Amae and Japanese learners of English: their strategies to deal with problems in understanding in conversations with native and non-native speakers

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AMAE AND JAPANESE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH:
THEIR STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS IN UNDERSTANDING IN CONVERSATIONS WITH NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Educational Theory and Practice
2019
Acknowledgements

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have received a great deal of support and assistance. I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Istvan Kecskes, whose expertise was invaluable in formulating of the research topic. Without his guidance and persistent help, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Anita Pomerantz and Dr. Junko Mori, who introduced me to the fascinating field of Conversation Analysis and keep inspiring me through their work.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Prof. Yasunari Harada, Mayumi Kawamura, Prof. Osamu Nakatsuka, Profs. William Husson and B.J. Fehr, Profs. Jeremy and Tari Lee Sykes, Prof. Lynette Kirschner for kindly recruiting their students to participate in the study. In addition, I am grateful to my friends and colleagues, Yunmi Lee, Ke Fang, Monika Kirner-Ludwig, Janet Sanders, Linda Fisher, Yumiko Murai, and Naoko Sakaeda, for never giving up on me, always believing in me, and keeping encouraging me to move forward.

Last but by no means least, a very special gratitude goes out to my parents, Kenzo and Yoshiko Kamiya. Thank you for supporting me spiritually throughout this academic journey and my life in general.
Abstract

The purpose of the study is to investigate how *amae* may affect Japanese learners of English when they are exposed to intercultural communication, so that educators can take advantage of the study’s findings to improve English education in Japan. *Amae* is a concept that a Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi introduced as a key to understanding the psychology of Japanese people. It is roughly translated as “dependence” but actually refers to a psychological disposition that is observed in specific patterns of behavior. Although the concept is frequently mentioned in studies of Japanese culture and society, not much is known about how the Japanese predisposition towards *amae* is brought into intercultural interaction in situations where the Japanese use their second languages, and where it may hinder their intercultural communication.

In this study, the concept of *amae* is applied to the analysis of 34 Japanese university students’ performance when they have problems in understanding in skype-video-conversations with international partners. The dyads consist of a Japanese subject paired with an American (NS), a Taiwanese (NNS), or a German (NNS) partner. All pairs interacted in English. Each pair had a conversation twice within a week, thus 68 conversations in total were included in the analysis. Using methods drawn upon from Conversation Analysis, this study examines how the strategies attempted by the subjects, when the strategies are associated with varying degrees of *amae*, affect their performance. The study reveals that, when those strategies associated with *amae* are attempted in intercultural communication in English, the Japanese subjects do not explicitly display their understanding or problems in understanding, which can result in confusion and communication breakdown to a varying degree. The international partners in conversation with the subjects in this study handle their Japanese partners’ attempts of *amae*—
based strategies differently, and the differences are found not only between NSs and NNSs but also between the Taiwanese and German NNS partners included in this study, which suggests that the international partners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds have different impacts on their conversations with Japanese speakers of English.

As a study on language education, the present study also considers using the recorded conversations as a learning tool. This part of the study was conducted by having the subjects listen to and evaluate their own performance in the conversation, and then respond to a written questionnaire with a view to improving their understanding and communicative strategies in the second sessions. The subjects’ performance from the first and second sessions, together with their questionnaire responses, was compared to examine the effect of the subjects’ reflection on their performance and experience of making plans for improvement generated by the intervention. As a result, in their second sessions, some but not all of the subjects were able to detect problems, implement their plans for improvement, and employ different strategies from the previous sessions. Interestingly enough, the changes in strategies that the subjects made in the second sessions appeared to indicate that they reduced the degrees of amae to bring in the conversation, which led to better outcomes in mutual understanding. The educational implications of understanding how amae affects Japanese English language learning are discussed, and suggestions are made about ways to appropriately lead learners to become more successful communicators in English.
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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1. English Education in Japan

With the active promotion of international exchanges and advances in technology, people all over the world have more and more opportunities to use English in their everyday lives. The spread of English is widely acknowledged and a number of researchers point out that non-native speakers (NNSs) of English have come to outnumber native speakers (NSs) of English (e.g. Firth, 1996; Graddol, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2005). Today, most intercultural communication in English involves NNSs of English, and NNS-NNS interactions in English have become a very common occurrence throughout the world. As the primary language for intercultural communication throughout the world, quality English education has been in high demand.

Since the last half of the 1980s (Murakami, 2007; Okada, 2016), the primary emphasis in English language education in Japan has shifted from an emphasis on accuracy in English language learning to an emphasis on communicative ability. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) decided to put an emphasis on “communication” in English education by implementing a drastic change in foreign language education policy. The Ministry began promoting English language instruction at the elementary level in 1995, and it actually became compulsory in 2011. Despite strong objections from those who are concerned about problems relating to the quality of available teaching materials, the realistic capabilities of teachers, and a lack of clear goals (Otsu et al., 2013; Torikai, 2006), MEXT announced “An implementation plan for English education reform to respond to globalization” (my translation) in 2013, and is preparing to launch a new curriculum in 2020. With the introduction of this new curriculum in 2020, English will become a formal subject at
the elementary school level (MEXT, 2014). For elementary and secondary schools, “cultivating children’s communication ability” (MEXT, my translation) has been set as a matter of highest priority. At the secondary school level, the focus of English language education has been changed from grammar to communication, and the introduction of practice to improve communicative competence has been aggressively incorporated into the curriculum. In higher education, more and more universities have actively developed and provided communication courses within their foreign language programs. However, the term “communication ability” is not defined in the policies or guidelines, and it seems like they leave the definition to individual interpretation. It is one of the purposes of the present study to offer a definition of communication ability by exemplifying certain skills which Japanese language learners exercise in intercultural interactions so the educators can advance concrete discussions based on the skills that are observed.

The sense that urgent change is needed is not limited to a reevaluation of English language education. Since the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan in 1989 (Hagerman, 2009) there has been a realization that English can serve as an engine for Japanese economic recovery. A number of efforts have been made to stimulate economic growth by promoting increased English language use in society in general. For instance, the Japanese government launched a “Visit Japan Campaign” in 2003 to attract foreign tourists. Moreover, since Tokyo was announced as the host city for the 2020 Summer Olympics in 2013, the government has become even more emphatic in its efforts to encourage a national effort to improve English language communicative skills in order to promote tourism and to respond to the influx of foreign tourists who will be attending the Olympic Games. Under the popular slogan of “omotenashi (hospitality),” English language schools have started to offer more conversation
courses by convincing people that learning English is important to better serve foreign visitors to Japan. The number of foreign visitors has been steadily increasing since 2012 and it is estimated to increase even more in the coming years (JNTO, 2017; Japan Tourism Agency, 2016). In fact, people are finding that they are encountering more and more opportunities to speak English not only with non-Japanese but also with other Japanese, especially in business settings. Since 2010, some of Japan’s large, influential corporations have adopted an “English as official language policy” (Takahashi, 2010) or an “English-only policy” (Wakabayashi, 2012) requiring their employees to use English for virtually all business interactions. In educational institutions, although the “All English” policy is a subject of heated debate and no conclusion has been reached yet about how far this policy should be applied, more and more secondary-level English courses have been required to be taught exclusively in English since 2013. In fact, some reports show that English is increasingly being used as a medium of instruction (Dearden, 2014).

Although the need for the Japanese people to speak good English is being heavily promoted for political and economic reasons, educators are demanding that the government take more deliberate and calculated steps rather than make hasty decisions (Mondejar et al., 2012; Otsu et al., 2013). Teachers and researchers in English language education have strongly criticized the idea of bringing English classes into the curriculum in elementary schools, arguing that this will not help children attain command of English but rather engenders their dislike for the language (Otsu et al., 2013, p. 74). Torikai (2013) calls the goals and policies set by the government superficial, overly simplistic, and lacking knowledge about language and communication (p. 106). Studies report teachers’ strong dissatisfaction with foreign language teaching training programs in Japanese universities (Bouchard, 2017; Browne & Wada, 1998; Hahn, 2013). In addition, recent studies have raised fundamental doubts about the government’s decisions in
regard to English language education. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, for example, Terasawa (2015) conducted studies which attempted to describe a realistic picture of English education and the learners in Japan. He revealed that statistical data obtained through large-scale surveys do not support perceptions, beliefs, or myths, about Japanese English education which are widely held throughout the country. Stating that English language policies are a cash cow for the politicians (p. 54), he points out that there are major flaws in the discourse that the Japanese people’s English ability is the lowest in the world based on the results of TOEIC tests, although such discourse is frequently cited by politicians, corporate managers, and researchers when they make important decisions. Moreover, from an anthropological perspective, Horiguchi et al. (2015) take a qualitative approach to grasp the circumstances surrounding Japanese learners of English, and conclude that the actual circumstances disagree with Japan’s education policies and the cultural perceptions concerning English education. Although these new attempts with careful analyses are very important and welcoming additions to the research on English education in Japan, the impact of their research is not yet strong enough to have a major influence on governmental and public opinion.

It has been often mentioned that the performance of Japanese learners of English is poor despite their devotion of a substantial amount of time, money, and effort. A decade has passed since Aspinall (2006), among others, stated that Japanese foreign language education had frequently “been criticized both at home and abroad” (p. 256). Today, Japanese people still blame the “failure” in their English language skills on either “the students/citizens themselves or their learning/educational/social environment” (Horiguchi et al., 2015, p. 5). Meanwhile, for the majority of Japanese teenagers, English is still situated in the school curriculum merely as one of the subjects which they must study to pass an entrance exam to university, rather than as a means
of communication which they will need in their daily lives. This discrepancy is the cause of much frustration among learners, educators, and policy makers.

The introduction of the new policies, drastic changes, and heated debates has received national attention, and led to confusion among English teachers and learners. Consequently, criticisms of the current educational system and calls for drastic improvement have grown even louder. While English education is a great concern for the Japanese people and there seems to be general agreement that “communication ability” is the key, not much has been done to explain what “communication ability” really means nor is there an accurate picture of how learners might exercise the communicative skills that they already have when they speak English. Therefore, more empirical research is needed to provide important information for researchers, educators, and teachers, which will provide them with opportunities to carefully check the effectiveness of their recommendations for necessary change. This study is expected to contribute to this endeavor.

2. The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate how amae may affect Japanese learners of English when they are exposed to intercultural communication, and to explore ways to take advantage of the findings to improve English education in Japan. Amae is a concept Doi (1962, 1981) introduced as a key to understanding the psychology of Japanese people and the social structure they live in. It is roughly translated as “dependence” but is actually a very broad concept and best understood as a psychological disposition that is observed in specific patterns of behavior. Although the psychology of amae is by no means unique to Japanese people, a culture in which amae is widely accepted clearly influences people’s language use and communication.
This is particularly true in Japanese culture. A half century after Doi’s first mention of *amae*, the question remains: is *amae* still observable in the behavior of today’s Japanese young adults when they speak English? Methods drawn upon from Conversation Analysis are used in this study to analyze conversations between Japanese subjects and their international partners. Detailed examinations of the learners’ actual performance in interaction with partners with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds provide a rich resource for information about what the learners have already learned and what they still need to learn in terms of the English language use. The study shows that *amae* is indeed still observable in the behavior of today’s Japanese young adults when they speak English. Moreover, the analysis also reveals how their international conversation partners react to the Japanese disposition of *amae*. This part of the discussion will be particularly useful for non-Japanese who communicate with Japanese people because it explains the reason behind something that can be thought of as peculiar behavior by the Japanese. The effects of the conversational partners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds on their responses to the Japanese subjects’ attempts of *amae* in intercultural communication and the ways in which the partners handle *amae* will be discussed.

To contribute to a better understanding of language learners, the study also makes attempts to find out if and how an awareness-raising intervention changes the Japanese subjects’ communicative behavior in any way. Questionnaire responses are examined to identify what the subjects perceive as problems in understanding and their ideas about resolving those problems. In addition, the subjects’ language production and behavior will be explained using a case study approach. The individual cases will then be compared qualitatively before and after the intervention to see if the subjects change their linguistic and strategic means for dealing with problems in understanding. *Linguistic means* is defined as the language that the subjects utter in
their conversations, or the linguistic forms (words, phrases, sentence structures, etc.) that they employ to convey their messages. Strategic means is defined as the actions taken by the participants to express their understanding or non-understanding. As is possible in any kind of communication, there can be a gap between the subject’s intended action and the partner’s interpretation of it. In this study, it is of particular interest that some of the strategies which the subjects use to display understanding or problems in understanding are difficult for their partners to interpret. This confusion occurs because the subjects are not necessarily aware that any difficulty has taken place. This is largely due to their lack of experience using English in actual conversations with people who are not familiar with Japanese ways of communication.

In addition, the study provides information about how learners transfer communicative strategies that they have already acquired through their experience using Japanese as an L1 into their use of English outside of the classroom context (Kasper & Kim, 2015). Such work is important for language education and research because it gives researchers and instructors a chance to pinpoint difficulties that learners have in actual L2 conversations by looking closely at the gap between language patterns of the learners and that of the speech community of the target language. Based on such empirical findings, educators can carefully check if their instructions are appropriate, highlight issues that language education should tackle, seek ways to develop more effective methods, and guide learners on ways to correct shortcomings which they might be unaware of. With these research objectives in mind, the current study invited individuals who are not familiar with the way that Japanese learners use English to be the learners’ conversation partners. By showing the learners’ linguistic behavior in real-life situations, rather than measuring learners’ knowledge gained in the classroom, the study reveals the “end products” of their current L2 acquisition process at an oral performance level. The evidence collected in this
study will be useful for researchers and educators in their attempts to identify problems in the learning process. Pedagogical implications for English language education will be provided based on the study’s findings.

3. **Research Questions**

The research questions to be addressed in this study are:

- **RQ1**: What linguistic and strategic means do Japanese speakers of English use while dealing with problems in understanding?
- **RQ2**: How do NS and NNS partners react to the Japanese participants’ linguistic and strategic means for dealing with problems in understanding, especially when they are combined with *amae*-based attitudes?
- **RQ3**: How do the Japanese subjects evaluate their problems in understanding? Do they think they can improve their performance in dealing with those problems?
- **RQ4**: How do reflections about problems in understanding in the first conversation and the development of plans to minimize those problems in the next conversation, affect the Japanese subjects’ further performance? What kinds of changes are observed in their linguistic and strategic means when dealing with problems in understanding?

The research questions addressed above are important for three reasons. First, research on learners’ interactional performance is necessary for the improvement of English language pedagogy since it serves as a basis for developing effective educational methods. In the classroom setting, learners are usually exposed to native-speaker models of English as the goal of acquisition, whereas in reality, especially for those who learn English as a foreign language
It is not uncommon to have more opportunities to use the language to interact with other NNSs (e.g. Korean, Chinese, Indonesian etc.) rather than NSs of English (e.g. American, British). Under such circumstances, there can be a gap between what the learners learn in the classroom and what they actually use or need to learn. By examining the interaction of learners with both NSs and NNSs of English in more real-life situations than the language classroom, this study provides practical implications for meeting the needs of English teachers and learners in Japan. For this reason, the study focuses on the places where problems in understanding occur, and on common scenarios in interactions involving Japanese learners of English.

In addition, while current teaching practices in Japan provide a large amount of ‘input’ in the teaching-learning environment, learners’ interactional ‘output’ is rarely assessed. Because second language learners are communicators who have already developed interactional competence through their first language experiences (Kecskes et al., 2018), language education should encourage learners to fully exercise their first language competency when attempting to communicate in the target language and help them make necessary modifications when needed. An examination of ways in which Japanese subjects do or do not signal problems in understanding (RQ1) and those subjects’ reflections about their own performance (RQ3) will shed light on what the learners have already learned and what they need to learn about when dealing with problems in understanding in order to improve their learning outcomes.

Second, also for a pedagogical purpose, it will be beneficial to observe how “consciousness raising” (Ellis, 1997) and “noticing” (Schmidt, 1990) can affect the subjects’ communicative performance. The study examined what the subjects regarded as problems in understanding (RQ3) and compared the subjects’ performance before and after a “consciousness
raising” intervention (RQ4). Using this information, the study shows how and where the learners’ reflections helped their own learning. On the other hand, when reflections were not effective, the data shows where self-learning proved to be of limited value and illuminates the areas that require formal instruction by teachers.

Third, from a research standpoint, the present study will contribute to the growing body of research in fields such as CA for SLA and Interactional Competence. Literature in those relevant fields will be reviewed in the next chapter.

4. Outline of this thesis

The purpose of the present study is to provide empirical evidence which identifies certain aspects of interactional performance which Japanese learners of English demonstrate in conversation with their international partners. Of particular interest is the way amae becomes manifest in the Japanese subjects’ performance in interactions with native and non-native speakers of English, and the way in which this can contribute to or hinder success in achieving mutual understanding. In Chapter 2, literature on relevant concepts and fields are reviewed to provide a background for the present study. In Chapter 3, the methodology, the participants, the design of the study, and definitions of the key terms are explained. The data, results and points of discussion are presented in Chapter 4, and all the research questions are answered there. In Chapter 5, conclusions drawn from the study as well as implications for English language education are presented.
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

1. Amae and Japanese

1.1 The Concept of Amae

Amae is a concept that a Japanese psychoanalyst Takeo Doi (1962, 1971/2007, 1973, 1988/2000b, 1989) introduced as a key to understanding the psychology of Japanese people and the social structure they live in. As seen in the translation of the title of Doi’s well-known book “The Anatomy of Dependence” (1973/2014), amae is most roughly translated as “dependence” in English but it is actually a very broad concept and best understood as a combination of patterns of behaviors (Maruta, 1992). Varying definitions are found in the literature and even Doi himself provides several definitions of amae, such as “passive love” (Doi, 1973/2014, p. 21), “a wish to be taken care of” (Doi, 1963, p. 267), behaviors in anticipation of affection of the other toward self (Doi, 2001b, p. 65), an emotion which welcomes personal closeness in relationships (Doi, 2001b, p. 84), or a desire to hold the other’s affection (Doi, 1971/2007, p. 55). Doi (1956) explains that amae is a noun derived from an intransitive verb ‘amaeru’ which means “to depend and presume upon another’s love or bask in another’s indulgence” (p. 349) but unlike love, amae “presupposes a passive stance toward one’s partner, as it is invariably involves a dependence on the receptive partner for fulfillment, though it is quite possible to pursue such a stance actively” (p. 350). Doi (2001a) also points out that although amae is visible to others, the amae attempters are usually not aware of their amae (p. 13). Because the success of amae attempts totally relies on the recipient’s decision to respond, the attempter often maintains an internal feeling of suspicion that the amae may be refused (Doi, 1975/1981, p. 176).
Doi is often criticized for leaving “a generous zone of ambiguity” (Taketomo, 1986, p. 529) around the concept of *amae* without providing a precise definition (Kumagai, 1981; Taketomo, 1986; Yamaguchi, 2004). Doi (2000a), however, pays little heed to this criticism, stating flatly that “I do not mind the ambiguity of *amae* at all” (p. 141, my translation). He claims that, since it is an everyday word in Japanese which even a child can use, what *amae* means is obvious (p. 129). Moreover, he stresses that *amae* has in fact diverse meanings but the meanings are interrelated and converge on a single concept (Doi, 2000a, p. 201, my translation). As a result, this latitude has allowed researchers of Japanese culture and communication to develop their own definitions of *amae* to be used as frameworks for their studies, including “a subjectively experienced feeling” (Kumagai, 1981, p. 251); “the ability to harmonise within everyday relations” (Pritchard, 1995, p. 261); a metalanguage which conveys a message that “this interaction is undertaken with mutual agreement that it may deviate from certain ordinary rules of behavior” (Taketomo, 1986, p. 535); and “the presumption that one’s inappropriate behavior or request is accepted by one’s counterpart” (Yamaguchi, 2004, p. 29).

Doi started taking a special interest in *amae* during his stay in the US in 1950 (Doi, 1956, p. 90). As a psychoanalyst, he noticed that American psychiatrists were significantly insensitive to the hidden *amae* that their patients projected (Doi, 1971/2007, p. 32). He recalls:

> the therapeutic situation promises help but does not at once give him the kind of help he wants. I subsequently realized that his initial helplessness and subsequent sensitivity really refers to the wish to be loved or to be taken care of. I was helped in detecting this wish by recalling the meaning of the intransitive verb *amaeru*, which may be translated
as “to depend and presume upon another’s love” or “to indulge in another's kindness.”

(Doi, 1963, p. 266)

Concurrently, Doi experienced cultural shocks during his stay in the US through interaction with the American people using English. When he was visiting an American family, the host offered some ice cream. Although Doi wanted it, he said “No,” with an expectation that the host would offer it again. It turned out that Doi did not get any ice cream and that is the moment when he discovered *amae* in himself, and he realized that it is absolutely foreign to the American culture (Doi, 2001b, p. 214). Doi (2000a) confesses that he had limited command of the English language at the time (p. 44).

Based on his experiences in the US, as well as his discovery that the word *amae* is not found in the English language while it is an everyday word for Japanese people, Doi argues that *amae* is widely accepted in Japanese society and extremely familiar to Japanese people, and that *amae* is a major factor in Japanese communication and customs, and is perhaps the exact opposite of what exists in Western societies (Doi, 2000a, p. 16). In addition, he points out that because of the word’s root ‘ama’ (‘sweet’), *amae* suggests “something sweet and desirable” (Doi, 1989, p. 349) and implies the Japanese people’s positive attitudes toward dependency (Doi, 2001b, p. 23).

Doi published “*Amae no Kozo (The Structure of Amae)*” in Japanese in 1971 and the book was translated into English as “*The Anatomy of Dependence*” in 1973. Doi (2001a), however, mentions that the English translation “dependence” is problematic because while the English word implies social subordination, *amae* is actually an expression of emotional connectedness. Doi explains that *amae* is relatively close to “to take for granted or count on
other’s favor” without a negative connotation (pp. 40-41, my translation). As the closest term to *amae*, Doi (1955) suggests “passive object love” coined by a Hungarian psychoanalyst Michael Balint (p. 38). In fact, Doi (1955) believes that “the typical psychology of a given nation can be learned only through familiarity with its native language” (p. 695). Doi (1989) states that the concept of *amae* enables the discussion of something that is not verbalized in ordinary communication, something that is left unnoticed when relying on European languages (p. 164).

As he proceeded with his research on *amae*, Doi (1975/1981, 2000c) used *amae* as a tool to analyze clinical materials from psychotherapy, as well as literary works of his favorite novelist Soseki Natsume. Doi (1975/1981) describes the analytical work as “dividing Japanese personal relationships using the concept of *amae* as a common denominator” (p. 41, my translation). This idea has inspired the present study to use the concept of *amae* to analyze the performance of Japanese learners of English in intercultural interaction.

Since the publication of the English translation of the book, the concept of *amae* has received world attention. The book was translated not only into European languages such as English, French, German, and Italian, but also into Asian languages such as Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, and Thai. The influence of the concept of *amae* went beyond the research field of psychology. In particular, it had a profound impact on nihonjinron, or discussions about Japanese national and cultural identity, both in and out of Japan. Although he repeatedly emphasizes that *amae* is not a phenomenon that is unique to Japanese people but is a universal concept, Doi seems to presume a uniformity in society when discussing Japanese culture, and may tend to overgeneralize the characteristics of Japanese ways of thinking (e.g. Doi, 1973). As a result, Doi’s theories of culture have been criticized by some as inaccurate and that his interpretations of Japanese culture are stretched or oversimplified (e.g. Kubota, 1999; Taketomo,
1986). On the other hand, Doi’s theories were incorporated into nihonjinron. Doi (1992) shows resistance to the inclusion of his studies in nihonjinron (pp.167-168). In fact, Doi’s views on culture may not be wholly congruent with those of nihonjinron advocates as he states that “amae is like a thread which comes in and out but runs through the complications of Japanese cultural events” (Doi, 2000a, p. 151, my translation). However, Doi’s sensitivity to cultural change like this is often neglected in the literature. Doi (2000a) confesses that he was surprised at what he considers younger critics’ basic misunderstanding of amae, and that made him correct his understanding about the concept: that is, the concept of amae is not as obvious to any Japanese as he once thought, and it requires explanation about what it actually means (p. 174).

1.2  Amae and sasshi

According to Doi (1987/1988), amae is indispensable for facilitating human interaction and indispensable in the expression of essential qualities of the Japanese self (p. 34). The prototype of amae is the feelings infants have toward their mothers. Such feelings are, he points out, universal. Amae is, as one of Doi’s colleagues suggested, something “even a puppy does” (Doi, 1971/2007, p. 15). Niiya et al. (2006) conducted studies to examine Japanese and American reactions to amae and found that both groups show positive feelings when they are exposed to amae. What is unique to Japanese people is that they have a specific word to refer to these feelings in everyday language and that the feelings are deeply embedded in Japanese culture (Doi, 2001b).

While he assigns great cultural value to amae within Japanese society, Doi sees things very differently when it comes to amae in intercultural communication. He explains that because amae is a feeling which is not expressed verbally and requires others to sense it,
Occidentals, American in particular, tend not to take it into consideration (Doi, 1987/1988, p. 51). Furthermore, Doi (1975/1981) describes *amae* as illogical and claims that because the Japanese custom of *amae* is not accepted in the international community, the Japanese people need to pay attention to the underlying psychology of *amae* and overcome it (pp. 183-184) so that it does not interfere in intercultural communication.

Based on Doi’s (1987/1988) claim that *amae* is a feeling which is not expressed verbally and requires others to sense it (p. 51), *amae* is often introduced with the associated concept of *sasshi* in the field of Japanese communication research (Miike, 2003). *Sasshi* is defined as meaning conjecture, surmise, or guessing what someone means (Nishida, 1977). Similar to *sasshi*, Tezuka (1992) uses *awase* (“to adjust/adapt oneself to the other”) to examine intercultural communication between a Japanese and an American in Japan (the language is not specified). Based on the belief that the American is someone from a low-context culture, Tezuka forms an opinion that the Japanese communication style can frustrate the interlocutor. She concludes that communication which presupposes *awase* is “not quite adaptive in intercultural communication” (p. 48) and that the challenge for the Japanese is “to modify it so that it becomes compatible with intercultural communicators of the world” (p. 49).

1.3 Japanese communication styles

Japanese communication styles are often described as indirect, contextual, and affective (Gudykunst, 2003). According to Hall’s (1976) concept of high-context and low-context cultures, Japan is considered as a high-context culture, in which collectivism is so strong that people are deeply involved with each other. Because they highly value intimate relationships, the people hide their feelings but imply them through non-verbal communication. The opposite
is true in low-context cultures, such as the US and Germany, in which people live more individualized lives and their communication tends to be direct and explicit. While it has been widely known and influential, Hall’s (1976) concept of high- and low-context cultures is often criticized for what some consider being as overgeneralization, exaggeration, and reinforcement of cultural stereotypes. For example, Holliday et al., (2004) argue that such essentialist views tend to “define the person before understanding the person” (pp. 10-11). In addition, Kittler et al. (2011) conducted a systematic review of studies which apply Hall’s concept and point out that the high-context and low-context classifications in the literature are inconsistent. Maynard (1997) stresses the importance of avoiding the pitfall of overemphasizing differences while almost ignoring the commonality of human experience (p. 222).

It should be noted, however, that the present study is not intended to argue about the controversial concept of high and low contexts (Hall, 1976). Moreover, it does not mean to add fuel to the criticism of exaggeration citing nihonjinron (criticized by Dale, 1986; Kubota, 2018; Maynard, 1997; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1995), or the individualism-collectivism debates which surround the concept (Okabe, 1983). Although it deals with certain aspects of Japanese people’s attitudes, the present study should not be confused with studies in Psychology, Social Science, Cultural Studies, or related fields. Instead, as a study of English learners’ communicative performance, it aims to show the complexity which the language learners constantly experience when they switch from L1 to L2, going back and forth between their background culture and cultures beyond their own. In this regard, I agree with Hasegawa (2017) who argues against the recent trend in the research of intercultural communication where certain research condemn cultural essentialism as being inferior to constructivism. She argues that there can be no such thing as an absolute and fixed culture for researchers of culture and communication to study, but
rather, cultures are shifting and elusive, and that cultures and their people reciprocally influence each other. This is particularly important for a study on communication that involves Japanese. Midooka (1990) points out that “Japanese communication behavior changes drastically in accordance with the person they are interacting with or the situation where the interaction takes place” (p. 479). Hasegawa (2017) claims that so-called cultural essentialism is actually based on constructionist assumptions that knowledge and facts emerge from cultures, societies, and human communication (p. 3). In fact, this claim coincides with Doi (1973), who discovered the concept of *amae* through the observation of human communication in Japan and the US and demonstrated “how the psychology of *amae* pervades and actually makes the Japanese patterns of communication” (p. 181).

By analyzing the performance of Japanese speakers of English in naturally occurring conversations, as well as the international partners’ reactions to performances involving *amae*, the present study is expected to provide insights into the way in which the Japanese bring the underlying psychology of *amae* into conversations in a non-Japanese language with their non-Japanese interlocutors. About 60 years after the first mention of *amae* by Doi, are *amae*-based attitudes observable in the communicative performance of today’s young Japanese when they use English? If yes, as Doi (2007) claims, do these *amae*-based attitudes have only a negative impact on intercultural communication? The key question is, after all, how much of the cultural patterns that reflect an attitude of *amae*, which are widely accepted in the Japanese L1 community, is brought by the Japanese into their interactions in L2, and how might that affect those conversations? It is hoped that the findings in this study will serve as an informative resource for Japanese learners and English language educators who wish to better understand
learners’ current communication skills and lead them to new strategies which will help those learners become more effective language users in the arena of intercultural communication.

