

The Backchannel Norms of Native English Speakers: A Target for Japanese L2 English Learners

Pino Cutrone

This article presents a general account of the backchannel tendencies of native English speakers for the purpose of assisting Japanese L2 English learners. The dimensions of backchannel behaviour which are described include the following: frequency, variability, discourse contexts favouring backchannels, and form and function. Some of the potential issues that Japanese L2 English learners may experience in acquiring these skills are explored. This general description of native English speakers' backchannel behaviour appears to be only one of the pieces in an emerging framework for analysing the efficacy of backchannel behaviour across cultures. It is suggested that future efficacy models should also involve measuring other interrelated aspects of backchannel behaviour such as learners' intercultural communicative competence, willingness to communicate, and development of conversational micro-skills and repair strategies.

1. Introduction

This article attempts to provide a general description of the phenomena involved in backchannel behaviour. In this article, backchannels shall be defined broadly as the responses and/or reactions that a listener gives to the primary speaker when the primary speaker is speaking (Yngve 1970). For a more in-depth account of some of the issues involved in identifying backchannels in conversations, White (1989), Maynard (1997) and Cutrone (2005) provide more comprehensive definitions. These studies have shown that Japanese EFL speakers' backchannelling behaviour differs to that of native English speakers in many respects, and these differences sometimes lead to miscommunication, negative perceptions and stereotyping. Considering the importance of backchannels in intercultural conversations, and the fact that they are largely neglected in EFL pedagogy in Japan (Okushi 1990; Capper 2000), it would seem that the next logical step in the research is to determine how this elusive aspect of sociolinguistic competence can be better acquired by Japanese EFL learners.

The first step in this pursuit is to establish some criteria for how EFL learners' backchannel behaviour can be evaluated in future studies as well as the classroom. In attempting to establish a baseline measurement, this article seeks to construct a broad description of some of the backchannel tendencies exhibited by native speakers of English. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the general description that follows is simply a starting point for EFL instructors, and is not meant in any way to prescribe backchannel employment to any set of absolute terms or measurements. Clearly, it is understood that there can exist a great deal of individual variation in backchannel behavior in any given group or speech community. Nonetheless, for instructional purposes, a thorough and precise description is necessary. For this purpose, American English is the model used in this paper. This is in no way intended to promote American hegemony and/or to discount the importance of learning other varieties of English for use in the international community. American English was chosen simply because there is a substantial amount of literature describing backchannel behaviour in American English that does not exist for other varieties of English.

To date, no researcher has been able to provide a coherent and comprehensive description regarding the backchannel practices of native English speakers which can be applied to the

language classroom. Ward (2003) perhaps comes the closest in his attempt to give meanings to individual sounds based on phonetic cues in American English. Other researchers have focused their attention on one or a few of the non-lexical items that comprise backchannels such as *Mm* (Gardner 1997), *Okay* (Beach 1993), *Okay* and *Uh-huh* (Hockey 1993), *Yeah* and *Mm-hm* (Jefferson 1984), and *Uh* and *Um* (Brennan & Schober 2001; Fox Tree 2002). While these approaches are undoubtedly helpful in attempting to piece together a description of backchannels, their focus seems too narrow for instructional purposes, at least initially. It is the author's opinion that a macro approach towards backchannel behaviour is best suited for classroom integration at the start. To this end, it is important that language teachers incorporating backchannel instruction into their lessons consider the backchannel tendencies of the learners in their native tongue.

Finally, the descriptions and target goals of backchannel behaviour which follows are specific to intercultural dyadic conversations involving Japanese L2 English speakers and native English speakers. While this context provides us with a starting point for analysis, it is important to keep in mind that backchannel behaviour is not limited to such contexts, and larger group dynamics and other external variables can certainly influence behaviours. Further, the design and methods of any study or test to assess backchannel behaviour can vary and will be highly dependent on the specific goals of the researcher(s) and/or instructor(s).

