

# Conversation Management Discourse Markers

## Some Features of the Use of Conversation Management Discourse Markers (CMDM)

- Participants:
  - 1) Japanese junior high school students (JHS)
  - 2) Philippine immigrants (ESL)
  - 3) Native Canadians (NS)
- Format:

Five-minute oral interactions in groups of three
- Topic: Culture

# Conversation Management

- Lexical CMDMs:
  - 1 Listener's feedback to a speaker to show L's interests, understanding and reactions– *well, OK, right*,
  - 2 Speaker's thought transition markers to let L know how S thinks of the flow of the conversation (S's thought transition signals– *so, actually, anyway*)
  - 3 Speaker's asking for L's agreement: *you know*
  - 4 Speaker's paraphrasing signal, when L shows misunderstanding or non-understanding– *I mean*
- Paralinguistic signals: eye contacts, facial expressions (smiles/laughter), gestures, noises and echoing and repetitions

# Number of Conversation Management Discourse Markers (CMDM)

**Table 3 The number of CMDM (words and expressions) per five minutes**

	JHS	Filipinos	NS
well	0	5	3
OK	2	1	1
right	0	0	0
you know	1	4	1
I mean	0	0	0
so	2	9	2
actually	0	1	0
anyway	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>

## Number of Conversation Management Discourse Markers (without words) per five minutes

Table 4 The number of CMDM  
(without words) per five minutes

	JHS	Filipinos	NS
<b>eye contact</b>	1	11	13
<b>facial expression</b>	0	5	0
<b>smile/laughter</b>	7	13	3
<b>gesture</b>	118	11	59
hand gesture	(39)	( 7)	(30)
nod	(60)	( 4)	(25)
touching oneself	(19)	( 0)	( 4)
<b>noise</b>	73	53	36
mmm, umm	(39)	( 5)	( 0)
ah, eh, uh	(12)	(10)	(16)
oh	(11)	(20)	( 6)
yeah	(11)	(18)	(14)
<b>repetition</b>	19	4	4

# Eye contacts

- Japanese students never cast their eyes aside, nor do they show obvious eye contacts. They try to show that they are always interested in their partners' speech; on the other hand, they seem to be uneasy about looking into someone's eyes. NS and Filipinas use eye contacts frequently and at ease.

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# Facial expressions

- The Filipinas use more facial expressions and smiles/laughter than the other two groups. They seem to prefer to show their understanding, agreement, interests through facial expressions. They smile even when the topic is serious. The JHS do not show their feelings on their faces unless the topic makes them laugh.

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# Gestures

- The NSs use hand gestures to illustrate what they are saying. The JHS use as many hand gestures as the NS and many more than the Filipinas. Are Japanese students imitating NSs? Should we recommend our students to use hand gestures, as the NS do?

# Nods among NS and Filipinas

- The NS nodded naturally on several occasions to show their understanding, agreement and/or interest in the topic.
- The Filipinas not only seldom nod, but also cast their eyes aside while another speaker is talking. They show their interests by their facial expressions, or 'Oh!' rather than nodding.

# Nodding among the JHS

- The JHS nod more than twice as many as the NS and fifteen times as many as the Filipinas.
- The JHS nod in order to show that they are listening to their partner with great interest      backchannels + reactive tokens

# Frequent nods and misunderstanding

- Frequent nods and 'yes' is a characteristic feature of Japanese English. Both nodding and 'yes' is a signal saying that we are attending to your talk. In this sense, our nod or 'yes' is similar to NS's 'uh, uh', a form of backchannels. But frequent nodding or 'yes' seems to NS that we are implicitly saying 'I know it already; hence it implies no need to talk or your talk is uninteresting.'

# Touching oneself

- The JHS frequently touched their hair, faces, arms, neck or clothes -- also seen among Koreans.

The JHS touched their body while they are talking or when they are about to talk as if they want to reduce tension of holding the floor or in taking their turn.

- The Filipinas did not touch themselves at all; they remained stiff and still.
- The NS touched their arms, in holding their arms.

# Noises

- NS used 'ah, eh, uh and erm': either backchannels (uh), showing surprise (ah) or linguistic planning (eh, erm).
- The Filipinas repeatedly used 'oh'; three times as many as the NS and twice as many as the JHS. They use 'oh' to show agreement or interest instead of nodding.

# Japanese favorite noise: 'mmm'

- The JHS use 'mmm' nearly forty times more, compared with the Filipinas' five and the NS none.
- Speaker's 'mmm' in Japanese is a colloquial form of 'hai' (yes) [ the recent trend: self-confirmation or self-checking] and 'mmmm' is also used as a filler for linguistic planning when they are thinking what to say next.
- 'mmm' is also used in the Listener's mode; it expresses agreement and/or interest; or prolonged 'mmmm' expresses some doubt or disagreement with rising intonation.

# Echoing and Repetition

- Functions of repetition and echoing: Ls express surprise or confirm Ss' idea.
- NS and Filipinas repeat two to four words.
- The JHS repeat one or two words.
- JHS's overuse of repetitions is confirmed in Murata(1994). Japanese use of repetitions tends to express understanding, agreement and/or interest.



- Japanese learners in general tend to use shorter segments, repetitions, fillers and other noises much more than NSs and their length of pauses is shorter and they pause less often, as if they feel pressurized to speak faster. This suggests that our image of NS fluency is to produce sounds constantly and rapidly; i.e., ‘the fluent speaker speaks very fast without any pause.’ This is true among some American speakers. But it is difficult to adjust our native speech habits. Slow speakers of Japanese are allowed to speak English slowly and vice versa.
- Learners’ image of ‘fluency’ might have a bad influence on their performance.

# So, as I said before, EIL pedagogy requires two principles:

- In order to facilitate efficient communication, we should respect Grician maxims: maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance and maxim of manner.
- In order to maintain good relationship with other partners (see in Lecture 2 Japanese English at the junior high school level), we should encourage our students to master politeness principles: don't impose, give options and make your receiver feel good.