2. **CA for SLA**

Following the emergence of Conversation Analysis (CA) as a radical approach to sociological inquiry in the 1960s, researchers in second language acquisition began adopting CA to their studies in the mid-1970s. One of the first advocates of incorporating CA into language education was Irene Daden, who wrote a Master’s thesis titled “Conversational analysis and its relevance to the teaching of English as a second language” in 1975. Pointing out that “most ESL teachers, as well as textbook writers and writers of teaching materials, are unaware of the rules of conversation” (p. 3), she claimed that training in conversational analysis is necessary for teaching conversation in ESL (p. 118). Another early advocate is Diane Larsen-Freeman, who compiled studies into a book titled “Discourse analysis in second language research” in 1980. Citing some of the earliest studies of CA, such as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), the contributors to the book demonstrate that analyzing recorded conversations is useful for promoting a better understanding of how English language learners learn and use their target language (Allwright, 1980; Celce-Murcia, 1980; Schwartz, 1980). Then, almost 20 years later, Firth (1996) proposed the idea of using CA methodology to analyze L2, or lingua franca, interactions. He stressed the importance of focusing on what the interactants are doing rather than solely on what they are saying. The proposal was further developed by Firth and Wagner (1997) who examined a NS-NNS conversation using CA methodology to challenge one of the predominant views in Second language Acquisition (SLA), which they termed the “learner-as-defective-communicator mindset” (p. 290). They claimed that the traditional SLA perspective
failed to account for the “interactional and socio-linguistic dimensions of language” (p. 285) and called for “a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use” (p. 286). Eventually, this study contributed to the development of CA for SLA.

Markee (2000) tackles a number of principal objections to the use of CA for SLA research, including an objection regarding incompatibility: CA being a behavioral discipline and SLA being a cognitive discipline (p. 24). Moreover, SLA is not concerned with the possibility of replication as much as CA is (p. 28). Nonetheless, since Firth and Wagner (1997), there have been calls for broadening the scope of SLA by incorporating naturally occurring conversational data (Brouwer, 2012; Kasper & Wagner, 2014; Markee & Kasper, 2004). In fact, since 2000, research on NNSs has been increasingly incorporating CA (e.g. Gardner & Wagner, 2004; Wong, 2000). By citing Mondada and Pekarek Doehler (2004), Seedhouse (2007) pointed out the significant similarities between CA and sociocultural theory drawing on a strong socio-interactionist perspective, arguing that “both of these frameworks converge in insisting on the central role of contextually embedded communicative processes in the accomplishment of human actions and identities as well as of social facts” (p. 11). More and more studies of NNS interaction have incorporated CA as a method for analysis and “discovered practices that have not been described in either CA or L2 studies (Brouwer, 2012, p. 1058). Pekarek Doehler (2013) points out the observability of sociocognitive processes embedded in CA for SLA. She states that the analytic apparatus of CA for SLA “enables it to uncover how learning processes are observably shaped” within communicative practices (p. 1099). In particular, these studies have revealed that NNSs successfully accomplish various interactional activities despite their seemingly imperfect linguistic competence in their second languages. As one of the major contributions of incorporating CA into language education, Waring (2017) mentions the
reconceptualization of L2 competencies. That is, rather than viewing L2 conversations as deficient in the way that traditional SLA did, the studies which apply CA have shown that “L2 users exhibit great sophistication and versatility in managing various interactional contingencies” (pp. 466). This is exactly what was called for by Firth & Wagner (1997) and has been achieved through the accumulation of evidence in studies of NNS interactions (Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Wagner, 2004; Hellermann, 2007). Waring (2017) states that such a reconceptualization “would not have been arrived at without CA’s deeply emic research stance that prioritizes participant orientations” (p. 467).

Brouwer (2012) points out that CA for SLA studies are built on “the results of prior CA research studies of “monolingual” conversations and compare them with interactional practices in L2 data” (p. 1055). Among the studies which aim at the practical use of CA for SLA studies in language instruction, there seem to be at least two major traditions. One is to exemplify NS models for classroom instruction (Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Wong, 2002; Wong and Waring, 2010). Wong and Waring (2010), for example, published a guidebook for ESL/EFL teachers, titled “Conversation analysis and second language pedagogy.” Their main concern is to utilize the information obtained from CA to improve the quality of teaching materials and teacher education so that learners can learn to approximate NS ways of speaking. The other tradition is to analyze the learners’ performance, mostly in classroom interactions (Cutrone, 2014; Mori, 2004a, 2004b; Mori & Hasegawa, 2009; Mori & Markee, 2009; Mortensen, 2009) and to evaluate the level of communicative competency which takes place. While the goal of the former seems to be to bring learner languages closer to native speaker models, the latter reveals the ways in which NNSs successfully accomplish various interactional activities despite their seemingly imperfect linguistic competence in their second language. In addition, a number of longitudinal studies
have been undertaken to investigate the development of L2 learners’ interactional competence (e.g. Nguyen, 2008; Sahlström, 2011; Watanabe, 2017). The present study is in line with these latter two traditions, although it analyzes the learners’ performance in conversations outside of the classroom and examines the changes of the learners’ behavior over a relatively short period of time.

Another challenge for using CA methods in the research of language learners is the researcher’s choice of language combinations involved in their study. As Brouwer (2012) points out, most of the researchers in CA for SLA study L2 materials which are L1s for themselves (p. 1059). For example, Mori (1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2010; Mori & Hasegawa, 2009) studies conversations in Japanese involving American speakers of Japanese. Likewise, the researchers involved in studies of English conversations involving Japanese speakers of English are often non-Japanese, native speakers of English who have experience teaching English in Japan (e.g. Carroll, 2004; Cutrone, 2014; Greer et al., 2009; Greer, 2013). This may be partly because in such traditions as sociology, ethnography, or linguistics, outsiders’ viewpoints have made significant contributions. Considering CA as a field of language analysis, it is no surprise that there are advantages to doing research on language learners’ performance from a native speaker’s perspective. In fact, as researchers in the field point out, analyzing materials involving the researchers’ L2s can be problematic because of the difficulty they may face when transcribing their data and because they may have a limited knowledge about what is considered to be ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ by native speakers of the target communities which they are studying (e.g. Brouwer, 2012; Firth, 1996; Moerman, 1996). The researcher of the present study conducted an analysis of conversations which were L2 materials for her, but which were produced by subjects who share their first language and culture with her. Being a native speaker
of Japanese and raised in the Japanese culture, the researcher not only takes up the subjects’ perspective, just as traditional CA studies on monolinguals have done, but also conforms to Doi’s (1955) statement that “the typical psychology of a given nation can be learned only through familiarity with its native language” (p. 695). Being a non-native speaker of English who has lived and has been educated in an English-speaking environment for more than 14 years, the researcher is able to distance herself from novice users of English. To a large degree this long exposure to an English-speaking culture alleviates any problems which someone with less experience using English might have in transcribing English language data, or in identifying what may be considered to be ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ by native speakers of the community being studied.

One of the indications that the research field has prospered may be seen in recent publications of CA for SLA which provide comprehensive overviews (Markee 2015; Waring, 2017). Looking back, we can see that CA for SLA studies have dispelled some of the concerns once addressed in the literature. The achievement of the reconceptualization of L2 conversations is one such example. Waring et al.’s (2012) endeavor to better understand the speaker’s intention by conducting follow-up interviews is clearly a helpful way to overcome what was pointed out as a shortcoming of CA by Larsen-Freeman (2004, p. 604). Still, as Waring (2017) points out, the approach has several problems and difficulties, including the difficulty of actually applying CA discoveries to teaching. To tackle the problem, Waring (2018) introduces ideas for ESL practice designed to take advantage of CA findings in order to encourage and promote methods for teaching students how to improve their L2 interactional competence. In the following section, I will review studies of interactional competence from the perspective taken in this study.
3. **Interactional competence**

Originated in Hyme’s (1972) concept of linguistic performance and his notion of language as a means of social interaction, interactional competence (IC) has been incorporated in studies on language learners’ interactional practices including conversational openings (Hellerman, 2008), repair (Hellerman, 2011), and topic management (Nguyen, 2012). Instead of viewing language competence as individual learners’ traits, within the framework of interactional competence, the knowledge and ability of the learners is jointly constructed by participants in interaction. Therefore, as Young (2011) stresses, IC is “co-constructed by all participants in a discursive practice, and IC varies with the practice and with the participants” (p. 428). Moreover, IC involves not only linguistic knowledge but also communicative skills to manage various strategies such as turn-taking and repair in interaction. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociolinguistic perspective and his ideas of language learning, Hall (1993) states that “the ability to participate as a competent member in the practices of a group is learned through repeated engagement in and experience with these activities with more competent members of a group” (p. 148).

As the perspectives of “good language learners” have changed since the 1990s (Norton & Toohey, 2001), IC has received attention particularly in the field of language education. Sun (2014), for example, points out shortcomings of Chinese education of English language which places communicative competence at the top of the priority list (p. 1062) and emphasizes the importance of paying more attention to strategic competence by shifting focus on communicative competence to interactional competence. He claims that “Chinese students tend to use a few strategies repeatedly in their conversation” (p. 1064) and their poor management capacity for conversational strategies can cast a negative impact on the learners’ use of English. If English
education in Japan rushes toward promoting “communication ability” (see Chapter 1), it will be undoubtedly important to closely examine the ways in which the learners use English in actual interaction, or their IC, before making any drastic changes in the educational policies.

In the context of Japanese learners of English, Watanabe (2017) conducted a longitudinal CA study and demonstrates the ways in which a young EFL learner in Japan develops interactional competence. Analyzing video-recorded conversations of the learners, Watanabe provides evidence that the learners “cultivate their IC through carefully orienting to locally appropriate practices” (p. 289). Another example is Yagi (2007), who examined telephone calls by Japanese ESL learners and reports some improvement in the learners’ interactional competence without explicit feedback from the instructor. Yagi suggests, however, that the learners should be given an opportunity to pay conscious attention to responses of more capable peers, and have guided reflection on their own performance to efficiently improve their interactional competence (p. 33). These insights from previous research have inspired the current study, particularly with RQ4 to examine the subjects’ reflections and changes in their performance between first and second sessions.

While more and more evidence of the learners’ IC has been reported in studies of second language acquisition (Hall, Hellermann, & Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2015; Young, 2011), Kecskes, Sanders, & Pomerantz (2018) point out two shortcomings of these L2 IC studies. One of them is that they view IC as language- or culture- specific. The other is that they tend to focus primarily on the IC’s influence on the learners’ performance and fail to take into consideration other factors which actually influence the learners’ IC. Taking a “success approach,” Kecskes et al. (2018) make clear their stance that basic interactional competence (BIC), or “interactional capabilities that NNSs already have as they enter into L2
learning” (p. 89) play an important role for successful intercultural communication. The notion that BIC is not language- or culture-specific but universal needs to be emphasized particularly in the present study which involves adult L2 learners. All of the subjects have long enough experiences of using their L1/Japanese and conducting interactional practices in the Japanese culture prior to their entry to interacting in their L2/English. It is inevitable and entirely reasonable that the subjects bring with the basic knowledge of how interactions work into their interactions in English. The question is, however, to what extent such knowledge and strategies that the subjects bring in contribute to, or hinder, the participants’ achieving mutual understanding.
CHAPTER THREE: Method

1. Pilot study

In 2009-10, I conducted a pilot study to try out my study design, which eventually became the basis of the present dissertation study. The purpose of the pilot study was to investigate the actual performance of interactants in conversations which involve Japanese learners of English. The participants were 15 university students: 5 Japanese in Japan, 5 Taiwanese in Taiwan, and 5 Americans in the US. The 5 Taiwanese students served as interlocutors for the Japanese students in one conversation, and the American students served as interlocutors in a second conversation. The data were analyzed using methods drawn from Conversation Analysis, focusing on the occasions where the Japanese participants produce the continuers “Mm hmm.” The interlocutors’ reacting strategies to this continuers and the Japanese participants’ responses to their reactions were analyzed. The analysis revealed that the interlocutors of the Japanese participants exhibited various kinds of reactions to the “Mm hmm”s. Based on the experience of the pilot study, I became convinced that a qualitative research design was not only feasible but also an appropriate tool for investigating English learners’ actual performance in intercultural communication and would produce evidence of the impact of their background culture over their use of L2. However, since the focus was only on the Japanese participants’ performance, the differences in group characteristics of the American and Taiwanese participants were not analyzed in the pilot study.

The target population of the pilot study was the same as the present study: Japanese university students in Japan. The two studies also share some things in common in the data collection procedure. The Japanese subjects were connected with their interlocutors via Skype. Each of the subjects had two conversations, and the conversations were recorded and transcribed.
for qualitative analysis. One of the findings of the pilot study that caught my attention was that when they seemed to have some problems in understanding, the Japanese participants rarely showed their non-understanding, and nowhere in the data can one observe instances where the Japanese participants took actions to request for help with their understanding by, for example, asking the interlocutors to speak slowly or to repeat what they had just said. This finding motivated me to study more about how Japanese speakers of English deal with problems in understanding when communicating orally with international partners.

The primary differences between the pilot study and the present study are in the data collection and the instruments used. The pilot study aimed to directly compare the performance of a subject in two conversations, one with a NS and the other with a NNS of English. Therefore, in the pilot study, each of the Japanese subjects had a Taiwanese partner for his/her first session, and then an American partner for the second session. However, it turned out that the results showed that there were some issues involving individual differences in the participants’ performance, as well as internal validity problems, including maturation. Based on this, I made 3 major changes in the design of the present study to avoid the issues which I had encountered in my pilot study.

First, I increased the number of participants from 15 to 68, and added a third partner group. Having 15 participants in the pilot study was reasonable because the sample size was good enough to test out the study design and the data collection procedure. However, the sample size of the pilot study was too small to make meaningful comparisons. The present study involved 34 Japanese subjects, and accordingly, the numbers of the American and Taiwanese partners increased. Moreover, German speakers of English were added to form a second NNS partner group, so I could have two NNS groups as partners: one with Taiwanese who served as a
culturally more similar and geographically close group to the Japanese subjects, and the other with Germans who are culturally less similar to and geographically distant from the Japanese subjects. This addition enabled me to highlight differences in the partners’ reactions to the Japanese subjects’ performance not only between the American NS and the Taiwanese or German NNS, but also between the Taiwanese and German NNS partners (cf. RQ2).

Second, the new design had the Japanese subjects have the same partners for both the first and second sessions. By comparing the Japanese subjects’ performance with the same partners in both sessions, the study was able to ignore differences between individuals in the first and second conversations and focus on changes in the subjects’ performance in the same situations. From there, I decided to add an intervention between the first and the second conversations between the Japanese subjects and their partners. With this change, the study was able to take advantage of the maturation which occurred between conversations and utilize the results to measure what the subjects learned through and from the first conversations. This change also made participation in the study a learning opportunity for the subjects by giving them an opportunity to reflect on their first conversation before engaging in their second. This opportunity to reflect added an important value to the present study in terms of educational research. The intervention, which required the subjects to listen to the first conversation on his/her own and fill out a questionnaire, enabled me to see what the subjects considered to be problems in understanding, detect what kinds of effects these reflections had on the subjects’ performance in their second conversations, and compare and contrast the subjects’ performance before and after the intervention.
2. The participants

The subjects for this study were Japanese university students in Japan who were taking at least one course to learn the English language. The criteria for being included in the study were as follows: (1) speak Japanese as their first language; (2) have learned English in Japanese institutions and speak English as a foreign language; and (3) have no more than 1 year of experience living in an English speaking environment. The criteria were explicitly stated in the flyer which was sent out to recruit participants. The flyer also mentioned that participants would have a chance to experience live conversations with someone in a foreign country, exercise their English, and learn tips to better communicate in English, which actually attracted the participation of young university students who have a very limited opportunity to interact with non-Japanese in their everyday life. All of the participants go to the nation’s top-rated universities, which require the students to do extremely well at the entrance exams including English. Additionally, those universities are located in Japan’s largest cities, where the English proficiency is considered higher than other parts of Japan (English First, 2014; Yamada et al., 2017).

Forty four Japanese students participated in the study. Out of the 44 participants, 4 participated in the first recording sessions but did not show up for the second; 6 came to both of the sessions but their partners did not show up for the second sessions. Consequently, a total of 34 participants completed both sessions, and they are the subjects of the study. The 34 subjects were connected via Skype to partners who were located in three different continents.

All of the participants, both the subjects and the partners, were recruited through their instructors at universities. The flyers (see Appendices A and B) and consent forms approved by IRB were distributed by the instructors. Because of the privacy policies of some of the Japanese
universities, the researcher was not permitted to directly contact the students to conduct the recruitment. After the instructors collected the students’ information, they passed it on to the researcher, so the researcher could start contacting each of the participants by email to set up the recording schedule. The researcher did not have a chance to meet the participants in person prior to the first recording sessions.

The partners were recruited by their instructors and asked to directly contact the researcher by email if they wished to take part in the study. Upon receipt of the consent form from each partner candidate, the researcher had a trial session with him/her via skype to check their availability as well as to test the video and audio conditions. The pairing was made according to the participants’ availability, but some last-minute changes were made before the first sessions because of issues such as participants’ late arrival or troubles with the Internet connection. As a result, on the days of the first sessions, the researcher had to keep rearranging the schedule while concurrently conducting more than one recording session in separate rooms. Under such a fluid situation, the subjects were not given specific information about their partners, including the first languages and locations of the partners, until a few minutes before their first sessions actually began. For the second sessions, because the subjects were required to have the same partners from their first sessions, the schedules were fixed beforehand.

3. **The three groups**

The subjects were randomly assigned with an international partner for the first session and had their second session with the same partner. For the analysis, the data were divided into 3 groups: Groups A, B, and C, according to the first languages of the partners who happened to be
paired for the first sessions. The subjects in Group A are those who had American NS partners.

Groups B and C had NNS partners, Taiwanese and German, respectively.

**Figure 1: Participant groups**

In Group A, the conversation partners of the Japanese subjects are native speakers of English from the US, who belong to Kachru’s “Inner Circle” (Kachru, 1986; Kachru et al., 2006). By contrast, according to Kachru’s definition, the NNS participants of groups B and C are those who live in the Expanding Circle as they speak English as a foreign language (EFL). The conversations between the Japanese NNS and these two groups of NNS partners were conducted in English as a lingua franca. While they are both NNS groups, the participants of the two NNS partner groups are different from each other in terms of their cultures and English language learning experiences. The NNS participants in Group B (Taiwanese students) are considered to have more similar, closer cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as learning experiences of English, to that of the Japanese subjects than the NS American or NNS German participants. In contrast, for the NNS participants in Group C (German students), the participants’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as their learning experiences of English are considered to be less similar but more distant to that of the Japanese subjects.
Each of the Japanese subjects in each group was paired with a partner and had two conversations with him/her within a week. While such an arrangement might possibly lead to issues of familiarity, having the same person to talk to in both Conversation I and Conversation II made it possible for the researcher to look for changes in the subjects’ performance which would not have been possible if they had had conversations with two different people, as was the case in the pilot study.

4. Skype

The participants had conversations via Skype, a software application which enables users to send instant messages, and make voice and video calls over the Internet. The calls between users (Skype-to-Skype calls) are free. The software has been used by both individuals and businesses worldwide. According to the official website of Skype, there are up to 30 million users online at peak times (Skype Limited, 2011). This application was selected for the present study from among several internet phone services because of the quality of the calls.

There are some possible limitations in using Skype for data collection, including negative influences on the nature of interactions over Skype. For example, mechanical troubles in the internet connection, camera, or microphone could distract the participants. Some participants reported that they had no prior experience of speaking to a webcam or someone on the computer screen and they were nervous about that. In addition, some gestures took place outside of the scope of the webcam, and eye gaze may not have been used as effectively as in real-life conversations. However, this arrangement was chosen because there are more advantages than disadvantages in using Skype to connect participants. In fact, no participants expressed complaints about using Skype after having their sessions. Many of them reported that they
enjoyed the new experience. This may be because the arrangement enabled the participants, who are remotely separated from one another, to have international encounters in a real sense, which is not always viable in traditional classroom settings. Some of the Japanese subjects excitedly told the researcher that it was their first time to speak English with someone of their own age or to “meet” someone in a foreign country. Moreover, especially for the research purposes of the present study, it was important to have the Japanese subjects talk with someone who had little knowledge about Japanese language and culture, including the *amae*-based style of communication. Instead of talking with foreign residents in Japan, the use of Skype created a natural context and a reason to communicate, and motivated the Japanese subjects to use English and to actively engage in dealing with problems in understanding in the course of an intercultural interaction.

5. **Instruments**

The data were gathered through video-taping the Skype conversations (video calls) and through the questionnaires distributed after the first conversation sessions. The conversations were transcribed following several resources describing the notation conventions of Conversation Analysis, including discussions of the transcription system (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 2004) and researcher guides in handbooks (Hepburn & Bolden, 2012; Markee, 2015; ten Have, 1999). These resources were used to best transcribe the performance of the participants, most of whom had noticeable non-native accents.
6. Research Design

The data collection consisted of three parts: Conversation I, Questionnaire, and Conversation II. First, each dyad (a subject and his/her partner) had a conversation via Skype and the conversation was video-recorded. After the recording, an audio file of the recorded conversation along with a questionnaire was given to each Japanese subject. The subject was asked to listen to his/her own conversation and then, based on this listening, to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire required the subjects to evaluate their performance with a focus on how they dealt with problems in understanding, and to indicate plans for improvement for their second sessions. The subjects were required to complete their reflections and submit the questionnaire responses before Conversation II, which they had within 7 days after Conversation I, so they could write their reflections and plans while the experience of the first session is still fresh in their minds.

Figure 2: Research design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation I (CA)</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Conversation II (CA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher analyzes participants’ means of dealing with understanding problems (RQs 1&amp;2)</td>
<td>Participants reflect on understanding problems encountered during previous conversation and make plans for minimizing them in next conversation (RQ3)</td>
<td>Researcher analyzes participants’ means of dealing with understanding problems (RQs 1&amp;2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare

Effects of reflecting on understanding problems in previous conversation and making plans for minimizing understanding problems in next conversation (RQ4)
7. Understanding displays and *amae*

Sacks (1992) states in his lectures that “if understanding isn’t there, then there’s nothing much going on” (vol. II, p. 140). Understanding is indispensable for social interaction, but that is not why understanding is of interest for researchers of social interaction. What interests us is the way in which participants in talk-in-interaction do “showing understanding.” Chiang (2009) studied NS-NNS interactions and found that the participants use strategies such as repair, reformulation, confirmation or clarification requests to achieve mutual understanding, and pointed out the importance of interactional skills in intercultural communication (p. 389). Kääntä and Kasper (2018) exemplified the ways in which clarification requests are used by Finnish students to claim non-understanding and actively pursue understanding. In terms of interactional skills, since the present study involves language learners, it is important to distinguish between “ability to understand” and “skills to display understanding.” After all, they are equally important in language learning, but it is questionable that language education treats the two as equal in importance because of the difference in difficulties in measurement. Ability to understand refers to the learners’ comprehension, and this can be measured in a variety of ways, including listening tests. Skills to display understanding, on the other hand, refer to how well subjects are able to express that they understand and let others know about the understanding by using some kinds of means of communication. Inevitably, skills to display understanding are more complex and difficult to measure than the ability to understand, and measuring them requires us to take a close look at the learners’ performance in their actual conversations. That is exactly what the present study does.

Another important distinction about understanding displays is the distinction between claiming understanding and demonstrating understanding (Sacks, 1992, vol. II, p. 141). In this
study, the distinction between the two corresponds with the degree of *amae* involved. When the Japanese subjects demonstrate their understanding, for example, by adding some follow-up information to what the partners said, the displays are clear and easily interpretable for the partners. In other words, such displays do not require the partners to exercise *sasshi*. For this reason, cases where the subjects demonstrate their understanding will be categorized as No *amae* (Category 1). Along with this, even if the displays are not clear enough, are incomplete or inappropriate, as long as the subjects are trying to demonstrate their understanding, the degree of *amae* is considered to be Minor (Category 2) because the Japanese subjects are still verbally expressive to some extent. In this case, the displays require the partners to exercise some *sasshi* to, for example, provide help for the Japanese to modify their understanding. In contrast, claiming non-understanding requires partners to exercise *sasshi*, because the partners are not given enough information about what caused the trouble for the Japanese subjects to understand. Therefore, in these cases the degree of *amae* is considered to be Moderate (Category 3). In such cases, although the *amae*-based attitudes are motivated by a sense of helplessness (Doi, 1963), the subjects’ actions of requesting help require their partners to pay careful attention to detect the trouble source before offering help. If the partners are willing to help, they need to reach out to the subjects to get more information from them, see what kind of help is requested, and then guide the subjects to their understanding. Moreover, with intense *amae*, the subjects may occasionally claim their understanding, at least from the partners’ perspectives, but they finally display neither their understanding nor non-understanding. This will be categorized as Major *amae* (Category 4). It should be noted that the development of these categorizations by no means suggests that *amae* is the only reason behind the ways in which subjects display their non-understanding. Other factors may be involved such as a subject’s limited command of the
English language or lack of experience in speaking with non-Japanese. The point is, however, that *amae* can be a useful framework to account for some of the attitudes of the Japanese people, whose interactions with others have often been described as indirect (Akatsu & Asao, 1993; Doi, 1996; Haugh, 2003; Yamada, 1997), implicit (Midooka, 1990), or vague (Akatsu & Asao, 1993; Clancy, 1986; Doi, 1996; Haugh, 2003; Midooka, 1990). The present study aims to provide evidence on the specific effects of *amae*, rather than Japanese communication styles in general.

8. **Definitions**

The concept of *amae* can be summarized as a sense of helplessness and a desire to be loved in which one can “depend and presume upon another’s love” or “to indulge in another’s kindness” (Doi, 1963, p. 266). *Amae* is not expressed verbally and requires others to *sasshi*, or sense it (Doi, 1987/1988, p. 51). Therefore, the *amae* attempter maintains a feeling of suspicion that their expression of *amae* may be refused by a recipient (Doi, 1981, p. 176). Based on these observations, examples involving *amae* will be identified when:

1. the Japanese subjects are in need of help to understand their partners;
2. their ways of showing this need are not verbally expressive and require the partners to exercise *sasshi*; and
3. whether or not the Japanese subjects are helped, as well as how they are helped, depends on the partners’ decisions.

When these three conditions are met, the Japanese subject’s performance is considered to be an *amae*-based strategy. Examples are categorized according to degrees of *amae*: (1) No *amae*; (2) Minor *amae*; (3) Moderate *amae*; and (4) Major *amae*. In the following section, I will
explain how the key concept of *amae* is applied to categorization criteria as well as to the
analysis of conversations (Chapter 4).

Table 1: The degrees of *amae*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of <em>amae</em></th>
<th>Strategic means</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Linguistic means (Examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NO</strong> <em>(Sasshi is not needed)</em></td>
<td>1. Displaying (non-) understanding explicitly</td>
<td>1.1. Demonstrating understanding in typical ways: e.g. Providing follow-ups, opinions, assessments; Correcting partner’s misunderstanding; Repeating partner’s words</td>
<td>“How many years do you play?” “So good dream.” “Dancing.” (Repetition with falling intonation and nodding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2. Demonstrating understanding in unique ways: Producing atypical responses (Delayed displays of understanding)</td>
<td>(In response to “How long?”) “When I was a high school student, …”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3. Demonstrating non-understanding by making specific requests</td>
<td>“What is it?” “How many what?” “I don’t know that words?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINOR</strong> <em>(Sasshi is needed to fill in the missing parts)</em></td>
<td>2. Displaying partial (non-) understanding</td>
<td>2.1. Trying to demonstrate understanding (but the response turns to be inappropriate or nonsense)</td>
<td>(In response to “What?”) “Yes yes.” (In trying to repeat ‘chess’) “Jazz?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODERATE</strong> <em>(Sasshi is needed to identify the trouble source)</em></td>
<td>3. Displaying non-understanding implicitly</td>
<td>3.1. Claiming non-understanding by direct requests</td>
<td>“Can you speak more slowly?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.2. Claiming non-understanding by indirect requests</td>
<td>“Sorry?” “Hm?” “What?” “I don’t understand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAJOR</strong> <em>(Sasshi is needed to guess about JP’s understanding, what is going on etc.)</em></td>
<td>4. Not displaying (non-) understanding</td>
<td>4.1. Postponing understanding displays (Let it pass)</td>
<td>“Mm hm?” “Uh huh?” “Ah.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2. Skipping understanding displays (Let me go ahead)</td>
<td>(Continues turn without responding) “To become a judge…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this study, analyses of example segments are divided into 4 parts according to the degrees of *amae* that are exhibited: (1) No *amae*: The attempter explicitly displays understanding or displays non-understanding by specifying the trouble source so the partner is not required to exercise *sasshi*; (2) Minor *amae*: The attempter displays (non-)understanding at least partially, but because the response is inappropriate or nonsense, the partner is expected to *sasshi* and provide help. The trouble source is apparent; (3) Moderate *amae*: The attempter implicitly displays non-understanding and the partner is expected to not only *sasshi* the non-understanding but also find out the trouble source; and (4) Major *amae*: The attempter does not display (non-)understanding and the partner is expected to *sasshi* about his/her understanding or non-understanding, decide whether to give the attempter a chance to display (non-)understanding or to give up mutual understanding, or otherwise decide if and how he/she could help.