2. Overall frequency

According to several researchers, such as White (1989) and Maynard (1997), Japanese English speakers employ backchannels considerably more than American native English speakers. Thus, if formal instruction does indeed prove to have a facilitating effect, it will presumably cause the Japanese EFL learners to send backchannels less frequently. A target pace for sending backchannels according to the American model has been shown to be approximately every 30-40 words. This is based on the results of the following studies. In intracultural dyadic conversations involving American native English speakers, White (1989) found that the participants sent backchannels every 37 words, and Maynard (1997) found that the participants provide a similar response every 19.25 seconds. While it is useful to have a target, it is highly unlikely that participants in intercultural conversations will approach such a high number of words between backchannels. The reason for this is that native speakers have been shown to accommodate or adjust their conversational behaviour to facilitate communication with the non-native speakers (White 1989). To this end, it seems logical for the native speakers to give the non native speakers constant feedback, and perhaps more than they would do so in conversing with another native speaker.

3. Variability

Research has shown that Japanese EFL speakers tend to use a smaller variety of backchannels than native English speakers, and this negatively affects their cross-cultural interlocutors' perceptions of them (Cutrone 2005). Thus, it stands to reason that JEFL learners would benefit from trying to use a more diverse repertoire of backchannels in their intercultural encounters in English. While the goal of employing more context-specific backchannels is generally understood, setting a concrete numerical target is not feasible here as this is a difficult area to quantify and measure in isolation. This is due to the fact that the backchannel form a listener utters is highly dependent on the context of the situation, and more specifically to the function that the non-primary speaker desires to convey. Thus, instruction regarding the functional use of American English backchannels will go a long

way towards increasing the variability that Japanese EFL learners include in the backchannels they use. As suggested by McCarthy (2003), it would be socially advantageous to include more of the content words that make up backchannel forms as these tend to have a positive influence on attitudes and perceptions. For instance, people who respond with lexical items such as *How true* or *I agree* rather than paralinguistic ejaculations such as *Mm* or *Umm* to indicate agreement, may be seen in a more positive light by the primary speaker as they would appear to be putting a greater effort into the conversation.

4. Discourse contexts favouring backchannels

Maynard (1997) and White (1989) have identified grammatical completion points and pauses (especially occurring simultaneously) as primary discourse contexts favouring backchannels in American English. This is also an area in which it is difficult to measure, compare and set a numerical target for several reasons. First, several other discourse contexts including self-adaptors and gesticulation (Duncan and Fiske 1977), gaze (Kendon 1977) and prosodic features (Ward & Tsukahara 2000) have also been suggested in the research. Hence, backchannels that are sent in discourse contexts other than the primary ones mentioned above are not necessarily considered incorrect and are largely dependent on the context of the conversation and the function that the non-primary speaker desires to convey. Nonetheless, as Japanese EFL speakers' backchannels have been shown to occur much more frequently and their discourse contexts tend to vary considerably, it is likely that many of the backchannels they send, even without any training, will occur at the discourse contexts that are prevalent in American English.

5. Backchannels creating simultaneous talk

One of the aspects of backchannel behavior that training may be shown to influence is the issue involving simultaneous talk. Maynard (1997) and Hayashi (1988) have demonstrated in their studies that Japanese tend to frequently send backchannels that co-occur with the primary speaker's speech creating simultaneous talk, while Americans do not. In quantifiable terms, the results in Hayashi's (1988) intracultural analysis show that the Japanese participants talked simultaneously more than twice as frequently as the Americans, every 72.4 seconds as compared to every 182.0 seconds.

Various researchers, such as Lebra (1976) and Mizutani (1982), have hypothesised that these frequent interjections may sometimes be taken as a sign of the listener's impatience and demand for a quick completion of the statement. While simultaneous talk only occurring every 182 seconds seems an ambitious goal in measuring intercultural dyadic conversations, it does help provide a general idea and initial target for this area of backchannel behaviour. Another way to measure improvement in this area is to use ratios comparing cultural groups. Thus, changes in the Japanese L2 English speakers' rate of simultaneous talk from a ratio of more than 2:1 to a ratio closer to 1:1 would be a positive development.

