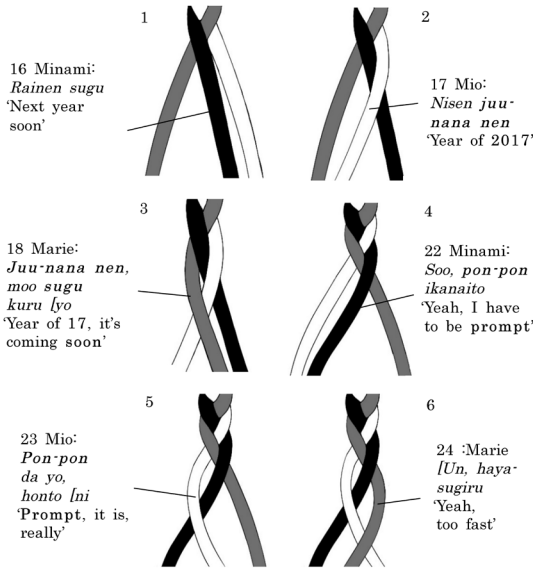


Figure 3 How Japanese speakers in an informal conversation converse in the braid structure

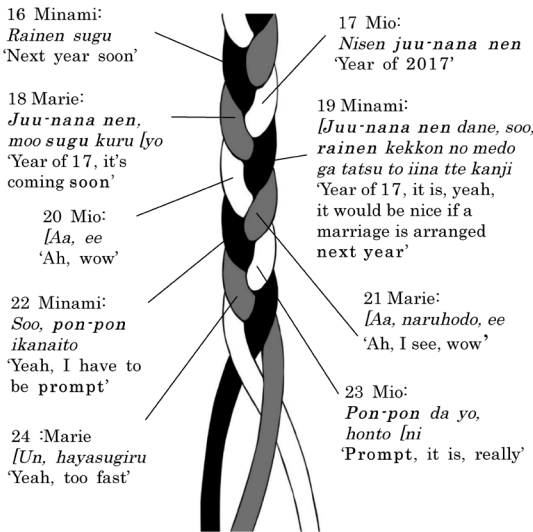


Figure 4 Three speakers' speeches interwoven into a braid

Imagine that the three strings are three speakers' utterances in a triadic conversation. In fact, part of excerpt (1), where Minami, Mio, and Marie animatedly talk about Minami's wish to get married, perfectly fits into this braid structure as shown in Figures 3 and 4 (Due to the limitation of space, in

Figure 3, lines 19 to 21 are omitted).

In an actual conversation, speakers do not take turns talking in a fixed order as in "Speaker A, Speaker B, then Speaker C, and repeat" like weaving a braid. Still, this braid structure represents the general idea of how speakers' utterances are intertwined in an animated conversation, that is, how each utterance is joined by another through the practices of repetition, paraphrasing, and co-construction to jointly develop a story. Consequently, the three speakers' utterances are tightly and intricately woven to the degree that there is no clear boundary between utterances, or even distinction between individual speakers. This indistinguishability of utterances and speakers is also pointed out by Ueno (2017), Strauss & Kawanishi (1996), Machi (2007), and Fujii (2016b). Ueno (2017, pp. 174-177) labels the collaborative storytelling style of Japanese "merging discourse," stating, "In merging discourse, utterances from both sides (speakers) converge in a single stream as if the teller and the recipient had a single mind. The distinction between the two speakers becomes blurred, and it does not matter from whom a given piece of information comes." She also repeatedly refers to weaving as a metaphor for Japanese conversation. Strauss & Kawanishi (1996), in their comparative study of assessment strategy in Japanese, Korean, and English conversations, also remark that, in Japanese, due to the frequent occurrence of other's repetition and collaborative finishes, assessment sequences often "become so complex that even the notion of who might be the primary speaker and who the interlocutor begin to cloud (p. 163)." These previous studies support our idea that speech produced by different speakers is better illustrated by flexible lines that can be joined and woven together rather than parallel straight lines. While the order of speaking is not fixed, the way the three actively engaged speakers interact to jointly develop a conversation resembles the process of braiding.

Lastly, it must be added that all the participants in our data set seemingly enjoy the friendly and lively atmosphere of braid-structure conversations, and that Japanese speakers more or less take pleasure in talking in this way. It is not only because they have the sense of connectedness

created by co-developing the stories and active and carefree participation. It can be assumed that speakers also enjoy the impromptu, unpredictable development of a conversation. Since it is co-creation by multiple speakers instead of a single speaker’s well-structured monologue, speakers never know how one topic will shift to another. As shown in excerpt (1), conversations often dynamically develop depending on which direction the participants want to proceed. It is possible that the topic flow has an unpredictable spin. While it is nice—and sometimes important—to talk about your story as you plan, it is also entertaining and stimulating to participate in a conversation where people freewheelingly and randomly develop a story. This is another reason that Japanese people often engage in talking in the braid structure.

6. Conclusion

Starting with the question of how the characteristics of Japanese informal conversation might be better illustrated, the present study has analyzed three prominent linguistic resources observed in informal triadic conversations in Japanese—repetition and paraphrasing of another’s utterance and co-construction of a sentence/story. The analysis has shown that the three resources all perform crucial roles, both respectively and synergistically, in allowing speakers to easily access and connect each other’s utterances, and to actively engage in the process of unfolding a conversation. It has also been revealed that due to the collaborative story-telling style, speakers establish and enhance a bond between them.