8.1 No *amae*: Displaying (non-)understanding explicitly

The first category, Displaying (non-)understanding explicitly, is divided into 3 subcategories: (1) Demonstrating understanding in typical ways; (2) Demonstrating understanding in unique ways; and (3) Demonstrating non-understanding by making specific requests. Note that the first two subcategories are not actually involved with problems in understanding but are included here mainly to illustrate examples where the strategic means involving “no *amae.*” When they explicitly display their understanding or non-understanding, the Japanese subjects are engaged in their conversations and show interest in the current topic. Because the subjects are verbally expressive and show no *amae* in their communicative attitudes, partners are not required to exercise *sasshi*. 
8.1.1. Demonstrating understanding in typical ways

The subjects demonstrate their understanding in ways which are commonly observed in NS conversations. Examples of these actions are: asking a follow-up question; providing a comment, an opinion, or an assessment in response to the partner’s utterance; correcting partner’s misunderstanding; and repeating a word or words in what the partner just said, particularly when they are crucial for understanding the partner’s utterance.

8.1.2. Demonstrating understanding in unique ways

The subjects demonstrate understanding in ways which are considered to be unique or uncommon in NS conversation. For example, they can produce a statement which does not seem to fit the context in the beginning, at least from the perspectives of the partner, but in the end, the whole statement functions as a display of understanding. In other words, the understanding is displayed later in the subject’s utterance since the subjects construct the utterances in their own way. Thus, I call such productions “delayed display of understanding.” This is probably due to the subjects’ insufficient skills in English grammar and the influence of Japanese syntax. Because of the unique sentence construction employed, the partner as well as the researcher cannot immediately interpret that the subject is displaying understanding. Rather, the utterance can be confused with a display of non- or misunderstanding and the partner may interrupt it and initiate repair.
8.1.3. Demonstrating non-understanding by making specific requests

When they explicitly display their non-understanding, the subjects demonstrate it by specifying the item(s) which is making it hard for them to understand. They request information by asking questions that are commonly used by NSs such as “What is it?” and “How many what?” or making a statement such as “I don’t know that words.” The subjects can also demonstrate non-understanding by repeating a word in the partner’s utterance as they hear and producing a similar but incorrect word (e.g. “Sheesaw?” for “sing song”) in their response. Such responses are often produced with a rising intonation.

8.2 Minor *amae*: Displaying partial (non-)understanding

Displaying partial (non-)understanding (Category 2) is observed when a Japanese subject tries to demonstrate their understanding or ask for confirmation of their understanding, but this effort eventually functions as a display of non-understanding because the response is inappropriate or nonsense. The main reason behind this seems to be the subjects’ limited vocabulary. The utterances are usually brief, as short as one word. Sometimes, an utterance contains the subject’s partial understanding of one part of what their partner has said and partial non-understanding of another part. Although *amae* is not involved in the part where the subjects articulate what they understand, the missing parts require the partners to guess, or exercise *sasshi*. Therefore, the subjects’ *amae* is considered as minor in these cases.

In some cases, such utterances clearly spot the trouble source. For example, when the subject produces “Yoringf school (falling intonation)” in response to the partner’s statement of “you live in school,” it is clear that the subject has trouble understanding the beginning of the sentence but not the ending. Another example is the case where the subject says “Jazz?” in
response to the partner’s statement that he likes to play board games such as chess. The subjects may or may not be aware of their own non-understanding as the displays of non-understanding do not always elicit repair from their partners.

In other cases, however, the situations are more complicated. For example, the subject may pick up a word from their partner’s utterance, which is not necessarily an important piece of information, so he or she can use it as a topic of the conversation that follows and take the lead in that part of the conversation. Cases like this imply that the subject only partially understands their partner, but the possible non-understanding of the rest of what has been said is not always revealed. At least the Japanese subject is engaged in the conversation, even though he/she may be more interested in leading the conversation by taking a specific item out of their partner’s utterances than understanding what his/her partner is trying to convey.

8.3 Moderate amae: Displaying non-understanding implicitly

Displaying non-understanding implicitly (Category 3) is observed when the Japanese subjects claim their non-understanding but do not specify the trouble source. In most cases, it is recognizable for the partner that the Japanese subject is having a problem in understanding. However, since it is difficult to spot the trouble source or to identify what the subject actually needs to turn their non-understanding into understanding, the partner’s help often ends up being ineffective. These kinds of display do not contain any information about exactly what the subject is asking for, and it is possible that the subjects are not making much effort to improve their understanding. This kind of display takes the form of a request for the partner to slow down, a request to repeat the whole utterance, or a more indirect request with a statement such as “I don’t understand.” When non-verbal cues such as “Hm?” are used, the Japanese subjects are
not verbally expressive but rely on their partner’s *sashi*. This requires the partner to do a great deal of guesswork for the sake of the subject’s understanding. Clearly, the subjects’ *amae*-based attitudes put a burden on their partner.

8.4 Major *amae*: Not displaying understanding or non-understanding

Not displaying understanding or non-understanding (Category 4) is observed when the subjects show some kind of action but displays of understanding are missing in places where the interlocutors, as well as the researcher, expect them to be. The subjects are most likely aware that their understanding is lacking or insufficient but they do not disclose their non-understanding. A possible reason for this may be that the subjects are waiting for some more information to come out, hoping to turn their non-understanding into understanding without bothering their partners. The subjects may feel that they need to hide their non-understanding for some reason. In some cases, however, the non-understanding is revealed later in the conversation. Because this behavior lacks displays of understanding or non-understanding, it is often difficult for the partner to see on the spot whether or not the Japanese subject is following the conversation, if they are engaged, what trouble source he/she may have, or in what direction he/she intends to lead the conversation. The subjects’ *amae* can pose a significant risk that it can cause confusion, frustration for the partner, and a breakdown in communication.

8.4.1. Postponing understanding displays (Let it pass)

When they do not display understanding or non-understanding but “let it pass” (4.1.), the Japanese subjects allow the interlocutors to continue their utterances and stay on the current topic.
The interlocutors may accept or decline the option. In this study, I will call this action of the subjects pending displays of understanding. This kind of displays is often produced in a weaker voice. If the Japanese subjects exercise “let it pass” and the interlocutor accepts it, the subjects can gather more information from the interlocutors’ utterances and may eventually be able to reach understanding. The partners either continue providing information until the subjects reach understanding, or forget about achieving mutual understanding and change the topic. In this sense, the subjects relinquish control of the conversation and leave the decision to their partners.

8.4.2. Skipping understanding displays (Let me go ahead)

Additionally, sometimes the Japanese subjects do not display understanding or non-understanding but take the action of “let me go ahead” (4.2.). I will call it skipping displays of understanding. In such cases, the Japanese subjects do not respond to what their partners say. When this occurs, Japanese participants take the floor and provide whatever information they are ready to provide regardless of the sequence of the conversation. The information can be an answer to a question that is asked earlier in the conversation, follow-up information to complete an unfinished utterance that they produced earlier, or something totally irrelevant but inserted to the current context. Although this may seem rude and egocentric, a possible reason behind the subjects’ use of this strategy is because they require time to compose what they want to say in English and their urge to put it out outweighs the need to respond to their partners appropriately. Consequently, this strategy can be accompanied by an abrupt change of topic, which is often described as a common characteristic of NNS speech production, especially in ELF communication. When this strategy is exercised, Japanese subjects are engaged in the conversations and they actively express themselves to make themselves understood, even though
they do not understand what their partners are saying. This requires the partner to *sasshi* and guess about what the Japanese subjects are doing or trying to do, to wait and see, or to give up any further attempts to help their Japanese partner understand what they have been trying to communicate.

When they use the strategy of not displaying (non-)understanding, Japanese participants may have lost the context of the conversation and may not be able to grasp what is being discussed. By not displaying their understanding or non-understanding, the Japanese subjects expect their partners to resolve the situation by providing more information to help them understand, by changing the topic so they can reset the situation, or by requiring them to accept the subjects’ way of expressing themselves. This kind of behavior demonstrates a major degree of *amae*, and the consequence is greater difficulty in achieving mutual understanding.

9. **Analyses of Recorded Conversations**

The recorded conversations collected in the study were analyzed to answer each of my four Research Questions. For example, in the case of RQ1: “What linguistic and strategic means do Japanese speakers of English use while dealing with problems in understanding?” each conversation was treated as an individual case so that this part of the research could provide practical examples of the participants’ use of linguistic and strategic means when they were dealing with problems in understanding. Examples are taken from all the conversations, regardless of whether they occurred in the first or second sessions, so that patterns in the subjects’ performance could emerge and be analyzed. The examples chosen for inclusion in this paper were purposely selected by the researcher to represent the characteristics of Japanese subjects’ performance involving *amae* in dealing with their understanding problems. As the findings are
not intended to be numerically representative, e.g. in terms of the frequency or the number of cases, but rather intended to show the diversity in the subjects’ performance and their partners’ responses, the examples include those that are less usual.

To extract the characteristics, the linguistic means used by the subjects were coded and then categorized into 4 strategic means according to the degree of amae involved: (1) No amae or Displaying (non-)understanding explicitly; (2) Minor amae or Displaying partial (non-)understanding; (3) Moderate amae or Displaying non-understanding implicitly; and (4) Major amae or Not displaying (non-)understanding. The categories were created through repeated modification until no further new themes emerged and saturation was reached (Creswell, 2007). Some of the categories were further classified into subcategories, so they made 8 subcategories in total. Each of the subcategories is explained in detail in the next section. The categorization was developed by the researcher’s judgment, basically taking the subject’s perspective. When there is a gap between the subject’s use of strategic means and the interlocutor’s interpretation of it, the gap and the consequence is described in the analysis. For example, when a subject’s attempt to display his/her understanding is interpreted as a display of non-understanding by the partner, that can cause confusion for the subject. In such cases, the gap is described through an emic approach to explain the way in which the participants interpret their utterances, and the consequence is analyzed using an etic approach to describe what it looks like from the researcher’s perspective.
10. **Group characteristics**

RQ2: “How do NS and NNS partners react to the Japanese participants’ linguistic and strategic means for dealing with problems in understanding, especially when they are combined with *amae*-based attitudes?” is a question that focuses on the group characteristics.

**Figure 3: Group characteristics**

The results of the analyses of the conversations (RQ1) are used again to examine if there are any significant differences in the participants’ performance between the groups: Groups A (with native speakers in the US, culturally distant), B (with non-native speakers in Taiwan, culturally close), and C (with non-native speakers in Germany, culturally distant). This part of the study was expected to provide empirical evidence about the characteristics of ELF communication in a context where *amae* may play a part.

11. **Intervention**

A questionnaire was used and qualitatively analyzed to answer RQ3: “How do the Japanese subjects evaluate their problems in understanding? Do they think they can improve their performance in dealing with those problems?” This part of the research focuses on each of the Japanese subjects as a language learner. To complete the questionnaire, the subjects were
required to listen to the conversations which were recorded during the first sessions. This
listening experience encouraged them to reflect and evaluate their own performance, and to
prepare for their second session.

The questionnaire (see appendix) consists of three main parts: Part 1 is for the subjects to
reflect on their own performance, Part 2 is designed to help them reflect on their partners’
performance, and Part 3 is designed to encourage them to make plans for their next conversation.
The reflection parts, Part 1 and Part 2, are used to raise the subjects’ awareness of problems in
understanding. To answer the questions in these parts, the subjects were required to specify the
segments of the conversation where they think problems in understanding had occurred by
identifying the actual utterances along with the starting times of these utterances in the audio
files. In addition, they were asked what they would do if they encountered exactly the same
problems in understanding as occurred in the segments they pointed out. Finally, in Part 3, the
subjects were asked to provide ideas which they thought might improve their performance in
dealing with problems in understanding in preparation for their second sessions. In this way, the
questionnaire responses serve as a basis to find out if any changes occurred in the subjects’
performance between the two sessions. The results of this analysis are directly linked to RQ4.

12. Analyses of the changes

RQ4: “How do reflections about problems in understanding in the first conversation and
the development of plans to minimize those problems in the next conversation, affect the
Japanese subjects’ further performance? What kinds of changes are observed in their linguistic
and strategic means when dealing with problems in understanding?” will be explored in detail by
comparing each subject’s performance in Conversations I and II. The results obtained from the
analyses of these conversations (RQ1) will be compared to see if there are changes in the characteristics of the subjects’ use of linguistic and strategic means before and after the intervention. The analysis also examines the effect of the subjects’ plans for improvement (RQ3) on their performance in Conversation II.

13. Data collection procedure

13.1 Conversation I

Each of the Japanese subjects had a video call with his/her partner on Skype. The partner was asked to be in a quiet room, log into his/her Skype account, and prepare a webcam and a microphone prior to his/her scheduled time. The recording was required to be conducted on campuses by the subjects’ instructors who mediated the participant recruitment (see Section 2 in this chapter). At a scheduled time, the researcher brought each of the Japanese subjects into the recording room where cameras and a voice recorder had been set to capture the participants’ performance. While the partners knew that they were talking with Japanese college students in Japan, the Japanese subjects had no information about their partners in advance except that they are in foreign countries. This is simply because of the procedural matter at the recording site. Although the researcher had made a tentative schedule of the sessions prior to the recordings, she had to make many last-minute adjustments due to the participants’ showing up late, missing the appointment, or computer and other technical problems. The Japanese subjects were notified where their partners were calling from only a few minutes before their first sessions began. As a result, some of the Japanese subjects did not have a clue about their partners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, some of the subjects mistakenly believed that their
Taiwanese or German partners to be native speakers of English even after they completed two sessions talking with them.

When the partner appeared on the screen, the researcher introduced the Japanese subject to his/her partner, and then told both of the participants that they would have 10 minutes to talk in English. They were also told that they would be asked to select a topic for their conversation, but should feel free to chat away from it. Three topics were given for the participants to choose from. The topics for Conversation I were: (a) Hobbies; (b) Family, friends, and personal relationships; (c) Globalization. The participants were reminded that the conversation would be video-recorded, and the researcher would be outside the room during the conversation to check the quality of the call (the equipment, internet connection, etc.), but she would not participate in the conversation. After the researcher left the room, the participants started their conversation in English for 10 minutes. The 10-minute time limit was set based on the experience of the pilot study (Section 1, this chapter), where it became apparent that 10 minutes is an appropriate length for subjects to maintain their concentration during a conversation in a second language, while at the same time providing data that are rich enough for analysis.

13.2 Questionnaire

Immediately after Conversation I, an audio file was created and a copy along with a questionnaire (see Appendices C and D) was given to each Japanese subject. The questionnaire was designed to raise the subjects’ awareness of problems in understanding, remind them that they would have a second session with the same partners within a week, and encourage them to make plans to improve their performance in their next sessions. The subjects were asked to
listen to their conversations, to complete the questionnaire based on what they heard, and return their responses to the researcher within a week by email.

13.3 Conversation II

The second sessions were conducted using the same procedure as the first sessions. A new set of topics were given for the pairs to choose from: (a) Future plans; (b) Culture; (c) Social concerns. The conversations were video- and audio-recorded.

13.4 Notes on recording

The conversations were recorded using 2 video cameras and 1 voice recorder per session. One of the video cameras was used to capture the Japanese subjects and the other to capture their partners on the computer screen. The video cameras recorded the audio but a voice recorder was placed near the Japanese subjects as a backup. Although it was not permitted for this study because of the security policies of the data collection sites (Japanese universities), those who try to replicate this study are recommended to use applications specially designed for recording skype conversations, such as Ecamm for Mac and TalkHelper for Windows, so they can conduct the recording more easily and collect better quality audio and video data than was possible in this study.
CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the four Research Questions will be answered based on the findings from the analyses of the audio and video data collected from the first and second sessions, as well as the questionnaire responses collected between the two sessions. The chapter comprises four major sections to answer each of the research questions. First, the data from transcriptions are presented to show evidence of the participants’ performance, followed by discussions about these segments (sections 1-4 for RQ1 and 5-7 for RQ2). In the next sections (8-10), RQ3 is answered by analyzing the questionnaire responses. Finally, the two sets of data analysis are combined in the final sections (11-15) to answer RQ4.

Due to space limitations, not all of the transcription data but only the segments which show evidence to support the answers for the research questions are presented. This selection of segments prevents unclear examples from occupying the limited space and enables the researcher to clearly make claims that are supported by the data.

The data

The data collected through the recordings of conversations and questionnaires are used for the analysis. The transcriptions created from the audio and video recordings of the conversation sessions, both the first and the second, are used throughout the analysis as they provide the core data to answer all four of the research questions. The questionnaire responses are used to analyze the subjects’ reflections (RQ3) and the influence of the intervention (RQ4) respectively.
The total length of the audio and video recordings used for the analyses is 765 minutes, with the average of 11 minutes 15 seconds per session (N = 68). The questionnaire responses were obtained from all the 34 Japanese subjects. The responses were originally written in Japanese by the subjects and translated into English by the researcher.

All the conversations were transcribed as heard with some necessary modifications for the purpose of the study: (1) To preserve the participants’ anonymity, all names and other personally identifiable information have been changed; (2) Important information for analysis such as descriptions of non-verbal actions seen in the videos was added to the transcriptions; and (3) When English words produced by Japanese can be heard differently by non-Japanese and Japanese-English bilinguals because of their familiarity or unfamiliarity with the accent, the judgments of the bilinguals were preferentially selected. This is because the conversations are analyzed not only from an etic perspective but also from an emic perspective. By taking both emic and etic perspectives, the analysis is expected to provide a basis for defining certain educational implications based on the sequential complexity in conversation (Schegloff, 1987). In addition, taking the perspective of Japanese learners of English enables the researcher (a Japanese-English bilingual) to focus on unveiling what and how they understand, and that is expected to be a more meaningful choice for a study aiming at contributing to the improvement of language education in Japan. Below is an example of such a case, where J11’s “Waseda university” (line 6) could be heard as “what is a university” by her partner:

#01 University

1 All: u:m. are you going to: (0.5) college? <university?>
2 J11: Ye:s.
3 All: Yeah?
J11: Yes.

A11: *en y-.* Where are you going.

J11: → **Waseda university**, (0.3) you know?

(1.4)

A11: What is a uni- it u::h (.). it’s like (0.8) like. after::

(1.7) you’re done with school. (0.6) and then you go (0.7) to

like get more schooling? Like a college,

Note that the “Waseda” part in J11’s utterance (lines 6) is pronounced with a mild stress on the ‘wa’ syllable and no remarkable stress on the other syllables, which is a typical way to pronounce it in Japanese. The “Waseda” part is connected to “university,” which is pronounced with almost no accent but with a slight pitch rise toward the end.

From an etic perspective, it is an example of miscommunication which neither of the participants recognizes. As the partial repetition in the beginning of A11’s response indicates (line 8), it is likely that the answer was heard as a question, “What is a university?” to the non-Japanese speaker’s ear. With the stress on the “wa” syllable and the pitch rise at the end of the sentence, it is reasonable that the utterance could be heard as such by A11, who is not familiar with Japanese words, pronunciation, or schools in Japan.

From an emic perspective, however, both of the participants are providing the information as requested by their partners. On line 2, J11 provides a confirmation of A11’s question, followed by a more explicit, positive response to A11’s confirmation request on line 4. Based on these confirmations, A11 asks a follow-up question (line 5), and J11 provides the requested information, which is the name of her school. The pitch rise of the “university” part followed by “you know?” indicates that J11 is aware that although it is a very famous school among Japanese, her partner in the US may not know it.
To transcribe this particular part, the researcher used her judgment as a native speaker of Japanese and regards J11’s action as providing the requested information (e.g. “I am going to Waseda university.”) rather than inquiring the meaning of the word “university.” In this manner, when Japanese speakers can hear an utterance differently from non-Japanese speakers and there is more than one way to transcribe it due to the hearer’s familiarity with the Japanese language and Japanese learners’ pronunciation, Japanese speakers’ judgment is given priority.

**RQ1: What linguistic and strategic means do Japanese speakers of English use while dealing with problems in understanding?**

In this section, the linguistic and strategic means which the Japanese subjects use when they do and do not display problems in understanding are analyzed. Before going into the analysis, the ways in which the Japanese subjects display their understanding with No amaee (Category 1) are examined. This provides contrasting examples of their performance while dealing with problems and helps readers to be better informed before they are presented with the more complicated discussions that follow. Then, to answer RQ1, examples in which Japanese subjects deal with problems in understanding are presented and discussed. The examples are categorized by degrees of amaee and the characteristics of the actions which take place in them: Minor amaee or Displaying partial (non-)understanding (Category 2); Moderate amaee or Displaying non-understanding without specifying the trouble source (Category 3); and Major amaee or Not displaying understanding or non-understanding (Category 4). These categories were developed by the researcher and further classified into a total of 8 subcategories (see Table 1 in Chapter 3, Section 8). Due to space limitations, only illustrative examples for each subcategory are presented, along with explanations.
1. **No amae or Displays of (non-)understanding**

   In this section, examples are presented to demonstrate how the Japanese subjects display their understanding. The examples are divided into three subcategories: (1) Typical ways to show understanding, (2) Unique ways to show understanding, and (3) Specific requests to display non-understanding. For the examples in the first two subcategories, the subjects do not have a problem in understanding and are not in need of help. For the third subcategory, the Japanese subjects are verbally expressive. As a result, the Japanese subjects’ performance in these examples does not require the partners to exercise **sasshi**. As they do not meet the conditions I set (see Chapter 3, Section 8), it is considered that no amae is involved in these cases.

1.1 Typical ways to show understanding

   Studies on interactions involving NNSs have shown that they are able to demonstrate their skills to successfully interact with NSs and other NNSs in their second language conversations (Gardner & Wagner, 2004; Hall et al., 2011; Mori & Markee, 2009). In these studies, the universality of the principles and structures of conversational organization are emphasized. As seen below, the Japanese subjects in my data are no exception in this regard. They are capable of showing understanding in commonly accepted ways among English speaking communities.
1.1.1. Providing follow-up information or questions

Just like native or expert speakers of English, the Japanese subjects show their understanding using various kinds of strategic and linguistic means. One of them is to provide follow-up information or questions. In the example below, J10 provides information about her own experience (lines 5-6) and asks a follow-up question (lines 9-10), both of which are relevant to what her partner A10 said.

#02 Fishing

1. I like to go fishing and golfing. I don't know if people do that there.
2. J10: Fishing?
3. A10: Yeah.
5. A10: Really?
6. J10: Yes so how many years do you play fishing?
7. A10: I been fishing since I was a little kid with my father.

1.1.2. Providing opinions or assessments

Japanese subjects also provide their assessments, opinions, or comments on the partner’s previous utterance to show understanding. In addition to a follow-up question (line 4), J3 in the
next example provides an assessment of what A3 said (line 7) to clearly demonstrate her understanding.

#03 Education and sociology

1 A3: Um (0.8) I studied, education and sociology.
2 J3: Ah education sociology.
3 A3: Mm hmm,=
4 J3: =Hm. (0.8) Why do you choose mm (0.4) thisssuu::: (.) subject?
5 (1.1)
6 A3: U:m, I wanna be a teacher.
7 J3: ➔ Oh >yeah yeah yeah yeah< so good. so good dream. (0.5) mmm,
8 A3: Yeah.

1.1.3. Correcting the partner’s misunderstanding

Moreover, Japanese subjects show their understanding by correcting the partner’s misunderstanding or initiating repair. In the example below, J48 does that by correcting G48’s utterance by repeating the information he provided (line 5).

#04 Too old

1 G48: How old are you?
2 J48: Ah ah ah. Twenty.
3 (1.0)
4 G48: Thirty.
5 J48: ➔ T- twen- (.) <Twenty.>
G48: Twenty. Twenty. ohh twenty ye(h)ah. I couldn't imagine thirty.
That's quite too old.
J48: HAHAHAHAHA hahahah yeah. (0.2) Too old.

In the next example below, J28 corrects T28’s misconception about the timing of a Japanese festival (line 15).

#05 Ghost Festival

T28: In Jul:y. in the middle, of July. you have ss- (.) kind of festival? It’s like a ghost (0.6) ghost festival?
(0.9)
J28: Ghost festival?
T28: You know the ghosts? (0.3) like spirits.
J28: Ah [ah hm.
T28: [like spirits (0.4) Spirits. uh (0.4) festival.
(1.0)
J28: Ahhh oh. ah oh. I know >I know I know.<
(1.0)
T28: Do you know that?
J28: Yeah so.
(1.0)
J28: ➔ So hmmm? a- a- m. in, (0.2) in Augus-, (0.4) in August s- (.) u:m
T28: Oh >yeah yeah yeah.< It is in, (.) August.
J28: Yah?
It is interesting to note that, as the conversation progresses, J28’s understanding is displayed more and more clearly. He starts with reactive tokens “ah” and “oh” (lines 6 and 9), which can be considered as turn-initial linguistic objects (Heritage, 2013) to signal his understanding. Then he produces a series of “I know” (line 9) to claim his understanding. And then J28 corrects his partner (line 14), which serves as a clear display of understanding. The correction is accepted by the partner (line 16) and it is evidenced that the participants achieve mutual understanding in the end.

1.1.4. Repeating word(s) in the partner’s utterance

The Japanese subjects use repetitions to display understanding. Although not all repetitions in my data indicate full understanding of the partner’s utterance (see 2.1. in this chapter for examples of repetitions eventually signaling non-understanding) and they are usually not as clear and sufficient as other kinds of understanding displays shown in the previous sections, some of the repetitions are treated as displays of understanding by the partners, especially when such repetitions are produced in series and combined with non-verbal expressions. In the next example, we can see an example in J46’s performance.

#06 Hobbies

1 J46: ((point at camera/partner)) What's your hobby? ((lean forward))
2 (0.9)
3  G46: My hobbies, 
4  J46: Ye[ah. ((nods))
5  G46: [Um, I, dancing.
7  J46: → ((adjust posture and smile)) Danshing. Oh good. ((nods))
8  G46: Yeah yeah. I like dancing. I'd (.). I um (.). dance in a group?
9  J46: → ((surprised look)) In Group. (0.5) ((nods)) Oh.=
10 G46: =Yeah. (0.4) um (0.5) especially hip-hop.
11 J46: → Ah hip-hop. Ohhh. ((smile))
12 G46: Ye- ye[ah. aahahah
13 J46: (((thumb up)) Good. ((nods))
14 G46: .hh um, (0.5) yeah, but I (.). also like to meet ↑friends,
15 J46: → Friends. ((nods))
16 G46: Go to the movie::s,
17 J46: → Ah mov- oh. ((nods))
18 G46: [ss- spend time with my family, (0.3) [Yeah.
19 J46: → [Family. ((nods))

The repetitions seen in this example exhibit the same characteristics which are pointed out in previous studies of non-native speakers’ performance in conversations. That is, the repeated parts are “discrete, detailed pieces of exact information” (Svennevig, 2004, p. 502) and usually consist of one or two elements (Greer et. al, 2009, p. 15). This may be a useful and easy-to-use strategy for Japanese subjects to not only show understanding to their partners but also to make sure if they correctly understand and follow what their partners say.

Although the words J46 in the excerpt above repeats are located exclusively at the end of his partner’s just-prior utterances, the locations actually vary. In the next example, J7 repeats a word in the middle of the original utterances.
On line 5, A7 provides information about her hobbies. J7 produces the beginning part of the word “tennis” on line 8 and completes the repetition on line 9 with rising intonation. Note the three items in A7’s preceding utterance, namely, “read,” “tennis,” and “golf.” Any of these words could be an item to be repeated but J7 takes up “tennis” only. The reason for that is revealed later in the conversation when J7 brings up his past experience of playing tennis. (This segment will be examined in detail later in 4.2.) In this manner, the Japanese participants strategically select what to repeat and use the repetition to contribute to mutual understanding between their partners and themselves.
1.2 Unique ways to show understanding

1.2.1. Non-understanding-like beginning of utterance

In trying to display understanding, Japanese participants begin their utterances in a somewhat unique way. At first, the utterances may seem to mismatch, for example, repeating what the partner asked and therefore be potentially signaling non- or misunderstanding. However, in the end, this kind of repetition can turn out to be a display of understanding. Taking a success approach, Kecskes et al. (2018) discuss cases where NNSs respond to a question with information which is “not directly requested but does “fit” the inferred purpose” (p. 95). When this kind of understanding display is produced by the Japanese subjects, the partners can be confused, or at least have to wait and see how it unfolds. The following is an example of such case.

#08 Finishing school

((J44 said that he wants to go to America or Europe in the future.))

1 G44: When will you be finished with your studies in Japan?
2 (1.5)
3 J44: E? ((tilt head))
4 G44: When? will you be finished with your plans in Japan?
5 J44: Japan. U:m (...) so
6 (2.2)
7 J44: → Now? uh I am, uh, first... first grade student. So (...) after (...)
8 four years? ((gesture “4”))
9 G44: Oh okay.
10 J44: ((nods)) Four years. ((nods))
11 G44: Okay, so four more years in Japan and then you will go to
In trying to get information about J44’s future plans, G44 asks when J44 finishes his education (line 1). After dealing with a hearing or understanding problem (line 3-5), J44 provides the requested information (lines 7-8). The response indicates J44’s understanding of the question/request by G44, but because of the structure of the sentence, whether or not J44 understands is unclear in the beginning. J44’s understanding becomes clear only in the end of the sentence, and even clearer when he repeats the requested information (line 10). G44 rephrases what she heard and asks confirmation (lines 11-12). J44 confirms it (line 13) and they achieve mutual understanding. It would be appropriate to label this kind of understanding as a delayed display of understanding since the understanding displayed by the Japanese subjects creates a delay before the partners recognize it as such. Below is another example.