6. Form and function

Many of the features of backchannel behaviour outlined above are highly dependent on the speakers' personalities and the functions that they desire their backchannel utterances to convey. It is the author's belief that learning about the functions of backchannels of the target group, along with possible forms that correspond to each function, is the aspect of backchannel behaviour that will likely have the greatest impact towards helping Japanese

EFL learners improve in this area. Success in this area will be extremely difficult to measure however, as no previous standard exists in the literature and, as Maynard (1997) has noted, the overlap between forms and functions is considerable. Further, the function that any given backchannel serves is highly dependent on the context of the conversation, and the context of a conversation will vary in any given conversation.

Several researchers have contributed to our understanding of backchannel functions. Fries (1952), Yngve (1970) and Orestrom (1983) believe backchannels are a means for the non-primary speaker to signal to the primary speaker that s/he understands and agrees, and thus have a supportive function. From a different perspective, Erickson (1979) and Schegloff (1982) marked a critical point in the study of non-primary turns by looking at the interactional functions and contextual cues that affect conversation. In his analysis of interracial interviews, Erickson (1979) identified moments in which listeners are obliged to show more active listening responses than at other times while the speaker is speaking as Listener Response-Relevant Moments (LRRMs). Similarly, Schegloff (1982) argued that turns in the turn-taking system should be analyzed in terms of their interactive functions and that backchannels serve as continuers. That is, they serve to pass an opportunity to produce a full turn, and thus have a regulative function.

The interactive function of backchannels advanced by Erickson (1979) and Schegloff (1982) has prompted further developments in this area. Jefferson (1984), using the term acknowledgment tokens, suggested that functional and sequential distinctions might exist between listener responses. This theme was followed by Goodwin (1986), as he distinguished among the several types of non-primary responses by proposing an important interactional distinction between assessments and continuers. According to Goodwin (1986), assessments such as *Wow* or *Great* serve to evaluate the primary speaker's contribution, whereas continuers such as *Uhuh* and *Mmm* serve to signal to the primary speaker that s/he should continue talking.

While there clearly exists some variation in how researchers choose to identify their categories regarding the functions of backchannels, this paper follows Maynard's (1997) list of six functions as follows: (1) continuer, (2) understanding, (3) support and empathy, (4) agreement, (5) emotive, and (6) minor additions. Brief descriptions, examples from various sources such as Cutrone (2005) and Maynard (1986, 1997) to demonstrate these functions, and specific forms for each function are provided below. Regarding the latter, it is necessary to point out that the list of forms corresponding to a specific function is not meant to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. Unquestionably, these language functions could be achieved by uttering expressions which are full turns at talk, as found in such resource books as Blundell, Higgens & Middlemiss (1982) and Dörnyei and Thurrell (1992).

6.1. Continuers

The main functions of this type of backchannel are for the non-primary speaker to signal to the primary speaker that they are indeed listening attentively, and to allow the primary speaker to continue their speaking turn. According to Schegloff (1982), this is premised on the turn-taking system and specifically on the non-primary speaker forsaking the opportunity to take a primary speaking turn. This can be seen in the following example in which A's back channel of *Mm hm* signals that A is listening and B should continue speaking:

- A. I'll pick it up from his place
- B. *Mm hm*
- A. at around 7 o'clock

6.1.1. Specific forms

According to Gardner (1998), items such as *Mm hm* and *Uh huh* with a fall rising intonation contour are prototypical continuers. *Yeah* and the minimally aligning form *Mm* have been

called acknowledgment tokens and also seem to serve a continuative function when they carry a fall-rising (or rising) contour. Uematsu's (2000) list of continuers includes *Umm(m)*, *Hm(mmm)*, *Un huh*, *Un huh un huh*, *Un(n)*, *Huh huh*, *Ummm un un*, *oh(h)*, *Ooo*, *Ahaa*; however, his data related to English was limited to one intercultural dyadic conversation between a Canadian and a Japanese participant, and it is not clear precisely how he arrived at the conclusion of identifying the above mentioned items as continuers.