The analysis of repetition, paraphrasing, and co-construction led us to reconsider the model of *kyowa* ‘cooperative talk’ presented by Mizutani (1993, 1995). While *kyowa* captures general features of Japanese conversational style in comparison to English *taiwa* ‘dialogic talk’ style, the model still seems insufficient since it uses the same parallel straight lines as English to illustrate conversations produced by Japanese speakers. In order to emphasize the intricate connection of three speakers’ speeches—the feature which the three linguistic resources promote—this study has introduced a braid structure model. The model

uses flexible lines to illustrate how Japanese speakers spontaneously weave their utterances to jointly develop a conversation. Furthermore, in order to support the braid analogy, two other elements—the three speakers’ frequent and relatively balanced contribution to the story-telling process and the continuous nature of the act of braiding—were indicated. In addition, the study briefly explicated how Japanese speakers enjoy the impromptu and unpredictable development of jointly created conversations.

Although we have mainly focused on the three most prominent phenomena, it is possible that other features of Japanese conversations are also relevant. For instance, devices such as back-channels, questioning, overlapping speech, and sentence-final particle *ne* also frequently occur and are considered to enhance speakers’ involvement and rapport in informal conversation. They may also play important roles in the creation of braid structure conversation. Moreover, the three speakers’ high accessibility to each other’s speech as well as their inclination toward the state of connectedness suggest that, in future studies, we need to take the ontological aspect of conversation into consideration. For example, the concept of the “self” and how speakers place themselves in relation to others in a conversation. While more examination is needed to strengthen the plausibility of a braid structure model, this study contributes to comprehensive understanding of Japanese conversation.

Endnotes

- 1) This relates to the phase of a conversation. Even though speakers’ high accessibility and co-development are prominent in an informal, friendly conversation in Japanese, there are scenes where one speaker mainly develops a conversation while the other two passively listen. For instance, when he or she refers to their personal life such as their family members and experiences that are not known to the other speakers.
- 2) The first episode was aired on September 5th, 2010 and featured Osamu Mukai, Ryuta Sato, and Kenta Kiritani. The second was aired on July 17th, 2016, featuring Teppei Koike, Haruma Miura, and Kenji Urai. The third was aired on November

27th, 2016, featuring Mio Matsumura, Minami Tanaka, and Marie Ueda. The show is produced by Fuji TV.

- 3) According to previous studies made by Tannen (1987, 1989), Johnstone (1987, 2002), Norrick (1987), Brown (1999), Ferrara (1994), Ishikawa (1991), Coates (2007), Bublitz (1988), Strauss & Kawanishi (1996), Fujii (2012), and Machi (2007, 2010, 2012, 2014), interactive functions of repetition in conversation include the following: to participate in a conversation and show listenership, to aid in the production of conversation, to create a humorous and playful frame, to savor a joke or expression, to link participants and their ideas, to ask and answer questions, to confirm the previous utterance, to display agreement or sympathy, and so forth.
- 4) Even though these three actors are in a close relationship and talk about various private subjects, Osamu sometimes speaks in a polite form using *desu* (polite copula) and *masu* (polite verb suffix) because he is two years younger than the other two men.
- 5) Machi (2018) shows that paraphrasing in Japanese conversations can be classified into two types—paraphrasing of shared information and of new information—depending on the paraphraser’s familiarity and knowledge of the original speaker’s story. Her study reveals that despite differences regarding the functions of paraphrasing, the paraphraser’s attitude, and grammatical structures between the two types, they both occur frequently in conversation.
- 6) It can be assumed that this *toohi* is an omitted version of *genjitsu toohi* ‘escape from reality’.
- 7) These agreement tokens are often doubled, tripled, or even more to express speaker’s intensified degree of agreement just as in excerpt (5).
- 8) This sentence structure in which a predicate is placed at the end is normal in Japanese because Japanese is a verb-final language (Fujii, 2012) and the basic word order is subject-object-verb (Maynard, 1997, p. 104).
- 9) This excerpt is also presented in Machi (2019).
- 10) The overlapping of lines 01 and 03 is a little different. Kenta mentions *sanbun no* (although he does not finish his expression, it can be assumed that he intends to say *sanbun no ichi*) which means “one third.” Considering that the speakers talk about the hourly wage system, we can assume that he mistakenly says *sanbun no*, when he means to say *sanjikan bun* ‘the same as three hours.’
- 11) According to Ueno (2017, p. 178), “addition is an utterance that adds something strongly relevant to what the other has said. (….) When an utterance is added onto a prior utterance, they are connected together so that they will sound (like a) monologue.”
- 12) It may seem too simple to use an analogy of braiding—an act of weaving three strings—for representation of conversations between three speakers. It is not shallow or irrelevant, however, if we consider the close relationship of the two words “text” (written words) and “textile” (woven fabric). These words are etymologically related, having the same Latin roots “texere,” which means “to weave, to join, fit together, braid, interweave,” and so on. While “text” refers to written or printed words, it is possible to expand this idea to say that the output of language has long been considered to be related to the act of weaving, braiding, and fitting together. This is why the braid analogy is expected to offer a suitable model for triadic conversations.
- 13) The balance of the contributions by the three speakers differs depending on the phase of a conversation, as mentioned in endnote 1).

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