#09 Where in Taiwan
((J31 told T31, his Taiwanese partner, that his grandfather lived in Taiwan many years ago.))

1 T31: U::h (. ) Your grandpa::,  
2 J31: Hai. (0.5) Ye=  
3 T31: =In:: Taipei? or:: (0.7) in Taichung. (0.6) or Kaohsiung.  
4 (0.5)  
5 T31: Which part. (0.6) did he live.  
6 J31: \(\rightarrow\) U::h my grandfather, (0.3) lives in uh (. ) a >country< sides.  
7 so. (1.2) eh (1.5) uh (1.8) a. (0.6) I: (0.9) with: (0.9) I::  
8 (0.4) didn’t (0.8) listen, deteel. deteel. I don’t know.
By his utterance on lines 6-8, it is likely that J31 is trying to say that because his grandfather lives far away from him, and he has never listened to the details about his grandfather’s experience in Taiwan. That is, J31 is claiming that he does not have the information T31 requested, and thus it is a display of understanding. The problem is that the sentence (lines 6-8) is confusing and two interpretations are possible here: (a) J31 misunderstood that T31 is asking where in Japan his grandfather lives at present while she is actually asking where in Taiwan his grandfather used to live in the past; or (b) J31 failed to put the beginning part of the sentence in an adverbial clause (e.g. “because”) to provide a reason for not knowing where in Taiwan his grandfather used to live. While it is strategically sufficient, J31’s utterance is linguistically problematic. The pause after the utterance (line 9) may indicate that T31 needs to process what J31 means. The partner rephrases what she heard (line 10) to confirm her understanding.

Similar to this, Japanese subjects put an adverbial clause to indicate time before providing the information the partners request. They start responding with “when” or other expressions as shown in the next examples.

#10 Guitar

1 T25: Have you ever... played guitar?
2 J25: ➔ Ahhh, when I was, uh, junior high sc ... uh, junior ... uh... high school student? a little? ((finger gesture “little”)) I played.
T25 asks about J25’s experience of playing guitar (line 1) and J25 provides his answer (lines 2-4) to satisfy an adjacency pair. However, because of the sentence structure which starts with an adverbial clause (“when I was a junior high school student”), whether or not J25 understood the question remains unclear until we hear the end of his utterance. T25’s confirmation on the following line: “Right, you played” (line 5) may indicate that T25 had expected J25 to provide the requested information in a more efficient manner. As Yokomori (2008) points out, putting an adverbial clause before the main clause is natural and more standard in the Japanese language and postponing the adverbial clause is sometimes not acceptable. Based on that, it is highly possible that Japanese participants’ productions in English maintain the Japanese sentence structure. Although it is not ungrammatical in English sentences, the learners should be informed that the Japanese-influenced sentence structure can cause problems in communication in English. Next is an example which creates a more significant delay.

#11  Every day

((J44 told G44 that he likes to play baseball.))

1  G44:  Do you play this every day? or once a week? or: (.) how m how
2        how [much do you do this
3  J44:  [((hiss)) U::m
4 (1.2)
5  J44:  \((tsk)) Then I was, (.) uh a high school, (0.3) students?
6        [eh everyday, everyday. play.
7  G44:  [Okay.
G44 is asking how frequently J44 plays baseball now (lines 1-2), but what J44 provides first is the frequency of his past experience, that is, he played baseball every day when he was in high school (lines 5-6). At this point, there seems to be a mismatch and it can be due to J44's misunderstanding of what is requested by his partner. His understanding of the question does not become apparent until the requested information that he now plays it once a week is finally provided (line 10).

Japanese subjects’ display of understanding also causes delays when they skip providing yes or no to the partner’s question. In example #12, J2 does not immediately answer A2’s question (“Do you like it?”) but provide some negative comments about Tokyo (lines 9-10). Note that in the excerpt #11 above, as well as in the next two examples (#12 and 13), the skipped answer is most likely negative from the Japanese subjects’ perspective.

#12 Tokyo
1 A2: Where in Japan?
2 J2: U:m (0.5) I, I’m live in Tokyo.
3 (0.9)
A2: Oh, wow.=
J2: =[Ye(h)ah heh heh,
A2: [That’s amazing. [So do you like it?
J2: [So.

J2: → Eh so, mmmm (0.9) I feel (.). there is (1.1) mmm I feel (.). Tokyo lackssss (0.3) uh nature.

#13 Taiwan

T27: So have you EVER been. (.) in m:y country? Taiwan? have you ever been.

J27: → U:m, (0.5) I have a graz- ettoh, eh graduratoh (0.4) t[rip. (0.3) for uh

T27: [Huh?


T27: Korea.

J27: → But u:m. (0.3) not but Taiwan.

T27: [huh ((chuckle))

J27: [No? [Ahh.

J27: [Nmmm. Sorry. hh ((chuckle))

As J27’s “sorry” (line 12) indicates, perhaps Japanese subjects hesitate to say no or provide information which they think contains something negative, especially when the topic is
something familiar to the partners. Below is a similar example where the Japanese subject does not immediately provide the requested information.

#14 Not Germany

((J43 told G43, her German partner, that she has been abroad.))

1 G43: And where, you’ve been?

2 (0.8)

3 J43: → A. e::h (0.3) I haven’t, (0.3) been doy– uh Germany,

4 (1.0)

5 G43: Okay,

6 J43: → But I:: ha– (0.3) I::: (0.3) a. for A⇌meːricah?

7 (1.7)

8 J43: Ame[ricah? (.)

9 G43: [Mm hm?

10 J43: ato: wa ("else") (0.8) eh, It– (. ) I⇌taliːah? (0.2) Italieh.

11 (0.9)

12 G43: Ita–, Italy. O[kay.

13 J43: [Yeah. yes.

G43 asks for information about the places J43 has visited (line 1). In response to that, J43 says that she has not been to the partner’s country (line 3). This response can be seen as a signal of misunderstanding, as the answer fits better to a slightly different question, such as “Have you been to Germany?” It is when J43 provides the requested information (line 6) that the partner, as well as the researcher, realizes that J43 had correctly understood but delayed displaying her understanding. The pause before responding (line 2) may indicate J43’s hesitation.
in stating that she has never been to the partner’s country, because in her view this might be unpleasant for her partner.

1.2.2. Understanding displays in responding yes or no

As it is well-known among Japanese learners of English, answering yes or no to a negative question in English is not easy for Japanese speakers. Sadock and Zwicky (1985) point out that answers to yes/no questions in the Japanese language have a typical agree/disagree system (pp. 189-190). This means that as long as they agree to the polarity of the question, the Japanese answer “hai” or “yes” in English. Therefore, when the question is negative, they respond with a yes to actually mean the opposite “no” in English (Takashima, 1989), and that can confuse their non-Japanese partners. Below are examples of such.

#15 Living in school

((T23 asked J23 if she lives in a dorm but J23 did not understand the word “dorm.”))

1  T23:  Do you live in school?
2  J23:  Ye:s.((nod))=
3  T23:  =Or, (0.4) o do you live in school.
4  J23:  ((nod))
5   (1.0)
6  J23:  Ah li↓boo. Ah ((smile)) no no no. ((wave hand))
7   (1.3)
8  J23:  mh ((chuckle))
9   (0.8)
10 T23:  So yo- (. ) you don’t live at school.
T23 requests information about where J23 lives. In response to the affirmative yes-no question (line 1), J23 says “Yes” with nodding (line 2). The latched turn by T23 (line 3) indicates that she was actually producing a choice question (e.g. “Do you live in school or out of school?”). After the attempt was interrupted by J23’s “Yes,” T23 asks for confirmation by repeating the affirmative yes-no question with falling intonation (line 3). Then, after a pause, J23 repeats the key element of the question (“live”), recognizes what information is actually requested, and corrects her previous answer (line 6). T23 asks for confirmation again, with changing it to a negative statement (line 10), to which J23 again says “Yes” with nodding (line 11). This response is, at least from J23’s perspective, a display of full understanding of what is asked, and by ‘yes’ she acknowledges and agrees to T23’s statement (e.g. “You are right, I don’t live at school.”) The pause (line 12) and J23’s “Mm?” (line 13) with gestures and facial expressions indicate that she is unsure of what is going on. In response to that, T23 provides a candidate correct answer of J23, “No, you (don’t live at school but) live in a home” (line 14) and asks for confirmation again. J23 confirms it with emphasizing that she lives at home (line 15). The example shows that even if they fully understand linguistic items in the partner’s utterance, the Japanese subjects’ understanding would remain partial until they acquire more pragmatic knowledge and learn how to appropriately display their understanding.
Note that for university students in Japan, especially if they are in big cities, it is extremely rare to live on campus and that is common knowledge among people living in the country. Considering that J23 had limited experience in communicating with someone who is not familiar with Japanese society, the question “Do you live in school?” could be something people around her never asks. What is particularly interesting is that these kinds of cultural difference can become apparent even between non-native speakers with geographically close backgrounds like the Japanese and Taiwanese. Below is a similar example.

#16 Korea

1 T31: Do you like Korea?
2 J31: Mmm. ((look up)) I =
3 T31: =Do Ja-
4 (0.4)
5 J31: ((smile)) don’t [like Ko(h)rea.
6 T31: [like Korea.
7 (1.3)
8 T31: You don’t like? or you like.=
9 J31: → =Ye- ((nod)) yes yes. sss ((chuckle))
10 (0.6)
11 T31: Aha you like?
12 (0.6)
13 J31: →Yep, ((wave hand)) no no no. ((wave hand))
14 (0.5)
15 T31: You don’t like.
16 J31: →Yes. sss ((chuckle)) ((nod))
17 (0.5)
18 T31: Ohh. Mhh?
As it is frequently pointed out, the Japanese ‘yes’ response carries multiple meanings (Gundling et al., 1999, p. 22) and can confuse interlocutors. Note that the hand wave used by both J23 (#15, line 6) and J31 (#16, line 13) to mean “no” is a Japanese gesture that is typically incomprehensible to non-Japanese. They put a hand near their face with the thumb towards themselves, and wave it back and forth in short strokes. Looking at the language learners’ performance in conversations with people abroad can give language teachers and researchers an opportunity to see the intercultural pragmatic competence that the learners exhibit in real-life communication, and an opportunity to consider what they should do to teach them in order to help them display their understanding in a more appropriate manner as English speakers.

1.3 Specific requests to display non-understanding

1.3.1. Making requests while specifying the trouble source

Although it is not frequently observed in my data, Japanese subjects can ask their partners to clarify the meaning of what has been said by clearly specifying the trouble source. The linguistic means used for this strategy include: “What is it?” and “What does it mean?” Note that these direct requests are more specific than the direct requests shown later in this chapter (see 3.1). With these specific requests, the partners immediately identify the trouble source and try to provide help for the Japanese subjects to achieve understanding without repeating the whole utterance.

#17 Theology

((G43 said that her major is English language education.))
J43 shows her partial understanding by isolating the trouble source ("theology") and producing a close enough repeat of it with rising intonation (line 3). Following that, she asks for clarification of the word (line 6). Although the utterance, “what it is” is ungrammatical as a question, that does not disturb the action which J43 is trying to implement through it. The pause (line 7) and G43’s confirmation request (line 8) together may indicate her slight confusion, but it is cleared when J43 acknowledges it and provides a confirmation as requested (line 9). G43 accepts J43’s request and provides clarifications (lines 11 and 15), which eventually leads J43 to understanding.
Below is a similar example in which J29 asks T29 for the meaning of “ferment” (lines 16 and 20) and that triggers T29 to help J29 understand what the word means. T29 is trying to tell J29 about a specific kind of Taiwanese traditional food.

#18  Stinky tofu

1  T29:   How about the famous Taiwanese choh dofu.
2 (0.6)
3  J29:   M? Ho-(.) how abouts
4 (0.7)
5  T29:   Stinky dofu.
6 (0.5)
7  J29:   Sticky dofu?
8 (0.8)
9  T29:   Yeah. Have you heard of stinky tofu?
10 J29:   Hmm I don’t know.(.) wha- wha--
11 T29:   =You don’t know?
12 J29:   Yeah. Whati- (..) what, (..) what is it.
13 (0.8)
14 T29:   It’s like, (..) fermented. Do you know what ferment is?
15 (0.7)
16  J29:   → Wa,(.) one, one formentteh (0.4) ‘again? °
17 (0.5)
18  T29:   Ferment.
19 (0.6)
20  J29:   → For men. (..) Eh?
21 T29:   Do you know what, (..) ferment i:s.
22 J29:   ((hiss)) No:::,Mmmm=
No. Ferment is. (.) like, (0.6) when you? (. ) when you? put- (. ) it's like, (0.5) yogurt? (. ) it's (. ) [fermented milk? [ 'Hm.' It's like you put? like (. ) germs? Or bacteria in it? (0.4) and [you let it [hm? In the air? (0.3) Do you know what bacteria is? Ba-Bac(h)teria. O- okay. I I know I know.

In the next example, the Japanese subject J12 makes a request for repetition or clarification using more complex strategies.

#19 How many more years

Um. How many more years of university do you have. (1.0) >Sorry< how many what? ((lean forward)) (1.0) How many m- (. ) u:h how (. ) much longer? do you have to spend in university. In the university. Before you can be a lawyer. (0.8)
J12: Uh maybe, ((put hand on mouth and look up)) uu::h ((count on fingers)) Maybe s- (. ) seven years.
A12: Oh wow. That’s [a long time.
J12: [Ye::ah.

To make the clarification request by isolating the trouble source from the partner’s original utterance, J12 uses the repetition strategy for the part he understands, replaces the trouble source with an interrogative word “what,” and produces the utterance with rising intonation (line 3). All of these are packaged in the three word sentence, “how many what?” and it serves as a display of having an understanding problem. It triggers the partner to repeat (“how many”), rephrase (“how many more years” to “how much longer”) and add information (“before you can be a lawyer”), and that helps J12 solve his understanding problem. J12 provides the requested information (lines 8-9) and the participants achieve mutual understanding.

Another more complex strategy to display partial understanding that the Japanese subjects can use is to paraphrase the partner’s utterances as seen in the next example.

#20 School starts
((J41 told that she finished her classes today but is having a meeting as a school festival committee after this session.))
G41: When did (your class start). at twelve? (. ) at one?
J41: Mm? Finish?
G41: Y- uh (. ) your um
J41: [Wo
G41: [Class. What time will it open.
(1.6)
Because of the inconsistent tenses of G41’s questions (lines 1 and 5), what information she is requesting is unclear. J41 displays problems in understanding by offering candidate words to make up for the unclear parts, such as “finish” (line 2) and “school festival” (line 7). After her offers were rejected by the partner (line 9), J41 displays partial understanding by putting together the words in G41’s utterances (“what time” from line 5, “school” from line 9, and “start” from line 1) with adding “you mean” with rising intonation to form a clarification request (line 11).

While such clarification requests are not uncommon for native and expert speakers of English to make, it is rarely observed in my data.

The examples above demonstrate that Japanese subjects are able to make clarification requests. Because such requests are more closed (Drew, 1997), specific, and straightforward, Japanese participants may find them harder to use than unspecific repeat requests (cf. 3.1. in this chapter). However, as the examples above demonstrate, these specific clarification requests can elicit the partners to provide more immediate, detailed, or simpler explanations. That would help
the Japanese participants grasp what has been said and more quickly solve the understanding problem. Obviously, these specific requests make the partners’ communicative workload lighter and help the participants achieve mutual understanding. Japanese learners of English should be encouraged to take advantage of their partial understanding and make their requests clear so they can reach understanding more efficiently in conversations in English.

1.3.2. Notes on requests for spelling

Asking for the spelling of a word could be another way to clearly display non-understanding by specifying the trouble source. In my data, the strategy is used by the partners, mainly by Taiwanese participants, and the Japanese subjects accept the spelling requests as seen in the next example. Note that club activities are often called “circle” among college students in Japan.

#21 Art club

1 J21: Yes. I belo- (. ) eh ((head up and look away)) I have belong to: (0.6) art circle?
2
3 (1.5)
4 T21: (Soccer)?
6 (0.8)
7 T21: Art soccers.
8 J21: Yes. ((smile and nod)) ((drawing gesture))
9 T21: → Ah. (. ) How to spell it uh
10 J21: E (. ) e: (0.6) a:ru (. ) tee. ((spelling gesture))
11 T21: Ey ar tee (. ) yeah oh [art.
T21 signals an understanding problem through the use of repetitions (lines 4 and 7) and as it remains unsolved, he displays his non-understanding more clearly by making a request for
spelling out the source of trouble (line 9). J21 accepts the request and provides the spelling of “art” (line 10) and T21 shows understanding of that part (line 11). Then T21 displays non-understanding of the following word “circle,” or pinpoints the trouble source (line 13). J21 acknowledges this and offers help by repetition and by spelling the word out (lines 18-20). J21 eventually changes it to “club” (line 23) when she perhaps recognizes that changing “circle” to mean “club” will be more understandable to her non-Japanese partner. From this point forward, J21 sticks with “club” and repeats using the word (lines 27 and 30) and affirmative responses (lines 27 and 33 with emphasis) until T21 displays understanding (line 34).

In this way, my data show that Taiwanese participants use the spelling strategy to deal with problems in understanding. However, there was no example of Japanese subjects using the same strategy. Interestingly enough, while they do not ask their partners to spell out sources of trouble, Japanese subjects regard spelling out themselves as an effective strategy to make themselves understood and they in fact implement their plans to actively provide spelling of words in the second sessions (The details will be discussed later in sections 11 and 14 in this chapter). In other words, they use the spelling strategy only to deal with problems in understanding that their partners have but not with problems of their own.

2. **Minor amae or Accidental displays of non-understanding**

Doi (1973) points out, because of amae, Japanese people expect that their interlocutors can understand them even when they do not verbalize their needs and feelings. In line with this, Miike (2003) explains one layer of amae as “the communicator’s need to be helped by the fellow communicator to understand the intended meaning of her or his message when she or he wants to” (p. 100). As Tezuka (1992) states, the amae expectation “requires an interlocutor to exercise
“sasshi” (p. 38), which is defined by Yamada (1997) as “a strategy where players try to understand as much as possible from the little that is said” (p. 37).

In this and following sections, answers for RQ1 are presented by analyzing the ways in which Japanese subjects signal a problem in understanding. The focus of these sections is on the degrees of understanding displayed in the Japanese subjects’ verbal and non-verbal productions, and the ways in which they are displayed. Note that the examples include segments where the Japanese subjects may claim that the problems are caused by their hearing, rather than a failure in understanding. While hearing problems are essentially different from problems in understanding, no distinction between the two is made here. This is because the focus of the study is on how the Japanese subjects display or do not display that they have trouble understanding, and because the Japanese subjects may use linguistic means such as “I can’t hear” to mean in fact they do not understand (see 3.2.2. in this chapter). Analysis of the exact causes of the problems, whether they derive from auditory reasons, the participants’ lack of knowledge, or the comprehensibility of the previous utterance, are out of the scope of this particular study.

To begin with, examples of accidental displays of non-understanding are examined in the following section. Among all the characteristic displays of problems in understanding discussed in this study, the accidental displays of non-understanding reflect the lowest degree of amae. Although the displays are not clear enough, are incomplete or inappropriate, the subjects are trying to demonstrate their understanding. To respond to these accidental displays of non-understanding, the partners are required to exercise sasshi to recognize that the Japanese subjects have trouble understanding. If they wish, the partners could offer help by, for example, filling in the missing parts of the Japanese subjects’ utterances.
2.1 Accidental displays of non-understanding

When the Japanese subjects attempt to display understanding by repeating what has been said by the partners, the attempts can turn out to display their non-understanding. In such cases, the displays are unintended and the Japanese subjects can be unaware of their own problems in understanding at the point of the displays, but the problems are apparent to the partners as well as the researcher.

2.1.1 Yes/No to non-Yes/No questions

One of the instances in which the Japanese subjects accidentally display their non-understanding is that they provide “yes” or “no” when it is not appropriate. See the next example.

#22 Talk with family

1 J1: A (.) uh do you talk (. ) abouts (. ) mm your future with. (. ) your family?
2
3 (3.0)
4 A1: Wait ( . ) do I talk about what with my family?
5 J1: Yes yes.
6 (3.5)
7 J1: Uh sorry, ( . ) do you talk ( . ) about, (0.7) u:m (0.2) your (0.6) your future plans? (. ) with zz (. ) your (0.5) ‘family?’
8
9 (2.5)
10 A1: Yeah, [um
11 J1: [Ah
In response to J1’s request for information, A1 asks for repetition by replacing the trouble source with the interrogative word “what” (line 4), to which J1 responds “yes” (line 5). This indicates that J1 treats A1’s utterance as a confirmation request and, in her view, she provides an affirmative response. Note that the sentence structure of A1’s question is different from what is usually taught as an interrogative sentence in an English classroom (e.g. “What do I talk about with my family?”). Most of the Japanese learners of English are trained to form their responses to match the first word of the question, which is in this case, “do.” After a long pause (line 6), J1 repeats the original utterance in a more careful manner, by changing “future” (line 1) into “future plans” (line 8). This indicates that J1 recognizes some kind of understanding problem on her side. Also, the addition of “plans” can indicate that J1 has detected the trouble source of her own understanding problem. In this case, the accidental display of non-understanding helped the Japanese subject to solve the problem on her own. Given the missing information, A1 provides the information that J1 asked for (lines 13-15).

2.1.2. Wrong repeats

Another instance of displaying partial non-understanding by accident is observed when the Japanese subjects attempt to show understanding by repeating words in the partners’ utterances (cf. 1.1.4 in this chapter) but eventually fail to do so. Below are examples of such case.
As a result of testing out present and past tenses, T26’s utterance contains restatements and duplications of the word “win” (line 1). In an attempt to respond, J26 repeats what he thinks he heard, but unlike the examples we saw in 1.1.4 where the repetitions help the participants achieve mutual understanding, J26 eventually generates a nonsense word, “waitful” (line 3). The small token “hm” with a rising intonation indicates that J26 is unsure about what he heard, and he asks his partner for confirmation. In other words, J26 signals that he has trouble understanding but tries to be helped by the partner without explicitly asking for it. The wrong repeat and the confirmation request elicit T26 to restate the initial question in a clearer way (line 4). This indicates that T26 exercises sasshi. After a brief pause (line 5), J26 produces the now-understanding token (Koivisto, 2015) “ah,” followed by the requested information (line 6). The
participants successfully resolve the understanding problem and reach mutual understanding.

Below is another example.

In trying to display her understanding, J21 attempts to repeat the key element of the partner’s utterance “sing songs” (line 1) but fails to do so successfully and produces “seesaws” with rising intonation instead along with a head move (line 2). This demonstrates J21’s communicative competence to signal an understanding problem. The wondering gesture may indicate that she doubts that playing on a plank could be a hobby for an adult male like T21, but then T21 provides an affirmation (line 3) and J21 accepts it (line 4). The repair T21 initiates in the following line (line 5) indicates that he exercised *sasshi* and recognized J21’s understanding problem. He pinpoints the trouble source, simplifies it and provides the word “sing” twice (line 5). J21 attempts to display understanding by repeating it (line 6), which is not very clear and triggers T21 to provide follow-up information (line 7).

Wrong repeats are helpful to signal problems in understanding but do not always lead the participants to mutual understanding. Indeed, they can instead complicate the situation,
especially when the participants stick with the repeat strategy and do not try other strategies to resolve the understanding problem. I will come back to this point later (see 4.1 this chapter).

2.1.3. Confusing repeats

When the Japanese subjects try to display understanding by repeating a word from the partner’s utterance, the repeat can cause confusion because the selected word is not important for understanding the utterance. The repeats to display understanding eventually reveal the Japanese subjects’ partial non-understanding.

#25 Popular music

1 J31: Mm, Ah. (.) >Do you< like? (..) Japanese music?
2 (1.4)
3 T31: Mm no. (.) I haven- (0.6) I haven- (..) heard (0.5) much
4 (0.4) Japanese music. (0.5) Ummm (0.5) well,
5 (1.8)
6 T31: U:::mmmm (.).hh I heard some mm (..) music in cartoon.
7 (0.8)
8 T31: But not the popular music.
9 (1.1)
10 J31: \textit{'Popular music.'}
11 T31: I don't, (.) I don't, (1.0)
13 T31: I don't hear (.) I don't listen to (.) Japanese [popular music
14 J31: [Ah.}
To respond to J31’s request, T31 provides information that she does not listen to Japanese music much (lines 3-4). She goes on and states that she has heard some music used in cartoons but it was not popular music (lines 6 and 8). J31 repeats the words “popular music” to show his understanding (line 10), which is recognized by T31 as non-understanding and leads her to restate what she said more clearly, in a simpler way (lines 11 and 13). J31 produces a now-understanding “ah” (Heritage, 1984) (line 14). While the repetition is a display of partial understanding for J31, the repeated words (“popular music”) are not important to convey what T31 means. J31’s repetition triggered T31 to initiate repair and repeat the more important part of the sentence (“I don’t hear”). When language learners are too focused on hearing what is said by others word by word, they may fall into a “can’t see the forest for the trees” kind of situation.

2.1.4. Responses revealing partial non-understanding

In contrast to the examples above, where the Japanese subjects’ non-understanding is revealed immediately, some accidental displays of non-understanding take more time for the partners and the researcher to recognize. One example is when Japanese subjects produce responses that do not match what has been said by their partners. Note that these responses look exactly the same as the unique displays of understanding (1.2 in this chapter), especially in the beginning. The mismatch is particularly remarkable when it is produced in response to some kind of request by the partner. In the next example, there is a mismatch between the information J4 provides and what is requested by his partner.
#26 Hardest language

((J4 told that he learned German before and is now learning English and Chinese.))

1 A4: Which language do you think is hardest to learn.
2 (1.0)
3 J4: → U:m, (0.8) uh I want [to: (0.4) study S\(\text{p}a\text{nish}\)?
4 A4: [What is
5 (2.3)
6 J4: Spanish. Yeah.
7 (1.4)
8 J4: Spanish is ssss (.). u:m (1.7) very (1.5) popular language, in
9 nnn (2.1) South a- (.). America? (1.9) I think (0.5) >South
10 America?< (.). An so I (0.5) I want to: go to: (.). South America

In response to A4’s request for the information about the language he found hardest (line 1), J4 provides information about the language he wants to learn (line 3). The beginning part of a question by A4 (line 4) indicates that he recognizes a possible problem in J4’s understanding and he is willing to restate his request, which J4 may not notice because of the overlapping of the utterances. J4 repeats his answer with confirmation (line 6) and provides follow-up information to support his claim (lines 8-10). Although it is clear to others including A4 that there is a problem in J4’s understanding, J4’s utterances throughout the segment indicate that he is unaware of it. Similarly, in the next example, J46 provides mismatching information with some follow-up.
Summer plans

G46: Do yave plans (.) like for the summer? (0.7)
J46: U:::[h.
G46: [vacations, holiday? (0.7) Do you want to travel? (0.6)
J46: Ah:::hm ((hiss)) Ah:::h
J46: It is necessary, (. ) for :me to:: (. ) ah iboo, (("if")) I?
((hiss)) become? (. ) ah rovy a? (("lawyer") (0.5) ((hiss))
U:::h=
G46: =Okay?
J46: I: (. ) I need to (. ) pass (. ) the (0.2) >bar exam.<
(2.0)
G46: O- do- do you wan, (. ) do you do you need to what?
J46: I I (. ) ((tsk)) mm I have to pass the, (. ) bar exam.
(1.1)
G46: Oh Okay. [h h h h
J46: [Bar exam.
G46: .hh
J46: It’s (. ) very
G46: A:nd (. ) [um
J46: [difficult.
G46: What. (. ) other plans? do you have? [for the future?
J46: [Ao:::h ((hiss))

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In this example, J46 provides information about his future plans (lines 8-10 and 15) in response to G46’s request for information about his summer plans (lines 1 and 4). While G46’s response (line 14) following a pause clearly indicates her confusion, J46’s restating the previous utterance with a slight change from “need to” (line 12) to “have to” (line 15) indicates that he treats it as a request for clarification. His repetition of the key element “bar exam” (line 18) and assessment (lines 20 and 22) demonstrate that J46 is confident about his understanding but is unaware that his responses do not match what is requested. G46 does not initiate repair throughout the segment but makes another request for information with a slight modification to the original (line 23). This modified request indicates that G46 is aware of the error in J46’s understanding that he is talking about his future instead of the coming summer.

The mismatching responses may be a result of Japanese subjects’ responding anyway even if they don’t understand what is being requested by their partners (see 4.2 in this chapter). Below is another example. Prior to this segment, J10 and A10 were talking about playing golf.

#28  Golf
  1  A10:  Is there golf courses there?
  2  (0.6)
  3  J10:  Ye- (.) Yes?
  4  (0.7)
  5  A10:  Is there golf courses there?
  6  (0.8)
  7  J10:  Gof? (.) Ah sorry.
  8  (0.8)
  9  A10:  Golf courses? (.) where people play golf?
 10  (0.5)
J10: → Uh I’m (.) “mm” (0.3) have never: (.) playing (0.4) golf.