Ward's (2004) description, involving syllabification, offers us a new and interesting dimension in examining the functions of the non-lexical items. It claims that syllable non-lexical items such as *uh*, *um*, and *yeah* are overwhelmingly fillers and disfluency markers, whereas two-syllable items such as *Uh huh*, *Um-hm*, and *Yeah yeah* are overwhelmingly backchannels in that they often signal to the primary speaker that they should continue speaking. With this in mind, Ward (2004) acknowledges that variations exist. For instance, when *Yeah yeah* is uttered in a creaky voice, and with a sharp downstep in pitch, it is often construed as a brusque way of telling the interlocutor to stop repeating themselves and get to the point.

Interestingly, Ito (2007) describes how repeated monosyllabic backchannels in Japanese have a stronger role in showing understanding, agreement and encouraging the primary speaker to continue speaking. Clearly, these differences in backchannelling conventions across cultures will need to be addressed to facilitate Japanese EFL learners' acquisition of American English backchannelling practices.

6.2. Display of understanding of content

This is when the non-primary speaker feels it is necessary to show that he/she understands the primary speaker as in the following example:

- A: You have to go two blocks
B: *Mm hm*
A: then turn left at the video store
B: *Uh huh*
A: It's a few stores down on the right side
B: *I see*
A: You can't miss it

In this example, B sends two continuer type backchannels in *Mm hm* and *Uh huh* to signal to A that he/she should continue giving directions, and once B seems to understand where the place is, B signals understanding of content to A with the backchannel *I see*.

6.2.1. Specific forms

Yeah is thought to serve several functions. Gardner (1998) for example asserts that one of these functions is to show understanding of content. Further, Ito (2007) has included the lexical items *I see*, and Uematsu (2000) found instances in which the Canadian in his analysis used discourse markers such as *Oooo*, *Un huh*, *Ununun*, *Uh hum(mm)*, *Ah ah*, and *Oh yeah* as backchannel forms in this category.

6.3. Agreement

This is when the non-primary speaker reacts to a question or question like utterance made by the primary speaker. This can be seen below:

- A: You mean you heard the news already.
B: (*Head Nod*)
C: I was going to tell you.

This example shows B reacting with the backchannel *Head Nod* in agreement to A's question like statement. In examples such this, it may be difficult to distinguish between the agreement

and understanding categories (Kobayashi 1995). Tao and Thompson (1991) provide a distinction by pointing out that a non-primary speaker gives a claim of understanding when the primary speaker provides some new and previously unknown information to them, whereas an acknowledgement of agreement does not involve unknown information. As an example of understanding, in the second example above, the non-primary speaker did not know how to get to the place that their interlocutor was describing; thus, the non-primary speaker was receiving new information and replied with an understanding of content type of backchannel. In contrast, in the third example the non-primary speaker did not receive new information as they had already heard the news that their interlocutor was referring to; hence, the non-primary speaker responded with an agreement type of backchannel.

6.3.1. *Specific forms*

Ito (2007) includes statements such as *That's exactly true* and *I think so too* to show agreement, and Uematsu (2000) presents non-lexical items such as *Hm hm hm*, *Um(m)*, *Umum*, and *Unhum*. Further, while it is not clear as to which corpus made up the contents of their book, Blundell et al. (1982) have offered a multitude of phrases to use in this category such as *You're (so) right*, *How true*, *Too true*, *I agree*, *Right*, and *Yeah*.

6.4. Support and empathy toward the speaker's judgment

This occurs when the non-primary speaker responds with a show of support or empathy to an evaluative statement made by the primary speaker. For example:

- A: He quit his job again
B: It's going to be hard to find a new one
A: *Yeah*
B: He'll have to apply...

This could be interpreted as A feeling it necessary to provide support to B's evaluative statement *It's going to be hard to find a new one*, hence A uttered the backchannel *Yeah*.

6.4.1. *Specific forms*

In her analysis, Maynard (1986) identifies *Yeah* as a backchannel form that can be used to express support and empathy towards the primary speaker's judgment. Further, Uematsu (2000) includes laughter, and Ito (2007) includes *That's good* in this category.

6.5. Strong emotional response

This is when the non-primary speaker responds emphatically to a statement made by the primary speaker, which indicate more than simple continuer, understanding, or support. Such backchannels are found in the forms of laughs and exclamatory statements as in the following example.