A10: No

J10: Um=

A10: =Have you seen anybody before? play golf? or know anybody that does?

J10: Oh,(.) m sorry. please speak more slowly.

J10’s wrong repeat and apology (line 7) functions to signal a problem in understanding. In response, A10 offers a correction to the trouble source (“golf courses”) by adding the definition of the words which might help J10’s understanding. J10’s utterance on line 11 indicates that the trouble is partially resolved but now she misses the content of the request. This is a display of partial understanding and partial non-understanding. Unlike other displays of partial understanding which function as build blocks and help the participants to achieve understanding, this kind of partial understanding actually complicates the situation. J10 might have hoped that her response contains the information which her partner seeks, but when A10 continues to seek the information (lines 16-17), J10 realizes that she has failed to respond properly and produces a clear display of non-understanding with apology (line 19).

In the next example, J27 uses the same strategy as that of J10, namely, responding with what he thinks might include requested information, but the reaction of the partner is different from the example above. Prior to the segment, T27 shared his experience traveling to Japan and told J27 that he enjoyed the trip very much.
Travel

T27: So how bout you hav- (.) Did you
(0.4)

J27: [Thank you.

T27: [U::m Travel,

J27: Hm.

T27: in your (. ) country?=

J27: =Hm.

T27: [And (. ) Anything happen?

J27: ((hiss)) Mmm we: ((hiss)) (0.2) travel mmmm .. uh.
(1.0)

J27: ➔ Today. ((tsk)) I
(0.4)

T27: -s that
(0.3)

J27: ((chuckle))
(0.4)

J27: ➔ I (0.2) go (0.4) eh this(. ) t(. ) go to this mm (0.4) ehm (0.8)
uh skel for a by (0.7) e (. ) train. (0.3) A:nd (0.8) k- subway. (0.3)
Hm but o (. ) its is very crowd. (0.4) for uh (. ) for uh many many
people.
(0.4)

T27: Ah [yeah. Very crowded right?

J27: [Ah mm. In the morning. So

J27: In the morning, many people. (. ) eh will mm (. ) go to (0.5)
eh? school, (. ) or uh (0.6) company? (0.2) with (. ) eh by (0.6) Train.
So.
In response to T27’s request for information about J27’s experience of travelling in Japan (lines 1-8), J27 provides a description of what he experienced earlier in the day (lines 17-20). Although, from the etic perspective, there is clearly a mismatch between what is requested and what is provided, T27 accepts J27’s response without making any signals of miscommunication (line 22). This elicits J27 to provide follow-up information and he explains the reason for the crowded train (line 24-26) and that is again accepted by T27 (line 27). The mismatch is not revealed and therefore J27 does not get a chance to repair his strategy and make efforts to achieve full understanding of what is communicated. To the participants’ eyes, it may look as if they are communicating smoothly without any problem. However, this kind of superficial exchange can cause a serious breakdown in intercultural communication and harm interpersonal relationships.

3. **Moderate amae or Displays non-understanding without specifying the trouble source**

One of the ways that Japanese subjects signal an understanding problem is to make a direct or indirect request for repetition, clarification, or explanation. This indicates that when the Japanese subjects make these requests, (1) they are aware of the problem; (2) they attempt to signal the problem; and (3) they often choose to do that without specifying the trouble source. The Japanese subjects are not verbally expressive or specific, and rely on non-verbal
communication, which requires the partner to do a great deal of guesswork. Clearly, the subjects’ amae-based attitudes are present and the burden on the interlocutors is large. As a result, this kind of display causes the partners to repeat, clarify, simplify, or paraphrase the whole of the previous utterances, as seen in the examples below.

3.1 Direct requests

One of the strategies that the Japanese subjects use to display their problems in understanding is to ask the partners to slow down the speed of speaking. As seen in the next example, this kind of request is made by saying “please speak more slowly” and what is requested is linguistically obvious. In most cases, however, the partners simply repeat the previous utterances, rather than decrease their speech rate. This may indicate that, even if they are willing to accept the request, it is not easy for the partners to instantly change the speed of their speech. As a result, the slowing down requests are often processed in the same manner as repeat requests.

#30 Train

((J12 came late for the session due to train service delays. He told A12 that he was in his train for an hour.))

1 A12: What u::m (0.5) I know we are supposed to talk about culture
2 but I'm very interested in what happened in the trains. (0.2)
3 today.
4 J12: \textit{Sorry, u::h t} (0.2) please speak more slowly?
5 (0.6)
6 A12: Oh sorry.
7 J12: ”Mm hm?” ((smile)) =
In response to the request by J12 (line 4), A12 trims and simplifies the original statement: “I’m very interested in what happened in the trains today” (lines 1-3) and changes it to a question “what happened with the trains today?” (line 8). That helps J12 reach understanding and provide the requested information. Note that A12’s “oh sorry” indicates that the slowing down request was possibly treated as an accusation. Judging from the active engagement throughout the conversation and his facial expressions including smiles, it is likely that the Japanese subject had no intention of accusing his partner and there is a discrepancy between what his intention was and his partner’s interpretation. Considering that the slowing down request is frequently made by the Japanese subjects, it is highly likely that they learned the expression “please speak more slowly” in their English classrooms and they are perhaps encouraged to use it. Japanese teachers of English may need to rethink what to teach, keeping in mind the pragmatic competence that is necessary for their students to be successful users of English.

3.2 Indirect, unspecific requests

In the following sections, the examples are presented to examine practices to indicate trouble in understanding without specifying the exact trouble source. Because they are not
sufficient or clear enough not only to specify the trouble source but also to signal problems in understanding, these displays put more communicative workload on the partners. They can even confuse the partners.

3.2.1. Open forms of repair initiation

One of the frequently used strategies for Japanese subjects to signal that they have a problem in understanding is to produce the least specific form of queries (Schegloff, 2007, p. 101) or to open forms of repair initiation (Drew, 1997). They are the “least complicated and costly remedy” (Pomerantz, 1984) and are preferred by the participants when they wish to avoid strategies which are more efficient but may also be face-threatening (Svennevig, 2008). Since it is unclear what the trouble source is or what information would help the Japanese subjects reach understanding, these types of request usually trigger their partners to repeat the whole utterance they had produced. This is frequently observed in my data. The linguistic means used in such cases include: “Sorry?” “Pardon?” “What?” “Once more please?” and the variations of them.

#31 My dog

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A6: You can see my dog if you want. (=)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>J6: → =Sorry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A6: [Do you want to see my dog?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>J6: → Uh sorry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A6: Would you like to see my dog?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>J6: Ha Ha Ha y(h)es yes yes. (0.5) I want [to see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A6: [You yes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

98
J6 signals that he has a problem by saying “sorry” with a rising intonation (lines 2). A6 recognizes it as a request for repetition and accepts it (line 3). Then J6 produces the same request again (line 4). A6 repeats providing the same information (line 6) and that leads J6 to display understanding by accepting A6’s offer to show her dog (line 8). By the time when J6 finally provides the requested information, A6 repeats the same offer three times. This segment shows evidence that while the request for repetition works to solve the problem in understanding that the Japanese subject had and the participants were able to reach a mutual understanding in the end, this is largely because of the partner’s contributions. Note that A6 changes the sentence type from a statement (line 1) to a question (line 3), and the modality from “do you want” (line 3) to “would you like” (line 6). As Sacks (1992) pointed out, these kinds of unspecific query may serve as an instruction for the partners to find whatever the trouble is, clear it up, and say it again (p. 413). Similar sequences are observed in the next examples when Japanese participants make requests with unspecified trouble source such as “pardon?” “what?” or “one more chance” in an attempt to resolve their problems in understanding.

#32 Studying in Tokyo

((J43 told G43 that her brother goes to school in her hometown.))

1 G43: Okay. and you? (0.2) didn’t want to do your studies, (. ) at
2 the town where your parents live, (0.2) You wanted to go to
3 Tokyo.
4 (1.6)
5 J43: Um. **pardon?**
6 (1.2)
7 G43: And you wanted to go to Tok- (. ) to Tokyo. to: (. ) to do your
studies.

(0.7)

J43: Oh. ye:s. yes.

(0.6)

G43: Yeah.

J43: Heh.

#33 Living alone
((J43 told that she lives alone.))

G43: And you like it?

(1.0)

J43: What, what?

(0.5)

G43: Do you like it, (.) to live alone?

J43: Ah no no [no. No. (0.3) It’s (0.5) eh

G43: [to have

J43: I want to::, (0.3) live my f- (0.3) with my fre-, maz (0.2)

fa;mily!

#34 Sisters and brothers

A3: So, do you have any sisters and brothers?

(1.6)

J3: A, (. m, so;rry? (. u::m (0.3) one, one more cha(h)nce. one

more cha(h)nce.

(1.2)

A3: Do you have brothers and sisters?
Japanese subjects use linguistic means which English speakers may find unusual to use for the same purposes as, for instance, “What (did you say)?” or “Say that again.” In the example below, J10’s “Yes?” is recognized as a request for repetition by her partner.

While the “yes” (line 2) by J10 could be an affirmative acknowledgment to his question (e.g. “Yes, my parents know how to speak English.”), A10 interprets it as a signal of non-understanding and repeats the question while adding a micropause in front of the key element “English” (line 4). His pronunciation of the sentence is spoken more clearly than the first time. Eventually, that elicits more accurate information from J10 that her parents do not speak English (lines 6-7). Note that this particular segment is found near the end (9:17) of their second session.
and J10 had produced this kind of “yes?” several times before reaching this point. While some native speakers of English report that they find the “unnatural” reactions and “unconventional” backchannels used by Japanese students to be confusing or irritating (Cutrone, 2005), this example demonstrates that the NS partner was able to learn a unique pattern in Japanese communicative strategy and was able to deal with their problems in understanding within as short a period as a two ten-minute video calls.

The response “yes” may be a literal translation of “hai,” a Japanese equivalent of “what.” Interestingly enough, the Japanese subjects in my data rarely use “what?” but instead more frequently use its Japanese equivalents: “hm?” “e?” “heh?” or “hai?” in their English conversations. These Japanese tokens elicit repetition from their partners without causing any trouble, as shown in the examples below.

### 36 Travel

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A3:</td>
<td>Um, do you want to travel? (0.5) outside of Japan?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>J3:</td>
<td>→ Hm?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A3:</td>
<td>Do you want to travel outside of Japan?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>J3:</td>
<td>A. Ye:s. I want to:: (. ) travel outside Japan. (0.5) u:h for example? (0.2) I want to:: go to South Africa,</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A3:</td>
<td>Oh nice.</td>
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### 37 How old are you

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A5:</td>
<td>How old are you.</td>
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When they are asked to repeat the whole utterance, the partners may slightly change or modify their original sentences linguistically but keep the same actions (e.g. asking for information). In this way, the Japanese subjects can initiate repair, have the partner restate the whole utterance, and gradually turn their non-understanding into understanding.

#38 Leisure time

1 T24: What do you do? uh ummm (0.6) uh durinya leisure time?
2 J24: E d- during, wha- what d- you say. sorry?= 
3 T24: =Ah (1.1) u:h, (0.2) what'sya hobby.
4 J24: A. H H H
5 T24: [hahaha
6 J24: [Thi: (.i this is main topics for u(h)s, h h h
7 J24: [huh uh,
8 T24: [haha Y= ye(h)ah. = 
9 J24: =Yeah, my hobby i::s (.i uh. I have many hobbies but
10 especially, I like mm bicycle. (0.4) cycling.
In this example, J24 displays non-understanding by using an open form of repair initiation (line 2), which elicits T24 to restate, or simplify, the original utterance (line 3). That helps J24 to reach understanding (line 6) and to provide information as requested (lines 9-10).

3.2.2. Other forms of indirect request

There are other ways that the Japanese subjects display their non-understanding to their partners including: (1) producing a statement about their inability to reach understanding such as “I don’t understand” or “I can’t hear” and (2) using non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions. Below are some examples.

#39 I can’t understand

1 T32: So wha- what is your major.
2 (1.4)
3 J32: I'm sorry. Pa- pardon?=
4 T32: Wha- <what is (. ) your major.> (0.3) What are you <studying> now.
5 (2.0)
6 J32: → I'm sorry. I- I, don't (. ) I can't understand, what to mean.
7 (1.3)
8 T32: May-, mayk- (. ) major.
9 (0.6)
10 J32: May?=
11 T32: Your major. Yeah.
12 (1.0)
13 T32: Are you u:h (. ) university student?
14 J32: a- a- I’m, (. ) I'm university student.
In response to J32’s direct request (line 3), T32 repeats the utterance followed by a paraphrased version of it (lines 4-5). J32, then, produces an indirect request, “I can’t understand what [you] mean” (line 7). Not only does it not specify the trouble source, but also it is unclear what action J32 is trying to make through the utterance. That triggers partner T32 to repeat the word “major” (line 9) as it is a potential trouble source, and to provide a confirmation (line 12). Then she provides “university student” (line 14) as relevant information and a clue for J32 to achieving understanding, and, along with the confirmation that J32 is a university student, repeats the original question again (line 17). Finally, T32’s step-by-step guide helps J32 reach understanding (“AH”) and provide the requested information (line 18).

A similar sequence is observed when Japanese participants display their non-understanding by saying “I can’t hear.”

#40 I can’t hear you
((A4 is introducing himself.))

1 A4: Hobbies? (0.5) um uh (. I play, (. I like to play a lot of
2 sports, I play basketball, I play football, things like that?
3 (. And um (. I also play chess, (0.6) I’m a chess player,
4 (0.7) checkers, (. and any type of board game I like to play
5 and any type of [sports game
6 J4: [((smile))]
7 A4: I also like to play. (. What about yourself,
J4’s smile near the end of A4’s self-introduction may indicate that he is at a loss and feels embarrassed (Nishiyama, 2000). He makes a direct request to slow down with a laugh (line 9) and A4 accepts it (line 11). Following that, J4 makes an indirect request saying “I can’t hear you” with a hand gesture (lines 13-14). A4 accepts the request and start repeating the information by breaking the original utterance down into chunks (lines 15-16, 22, and 24). This indicates that,
instead of taking it as a signal of a hearing problem (e.g. checking the microphone), A4 treats J4’s utterance as a signal of an understanding problem. J4 shows understanding by repeating the word at the end of the utterance (line 18; cf. 4.1.1.).

Many of the Japanese subjects in my data use gestures, body movements, and facial expressions when displaying their non-understanding. For example, they lean forward to the computer screen, put a hand or a finger on the ear, head, chin, or over mouth often while verbally producing some kind of signals of non-understanding. Sometimes, they even signal their non-understanding almost exclusively through these non-verbal cues, as seen in the next example.

#41 Bullying

((J10 told that she had a discussion on bullying in class and A10 told that he had a similar class in high school.))

1 A10: Did you ever go to like uh (. ) uh presentation, (0.2) or
2 anything on (. ) bullying, and how to like (. ) prevent it, and
3 stuff like that,
4 (1.5)
5 J10: \[ ((pulling hair behind ear, eyes closed)) Oh. =
6 A10: \[= [Cause, (0.4) we had to do that. (. )
7 J10: \[ [((slightly nodding))
8 A10: \[ for one of my uh (0.3) in my high school. (. ) We had to go to
9 like (. ) a presentation, (. ) on how to stop bullying, (0.7)
10 and uh \[(1.2) U::h (. )
11 J10: \[\[ ((rapidly blinking))
12 A10: \[ how not to be a bully, and uh all that kind of stuff, stop
13 being a bystander and stuff,
14 (1.1) ((J10: rapidly blinking and nodding))
J10: → Mm. (hands on cheeks)
(1.2)
A10: Yeah y- (.) you do that stuff too?
(0.9)
((J10: still hands on cheeks, tilting head))
(1.9)
J10: Ohm
(1.9) ((J10: hand on neck, looking down, smiling))
J10: Eh
(1.5) ((J10: tucking in chin, closing eyes, smiling))
J10: Yes. u:m=
A10: =[Did y- (0.5)
J10: → [(fingertips on nose, smiling, and then hands on cheeks)]
A10: Did your teacher talk to you about bullying? or did you.
actually, (0.2) like (0.6) talked to the kids that are being bullied.
(0.9)
J10: A:h (0.3) Yes. ah (.). we- WE:: (0.2) are discussing (0.2)
about (0.7) u:mt (0.8) a ((hand down, frowning)) how to:: (.)
stop the bullying, ((hand down))

Throughout the segment, J10 uses a lot of gestures and facial expressions. She is far more active non-verbally than verbally, and the vast majority of what she produces are non-lexical prosodic cues such as “uh” and “mm” to maintain her listenership (Fujimoto, 2007; Gardner, 2001). A10’ actions, such as providing follow-up information or reasoning for his inquiry (lines 6) and examples (lines 8-10 and 12-13), asking the original question again modifying it in a
simpler form than the first time (line 17), slightly changing the original question and asking it again (lines 28-30) all indicate that he treated J10’s gestures, facial expressions, and prosodic cues signaling her non-understanding.

4. **Major amaee or No displays of understanding or non-understanding**

While they display their non-understanding in a variety of ways, Japanese subjects may also choose not to display understanding or non-understanding but rather simply claim understanding or proceed to shift the focus of the talk. This should be of interest to researchers of Japanese communication, particularly those who study the concept of *amaee*.

Lack of understanding display is sometimes called “non-understanding indicator routines” (Varonis & Gass, 1985) or categorized as “non-understanding” (Uematsu, 2000). While it is appealing to label all such responses as non-understanding because they indeed appear to be non-understanding, my data show that it is not always possible to determine the subjects’ lack of understanding, as seen in the following examples. Therefore, it should be considered appropriate not to simply treat all responses involving a lack of display as signals of non-understanding, but to propose a category of “no display of understanding” as a strategy of Japanese subjects regardless of their actual understanding. This allows us to look into the linguistic means which are used in multiple ways within the category. The category is divided into 2 subcategories: (1) “let it pass” or pending displays of understanding by using continuers (e.g. “Mm hm?”); and (2) “let me go ahead” or skipping any response, including display of (non-)understanding, to the prior talk. While *amaee* is highly involved and the burden on the interlocutors is largest in both of the subcategories, the first and the second are the exact opposites in terms of leading the conversations. In the first subcategory of “let it pass,” the Japanese subjects relinquish leading
the conversation and leave the decisions to continue or discontinue the current topic entirely up to the partners. In contrast, with “let me go ahead,” the Japanese subjects seize the initiative and take control of the conversations. When this occurs, unlike typical conversations, topic can be changed without sequences around topic transitions (Jefferson, 1984; Riou, 2017; Schegloff, 2007), which may be a reason behind what is sometimes labeled as NNSs’ “marked topic changes” (Morris-Adams, 2016).

4.1 Pending displays of understanding: “Let it pass”

Firth (1996) states that not displaying understanding or non-understanding is a commonly deployed resource in lingua franca or in NNS-NNS interactions as well as other interactions and calls it “let it pass” (p. 243). The frequently used linguistic means for this include “uh huh,” “mm hm,” and “okay.” Below are examples from my data.

#42 Instruments

((J41 told that she likes classical music and G41 told that she prefers some other kind of music.))

```plaintext
1 G41: because, (. ) I’m playing the fute, ("flute") (0.2) and the
2 saxophone?
3 J41: → Hm mm mm. ((nods))
4 G41: And so, it’s kind of I’m listening to hip-hop. (. ) classic.
5 (0.7)
6 J41: → A:::h. ((smile + nod))
7 G41: Actually pretty much what I like.
8 J41: ((nods))
9 (2.4)
```
G41 provides a reason of her preference for a particular kind of music and states that she plays musical instruments herself (lines 1-2). J41 provides acknowledgement tokens with quick nods. Subsequently, while G41 provides more follow-up information, J41 produces some varieties of acknowledgements such as prolonged “ah,” “okay,” and “hm mm” with nods and smiles. Long pauses (lines 9 and 14) and the head tilt (line 10) may indicate that she has a problem, but J41 does not explicitly display her understanding or non-understanding, and it is actually hard for both the interlocutor and the researcher to determine if J41 understands or not up to the point of line 14. Then, J41 asks “do you play some instrument?” (line 15) and it becomes clear that she did not understand G41’s utterance when it was produced on lines 1-2. The pause (line 16) and G41’s asking back “What?” (line 17) may indicate her confusion, but the way J41 responds (line 19) indicates that she treats G41’s question as a request for repetition.
After G41 provides the answer (line 21) for the first time from J41’s perspective but the second time from G41’s perspective, J41 displays understanding by repeating the word (line 22), which supports the assumption that the ambiguous responses J41 produced before reaching that point had masked her non-understanding.

It should be noted that, as this example shows, it is very difficult for both the partners and the researcher to interpret what is actually intended by the Japanese subjects’ responses such as “mm hm” and “uh huh” with nodding. Although in conversations among native speakers, the acknowledgement tokens are typically used to claim the respondents’ understanding thus far (Clark & Schaefer, 1989), that is not always the case with Japanese learners of English who may produce those tokens when they do not necessarily understand. This can be considered as evidence of transfer of the Japanese use of aizuchi, backchannel or reactive tokens in Japanese conversations (Clancy et al., 1996; Kawahara et al., 2010; Maynard, 1986) to English conversations. Kita and Ide (2007) point out that some of the Japanese aizuchis express more than merely a continuer function, but they could function as “a sign of emotional support for the turn-holder” (p. 1244).

By not displaying understanding or non-understanding, Japanese subjects make it unclear for their partners, as well as the researcher, to see if they are following or not. In fact, as the above example shows, it can turn out to be non-understanding and reveal that they were not following while they were producing their ambiguous responses. However, not all such responses end up with non-understanding. See the examples below.

#43  Germany

1  G42: Uh well, Germany isn’t u:m (0.4)
2  J42: [hm
[not big like Japan? hh ((chuckle))]

Hmmm?

And (0.6) well whe- (. ) I live, (. ) my town? (0.3) isn’t that big? it’s about, (. ) well, (0.6) about (0.3) twenty thousand,

Uh huh? =

=people who live here.
(0.4)

Uh huh?

Roundabout.
(0.5)

Oh? =

=So,
(0.9)

And we have forests and lakes. (. ) so I can
(0.7)

Uh huh.=

=uh do (for?) some (0.5) woods (. ) here, and (0.2) fields,
(0.7)

Uh huh?

h huh huh=

=Ah ah?

And the next, (. ) big town. (. ) is (. ) uh Ham (. ) burg?

Mm hm?

(0.6)

A- (. ) do you know Hamburg?
(0.5)

Ham-
During G42’s explanation of her home country Germany, J42 produces a series of reactive tokens and keeps his listenership (lines 4, 7, 10, 13, 14, 18, 21, 24, 26). G42’s action to check J42’s understanding of the German city (line 28) indicates that J42’s response in the previous utterance (line 26) is not sufficient for her to feel certain about her partner’s understanding, and G42 attempts to provide follow-up information (line 31). J42’s partial repetition (line 30) signals that he is not perfectly sure of the word, and his interrupting G42’s utterance and producing a series of affirmative acknowledgement tokens “yeah” followed by a now-understanding (Heritage, 1984) “ah” and a series of “yah” (line 31) indicate that at this point he reaches understanding, and he confirms his understanding by claiming that he has knowledge of the city. Looking back, J42 may have been collecting and interpreting information from his partner’s utterances while producing ambiguous responses. In this sense, it could be said that the Japanese subject uses the “let it pass” strategy to gain time to process the information before reaching understanding.

To make things even more complicated, Japanese subjects also use the “let it pass” strategy with some understanding-like responses, while at the same time, signaling non-understanding.

#44 Basketball

1 T21: And I (0.3) also like to:: (2.0) uh play baskitball?
2 J21: P- (.) preves? ((tilt head))
3 T21: Baskitball?= 
As seen in 2.1.2., J21 keeps providing wrong repeats which indicate her non-understanding. Note that most of the words she produces in the repeat are nonsense even in Japanese. J21 claims her understanding by the use of frequent nods and by using tokens such as “Ah” and “Oh,” and finally looks away (line 11). This indicates that she is not eager to reach understanding or not willing to cooperate with her partner who keeps initiating repair to achieve mutual understanding. T21 even provides follow-up information by producing onomatopoeia
and a shooting gesture (line 12), to which J21 responds with silent nods (line 13). Finally, T21 asks a question narrowing down the topic to “sports” (line 19) and this elicits a clear display from J21 about her understanding (lines 20-22). Eventually, this segment provides a sharp contrast between J21’s responses with and without *amae*. Next is a similar example.

#45 Sing

1 T21: And I also like to um (0.9) uh sing songs, play (0.4) guitars?
2 J21: Oh. Shee [saws? ((tilt head))
3 T21: ['Yea'
4 J21: Oh ((nods))
5 T21: Ye- Sing. (. ) Sing.
6 J21: Shin. Um. ((nod))
7 T21: En with a microphone?
8 (0.4)
9 J21: → Ah ohhh ((raise eyebrows))
10 T21: You know? (. ) Then
11 J21: Oh. Mi- (. ) microphone? (0.9) Mm?
12 T21: Yep. Sing songs?
13 J21: → ((nod))
14 T21: That's my hobby. Sing.
15 J21: → Sinka. [Ohh. ((move hands))]
16 T21: [Ye. Sing. Sing.
17 J21: Ohh. ((nod))
As we saw in 2.1.2., J21’s wrong repeats (“shee saws” for “sing songs” on line 2 and “shin” for “sing” on line 6) reveal her non-understanding. Then, J21 provides an understanding-like display (line 9) but again shows non-understanding (line 11). T21’s repetition (line 12) indicates that he is aware of the trouble source and J21’s non-understanding. Following that, although J21 does not display non-understanding (line 13), his providing the word again (line 14) indicates that T21 is still unsure if J21 understands what he said. J21 provides another incorrect repeat (line 15), which triggers T21 to repeat the word twice (line 16). In the end, whether or not J21 understood remains unclear.

The shift from low to high degrees of *amae* is also observed in the next example.

### #46-1. Tranese (1)

((J22 told T22 that one of her future plans is to learn Chinese.))

1 T22: You want to learn Chinese?

2 J22: Thainese. I don’t know. (0.5) Wow. (0.8) ((shake head)) I don’t know that words? (1.1) What?

3 T22: Don’t yo- don’t you really want to learn Chinese?


5 T22: Uh Chinese means uh (0.2) my nature language, my mother language.

6 J22: ➔ Ahhh. ((lean back)) Yeah. (0.3) ((nods)) Okay? ((look up)) And (0.5) uh (0.3) um ((back to the screen)) one, (. ) one more please? uh m (0.2) Ask question, me.

Hearing that J22 plans to learn Chinese, T22, a native speaker of Chinese, is asking a follow-up question (line 1), but J22 shows difficulty understanding the word “Chinese” by saying that she
does not know the word and the meaning, followed by wrong repeats of the word with a rising intonation (e.g. “Tranese?” on line 5). In response, T22 provides an explanation of the word (lines 6-7) and J22 produces the now-understanding “ah” and signals understanding with “yeah,” “okay,” and head nods (line 8), but it turns out that the understanding is not actually achieved as can be seen in the conversation that follows.

#46-2. Tranese (2)

19 T22: Do you want to learn Chinese?
20 J22: → Tranese? Uh ((look up)) ‘do you want Tranese?’ Yeah. ((nods))
21 Of course. ((smile +nods))
22 (1.5)
23 T22: Yeah, so have you (...) do you think (...) Chinese word is
difficult because I know Japanese words (...) ha (...) in (..)
includes some of the Chinese words.
26 J22: → Hmm.
27 (1.6)
28 J22: → ((chuckle))
29 T22: Do you know? do you think it’s difficult to try (...) those (...) 
Chinese words?
31 J22: → Ah. ((lean back)) Yeah. ((nods)) Chinese words is different to
Japanese? (..) um character? So it is ((shake head)) very
difficult ((chuckle)) for me. ((nods)) Yeah. ((nods))

T22’s utterance on line 19 is his fourth time to ask the same question. J22’s response that
she wrongly repeated the trouble source “Chinese” as “Tranese,” looks up, which is a common gesture for Japanese while thinking, then repeats the question in a low voice, again with a wrongly repeated word “Tranese” (line 20). That clearly indicates her non-understanding, but immediately after that, J22 says “Yeah, of course” with nods and smiles (line 21). This may be, at least in a literal sense, considered as a confirmation, but note that the intonation is level and it does not carry any emotional features. The pause (line 22) may indicate T22’s uncertainty about J22’s understanding. When T22 asks a follow-up question (lines 23-25), J22 provides a minimal response (line 26). Then, after a pause, J22 laughs (line 28). Following that, T22 restates his question (lines 29-30), which indicates that he took J22’s responses as a signal of some kind of understanding problem. In response, J22 produces “Ah” with some body movements, and finally displays her understanding by providing the requested information (lines 31-33). This could be an instance of what is called “faking it” (Hatch, 1992) in studies of language learners’ pretending behavior. Terui (2012) points out that the language learners’ goal is to “avoid unpleasant outcomes” due to miscommunication, rather than reaching perfect communication (p. 170).

Although it is unclear at which point J22 reached understanding, the example demonstrates that the Japanese participant can produce an understanding-like response, or display pseudo-understanding, when she in fact has trouble understanding.

There are many studies that reveal cultural differences in responses in conversations. For example, Yamada (1997) states that “interdependent relationship” is the key to a good business with Japanese, and Japanese saying “yes, yes” with head-bobbing and smiles does not mean agreement. The findings here suggest that Japanese subjects do bypass trouble sources but they also provide some understanding-like displays, or pseudo displays of understanding. By doing
that, the Japanese may be able to gain time to comprehend what is asked and eventually achieve understanding, but it can also cause confusion for their partners.

Likewise, as seen in the next example, Japanese subjects can switch their language and utter Japanese words when they seem to have problems in understanding (line 12). Although these are inherently different from non-lexical tokens, in this particular situation, where the Japanese subject is aware that his partner does not speak Japanese and would not know what he says in Japanese, producing something in the Japanese language functions in much the same way as no displays of (non-)understanding do.

#47 Western Europe

((T31 is explaining her experience as an exchange student in Czech Republic.))

1 T31: And uh while I was there, (0.5) I went to:: (0.5) ch- I
2 went travel to:: (0.2) several country? (0.6) around Europe? (1.0) Including (0.6) English?
4 (1.0)
5 T31: Um (.) [mm
6 J31: "Inga-"
7 T31: the Western Europe, (0.5) and (.) I didn’t go North Europe.
8 (1.0)
9 J31: Ah.=
10 T31: = because, (0.3) it’s too expensive.
11 (1.5)
12 J31: "Zenzen kikoe-"("Can- hear at all")=
13 T31: = and yo- (0.4) where
14 (2.2)
The use of Japanese does not always serve as a display of non-understanding. In other cases, Japanese subjects use Japanese language when they understand but do not know how to display their understanding. Here is an example:

\#48 Homonyms

((A9 explains that both “pause” and “paws” are pronounced the same.))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A9:  Do you have words, in Japanese? that are spelled differently but can sound the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>J9:  Ahhh. ((smile)) Mmmmt. ((laugh)) e:tt[oh ((Japanese “well”))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A9:  (((chuckle))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>J9:  ( \rightarrow ) (((chuckle)) E:: (1.0) tto ne. (1.0) Mm pa- (. ) sugu dete konai ((“Well, can’t get it off the top of my head”)) Ch(h)o- ((chuckle))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A9:  (((chuckle))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>J9:  I s-(.) ettoh. ((“well”))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In response to A9’s request for information (lines 1-2), J9 displays understanding of what is asked and tells that she needs time to give examples, but the utterances are presented in Japanese (lines 7-9, 13-15, and 18). The English parts, “I have” (line 13) and “same” (line 18) are an affirmative response to A9’s question and could serve as a display of understanding, which together means something like “yes, we have the same things.” It is unclear how these English words by J9 were heard or understood by the partner, as A9’s showing empathy and taking back the request for information by saying “It’s okay” (line 21) can be interpreted as her treatment of J9’s responses as both a sign of non-understanding and a sign of understanding. This example demonstrates that, even when Japanese subjects do not intend so, their responses in Japanese can function in the same way as the let it pass strategy at least from the perspective of their partners.
who do not speak Japanese.

The other situations where Japanese subjects use “let it pass” include when: they stop trying to make themselves understood by their partners; they do not correct their partners’ misunderstanding; and they produce understanding-like responses instead of signaling non-understanding. In the next example, J23 tries hard to make herself understood but gives up, and lets it pass in the end of the segment.

#49 Kimono

((T23 is asking questions about kimono, Japanese traditional outfits.))

1 T23: Its (0.3) its probably expensive? Is that (0.6) that kind of (1.0) clothes. (0.4) Expensive?
2 J23: Expensive. Den.(.) Ren-
3 T23: =is that [expensive.
4 J23: [Renta:1.
5 (1.9)
6 J23: [Ren. Rental.
7 T23: [What- (1.2)
8 T23: What’s that?
9 (0.5)
10 J23: Not oh (.) buy ee (.) kimono.
11 (1.5)
12 J23: [Buying.
13 T23: [But, (.) you make it?
14 (0.4)
15 J23: >No no no.<
16 (1.4)}
T23: You buy it.

J23: E (.) rental. (0.4) Ren- (0.5) Rentoh. (1.5) Rent the kimono.

T23: You (.) you buy?

J23: No=

T23: =You buy (.) ki:mo:[no?

J23: [Rent.

T23: And then, (0.3) Or you make it. Yo- (.) You make it yourself?

J23: Yes. (0.5) 'make it?'

T23: You (.) you make the kimono yourself?

J23: No no no. ((chuckle))

T23: [((chuckle))

J23: [Mmto: (0.6) nante iun daro ("how should I put it") Borrow

T23: (0.3) borrow the kimono? (0.4) mmmto

J23: Mm=

T23: =Or you buy it?

J23: → Yeah.=

T23: =A! (0.4) Is this expensive?

J23: Yes yes.
In response to T23’s confirmation request about the price of Japanese traditional dress, J23 provides a confirmation and follow-up information (lines 3 and 5). She probably means that “because it is expensive, I rent it” but she could not get it through. From there, J23 tries to make herself understood by repeating (line 7) and rephrasing the word (lines 12 and 21). However, those efforts did not help T23 understand as she sticks with a choice between buy and make. After many attempts to correct T23’s either-or framework, J23 explicitly expresses her struggle in Japanese (line 36), changes the trouble source to other word (“borrow” on lines 36-37), but finally, gives up and provides a confirmation to T23’s offer of a candidate answer (line 42).

Likewise, in the next example, J50 does not correct his partner’s misunderstanding and lets it pass.

#50 Schools

1  J50: You said (0.6) you want (.) to be (0.5) a teacher. Right?
2    (0.8)
3  G50: Yes. That’s right.
4    (1.5)
5  J50: At high school, or (1.2) university?
6    (0.8)
7  G50: hh U:mm (.) it’s kind of difficult? Because (.) it's (.) like schools? Where uh: (.) students go to? when they finished? u:mm their school?
8    (0.9)
9  G50: And (want)((sound distorted)) to: umm (0.5) get uh (.) uh
10 <what is it< (0.4) get a job. You know?=
11  J50: =Hm.=
12  G50: =So it's (.) like college. Teacher for college.
J50 asks at which level of education G50 wants to work as a teacher (line 5). G50’s response to that (lines 7-9) has some indication that she misunderstands what information is being asked for, but J50 does not react to it (line 10). The next utterance by G50 more clearly indicates that she is providing information about the school she goes to, and J50’s responses are minimal. The responsive tokens are latched (line 13) or overlapped (line 16) and produced in a weak voice. Finally, J50 does not initiate repair at all and concludes the segment without reaching understanding (line 19).

4.2 Skipping displays of understanding: “Let me go ahead”

Japanese subjects may skip displays of understanding, or ignore what has been said by their partners and say what they want to say before responding. This is seen when they prioritize that they have something to say in their minds and insert ideas regardless of the sequence of the conversation. Next segment appeared toward the end of the first conversation session between J7 and A7. Before reaching this point, J7 had trouble pronouncing English words and difficulty getting through what he wanted to say to his partner. Prior to this particular segment, J7 was listing country names that he had visited including England, Italy, and Belgee (Japanese pronunciation for “Belgium”), to which A7 showed non-understanding.
Travel

J7: I visit almost, (0.7) uh six, or uh (. ) seven countries.

(1.3)

J7: It’s very good so:,

A7: [So you’ve

J7: [It’s

A7: traveled

(0.7)

J7: So. In the future,=

A7: =You’ve only traveled, to Europe?

J7: Em? What?

A7: [Yes. so

J7: [I said. you only traveled to (0.3) to Europe, you haven’t been
to the Caribbean?

J7: → Yeah. so. ((hiss)) mm in the future uh,(.) so maybe, I’d like to

(0.3) uh (0.5) get the job. (0.4) uh: h for example, I (.)

travel (. ) all over the world.

A7: Ah okay. O[kay.

J7: [Yeah.

J7 summarizes his sharing travel experience (lines 1-2), provides an assessment (line 34), and is ready to move on to provide information about his future plan (line 9). A7, on the other hand, requests confirmation of her understanding (line 10 and then again on lines 14-15).
Although J7’s display of non-understanding (line 11) indicates that he was once willing to turn his non-understanding to understanding and A7 offered help, J7 eventually resumes providing information (lines 16-18) without showing understanding what was requested by his partner. As a result, J7 ignores the partner’s request. Next is a similar example in which J10 ignores what is requested by her partner (lines 16-18).

#52 Judge

1 J10: U::m (0.2) I,(0.2) a in the future, I want to: (0.2) beco:me
2 the (0.3) judge.
3 (1.5)
4 A10: Oh really?
5 J10: Yes ((chuckle))
6 A10: That’s cool.
7 J10: ((chuckle)) Thank you ((chuckle))
8 (0.9)
9 A10: Is that just like short-term future? or is that what you wanna
do as a career.
10 (1.0)
11 J10: → Oh.
12 (3.6)
13 J10: → -kay u:m.
14 (1.2)
16 J10: → En (0.3) to become the (0.2) judge, (0.2) eh I musts- (0.2) mm?
17 I have to: (0.2) go:: (.1) up to:: the (0.7) u:m (1.0) law
18 school.
19 (0.9)
20 A10: Right. You have to be a lawyer first right?
When A10 asks a follow-up question about J10’s future plan to become a judge (lines 9-10), J10 stops and says “Oh” (line 12). Then, following a long pause, she says “(O)kay” (line 14) and eventually resumes providing information without answering to A10’s question (lines 16-18). From J10’s point of view, A10’s follow-up question (lines 9-10) may seem to be an interruption. The long pauses (lines 11, 13, 15) may indicate that J10 was privately debating between dealing with her problem in understanding and making out a statement in her head. J10’s “(O)kay” might indicate that she decided to take the latter option and complete her statement without displaying understanding or non-understanding about what A10 said. Next is another example.

#53 Books

1 T21: And you say you like to reading books?
2 J21: Yes, reading books. ((smile + nods)) yes.
3 T21: Oh
In this example, the participants are talking about J21’s hobby, reading books, and T21 asks what kind of books J21 reads (lines 5 and 7). In response, J21 produces “oh” and laughs (line 8). T21’s repeat of a part of his question (line 9) indicates that he thinks the response was not sufficient as information he requested. Then J21 says “yes” and shows an attempt to introduce something new (line 10), but T21 restates his question in a more specific way, by providing candidate answers of “horror” (line 11) and then “love story” (line 13). These attempts by T21 show that he does not consider J21’s responses as evidence of understanding. Finally, J21 displays her understanding, confirms that she reads love stories, and provides follow-up information that she reads “hard boiled.”

Next is another example where the Japanese subject attempts to skip displaying his understanding and control the topic of the conversation.
Tennis

J7: So (.) what’s your (.) what’s your. (.) hev- hobby.

(2.1)

A7: Uh

(2.3)

A7: U::m, I like to read? a::nd (0.2) I like to play tennis? and
golf,

(0.7)

J7: A Tenni-=

A7: =I like sports.

J7: Tennis?

(1.7)

A7: Hmm?

J7: hm

A7: What did you say?

(0.7)

J7: S- sorry sorry. Please say again? ((smile))

(1.3)

A7: I said, uh. I like to, (.u:m play tennis? You know what
tennis is?

J7: → Ah. playing tennis? ((smile))

(0.6)

A7: Mm hm?= 

J7: =[Oh.

A7: [A:nd read? I like to read books?

J7: Oh [so

A7: [a:nd u:m (0.6) Yeah. I like to u::h (.u: play golf.

J7: → So ((look away)) how long, d-=

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A7: =yo
J7: \textbf{played peer} \textit{tennis}?

A7: U::m, (0.7) just a few years, A couple years,

J7: ho:::h. So you started it \textit{for} (0.5) for three, \textit{two or}

three years ago?

A7: Mm hm? [Yeah.

J7: [Ahhh

A7: Do you play tennis?

J7: \textbf{Oh YES. ((smile))} uh=

A7: =Do you play any sports?

J7: \textbf{Yes. uh when,} \textit{I was a} \textit{junior high school student},

(0.4) uh. \textbf{I played tennis} for three years.

A7: Wow.

J7: ahah hah hah. (0.8) Yeah. u:h (0.2) \textbf{playing tennis is very}

interesting (0.3) for me.

After dealing with problems in understanding, J7 not only displays understanding of “playing tennis” but also takes it as a topic (line 20). Then he provides a follow-up question (lines 27-29), follow-up information (lines 41-42), and an assessment (lines 45-46).
Answers to RQ1

Japanese subjects use a wide variety of linguistic and strategic means to display and hide their understanding and non-understanding. They may display understanding and non-understanding in native-like ways; in unique, somewhat confusing ways to non-Japanese; or may not display understanding or non-understanding. With the exception of the explicit displays of (non-)understanding, the responses require their partners to exercise *sasshi*, thus these kinds of responses involve the Japanese predisposition of *amae*. The subjects may actively signal their problems in understanding by making various kinds of requests. Sometimes, the subjects may accidentally display non-understanding while trying to display understanding. When the subjects signal non-understanding but do not specify the trouble source, they make requests to repeat or slow down, produce non-verbal cues, and state that they do not understand. Moreover, they may not display (non-)understanding at all but use strategies such as “let it pass” or “let me go ahead.” These linguistic means for displaying (non-)understanding make it difficult for their partners to interpret what was actually intended. In fact, the same linguistic means can be used to display understanding, partial (non-)understanding, or non-understanding. The tone that is used (e.g. falling, rising) may give a clue sometimes but not always. This suggests that, in contrast to what is generally considered to be normal in the communities of NSs, the Japanese subjects’ “standards” or agreed-upon linguistic and strategic means to show understanding or non-understanding require considerable guesswork. In such cases, the subjects apply what they think is appropriate based on their prior experiences communicating with other Japanese people in the Japanese language or through their engagement in intercultural communication in English. These approaches may not become problematic if all the participants of the conversation are familiar with Japanese ways of communication, such as in conversations with non-Japanese who
reside in Japan. However, in cases such as this project, where the subjects speak English to their international partners via skype calls, if the Japanese subjects rely too much on their prior experiences or bring too much *amae* into the interaction, the way they communicate can cause problems and confuse their non-Japanese partners.

As shown above, what is generally considered as standard in English speaking communities does not always agree with what is produced by Japanese subjects in interaction in English. For example, when Japanese subjects actually understand but delay their display of understanding, it leads interlocutors to offer help by repairing their own utterances (e.g. repeating, paraphrasing, rephrasing), which turns out to be unnecessary. In other words, the ways in which the Japanese subjects deal with problems in understanding can be a source of inefficiency in communication. Moreover, they may force their own problems in understanding to be resolved by their interlocutors without making an effort on their side.

One of the possible explanations for this is that Japanese learners of English are not taught how to deal with problems in understanding in their English language education. The learners can simply be unaware that, for instance, their responses are unclear, confusing, or open to varying interpretations. Learning the ways in which members of English speaking communities deal with problems in understanding will raise learners’ pragmatic awareness in areas which are important for successful intercultural communicators. Offering NS models (e.g. Wong and Waring, 2010) to learners should be useful in this respect.

Additionally, the data in this study showed that partners can get used to the Japanese style of displaying understanding and can adjust accordingly even in as short a period as a 10-minute conversation. This means that some of the problematic segments shown in this chapter can be resolved solely by the interlocutors’ communication skills. On the flip side, as long as Japanese
learners of English practice conversations with people who are familiar with Japanese culture, these problems will be barely discernible. By analyzing the interactions between the Japanese and those who are unfamiliar with Japanese culture, the current study reveals what is not usually noticeable within the context of foreign language education in Japan.

**RQ2: How do NS and NNS partners react to the Japanese participants’ linguistic and strategic means for dealing with problems in understanding, especially when they are combined with amae-based attitudes?**

As we have seen in the results of RQ1, the Japanese subjects in the present study display or do not display their (non-)understanding in various ways and such behaviors are observed in conversations regardless of their partners’ first languages or background cultures. While the differences in the kinds and frequencies of these displays vary by individual, there are no notable differences in the linguistic and strategic means used by the Japanese subjects across the three groups. Nevertheless, differences in patterns of interaction did occur between the Japanese subjects and their interlocutors. Since the displays of the Japanese subjects did not change, the researcher was led to focus on the performance of their partners, and to look for ways that the communicative strategies of those partners might be creating differences in the characteristics of the interactions which were occurring between individuals and groups. In this section, such differences will be shown by comparing the partners’ reactions to the Japanese subjects’ attempt of amae when, for example, they display neither understanding nor non-understanding (cf. Section 4 in this chapter). By shifting the focus from the subjects to the partners, the analysis reveals details of the efforts that the partners make to achieve mutual understanding, which, in turn, sheds light on the room for improvement that needs to be made by the Japanese if they wish
to improve their intercultural communication, and on their partners, who need to become more aware of how their own cultural background can cause difficulties in communication with Japanese speakers of English.

5. **Group A: American partners**

The Americans show the most varied kinds of strategies among the three international partners in the data when attempting to respond to Japanese subjects who are expressing *amae*. The most frequently observed strategy is rephrasing what the Japanese subjects have just said (5.1). When the rephrasing does not work, the American partners may stop asking further (5.2). Other strategies that are less frequently observed include apologizing (5.3) and suspending asking for information (5.4). The latter two strategies are not found in interactions with other partners but only in the American partners’ performance data.

5.1 Rephrasing

When the Japanese subjects signal problems in understanding through the expression of *amae*, American participants recognize that their Japanese partners have trouble understanding, and respond with paraphrasing or restating their own utterances in different ways to help resolve the problems. In terms of *amae*, this means that the partners exercise *sasashi* and offer the help which the Japanese subjects seem to be requesting. Below is an example of such.

#55 A lot of time

1 All: Do you spend a lot of time there?
J11: ((J tilts head)) Hm? [One more "pl" ((finger on chin))]

A11: [Do you spend a lot of time?]

J11: Do you spend?

(1.3)

A11: ➔ Speak up. Sorry. U:m (0.8) do you spend a lot of time.

(1.3)

A11: ➔ playing tennis.

J11: ((look away)) Mmmm. ((shift eyes))

(1.5)

A11: ➔ Do you play tennis a lot?

J11: Yes. Yes. ((smile and nod))

(0.7)

A11: ➔ Yeah. Like (. ) every day?

J11: Yes. ((smile))

(0.7)

A11: Yeah?

J11: ((nod))

A11: That's cool.

J11 signals non-understanding by saying “Hm?” with the gesture of tilting her head and then by asking for repetition (line 2). The pause (line 4) and the partial repetition by J11 (line 5) triggers A11 to sasshi that J11 has trouble understanding. A11 apologizes and then repeats her utterance (line 7). Her adding of “playing tennis” (line 9) following a pause indicates that A11 found the repetition insufficient to help J11 reach understanding. Then, in response to J11’s long prosodic token “Mmmm” with some noticeable eye movements, by which she signals that she is
in need of help and attempting amae, A11 rephrases her utterance (line 12). This elicits J11’s display of understanding (line 13), but A11 asks a follow-up question (line 15), which functions not only to specify the amount of time J11 spend for tennis but also to make sure that she understands what is asked. By changing from “spend a lot of time” to “play tennis a lot,” and then from “a lot” to more specific “every day,” A11 helps J11 display understanding.

5.2 Stopping asking

Next is another example of rephrasing, but the consequence of the American partner’s help is different from the previous one. After J3 did not provide requested information, A3 stops asking.

#56 Boyfriend

1 A3: How um (. ) how long have you been together
2 (1.2)
3 J3: U:::m (0.7) mm? mm? wa (. ) one more cha one more cha(h)nce.
4 A3: Okay(. ) um how long have you been with your boyfriend
5 (2.0)
6 J3: Mmmmnt (1.5) Ohhhmmmm ((hiss)) mmmmm a (. ) mm? ((chuckle))
7 Mmmmm mmm (0.7) mm? wa- one mo(h)re cha(h)nce. So(h)rry.
8 (3.6)
9 A3: °Mm hm°
10 J3: Mm hm?
11 A3: Yeah. You’ve been with your boyfriend for (. ) since did you
12 meet him in college?
13 (1.4)
14 J3: Ah yes yes yes. mmm=
15 A3: =Okay
16 J3: He is Waseda University student, (0.6) So
17 A3: °Okay°
18 J3: Yeah. Meet every week.
19 (0.8)
20 A3: → Oh okay.
21 J3: Okay. Yeah. ((chuckle))
22 A3: °Nice.°

In response to J3’s prosodic tokens and requests for repetition, A3 rephrases her utterances by changing “together” (line 1) to “with your boyfriend” (line 4), and then from “how long” (lines 1 and 4) to “since you met him in college” (lines 11-12). Clearly, A3 increases the specificity of her utterances to help J3 reach understanding. The help worked partially and J3 shows understanding of some words in A3’s utterance, such as “boyfriend” and “college,” and then provides information that she thinks A3 requested (line 18). However, it turns out that the help did not result in eliciting the requested information because while A3 asked about time, J3 provides information about frequency. The pause followed by her saying “Oh okay” (line 20) indicates that A3 recognizes that J3’s problem in understanding remains and the pair has not achieved mutual understanding, but she chose not to ask further.
5.3 Apologizing

The American partner’s strategy of stopping to ask is also found in the next example. The unique feature of this segment is that A9 is more open about the pair’s failure in achieving mutual understanding than A3 in the above example.

#57 Crime Rate

A9: I think it's interesting. 'cause even other (0.4) like (.)
Canada. is very similar to the United States in a lot of ways.
J9: Hmmm ((nod)) =
A9: but not with their crime rate.
J9: ((smile))

A9: → It's (.) it’s just i- It's just interesting. You know what I
mean?

J9: Hm? Eh ((look away)) (1.6) Int- mm? ((tilt head)) (0.9) plea-
one m- ((finger “one”))=
A9: =U:m I jus-

J9: → I just find it (.). I just find it interesting.
A9: Interesting.((nod)) =
A9: =how
J9: ((smile))
A9: → U::m (1.2) well (1.0) I- I'm sorry. Am I confusing you? I know
sometimes I talk fast.
J9: ((laugh))
A9: ((laugh))
A9’s repetitions of part of her own utterance on line 7 and again on line 14, both following a pause, indicate that she notices that J9’s problem in understanding is possible. A9 could have started offering help for J9 to reach understanding but, as indicated in the utterance on lines 18-19, she chose to close the topic with a well-prefaced turn (Heritage, 2015). This elicits laughter from J9 and then A9 laughs as well. By apologizing, blaming herself (lines 18-19), and closing the segment with laughter, A9 leaves J9’s problem in understanding unsolved.

5.4 Suspending and resuming

The next example is another rare but interesting one. A10 suspends his asking for information when J10 skips displaying understanding and attempts “let me go ahead.” This is a major form of amae and requires the partner to use a significant amount of sasshi to figure out what is going on.

#58 Japan

1 J10: Do you ever (0.7) come to Japan?
2 A10: I have never. I want to though. It sounds awesome.
3 J10: Oh. ((chuckle)) And do you like Japan?
4 (1.0)
5 A10: I do! It sounds cool.
6 J10: Oh.
7 A10: [Have y- uh
8 A10: $\rightarrow$ Have you ever wanted to come to the United States? or have you?
9 J10: $\rightarrow$ Oh. Eh (.). Why do you like Japan.
10 (1.3)
A10: U:::h, (0.8) I (like to add) at a different perspective on things I think.

((A continues for 21 sec))

A10: So. (0.6) Learning from there would be good (.) for me. I think.

J10: Oh. ((hiss)) U:::m (1.4) Hm. (1.4) Oh?

A10: \(\rightarrow\) Have you ever been to the United States?

J10: Uh (.) I don't, (0.4) I’m (.) never go m U-nited States.

A10 asks for information about J10’s willingness to come to the United States or her experience of coming to the United States (line 8) but that elicits a somewhat unexpected response from J10. Instead of answering A10’s question, J10 asks him a question. That is a follow-up of the exchange about A10’s preference for Japan, which the pair had earlier. This indicates that there is a perception gap between the two in topic closure. One possible interpretation is that J10 took more time to compose her follow-up question than A10 expected. She may have simply failed to hear A10’s question on line 8, but in any case, J10 does not display understanding or non-understanding to it. A10’s long prosodic token following a pause (line 11) may indicate his hesitation, but at the same time, gives him time to sasshi what effectively works for J10 in this situation. As a result, A10 suspends his inquiry and provides information as requested (lines 11-15) before he resumes on line 18. Although J10’s response is not clear enough as a display of understanding, A10’s actions satisfied J10’s need and help her recognize the topic closure. When A10 resumes his inquiry, he simplifies and makes a slight modification to the original (line 18), to which J10 finally displays her understanding (line 19).
5.5 Summary

The American partners appear to accept *amae*, to exercise *sasshi*, and to offer help for the Japanese to reach understanding. They use various combinations of strategies. They rephrase their utterances with increasing specificity so that can help their Japanese subjects follow the conversation more easily. When this help does not work, they stop there and do not ask further. When “let me go ahead” is attempted by the Japanese, the Americans may suspend their action, let the Japanese partners “go ahead,” and resume afterward. Even when the problem remains unsolved, the Americans can make the pair’s failure in achieving mutual understanding open by apologizing and then mitigate the unsuccessful consequence with laughter. Some of these strategies require a high level of linguistic and communicative skills, which makes this way of responding distinctive to native speakers in my data.

6. Group B: Taiwanese partners

6.1 Repeating

As a response to *amae*-based attitudes, repeating his/her own utterance is one of the most frequently used strategies by the Taiwanese in my data. In the next example, J21 tries to display understanding by repeating T21’s utterance but the repetitions actually reveal her non-understanding, which triggers a series of repetitions by T21.

### #59 Basketball

1 T21: And I also like to (3.3) play basketball?
At first, with a rising intonation and a head move, J21 produces a wrong repeat and signals non-understanding (line 2), which triggers a repetition of the trouble source by T21. Note that on the next line, by producing an oh-prefaced utterance (Heritage, 1998) with a falling intonation with nodding, J21 claims that she had turned her non-understanding into understanding. This indicates that J21 shifted her need from help solving the understanding problem into letting it go. She may have lost interest in achieving mutual understanding. Nonetheless, T21 continues providing help to turn J’s non-understanding into understanding with repetition (lines 6, 8, 10), then with imitating the movement and sound of shooting a basketball (line 12).

A similar sequence can be found in the example below where T29 keeps repeating the same information. Unlike T21 in the above example, T29 makes repetitions at the sentence level, which may have made it hard for J29 to detect what T29 is trying to achieve through the
repetitions and ends up confusing him.

#60 Music

1 T29: You know? [it really depends on the mood.

2 J29: [Ah

3 T29: Li[ke

4 J29: [Ah huh huh

5 T29: Iffff (. ) if (. ) I:::m >I don’t know.< sleepy?

6 [I prefer classic?

7 J29: [Ah ((chuckle)) Ah classic. Ah=

8 T29: =So (0.4) e- (. ) then, if I’mm (. ) trying to:: (. ) do my

9 homework? [or something I need energy, I choose rock.

10 J29: [mm mm mm mm ((chuckle)) Ah rock. Ah rock is very

11 good. (0.4) Uh of cou[rse I

12 T29: [Yes. So um it really depends.

13 J29: Hm?

14 (1.3)

15 T29: → No (. ) I mean, I said, (0.4) so what kind of music (. ) it

16 really depends. (0.4) on my mood and what I’mm doing.

17 (1.3)

18 J29: Mu- m (. ) wha-(. ) what I (. ) what I?

19 (0.7)

20 T29: [No no. Like

21 J29: [Hm?

22 T29: → I choose the music. f-(0.4) when (0.3) when I’m doing. (..)

23 What (. ) mm:wha- [I do.

24 J29: [Ahh.
The Taiwanese partners’ actions of keeping repeating the same information indicate that they have a limited repertoire for helping the Japanese reach understanding. Despite their effort, the Japanese subjects’ displays of understanding remain partial. Note that J29 claims understanding at least twice, on line 7 and then lines 10-11, by ah-prefaced utterances with falling intonations and adding some information. Both of these utterances are interrupted by T29 who keeps repeating his statement. This may indicate that J29 is more interested in topic closure than reaching an understanding of what T29 said earlier. What Yamada (2015) argues should be relevant here. By showing examples of intercultural business meetings involving Japanese participants, Yamada points out that the Japanese tend to allow long pauses up to 8.2 seconds to shift topics. She states that “[i]f the topic is otherwise exhausted, and a communicator insists on filling silences with talk, the meeting risks continuing endlessly” (p. 9). If we apply this observation to the examples above where the Taiwanese partners keep filling silences with repetitions, they may be blocking topic shifts that the Japanese are wishing for. That is, while the Taiwanese accept *amae* and *sashiki*/sense that the Japanese are in need of help, they may fail to detect what kind of help is demanded. As a result, the conversations became lengthy, perhaps not so meaningful and inefficient in achieving mutual understanding. These examples demonstrate that even those who are culturally close and share similar experiences of learning EFL to the Japanese can nevertheless fail to handle *amae* attempts by the Japanese.

6.2 Providing examples

In conjunction with repetitions, the Taiwanese partners may provide examples to help the
Japanese reach understanding as seen in the segment below (lines 6-7 and 14-16).