- A: I got an A+ on my Chemistry test.
B: *Fantastic!*
A: I hope I can keep it up all semester.

6.5.1. *Specific forms*

Goodwin (1986) has suggested assessments such as *Wow* or *Great* serve as strong emotive responses, Maynard (1997) has proposed laughs, and Uemastu (2000) has included the non-lexical item *Hehehe*. Gardner (1997, 1998) and Selting (1994) have identified that *Yeah* and *Mm* with rise-falling contours also take on some of the characteristics of assessments, indicating some evaluation and heightened involvement in the primary speaker's talk.

6.6. Minor addition or request for information

This occurs in such instances as when the non-primary speaker corrects something the primary speaker has just uttered, when the non-primary speaker needs clarification or when the non-primary speaker attempts to add a word in completing the utterance the primary speaker has just made.

A: John will likely be back in April.

B: *Really*.

A: Yeah, the government is reducing troops in the gulf.

In this example, it is clear to see that B was surprised at A's first utterance, and B's backchannel response of *Really* signalled B's request for confirmation.

6.6.1. Specific forms

Maynard (1997) and Cutrone (2005) have pointed out that *Really* is a common backchannel form to request confirmation. Another strategy that might be helpful to this end is for the non-primary speaker to repeat the last word or two of the primary speaker's utterance with a rising contour.

7. Issues involving Japanese EFL learners

In teaching the forms and functions of American English backchannels to Japanese EFL speakers, it is necessary to examine potential tendencies that may be considered unconventional in American English. There is evidence of Japanese EFL speakers employing simple continuer type backchannels when they do not understand what the primary speaker is saying (Uematsu 2000). Cutrone (2005) also found that Japanese EFL speakers sometimes provide continuer type backchannels when they disagree with what the primary speaker is saying. Further, Japanese EFL speakers sometimes employ backchannels as hesitation devices to avoid taking primary speakership (Kobayashi 1995; Cutrone 2005) and they sometimes backchannel as a means of requesting the primary speaker to end their speaking turn (Kondou 1988; Kobayashi 1995).

Considering instances where Japanese EFL speakers send backchannels when they do not understand or agree with their interlocutor, it is plain to see how misunderstandings and confusion can occur. Sometimes these misunderstandings can have dire consequences as was the case in the Hitachi-Mitsubishi trial (Japan Times 1983). One of the defendants in the case, Mr Ishida of Mitsubishi claimed that he had not agreed with the FBI undercover agents when they told him he had to steal some information/documents. His defense counselor argued that Mr Ishida's responses of *Yeah* and *Uhuh* were not to show agreement, but rather to indicate he was listening and to allow the other person to continue.

Further, as Blanche (1987) and Cutrone (2005) have documented, misunderstandings due to differing uses of backchannels across cultures can have a detrimental effect on the EFL classroom in Japan. In a commonly described scenario, native English speaking teachers sometimes have reported misinterpreting students' nods coupled with vocalizations of *Yes* and *Mhm* at seemingly appropriate times as displays of understanding, rather than simply polite expressions of attending. When teachers discover much later on that students have not understood them, they have reported feeling perplexed and/or even slightly annoyed by what they perceive to be mixed signals, or in extreme cases, deceptive messages, resulting in the squandering of valuable class time.

8. Conclusion

As the ultimate goal of the author's research is to inform Japanese EFL learners regarding the backchannel practices of American native English speakers, this article provides a minimal working description of how American native English speakers generally use backchannels. To substantiate this portrayal of American backchannel behaviour, more conversational data needs to be collected and analysed. In addition, it would also be useful to survey American native English speakers on their perceptions as to which forms are most appropriate in specific situations. While this seems like a good place to start, instructional goals in this area need to go much further than mimicking the tendencies of native English speakers' backchannel behaviour. Clearly, the relationship between backchannels and discourse is not a linear one. Rather, it is complex and multifaceted, with many interrelated and overlapping components. For instance, from a pedagogical perspective, teaching backchannel behaviour and developing conversational skills are not isolated endeavours.