#61 Management

1 T30: So (..) we are (.) in the same department.
2 J30: Ahh. Hm? Same si-?
3 T30: Yeah.
4 (1.5)
5 J30: Hm[m?
6 T30: → [Yeah. I (..) I study (.). i:nn (0.5) uh: man- (.) man-gement too.
7 J30: >Hm hm hm hm.< (0.4) Hmm?=
8 T30: =Hm yeah.=
9 J30: =>Hm hm hm.<
10 T30: → So:: (.). you study [i:n
11 J30: [Hm.
12 (0.9)
13 T30: → U::h (..) industrial man-i-ments, (0.4) o::r (1.2) u::h (.)
14 business, eh (.) uh bi- (.) u:h (..) o::r s- (..) wha- (.)
15 what's your ma- major now.
16 J30: Mejor?
17 (0.8)
18 T30: Yeah. (.) Major.
19 J30: Menjor?
20 (0.8)
21 T30: Yeah. (..) You::r sss- ummm (0.8) Subject.
22 J30: Subject.
6.3 Summary

The Taiwanese partners also accept *amae*, exercise *sasshi*, and offer help for the Japanese so that they can reach understanding. They use repetition most frequently, in conjunction with rephrasing, providing examples, and non-verbal cues such as gestures and sound imitations. When this help does not work, they continue the effort to help, which may result in lengthy exchanges without success. The strategy is inefficient for achieving mutual understanding, but from the Taiwanese perspective, it may be preferred because it appears to make the conversations harmonious and contribute to a sense of rapport or solidarity. Such characteristics are reported in many studies on interactions between non-native speakers of English, or English as a lingua franca (e.g. Pullin, 2010).

7. Group C: German partners

7.1 Adding information

When the Japanese show *amae*-based attitudes and do not display understanding or non-understanding, the German partners may offer help by adding relevant information.

#62 Computer game

1 G45: Isn't there (.) Isn't there a game? What is it called
2 (0.7)
3 J45: Hm[mm]
G45: → [Ye- (.) I don't know if it's in Japan or somewhere else in Asia (0.4) It's called s- (...) something with star?

J45: Hmm.

G45: → Like (. ) A computer game? (0.6) And it's (. ) very big in Japan?

J45: Hmm.

(0.7)

G45: What is it called. I have no idea.

(2.5)

G45: → I just (. ) saw like tournaments? You know? where uh a lot of people play the game?

J45: Hmm.

G45: → against each other? (0.6) I have no idea what it's called again.

J45: Hmm.

(1.5)

G45: But (0.5) Do you like play computer games? Or

(1.3)

J45: Ye:s. I::: often (. ) do that’s s- so. (. ) I like very much.

In response to G45’s request for filling in the missing piece of information, namely, the name of the computer game, J45 does not display understanding or non-understanding (line 3). G45 exercises sasshi and starts providing additional information on the associated word (line 5), the popularity (line 7), and a related event (lines 12-15). However, J45 consistently provides let-it-pass’s until G45 slightly shifts the topic and asks if he likes to play computer games (line 18), which eventually elicits J45’s display of understanding.
Checking understanding

Occasionally, the partners explicitly inquire about the Japanese’s understanding. That is particularly noticeable with the German partners. In the examples below, the Germans actively check understanding, which eventually reveals the Japanese’s non-understanding.

#63 Girlfriend

1 G48: My girlfriend. Sh- she (.) she used to lived in my house.
2 (2.0)
3 J48: Hohhh.
4 (1.3)
5 G48: → Are you (.) are you still listen to me? Do you still understand?
6 (0.5)
7 J48: Sorry?
8 (1.0)
9 G48: → Do you still understand me.
10 (1.7)
11 J48: Uh. I can't understand. What (.) hmm?
12 (1.1)
13 G48: → Do you (.) <understand.> I will, (.) Obviously I will call you back in a second. Alright?
14 (1.7)
15 J48: Oh s- m u::h. Sorry. I can't understand. (0.8) Mm mm mmm.
16 (2.2) S- stand?
17 G48: → Do I need to talk (.) Do (.) I (.) need to talk (.) <louder>
18 than I do no:w.
19 J48: Ah. Yeah. (0.7) So. [I (.) I hope so.=
G48: [Okay,]
G48: =I'm talking into the microphone.
(1.0)
J48: A (.) thank you very much.
(1.0)
G48: Yeah you're welcome.

#64 Parties
1 G46: How are the parties. In Japan.
2 J46: Parties.=
3 G46: =Like (.) YEAhh, (1.3) Do you go often, party like (.) dancing
   in a club, or clubbing?
4 J46: Ahhh, ((hiss)) Party. Ah (0.5) Not so [club
5 G46:  Do you understand me? What I mean?
6 G46:  Do (.) [do you unders-
7 J46: [One more.
8 (0.7)
9 J46: [Not
10 G46:  Do you understand what I mean?
11 J46: ((hiss)) No:: (0.9) One more (.) please?
12 (1.9)
13 G46: Mm [sorry what did you say?
14 J46: [Pardon,
Tranekjaer (2018) analyzed conversations in which NSs of Danish check NNSs’ understanding with explicit requests for confirmation of understanding like “Do you understand?” and identified the sequential patterns of the trajectories. The example presented here follows exactly the same pattern: [1] G46’s request for confirmation of language ability/understanding (lines 7, and 11); [2] J46’s minimal, hesitant confirmation or lack of confirmation (line 9); [3] G46’s repeated use of a request for understanding (line 15); [4] J46’s demonstration (line 20); and finally [5] G46’s acceptance (line 22). Referring to laughter in the 2nd step (minimal or hesitant confirmation) in her example, Tranekjaer (2018) points out that it could be “heard as a display of discomfort and delicacy occasioned by the face-threatening nature of explicit inquiries about understanding” (p. 83). In the example shown above, pauses before and after J46’s fragmented utterance (line 10), as well as hissing (lines 9, 16, 20) clearly indicate his hesitation.

Mori (2004a) explains that in second language interactions, interlocutors prefer self-repair over other-initiated repair (Schegloff et al., 1977). In contrast to the cases with Taiwanese partners (cf. section 7, this chapter), explicit inquiries about understanding seem to be efficient for reaching mutual understanding. With respect to amae, it could be said that those inquiries indicate that the Germans refuse amae and encourage the Japanese subjects to explicitly ask for help rather than attempting others to exercise sasshi. However, since this is potentially face-threatening, it may make the Japanese subjects feel awkward, challenged, or disrupted.
7.3 Summary

Just like the other two groups, the German partners accept *amae*, exercise *sasshi*, and offer help for the Japanese to make it possible for them to reach understanding. When the help does not work, they may add information, which is not necessarily helpful for the Japanese. They also explicitly check the Japanese’s understanding and make suggestions for improving their understanding. This strategy is efficient for achieving mutual understanding, but some may find it face-threatening.

Answers to RQ2

This part of the study shows that the partners handle *amae* attempts differently according to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and that while some of the responses effectively work to resolve the problems, others result in confusion or communication breakdown. Moreover, the differences are found not only between NSs and NNSs, but also between the two NNS groups. In response to *amae* attempts, American NS participants use various combinations of strategies (e.g. increasing the specificity of the information) and when the help does not work, they stop trying further. By contrast, Taiwanese NNS participants use relatively simple strategies such as repetition, rephrasing, and non-verbal cues (e.g. gesture, sound imitation). When the help does not work, Taiwanese NNS participants continue to repeat the same strategies while German NNS participants explicitly check the Japanese subjects’ understanding.

When *amae* is attempted by the Japanese in implicit displays of understanding problems, the international partners exercise *sasshi* and offer help in a variety of ways. Their strategies range from efficient to inefficient, as well as from harmonious to potentially face-threatening.
Some of the partners’ actions efficiently help resolve the Japanese’s problems in understanding, while others do not, and yet others can cause confusion. The characteristics of the partners’ reactions are different even between NNS groups. This implies that the complexity of L2 conversations cannot be explained without considering the participants’ cultural backgrounds.

When we consider the education of Japanese English learners, it is important to note that when the Japanese have trouble understanding and express this through *amae*, it is their partners who must put in more effort to achieve mutual understanding than the learners do themselves. As contributors to intercultural communication, Japanese subjects need to do much more to make their English conversations more effective and efficient. They should, for example, display understanding and non-understanding more explicitly so the partners can reduce the guesswork and stop offering ineffective help. An implication for English education in Japan is the importance of training Japanese learners to become more active in controlling their *amae* and in displaying understanding and non-understanding.

**RQ3: How do the Japanese subjects evaluate their problems in understanding? Do they think they can improve their performance in dealing with those problems?**

RQ3 is answered by analyzing the questionnaire responses which were obtained between the first and second conversation sessions. The questionnaire was electronically sent to the Japanese subjects along with the audio files of their first conversations so the subjects could listen to and evaluate their own performance in conversation while they remembered the experience well. This material was returned to the researcher before the second sessions which took place 7 days after the first. All 34 Japanese subjects turned in the questionnaire. Most of them (29 participants; 85.3%) show evidence that they listened to the recorded conversation from
their first sessions by specifying at least one part of the conversation where they had an understanding problem by indicating a certain minute and second on the audio file where it occurred.

8. On understanding the partners

8.1 Recognition of problems in understanding

The first question on the questionnaire is “Were there places where you did not understand your partner? If yes, please list each one.” Out of the 34, only four of the Japanese subjects (Group A: 1; Group B: 1; Group C: 2) answered that they had no understanding problems and the majority (Group A: 10; Group B: 11; Group C: 7; Total 28 subjects/ 82.4%) reported that they had understanding problems. Twenty seven subjects specified 1 to 15 (average 3.52) parts of their conversation, with time information, as places where they did not understand their partners.

Table 2: Recognized problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>No Ans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

155
Of the 28 subjects who reported problems in understanding on their side, 8 (Group A: 5; Group B: 1; Group C: 2) provided additional comments such as: “I was not following my partner,” “I didn’t understand most of the entire conversation,” and “I lost track when the partner went into detail.” Subjects of Group A, who had native speaker partners, provided more non-specific statements than subjects in the other groups. In other words, subjects who had non-native partners were more able to pinpoint the places where their problems in understanding occurred.

Some of the subjects described their problems as being ones where they could not “kikitoru” certain words or it was hard to “kikitoru” what their partners said. Their use of the compound verb (“kiku” = to hear, listen; “toru” = take) may imply that they do not distinguish hearing problems from understanding problems.

8.2 How to deal with the problems

The 28 respondents who indicated problems in understanding were asked the follow-up question: “How did you deal with the problem? Was that worked out?” The subjects answered that they: asked the partner to repeat (13); did nothing (10); showed non-understanding (7); faked or pretended that they understood (6); guessed what was just said and responded anyway (6); asked the partner to slow down (4); and apologized (2). It is remarkable that 10 of the 28 respondents (35.7%) reported that they “did nothing,” which includes the cases where the partners brought in a new topic while the subjects remained silent. This, as well as “faking or pretending” and “guessing and responding anyway” are considered as amae-based attitudes as we have seen above (See 3.2. and 4.1. this chapter). The results show that, although they are presumably unaware of the concept of amae, the Japanese subjects are able to detect those culturally distinctive attitudes in their own performance. Eleven (11) subjects (Group A: 3;
Group B: 4; Group C: 4) reported that the problems they encountered were at least partially solved while 15 (Group A: 5; Group B: 5; Group C: 5) reported that the problems they encountered remained unsolved. There was no significant difference in the responses among the three groups.

Table 3: How to deal with understanding problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ask to repeat</th>
<th>Do nothing</th>
<th>Show non-undstnd</th>
<th>Pretend</th>
<th>Guess</th>
<th>Ask to slowdown</th>
<th>Apologize</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Problems solved or not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>YES + NO</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Unspecified</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.3 Handling the problems in the future

To the next question: “In the future if you encounter any of the understanding problems you identified in 1-1, do you think you would handle them the same way or differently? Why? Explain your answer,” the subjects gave mixed responses. The responses are almost evenly
divided between “Will handle the problems the same way” (Group A: 6; Group B: 5; Group C: 3; Total 14) and “Will handle them differently” (Group A: 4; Group B: 5; Group C: 3; Total 12).

**Table 5: Will do the same or differently?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SAME</th>
<th>DIFF</th>
<th>MIXED</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight (8) of the 14 respondents who answered that they would do the same wrote that they did not know what else they could do (e.g. “I will simply do the same because I can’t think of any good solutions.”). Four (4) of these 8 respondents reported that their strategies (e.g. asking to repeat or slow down, letting it pass, and laughing it off) were not successful and their problems in understanding remained unsolved, but they had no option other than reusing the strategies they used for the first conversations. The results suggest that even if the subjects intend to improve their understanding and recognize the need to change their strategies, they lack the resources to equip themselves with better linguistic and communicative skills.

When it comes to doing things differently, the 12 respondents answered that they think their strategies used for the first sessions were inappropriate or rude (5); they want to improve their understanding (3); and communicate better (3). When asked to specify what they would do differently, the respondents answered that they would: ask their partner to repeat (7); show non-
understanding (7); make specific requests (5); ask to slow down (4); and change the topic (1).

Note that these actions, with the exception of “making specific requests” (See 2.1), involve amae (See Chapter 3, Section 8). The responses suggest that the Japanese subjects consider that actions which are familiar in their L1 communication will be equally effective in their L2 communication, while these actions can in fact confuse their international partners (See RQ2 and Sections 6-9 this chapter).

Table 6: What to do to handle the problems differently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ask to repeat</th>
<th>Show non-undstnd</th>
<th>Specific Qs</th>
<th>Ask to slow down</th>
<th>Change topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Plans for the second sessions

9.1 Confidence about improving understanding

The final question asked the subjects if they think they can improve their performance to reach a mutual understanding and the subjects expressed mixed feelings. For Group A (NS partners), the subjects’ responses were evenly split among Yes (4), No (4), and Neither or No response (4). For the other two groups (NNS partners), the responses were nearly evenly split between Yes and No. The results suggest that, after listening to and evaluating their own performance, over half of the subjects (Group A: 8; Group B:7; Group C: 5; Total: 20 / 58.8%)
were not confident about improving their mutual understanding with their partners in their next session.

Table 7: Can improve mutual understanding?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NEITHER/No ans</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.2 Plans for the second sessions

When asked to describe their plans for what to do in the next session, the subjects provided a variety of answers. They range from plans for better communication (24), plans to become a better / more active speaker (16), and plans for emotional control (9). “Plans for better communication” include: finding common interests (6), showing non-understanding (4), focusing on one topic in order to have a deeper conversation (3), asking to slow down (3), not laughing off or pretending understanding (2), using more gestures and visuals (2), structuring a better conversation (2), asking to repeat (1), asking specific questions (1). “Plans to become a better / more active speaker (16)” include: speaking more actively (9), bringing in more topics (4), speaking more slowly (1), using various words and expressions (1), and speaking up (1). Finally, “plans for emotional control” include: trying not to be nervous (5), not worrying too much about grammar and expressions (2), expecting partners to accommodate their familiar topics (1), letting partners know their English is bad (1). Three (3) subjects responded that they
had no plan because the second session should be better than the first session anyway. The wide range of diverse responses suggests that the subjects were not able to identify what might actually be effective for promoting mutual understanding.

It is important to note that the subjects’ responses here demonstrate a willingness to become an active speaker and gain control over the conversation. In other words, they intend to occupy themselves with speaking actively and making themselves understood rather than figuring out ways to understand others. Although it can eventually enhance the probability of achieving mutual understanding, language learners should not oversimplify the complexity of mutual understanding by believing that mutual understanding is achievable simply by switching their role as a listener to a speaker. If the change turns out to be effective for achieving mutual understanding, that is probably because it is relatively easy for the Japanese to hold back *amae* while taking the floor in a conversation.

**Table 8: Plans for Conversation II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speak more actively</th>
<th>Find common interests</th>
<th>Try not to be nervous</th>
<th>Bring in more topic</th>
<th>Show non-und</th>
<th>Have no plan</th>
<th>Focus on one topic</th>
<th>Ask to slow down</th>
<th>Not laugh off</th>
<th>Use gestures</th>
<th>Structure better</th>
<th>Not think about grammar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: US</td>
<td>1 3 2 2 1 0 0 3 1 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: TW</td>
<td>4 1 2 2 1 3 1 0 1 2 1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: GE</td>
<td>4 2 1 0 2 0 2 0 0 0 1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>9 6 5 4 4 3 3 2 2 2 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. **Subjects’ comments on the experiences**

At the end of the questionnaire, many of the subjects voluntarily left positive comments about their participation in the project. Seven (7) wrote that they enjoyed the conversations and found the opportunity precious. Thirteen (13) reported that they got motivated to do more
language learning as a result of the experience. Seven (7) participants stated that it was the first time in their lives to speak English with foreigners. These comments indicate that there are very limited opportunities for English learners in Japan to use English in real-life conversation.

On the other hand, the subjects provided negative comments about their own performances, expressing that they felt sorry for their partners, ashamed, or sad because their English was “no good.” Twelve (12) subjects left comments criticizing themselves (e.g. “My English was far worse than expected.” “I felt frustrated that I could not translate what I wanted to say into English in my head.” “I felt ashamed when I listened to my own conversation because I wonder why I said such bizarre things and gave fake laughs.”) or comments critical of English education in Japan (“Japanese people study English since junior high school but I realized that how useless it is”). Some subjects express appreciation for their partners’ caring attitudes (“My partner was very kind and accommodating”).

**Answers to RQ3**

When they were given a chance to reflect on their English conversations with their international partners, the majority of the Japanese subjects recognized that they had problems in understanding. In particular, subjects who had non-native partners were more able to specify exactly where the problems occurred than those who had native speaker partners. When they were asked how they dealt with the problems, the subjects could list various actions they took to resolve the problems. However, the subjects also showed some recognition of their own amae-based attitudes by reporting that sometimes they left problems unresolved without doing anything to resolve them. When the problems remained unsolved, the subjects were aware that no resolution had taken place. The subjects were also aware that the strategies they tried were
not effective for them to improve understanding, but even with such an awareness, they thought that they had no option other than to repeat the same strategies (e.g. asking to repeat or slow down, letting it pass, and laughing it off) because they did not know what else they could do. This suggests that even though the subjects recognize their problems in understanding and want to use better strategies to resolve them, they find that they have very limited options to improve the situations which they encounter. As a result, over half of the subjects reported that they were not confident about improving their mutual understanding with their partners in their second conversation sessions.

Likewise, the subjects’ plans for the second sessions reveal that the subjects lacked confidence and knowledge about how they could improve mutual understanding in their upcoming conversations. The fact that they provided a wide range of responses suggests that the subjects were not able to identify what is actually effective for promoting mutual understanding. Some of the subjects’ responses showed that they appeared to be more willing to become active speakers, and to seek to gain control over the conversation in order to make themselves understood, but they did not look for new ways to understand their partners better. Their English language classrooms may have failed to provide sufficient resources for the learners to help them learn the importance of using strategies to improve understanding in intercultural communication.

RQ3 allowed us to explore the subjects’ perspectives about their problems in understanding and their ideas for resolving those problems. In the next section, we will look at what the subjects actually did in their second conversation sessions, and the degree to which their plans for improvement actually led to more successful communication.
RQ4: How do reflections about problems in understanding in the first conversation and the development of plans to minimize those problems in the next conversation, affect the Japanese subjects’ further performance? What kinds of changes are observed in their linguistic and strategic means when dealing with problems in understanding?

Since Krashen (1979, 1982) developed the monitor hypothesis, the importance of noticing, attention, and awareness in language learning has been widely discussed in SLA research, particularly in the field of ESL/EFL teacher education. While many of the studies focus on the learners’ awareness of grammar (Ellis, 2002; Schmidt, 1990, 1992, 1995; Truscott, 1998), some relatively recent studies focus on pragmatics (Esami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2011; Kasper, 1997). In order to raise the language learners’ pragmatic awareness, techniques such as translation from L1 to L2 and observation of texts which represent cultural features of the target language community are used (Esami-Rasekh, 2005).

The aim of this section is to examine how the subjects’ performance in actual interaction was affected by the intervention which occurred between the first and second sessions, where the subjects listened to their own conversations in the first session and made plans to increase the mutual understanding between themselves and their partners in the second session. Although the intervention lacks formal instruction (Ellis, 1993, 1997), it makes it possible for the subjects to reflect on their own performance, to detect problems, and to make plans for improvement to better deal with problems in understanding.

Five telling cases will be presented to describe the differences in the subjects’ performance before and after the intervention. Each of the cases will be examined by looking at (1) Problem detection: the segments from the first sessions which the subjects found problematic; (2) Questionnaire: what the subjects think about the problematic segments and what
plans they made for the second sessions; and (3) Second session: the subjects’ performance seen in the second sessions.

11. Providing explanations

Case I: J23 (Group B: Taiwanese partner)

11.1 Problem detection

After listening to the conversation from the first session, J23 pointed out that this Harry Potter segment as problematic. They are talking about watching movies.

#65 Harry Potter
1 T23: So (0.5) what kind of movies are favorite.
2 J23: → Mmm toh (0.8) I like Harry Potters.
3 (1.6)
4 T23: Ha. What?= 
5 J23: → =Harry, (.) Harry Potter.
6 (2.3)
7 J23: → Ha[rry Potter.
8 T23: [([noise))
9 (2.4)
10 T23: Ho- how how do you spell that.
11 (0.5)
12 J23: e.
13 (0.6)
On line 2, J23 provides information in response to the request by T23. Recognizing the pause followed by a signal of non-understanding by T23 (“Ha. What?”), J23 repeats the information (line 5). As this attempt does not elicit any displays of understanding from T23, J23 repeats the same information again (line 7). At this point, repetition, which is the primary strategy for J23 to solve the understanding problem, does not work. Then, T23 suggests other strategy, which is spelling out the trouble source (line 10), and J23 accepts it (line 14). It can be said that J23 gained a strategy to better convey the information to her partner. The spelling helped the participants reach mutual understanding.

11.2 Questionnaire

J23 raised the Harry Potter part as problematic by indicating the specific time when the problem occurred on the audio file. This shows that she listened to the conversation and
answered the questionnaire as instructed. J23 reported that she was able to get her thought understood by spelling out the name and the problem was solved. She also wrote that she was willing to improve the quality of the conversation the next time and she wanted to accomplish that by offering more explanation.

11.3 Second session

In the second session, there is evidence that J23 implement her plans to improve mutual understanding.

#66 Senbei (Japanese rice crackers)

1 T23: What do ta-(.) wha- what is the Japanese (0.3) favorite snack.
2 (0.7)
3 J23: Hm?
4 (1.4)
5 J23: Par[don me?
6 T23: [snack.
7 (0.8)
8 J23: Hmm?
9 (0.8)
10 T23: Uh: (0.5) The Japanese (0.3) favorite snack.
11 (0.8)
12 J23: Snack?
13 (1.8)
14 J23: → Mmmm, S- (.) Do you know (0.8) mmm senbei?
15 (1.0)
T23: Senbra? What’s [that.

J23: [Senbei. (0.4) Mmm.

(1.4)

J23: → Make, m (0.4) from mm (. ) rice.

(2.2)

J23: → Like cookie.

(0.5)

T23: Oh like cookie?

J23: Yes.

(1.0)

J23: [but mm

T23: [U:m

(1.0)

J23: Mmmm

(1.5)

J23: → Little salt.

(1.8)

T23: Mm hm?

J23: → Not sweet.

(1.9)

T23: Not sweet one?

J23: Yes.

(0.8)

T23: It’s salt one?

(0.3)

J23: Salt.

(0.9)

T23: Whooh!
After some negotiations of meaning (Veronis & Gass, 1985), the request for information that T23 made on line 1 and again on line 10 is accepted and J23 provides the information on line 14. The mmm’s and brief pauses in the utterance, as well as the rising intonation indicate J23’s hesitation because it is probable that T23 is unfamiliar with the Japanese name of the specific snack. In fact, it elicits T23’s display of non-understanding (line 16). As occurred in the first session, J23 first tries repetition (line 17), but this time, she starts explaining the ingredient (line 19), the appearance or type of food (line 21), and the taste (lines 31 and 34). J23 implemented her plans to offer more explanation than she did in the first session.

12. Asking for confirmation

Case II: J42 (Group C: German partner)

12.1 Problem detection

J42 points out 8 segments in his first conversation where he had problems in understanding by specifying the time on the audio file when they occurred. Below is one of the segments where J42 states that he had an understanding problem but “gomakashita” or hid it.
#67-1. My town

1  G42:     Well bu- (. ) where I live, my town? (. ) isn’t that big? It’s
2       about (0.5) well, (0.2) about twenty thousand,
3  J42:     Uh huh?= 
5  J42:     Uh huh?
6  G42:     Roundabout.
7  J42:     Ohh?= 
8  G42:     =So
9    (0.8)
10 G42:     And we have forests and lakes so I can
11    (0.7)
12  J42:     Uh huh.
13 G42:     uh do ((inaudible)) some (0.4) woods here, and(.) fields,
14    (0.6)
15  J42:     Uh huh?
16 G42:     ((chuckle))
17    (0.7)
18  J42:     Ahhh?
19 G42:     And the next big down is (. ) uh Hamburg?
20  J42:     Mm hm?

It should be noted that J42 displays neither understanding nor non-understanding, but keeps providing minimal feedback (Vasseur, Broeder, & Roberts,1996) or response tokens (McCarthy, 2003) such as “Uh huh?” and “Ohh?” As discussed in RQ1, this is a strategy not to show non-understanding. It is unclear if G42 noticed a possible understanding of J42. Unlike
NSs who “might become tired or give up on the interaction” (Vasseur, Broeder, & Roberts, 1996, p. 79), the NNS partner, G42, continues providing information without taking any actions to mark the lack of display of understanding until she slightly changes the topic.

#67-2. My town (continued)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>G42: And the next big down is (.). uh Hamburg?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>J42: Mm hm?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>G42: D-(.) do you know Hamburg?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>J42: .hh Ham-=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>G42: =It’s=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>G42: It’s it’s north it’s north Germany?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>J42: Nor[th Germany.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>G42: [And it’s about one hour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>J42: Uh huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>G42: from my(.). city.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>J42: Ohh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>G42: [Yeah.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>J42: [I see.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Followed by G42’s understanding check, J23 repeats the first syllable of the word he understands (line 23), which indicates that he tries to display partial understanding. This is a more explicit strategy than minimal feedback, and following that, J23 provides a series of “Yeah” (line 25) which indicates he arrives at his understanding. On this point, J23 describes that “there
was nothing I could do (about my non-understanding) but I was saved because my partner kept
talking” (my translation).

12.2 Questionnaire

J42 states that he did not understand what the partner said but decided to hide his non-
understanding. As a reason for that, J42 wrote that before they got to that point he had already
made requests for repetition several times and he felt bad to ask again at this point. Note that the
segment starts at 4’30” of the 10-minute conversation.

J42 describes his mixed emotions about hiding his non-understanding but shows a
willingness to improve mutual understanding:

If I do not understand something in what my partner said but she keeps talking, I would
hide my non-understanding again. That is because asking to repeat too many times
disrupts the flow of conversation and that can make my partner unhappy. However, like
in the segments I pointed out, sometimes the conversation did not go any further because
of my fake understanding. We had an awkward pause and I felt uncomfortable. If that
happens again next time, I will ask what she said by saying “sorry?” or “pardon?” I will
also confirm what my partner intends to say by using expressions such as “you mean…”
(my translation)
12.3 Second session

In the second session, J42 implements what he planned to do based on his reflections from the first session. Note that this segment starts at 7’52” towards the end of the 10-minute conversation, and prior to the segment, J23 has asked for repetition several times as his “again” on line 19 indicates.

#68 Native speaker

1 J42: Ye- (0.2) You’re um=
2 G42: =Yeah.
3 J42: mm native speaker of English right?
4 (3.0)
5 G42: I’m ((inaudible: technical difficulties)) nati-, No.
6 J42: [No?
7 G42: [Uh um
8 (2.0)
9 G42: My my father. My father is English?
10 J42: Mm [hm?
11 G42: [and my mother is German so (0.3) u:m I’m half English? so not quite native speaker.
12 (1.0)
13 J42: Mm so y- so. hm?
14 (1.0)
15 J42: s- (0.5) mm?
16 (0.6)
17 G42: Did you ge- (0.4) get it?
18 J42: No, I don’t hear you? again. (0.4) ((chuckle))
19 (0.7)
G42: OK, now? ((chuckle)) Um (0.6) you asked me if I’m a native speaker?

J42: Uh huh?

G42: U:m I am … well my father is English?

J42: Uh huh?

G42: and my mother is German.

J42: Uh huh?

G42: So I’m half English and half German, [so I’m not

J42: [so

G42: Not quite uh native speaker.

J42: -> Mmmm? (0.5) so so: your native language is Germany? (0.5)

German [German?

G42: [Yeah.

J42: Ohhh? (1.0) I see. ((chuckle))

After G42 provides reasons why she does not accept the idea of herself being a native speaker of English (lines 9-12), J23 produces some non-word vocalizations (lines 14 and 16). These responses, together with the pause in between, indicate J23’s non-understanding and that elicits G42’s checking (line 18). J42 responds with an explicit display of non-understanding. G42 takes it as a request to repeat the information, and she provides the same information but this time in smaller chunks. J42 gives minimal feedback after each chunk (lines 24, 27, and 29) and when G42 finishes providing the information, J42 asks for confirmation of his interpretation on what the partner said (lines 34-35). The request is accepted by G42 (line 36) and the
participants achieve mutual understanding. J42 implemented his plan to confirm his understanding of what his partner said.

13. Explicit displays of non-understanding

Case III: J5 (Group A: American Partner)

13.1 Problem detection

As places where he had problems in understanding in the first session, J5 listed 10 segments with specific time information on the audio file, including the example below.

```
#69 Weather
1 A5: How is it out there, though, is it nice? (. ) Nice weather?
2 J5: Oh. (0.6) nu:m yes yes.(.) Today is (0.2) uh but,(.) uh some
3 cloud?
4 (1.9)
5 J5: Mm hm.
6 (1.6)
7 A5: Was it real hot?
8 (0.5)
9 J5: → Mm real high?
10 (0.9)
11 A5: Was it real hot? (. ) Like hot?
12 (1.4)
13 J5: → Hottoh. ((Japanese "Hot"))
14 (3.1)
```
In the beginning of this segment, A5 brings in a topic of weather and as J5’s response (lines 2-3) indicates, he accepts the topic. Then the word “hot” in A5’s utterance on line 7 becomes a trouble source. Following that, J5 tries to show his partial understanding by repeating the words in A5’s previous utterance (line 9) but it turns out to be a display of non-understanding. In response, A5 repeats his question with correcting “hot” and repeating the word (line 11), which indicates his recognition of the trouble source. The long pauses (lines 12 and 14) and J5’s Japanese pronunciation of the word (line 13) indicate that J5 recognizes the trouble source and takes time to form his hypothesis for what he heard in relation to the topic. However, his chuckle (line 15) indicates that the hypothesis forming was not successful. A5 tries to deal with the trouble source again by slightly changing the question into J5’s preference of weather (line
16. J5 still has trouble understanding the word and produces a sound similar to the trouble source (line 18). Treating it as a signal of non-understanding, A5 gives up the word “hot” and brings in a different word related to the topic: “raining” (line 20). However, this word becomes another trouble source for J5. He tries but fails to repeat the word and apologizes (line 21). A5 repeats the word, provides a description (“like water”), and repeats again. J5 tries to repeat A5 but it turns out to be wrong again, which indicates his non-understanding (line 25). After a pause, J5 chuckles (line 27), which is exactly the same as what he did with the first trouble source. A5 takes it as a signal of non-understanding and changes the topic (line 28).

13.2 Questionnaire

J5 expresses deep reflection in the questionnaire response. He lists the strategies he used when he did not understand the partner and that includes hiding the non-understanding, pausing, providing random answers, and laughing out. In particular, he accuses himself of pausing and laughing out. He writes:

Pausing does not help to communicate with the partner and the silence causes awkward moments. Laughing out is rude. I blame myself for doing that when I did not understand. Next time, when I have an understanding problem, I will tell my partner that I don’t understand and I will ask him to speak slowly and repeat. If I can fully understand what my partner says, the conversation would be more fun. (my translation)
13.3  Second session

  J5 implements the plan in the second session. Below is the example where he asks the partner to repeat (lines 11, 22, 31) and speak slowly (lines 27 and 31).

#70  Law school

    A5:  What do you want to be when you grow up.
    J5:  U::h (.). after graduate school? (0.5) uh (.). I want to go::,(.)
            uh (0.9) e::h (0.2) uh mm? (0.2) law- law school. (0.5) Do you
               know law school?
    (1.1)
    A5:  Law school?
    J5:  Yeah, I want to be a lawyer (0.2) in the future.
    (1.7)
    A5:  Oh, that's good. What la-(.). law school do you wanna go to.
    (1.4)
    J5: \rightarrow Mm (0.2) What(.). what do you say.
    (1.6)
    A5:  What law school, do you wanna go to.=
    J5:  =Uh I want to go to (2.0) uh (0.7) Waseda u- (.). Waseda Law
            School?
    (1.6)
    A5:  What's it called?
    (2.2)
    A5:  Oh OK, where's tha- at
    (1.1)
    J5: \rightarrow Mm hm? (0.7) Again please?
A5: Where is it at
(0.8)

J5: Where is it in?
(2.3)

J5: → Uh, please say slowly. Sorry.
(2.7)

A5: Huh?
(1.1)

J5: → <Please> say again, (0.3) slowly.
(1.6)

A5: Where is the law school at.

J5: Ah, here here.
(1.2)

J5: I’m [in Waseda University so

A5: [Oh

J5: Waseda Law School is here.

There are two trouble sources for the participants to deal with in this segment. For the first trouble source (“What law school do you want to go?”), A5 provides repetitions in response to J5’s request (line 13) and that helps J5 reach understanding (lines 14-15). For the second trouble source (“Where is it at?”), A5 not only repeats but also slightly changes the utterance by specifying the subject of the question instead of using a pronoun so that makes it easier for J5 to understand (line 33). By using strategies such as asking for repetition and slowing down, J5 was able to turn his non-understanding into understanding and successfully provided information as requested by his partner.
14. Making himself/herself understood by partner

Case IV: J10 (Group A: American Partner)

14.1 Problem detection

Some of the subjects made plans to make themselves understood by their partners rather than developing strategies for understanding them better. As an example, J10’s performance is analyzed here. She listed four segments as places she had trouble understanding her partner including the example below, which indeed includes problems as such, but by the time she makes a plan for improvement, the subject’s focus seems to have shifted from her understanding to pronunciation:

#71 Major (1)

1 A10: What are you studying in school? You go to college, right? (0.4)
2 (J10: Eh (.).) I'm study law,
3 (1.4)
4 J10: law u::m
5 (1.2)
6 J10: Ohh.
7 (1.1)
8 (J10: eh in (.).) this university?
9 (2.3)
10 A10: What do you s- (.). what are the topics.
11 (1.0)
12 J10: Eh=
13 A10: =Your topics (0.6) major.
J10: Teacher?
A10: No. Major. (. ) Like (. ) what [you ((inaudible))]
J10: [Major. Ah ah.]
J10: Yes yes. (0.3) u:m (0.4) I:: (. ) study in (0.2) lal-(.) law-oo
(0.9)
J10: U::m
(1.5)
J10: Ohhh (0.8) ((hiss))
(1.5)
J10: Law a::nd (0.6) .hh Japanese, (0.6) Hmmm? ((chuckle))(0.8)
Roll system.
(1.4)
J10: OK? ((chuckle))
(2.2)
A10: OK.
(2.0)
A10: That's cool. m is there a lot of people that go to your
university?

On line 3, J10 provides correct information as requested by A10. It is an appropriate response in the question-answer sequence, but the pauses that follow and lack of response by her partner elicits J10 to repeat the information followed by a prolonged “um” which indicates her hesitation or uncertainty about the correctness or appropriateness of her response. After that, by going through some repairs, J10 displays a very clear understanding of what is requested (line
Since her understanding problem was resolved, J10 provides several variations of the word “law” (lines 20 and 26-27), along with adding some explanation (“Japanese law system” on lines 26-27) and hesitation strategies such as hissing (line 24) and chuckling (lines 26 and 29). This indicates that J10 recognizes that she has trouble being understood when she is trying to display her understanding, and attributes the source of the problem to her pronunciation of the word “law.”

14.2 Questionnaire

In this particular segment, J10 wrote that she pronounced the word several times but her partner did not understand and she thought her pronunciation was bad. When asked what she would do next time, she answered that she was not sure about speaking with good pronunciation and she would try spelling out the trouble source.

14.3 Second session

In the second session, J10 implements her plan and the evidence that she uses the spelling strategy is found in two different segments and the attempts in both cases prompt the partner’s understanding. The first example appears at the beginning of the conversation, right after the participants decided to talk about their future plans. J10 spells out the trouble source of their first session, the word “law” (lines 5-6).
The second example appears about three minutes later, when they start exchanging information about their social concerns. When she finds that she has trouble making herself understood, J10 takes up the spelling strategy again.
And in the (0.7) Japanese elementary school, and (0.2) ha-
. . . junior high school, (0.3) a::n (0.2) bullying, is (0.4) the serios(“serious”) problem.
(1.4)
A10: Is the WHAT?
(0.5)
J10: E::to:: (0.5) mmm (1.1) Eh (. ) the (0.2) eh (. ) a students
(0.3) heart (0.3) son (. ) others.
(2.0)
J10: And (0.5)[mm
A10: [Countries?
(0.8)
J10: Yes?
(0.9)
A10: U- (. ) students from other countries? Is that what you were
saying?
(0.7)
J10: Eh (. ) In (. ) Japanese (0.7) country?
(1.2)
A10: Right.
(1.2)
J10: U::m
(1.6)
J10: Hmm.
(2.4)
J10: ➔ E (0.6) Okay I (. ) sell (. ) your (0.5) spell?
(1.3)
J10: [um
A10: [What’s that?
When A10 displays non-understanding and requests clarification (line 9), J10 accepts the
request and first tries to explain (lines 11-12). However, the attempt is not successful and A10
shows confusion and asks for another clarification with a candidate answer (lines 15 and 19-20).
After pauses and short tokens, J10 explicitly announces her planned strategy (lines 30 and 35),
which once again confuses A10 (line 33). J10 did not respond to the confusion but spells out
what she thinks the trouble source (line 37). Clearly, J10 implements what she planned and the
strategy helped her convey what she is trying to say, but this change actually increased the
degree of amae from Minor (cf. 2.1: Accidental displays of non-understanding) to Major (4.2:
Skipping displays of understanding or “let me go ahead”). J10’s actions in the second session
can be more harmful for interpersonal relationships than in the first session.

While she used spelling out as a new strategy as she planned to make herself understood in
the second session, J10 did not show any significant differences in behavior to improve her
understanding as shown in the next example.
15. Lack of significant change

Case V: J10 (Group A: American Partner)

15.1 Problem detection

J10 listed four segments as places where she did not understand what her partner said.

Below is one of the segments:

#74 Vacation

1 A10: Are you uh .. are you in school still?
2 (0.7)
3 J10: Stel still?
4 (0.5)
5 A10: Are you still s- (.) like in the semester or whatever?
6 (0.6)
7 J10: U:m (0.3) I'm (0.5) u::h (0.8) semestore (0.9) oh?
8 (1.7)
9 J10: Mmm. (0.8) My (0.2) grades?
10 (1.2)
11 A10: No I mean, do you have like a vacation or a time off from
12 school?
13 (1.6)
14 J10: Time?
15 (1.2)
16 A10: Like I (. ) like, (. ) do you have a period when you don't have
17 to go to school any more? Like a vacation?
18 (1.1)
19 J10: vek (.) ohhh. ((chuckle))
A10: Like, when y- (.) you know (.) you know what a va-cation is?

J10: Eh (.) -cation? Oh sorry,

A10: You know (.) your school doesn't do that?

J10: School?

A10: [Yo- (.) like, (0.3) you uh at my school? uh university? SUNY Albany that I go to? (0.4) uh like every (0.6) during the summer time like right now. I don't have to go to school for two months.

J10: Hm (.) O:::=

A10: =Th- (.) That's called a vacation for me.

J10: M(h)m sorry. ((chuckle))

A10: (It’s OK.) I understand.
15.2 Questionnaire

While she was able to detect the problems and analyze her own performance in the troubled segments, J10 wrote that she would not be able to improve the situations even if the same problems occur in the second session. She expresses her frustration.

One time I let it pass and the problem remained unsolved. The other time I asked my partner to speak more slowly, but I still could not understand him. Eventually, all I could do was to apologize. I am nervous when I speak with foreigners and I will be the same next time. I have no confidence. (Even if the same thing happens next time,) I would do the same because I cannot think of anything else. Also, if I endlessly ask my partner to repeat, the conversation won’t go and it will be mentally hard for me. (my translation)

15.3 Second session

Even given a chance to reflect on her own performance in the first session, J10 was not able to develop any solution to improve the ways in which she deals with her problems in understanding. Below is an excerpt from her second session with A10. The sequence continues without meaningful exchange of information and the communication ended up to be inefficient.

#75 What else

1 A10: Have you talked about anything else in your classes? (.) like that?
2
3 (0.7)
4 J10: Um another topics?
A10: Yeah, like another like (0.4) uh you talked about anything besides bullying like that?

J10: Eh. (0.2) Change the topics? *Hm*

A10: No. I, (. ) in (0.3) you know, in your English class you are talking about bullying?

J10: =Yes?

A10: Are you talking about anything else?

J10: Aoh. Ye:s, um (1.9) Hm=

A10: =That’s fully related to bullying? (. ) Is that topic?

J10: Wo?

A10: No. Y-. you know how you mentioned that you were talking about bullying in your English class?

J10: Yes.

A10: Is there (0.3) w- what else are you talking about in your English class.

J10: Uh.(1.0) E. (1.3) Oh. So- sorry. en...

J10: E:ttot ((chuckle))
A10: What else did you learn in your English class. Or you- (. ) the
class that you are talking about bullying in.

J10: Uh. (0.5) I (0.7) wha- u:m (0.4) what I learned. about? ah in
the. English class?

A10: Yeah.

J10: U::m.

J10: Eh (0.6) in Japa:n, (0.5) eh (1.0) bullying i:s (0.8) so
serious("serious") and in (0.3) especially in (.)
elementary, (. ) school,

J10: And, (0.6) u:::m.

J10: Hmmm. (0.5) We::: (1.0) ((chuckle)) (1.0) Hmm.

J10: Mmm. ((hiss)) to: (1.0) to::: (0.4) mm so- to solve the
problem. i:s (0.6) eh (0.4) very difficult a:nd, we have to
(0.5) mm (1.2) we have to think, (0.7) about that. A:nd (0.7)
I (. ) don’t, (0.2) I didn’t, (0.3) eh find, the: (0.7) best
(0.8) solution?

A10: Yeah, well (. ) we talked some of that same stuff
The fact is that J10 is actually able to employ a variety of strategies to signal problems in understanding. For example, in the first conversation (#74), she uses strategies including displays of non-understanding by producing wrong repeats (lines 6, 19: cf. 4.1.4), partial understanding by repeating words from the previous utterances (lines 3, 14, 27: cf. 4.2.1) and by providing a random answer (line 9: cf. 4.2.2). She basically repeats the same strategies in the second conversations (#75), without appropriately respond to the request by her partner (“what else” on lines 15 and 28-29), and both of the segments end up not achieving mutual understanding. This example may demonstrate the limitation of the learner’s self-assessment, probably because she has received no formal instruction or advice about ways to improve mutual understanding from more experienced speakers of English such as instructors in the language classrooms, and so has little to guide her.

**Answers to RQ4**

The intervention of listening to their own conversation and making plans for improvement did affect some of the subjects’ performance. The experience of responding to the questionnaire led some of the subjects to pay attention to the problems in understanding that had developed in the conversations they participated in, led them to make plans to reduce the problems, and led them to actually implement their plans in the next session. In some cases, the effect of the intervention in helping subjects improve their communication strategies was remarkable. It helped these subjects to identify where they had had problems, what had gone wrong, and to develop new strategies for improving understanding, such as asking for confirmation, and making more explicit displays of non-understanding. It is very interesting that, even without mentioning the concept of *amae*, these actions eventually encouraged the subjects
to try more effective strategies to decrease the degrees to which they expressed *amae*. As a result, the change in these strategies led to more effective help being offered by their partners, and the participants could increase the potential for mutual understanding in their conversations. It is important to note, however, that not all of the participants were able to pinpoint the problems in their conversations or think of solutions themselves (see RQ3). In addition, some of the subjects’ plans for improvement did not result in significant change or result in achieving mutual understanding. This indicates the limitations of any intervention that is designed to provoke self-learning in situations where the cultural presupposition of *amae* is persistent. For some of the Japanese subjects the intervention was not effective in improving communicative performance. The reasons for this may be that the subjects had not received any instruction about how to improve their performance, and because the time between the first and the second session was only 7 days. To make the reflection activity more effective, all learners would need to be instructed how to detect communicative problems, would need to be taught how to use effective strategies for solving those problems, including what works or not, and would need to be provided with opportunities to practice implementing these solutions.
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions and Implications for English Language Education

1. Conclusions

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects that occur when Japanese English language learners exercise their predisposition to use strategies that fit with the attitudes of *amae* when they are exposed to intercultural communication. In this study, I presented detailed descriptions about how the attitude of *amae* shapes the performance of Japanese learners of English when they use the target language to talk with NSs and NNSs. A particular focus of the study is the ways in which the Japanese learners exhibit *amae* in their L2 interactions and the ways that affect the interactions where the Japanese deal with problems in understanding using English. To answer RQ1, I exemplified the various kinds of strategies which Japanese subjects use to display or not to display their (non-) understanding. The analysis revealed that, when they have difficulty understanding their partners, the Japanese subjects deal with the problems in various ways: They may explicitly display the problem; signal it by making requests for help; accidentally signal it in trying to display understanding; or do not signal it using strategies, such as “let it pass” or “let me go ahead.” These findings suggest that *amae* is, not always but at least sometimes, observed in interactions of today’s young Japanese. Some of the displays or lack of displays of understanding and non-understanding involve the Japanese predisposition of *amae*, and they are difficult to interpret for non-Japanese partners. On one hand, the subjects used those linguistic and strategic means to successfully achieve mutual understanding, which confirms their communicative ability in their L2. In this case, the Japanese subjects’ basic interactional competence (Kecskes et al., 2018) contributes to the success. On the other hand, the subjects’ performance can cause confusion and communicative breakdown because they use indirect ways of signaling trouble in understanding or even act as if they understand when they
do not. This is possibly due to the heavy reliance on their interactional experience in L1, lack of experience in intercultural communication, inadequacy of linguistic and communicative competence in L2.

With RQ2, I examined the reactions of the study’s international partners, who are distant from Japan physically, culturally, and linguistically, to the Japanese subjects’ *amae*-based attitudes. I found that the partners handle the situations where they encounter *amae* differently, according to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. American NS participants use various combinations of strategies to help the Japanese achieve understanding. When this help does not work, they stop there and do not try any further. By contrast, NNS participants offer help by using relatively simple strategies. When this help does not work, Taiwanese NNS participants continue to try to help through repetition, while German NNS participants explicitly check the Japanese subjects’ understanding. The findings show differences, not only between NS and NNS partner groups, but also between the two NNS groups. Based on an analysis that focused on the international partners’ performance, I argue that there is much room for the Japanese learners of English to improve the ways in which they use the target language and to make their conversation practice more effective and efficient.

As a study in language education, this study also examined if an awareness-raising intervention changes the Japanese subjects’ communicative behavior in any way. Findings from RQ3 show that when they are given an opportunity for reflection and planning, some subjects are able to properly evaluate their own performance, identify problems, and make plans to improve the quality of their conversations. Most of the subjects indicated that they felt that they should have more control of their conversations. This indicates that they are willing to abandon their *amae*-based attitudes if that is beneficial for better communication in English. The results of the
study’s questionnaire responses also showed that some of the subjects were not able to identify problems and make improvement plans.

With RQ4, I presented cases to show the evidence of the change in the subjects’ performance by comparing their first and second conversation sessions. Some subjects implemented their plans and actually improved in the second conversations. Others implemented their plans, but this did not produce significant change or impact to help them achieve mutual understanding. The results indicate the limitations of short-term, self-learning kinds of intervention, but also show that interventions of this kind can be beneficial. I will discuss the educational implications of what was revealed by the study in the next section.

2. **Implications for English Language Education**

   Although it has been a while since English language education in Japan started stressing the importance of communication skills and started incorporating communicative activities in classroom instructions, little is known about how the learners use English in actual interaction and what exactly Japanese educators mean by “communicative competence.” Based on the findings of the present study, I see three implications for English education in Japan.

   First, language learners should be taught about the influence of their background cultures over their use of target languages. In the case of *amae*, it is highly probable that Japanese learners and educators are unlikely to think about the *amae*-based attitude, or even be aware of its presence when they are communicating because to *amaeru* and to be *amaeru*-ed is pervasive in the everyday life, is taken for granted, and is even positively accepted by the Japanese people. They should be given an opportunity to learn about the consequences of exercising *amae* too much in intercultural communication. If the goal of using English is to establish a personal
relationship with non-Japanese, the learners should know that high degrees of *amae* can have a negative impact. This study’s findings should also be beneficial for those who converse with Japanese learners of English, as an awareness of *amae* can provide helpful information about the Japanese communication style in English, and about the ways in which the expression of *amae* can cause difficulties in communication. Although the present study examined only instances of *amae* among Japanese speakers of English, similar phenomena might be found in communication involving other L2 learners with different cultural presuppositions. The most effective way to identify when *amae* is occurring is to set up interactions between Japanese learners and people who are unfamiliar with the Japanese learners’ background culture, regardless of whether the interlocutors are native or non-native speakers of the target language.

Second, it is important to incorporate awareness-raising activities into language learning so the learners are given an opportunity to understand that what they take for granted can affect their communication in a foreign language. Although it is ultimately the choice of individuals how they perform, learners need to know how to effectively use the words and phrases that they have learned in the foreign language classroom in actual interaction with someone who does not necessarily know about the learners’ background. For example, the learners should be encouraged to display their (non-) understanding in ways that are considered normal or natural in the target language community. In the case of Japanese learners expressing their (non-) understanding in English, as the findings of the present study suggest, they would need to practice claiming and demonstrating their understanding, identifying the trouble source, and effectively requesting help from their interlocutors so they can convert their non-understanding to understanding if they wish. In the larger context of English language education, merely shifting classes from being teacher-centered to learner-centered is not enough to increase
interactions which improve understanding, because in either situation learners can remain passive and maintain their *amae*-based attitudes in their communicative activities. In the classroom, teachers should keep encouraging learners to express themselves and raise awareness about intersubjectivity in conversation, so the learners realize that they need to actively choose to contribute to conversations, and that their contributions can enhance mutual understanding. In this light, the role of listener/recipient of the talk (Gardner, 2001) should be more recognized and emphasized in English education. Bearing in mind that the listener is as essential as the speaker in a conversation, the importance of recipient skills should be emphasized in communicative language instruction. In the case of Japanese learners, for example, they should be taught that varying tokens are deeply linked with the display of interest (Schegloff, 1982, pp. 85-86). They may need to avoid consecutive use of certain tokens, such as “Mm hmm,” which may hint a user’s disinterest despite their actual intention of showing interest.

Finally, reflection activities should be incorporated into conversation practices. With technology such as skype and recording devices or applications, learners can easily increase their opportunities to practice speaking English, both inside and outside of the classroom. Through the experiences of using English to interact with non-Japanese living abroad with appropriate instruction, the learners are expected to raise their awareness about their own culturally based communication styles, learn how to balance between “nativeness” and “non-nativeness,” and decide by themselves how much “Japaneseness” they want to bring into intercultural communication. Language teachers and learners will benefit from studies of CA for SLA in this respect since research in this field provides a rich resource of NS and NNS models to review which have been extracted from actual conversations.

In order to survive the uncertain condition of the English education system in Japan,
Japanese learners of English must take responsibility for navigating their own learning. Educators must respect those learners’ decisions. The goal of language education should not be to make the learners approximate certain models, such as a particular kind of native speaker’s way of speaking, but to help them become successful communicators in intercultural communication.
References


Learning (pp. 1-63). Honolulu: University of Hawai`i, National Foreign Language Resource Center.


Svennevig, J. (2004). Other-repetition as display of hearing, understanding and emotional stance. Discourse Studies, 6(4), 489-516.


Appendices

Appendix A: Flyer for participant recruitment, Japanese

Appendix B: Flyer for participant recruitment, English

Appendix C: Questionnaire, Japanese

Appendix D: Questionnaire, English
異文化コミュニケーション・ビデオ会話

参加者募集のお知らせ

XXX 大学のみなさま

はじめまして。

私はニューヨーク州立大学大学院で英語教育について研究しております神谷恵美子と申します。今回、xxx 先生のご協力により、XXX 大学にてビデオ会話（テレビ電話）を使った英会話プロジェクトを行うことになりました。ぜひご協力いただきますようお願いいたします。

ご協力いただく内容は以下のとおりです。

- 外国の大学生と英語で、スカイプを使ったビデオ会話を 2 回していただきます（会話は各 10 分）。
- 会話は 2013 年 5 月の第 3 週と第 4 週ごろに行う予定です。
- 収録はキャンパス内にて行います。
- 1 回目の会話の後で、簡単なアンケートへのご記入をお願いします。アンケートは最長 30 分ほどで書き終わります。

参加条件
以下の3点すべてを満たす方を対象者とさせていただきます。

1. 日本語を母語とすること。
2. 英語を、主に日本の教育機関で外国語として学習していること。
3. 英語圏での生活経験が1年以下であること。

参加者は、外国人との会話を体験することに加え、英会話を伸ばすためのヒントとなる経験をしていただくことができます。

プライバシーについて

・会話は録画されますが、撮影したビデオは研究以外の目的では一切使用しません。
・参加者の名前はすべて匿名で扱われます。あなたの顔や名前、その他個人情報が公表されることは一切ありません。
・ご希望であれば、ニックネームや仮名で参加することもできます。

ご参加いただける方は同意書に必要事項をご記入のうえ、xxx先生に提出してください。具体的な日程の調整などについてこちらからメールでご連絡いたします。

皆さんのご参加をお待ちしています。よろしくお願いいたします。
Appendix B: Flyer for participant recruitment, English.

Intercultural Communication and Conversational English

Project Volunteer Recruitment

Dear Students,

My name is Emiko Kamiya and I am a graduate student in Educational Theory and Practice, State University of New York, University at Albany. With Professor xxx’s cooperation, I will conduct a conversational English project using video calls with you, students of CLASS#. If you speak English as your first language and are interested in talking with someone from other cultures online, please consider participating in this project.

Outline of the Project

- You will be asked to have two Skype video calls in English (10 minutes each) with a university student in Japan.
- You will have the two conversation sessions within two weeks, sometime in the third
and fourth weeks of May 2013.

- You can participate in the conversation sessions from school, home, or anywhere at your convenience.
- You will get an extra credit for the participation.

About Your Privacy

- The conversations will be video-taped. The videos will not be used for purposes other than this project.
- Your name will be kept anonymous. Your face and name will never be disclosed in public.
- You may use a nickname or pseudonym if you wish.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at EMAIL so we can start discussing your availability in detail.

I look forward to your participation. Thank you very much!
Appendix C: Questionnaire, Japanese

アンケート

今日の会話についてご感想をお聞かせください。名前の記入は不要です。回答はすべて匿名で集計されます。

今日の会話を聞いて以下の質問にお答えください。

Part1

1-1. 今日の会話中に、相手の言っていることが理解できない箇所はありましたか。もしければ Part 2 へ進んでください。もしだければ、それはどこか、「2’ 30”で(相手が)”XXXXX”と言ったところ」のように具体的に挙げてください(いくつでも)。

1-2. 相手の言っていることが理解できなかったとき、あなたはどう対応しましたか。その対応によって問題は解決されましたか。

1-3. もし、今後の会話中に 1-1 に挙げたことと同じことがまた起きたら、今回と同じように対応しますか。違う対応をしますか。なぜそうするか、理由を説明してください。
1-4. もし違う対応をするなら、どんなことをしますか。何を言ったり、したりするか、できるだけ具体的に例を挙げて書いてください。

Part2

2-1. 今日の会話中に、相手が、あなたの言っていることが理解できていない箇所はありましたか。もしなければ Part 3 へ進んでください。もしあれば、それはどこか、「2’30”で（私が）“XXXXX”と言ったところ」のように具体的に挙げてください（いくつでも）。

2-2. 相手が、あなたの言っていることが理解できていないようだったとき、あなたはどう対応しましたか。その対応によって問題は解決されませんでしたか。

2-3. もし、今後の会話中に 2-1 に挙げたことと同じことがまた起きたら、今回同じように対応しますか。違う対応をしますか。なぜそうするか、理由を説明してください。

2-4. もし違う対応をするなら、どんなことをしますか。何を言ったり、したりするか、できるだけ具体的に例を挙げて書いてください。
Part3

約1週間後に、同じ相手ともう一度会話をしていただきます。お互いの理解について、今回よりうまく対処することはできると思いますか。そう思う場合は、次の会話でどんなことをするつもりか、考えを書いてください。

Part4

その他、どんなことでもご自由にお書きください。

アンケートは以上です。ご協力ありがとうございました。

Thank you very much for your time!
Appendix D: Questionnaire, English

QUESTIONNAIRE (English Translation)

I would like to know how you felt about today’s conversation. Please help me by answering the following questions. Do not give your name. Results and all individual comments will be kept anonymous.

Please listen to today’s conversation and answer the questions.

Part 1

1-1. Were there places where you did not understand your partner? If no, stop here and go to Part 2. If yes, please list each one. e.g. (My partner said) “XXXXX” at 2’30”

(Blank space for answer)

1-2. How did you deal with the problem? And was it worked out?

(Blank space for answer)

1-3. In the future if you encounter any of the problems in understanding you identified in 1-1, do you think you would handle them the same way or differently? Why? Explain your answer.

(Blank space for answer)
1-4. If you would handle any of them differently, what would you do? Please be specific and give concrete examples of what you might say and do.
(Blank space for answer)

Part 2

2-1. Were there places where your partner did not understand you? If no, stop here and go to Part 3. If yes, please list each one. e.g. (I said) “XXXXX” at 2’30”
(Blank space for answer)

2-2. How did you deal with the problem? And was it worked out?
(Blank space for answer)

2-3. In the future if you encounter any of the problems in understanding you identified in 2-1, do you think you would handle them the same way or differently? Why? Explain your answer.
(Blank space for answer)

2-4. If you would handle any of them differently, what would you do? Please be specific and give concrete examples of what you might say and do.
(Blank space for answer)

**Part 3**

You will have another conversation with the same partner in a week or so. Do you think you can improve your performance in dealing with understanding problem? If yes, please describe your plans for what to do in the next session.

(Blank space for answer)

**Part 4**

Please feel free to make additional comments.

(Blank space for answer)

Thank you very much for your time!