Producing a backchannel versus taking primary speakership in a conversation seem to be inextricably linked. As Schegloff (1982) noted, when non-primary speakers provide backchannels they are essentially forsaking the opportunity to take a primary speaking turn. Hence, solely examining how various quantifiable elements of backchannel behaviour have changed over time will not tell the whole story as to whether a learner has actually improved or not. More important, it is necessary to see how changes in backchannel behaviour influence intercultural conversational holistically, with a specific emphasis on the perceptions of members of the target group. To this end, future efficacy models for backchannel behaviour would be well-advised to incorporate dimensions of intercultural communicative competence, which deal with conversational satisfaction, expectancy, and perceptions across cultures (Spitzberg 2000).

Other interrelated aspects of conversation directly affecting backchannel behaviour should also be considered in this framework for analysis. This includes an examination of learners' willingness to communicate in English (Yashima 2002), and the development of conversational micro-skills such as repair strategies to aid in preventing communication breakdown (Dörnyei & Thurrell 1992). Due to the rather complex nature of measuring and, subsequently, evaluating backchannel behaviour, it is easy to see why this skill-set has received such little attention in EFL pedagogy to date (Thonus 2007). Once a comprehensive analytical framework is established, the next step in the research would seem to be an exploration into the teaching methods and strategies which hold the greatest promise in helping EFL students improve in this area.

References

- Beach, W.A. (1993). Transitioning regularities for 'casual' "okay" usages. *Journal of Pragmatics* 19, 325-352.
- Blanche, P. (1987). The case for a pedagogy of pragmatics in foreign or second language teaching. *RELC Journal* 18, 46-71.
- Blundell, J., Higgins, J., & Middlemiss, N. (1982) *Function in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brennan, S.E., & Schober, M.F. (2001). How listeners compensate for disfluencies in spontaneous speech. *Journal of Memory and Language* 44, 274-296.
- Capper, S. (2000). Nonverbal communication and the second language learner: some pedagogical considerations. *The Language Teacher* 24. Retrieved 7 October 2001 from <http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/2000/05/capper>.
- Cutrone, P. (2005). A case study examining backchannels between Japanese-British dyads. *Multilingua* 24, 237-274.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1992). *Conversation and Dialogues in Action*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1994). Teaching conversation skills intensively: course content and rationale. *ELT Journal* 48, 40-44.
- Duncan, S., & Fiske, D. (1977). *Face to Face Interaction: Research, Methods, and Theory*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

- Erickson, F. (1979). Talking down: some cultural sources of miscommunication in interracial interviews. In Wolfgang, A. (ed.) *Nonverbal Behaviour: Applications and Cultural Implications*. New York: Academic Press, 99-126.
- Fox Tree, J.E. (2002). Interpreting pauses and ums at turn exchanges. *Discourse Processes* 24, 37-55.
- Fries, C. (1952). *The Structure of English*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Gardner, R. (1997). The conversation object mm: a weak and variable acknowledging token. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 30, 131-156.
- Gardner, R. (1998). Between speaking and listening: the vocalisation of understandings. *Applied Linguistics* 19, 204-224.
- Goodwin, C. (1986). Between and within: alternative sequential treatment of continuers and assessments. *Human Studies* 9, 295-27.
- Hayashi, R. (1988). Simultaneous talk – from the perspective of floor management of English and Japanese speakers. *World Englishes* 7, 269-288.
- Hockey, B. (1993). Prosody and the role of okay and uhuh in discourse. In Bernstein, M. (ed.) *Eastern States Conference on Linguistics '92*. Ithaca: Cornell University Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, 128-136.
- Horiguchi, J. (1988). [Listener's Verbal Acts in Communication]. *Nihongo Kyoiku* 64, 13-26.
- Ito, A. (2007). *Functions of Backchannels in Japanese Casual Conversations: Comparing Single Back Channels and repeated Back Channels*. Kobe: Kobe College Graduate Division of English.
- [Japan Times] (1983). Japanese mannerism is a key point in IBM case. *The Japan Times* (23 January 1983), 2.
- Jefferson, G. (1984). Notes on systematic deployment of the acknowledgment tokens 'yeah' and 'mm hm'. *Papers in Linguistics* 17, 197-216.
- Kendon, A. (1977). Some functions of gaze-direction in two-person conversation. In Kendon, A. (ed.) *Studies in the Behavior of Social Interaction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kenna, P., & Lacy, S. (1994). *Japanese Patterns of Behaviour*. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press.
- Kobayashi, H. (1995). On backchannel performance in an intercultural conversation in English: between Japanese and a native speaker of English. *Language Laboratory* 32, 151-166.
- Kondou, T. (1988). Nihongo no kaiwa ni okeru kaishi to shuuketsu no sutoratejii. In Pan, F.C. et al. (eds) *Koudo Toshiteno Gengo*. Hiroshima: Bunka Hyouron Shuppan Kabushikigaisha, 3-26.
- Lebra, T. (1976). *Business Japan: A Practical Guide to Understanding Japanese Business Culture*. Lincolnwood: Passport Books.
- Maynard, S.K. (1986). On back-channel behavior in Japanese and English casual conversation. *Linguistics* 24, 1079-1108.
- Maynard, S.K. (1997). Analyzing interactional management in native/non-native English conversation: a case of listener response. *IRAL* 35, 37-60.
- McCarthy, M.J. (2003). Talking back: small, interactional response tokens in everyday conversation. *Research on Language in Social Interaction* 36, 33-63.
- Mizutani, N. (1982). The listener's responses in Japanese conversation. *Sociolinguistic Newsletter* 13, 33-38.
- Okushi, Y. (1990). Misunderstood efforts and missed opportunities: an examination of EFL in Japan. *Penn Working papers in Educational Linguistics* 6, 65-75.
- Orestrom, B. (1983). *Turn-Taking in English Conversation*. Lund: Lund University Press.
- Roach, P. (1991). *English Phonetics and Phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schegloff, E. (1982). Discourse as an interactional achievement: some uses of "UH-HUH" and other things that come between sentences. In Tannen, D. (ed.). *Georgetown University Roundtable on Language and Linguistics, Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 71-93.
- Selting, M. (1994). Emphatic speech style – with special focus on the prosodic signalling of emotive involvement in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics* 22, 375-408.
- Spitzberg, B.H. (2000). A model of intercultural communication competence. In Samovar, L., & Porter, R. (eds) *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*. 2nd edition. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Szatrowski, P. (1993). [The Analysis of Structures in Japanese Conversations: Observations on Persuasion Strategies]. Tokyo: Kuroshio Shuppan.
- Tao, H., & Thompson, S.A. (1991). English backchannels in Mandarin conversations: a case study of superstratum pragmatic 'interference'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 16, 209-223.
- Thonus, T. (2007). Listener responses as a pragmatic source for learners of English. *CATESOL Journal* 19, 132-145.
- Uematsu, S. (2000). The use of back channels between native and non-native speakers in English and Japanese. *Intercultural Communication Studies* 10, 85-98.
- Ward, N. (2004). Pragmatic functions of prosodic features in non-lexical utterances. *Speech Prosody* 4, 325-328.
- Ward, N. (2006) Non-lexical conversational sounds in American English. *Pragmatics & Cognition* 14, 129-182.
- Ward, N., & Tsukahara, W. (2000). Prosodic features which cue back-channel responses in English and Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32, 1177-1207.

- White, S. (1989). Backchannels across cultures: a study of Americans and Japanese. *Language in Society* 18, 59-76.
- Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: the Japanese EFL context. *The Modern Language Journal* 86, 54-66.
- Yngve, V. (1970). On getting a word in edgewise. *Chicago Linguistic Society* 6, 567-578.
-

Pino Cutrone received his B.A. majoring in Sociology from the University of Winnipeg in 1997. In 2002 he graduated from the University of Leicester's M.A. in Applied Linguistics/TESOL program. He has spent twelve years teaching EFL in Japan. Currently, he is a lecturer at the University of Nagasaki and a PhD candidate in the field of Applied Linguistics at the University of Reading. His research interests include conversational analysis in intercultural communication, sociolinguistics relating to Japanese EFL learners, and CALL. Email: p.cutrone@reading.ac.uk.