

The use of overt first-person singular pronouns in opinion-negotiation sequence in Japanese conversation

Miyabi Ozawa

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates how the utterances with the overt first-person singular pronouns contribute to the execution of particular actions in the opinion-negotiation sequence, where the co-participants negotiate their individual's internal and evaluative position about circumstance. Adopting the framework of Interactional Linguistics and Conversation Analysis, the study analyzes naturally occurring conversation taken from the Corpus of the Everyday Japanese Conversation¹ from the National Institute for Japanese Language and the author's video-recorded collection. The study aims to answer three research questions: (1) When is the overt first-person singular pronoun used in the opinion-negotiation sequence?; (2) What types of actions are accomplished by the utterance with the first-person singular pronoun in the opinion-negotiation sequence?; (3) How is the use of the overt first-person singular pronoun relevant to showing a speaker's stance about the circumstances? The study shows that the overt forms are assembled in different social actions depending on how the co-participants align with the previous assertions toward the circumstance they are discussing.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the previous studies which are relevant to the first-person singular pronouns

in Japanese. Section 3 shows the analytical frameworks and the analytical focus, and Section 4 then explains the data. Section 5 illustrates the data analysis, followed by the discussion in Section 6 and concluding remarks in Section 7.

2. Person “pronouns” and the use of the first-person singular pronouns in Japanese

Previous studies have shown a number of aspects in personal pronouns in Japanese, which are different from Indo-European languages. Some studies argue that there is no “pronoun” system in Japanese that corresponds to the Indo-European languages (e.g. Kanzaki 1994; Suzuki 1973). This is because Japanese personal “pronouns” have a number of forms and function as nouns in syntactic and epistemological perspective (e.g. Ishiyama 2008; Kindaichi et al 1993; Makino and Tsutsui 1986; Shibasaki 2005; Whitman 1999). In addition, varieties of forms associated with the first-person singular pronouns are dependent upon contexts, including the level of formality (e.g. Kataoka 2002; Shibatani 1990; Suzuki 1973) and gender identities (e.g. Kataoka 2002; Saito 2018; Suzuki 1973). For these reasons, personal “pronouns” in Japanese express not only referential but also non-referential indexicalities (Silverstein 1976).

Examining the use of personal pronouns in Japanese conversation, especially the one in the nominative position, calls for an additional layer of issue: non-occurrence of subject in Japanese. From a cognitive and semantic perspective, the speaker as the center of epistemology is not often overtly stated in Japanese, such as when expressing internal states (c.f. Iwasaki 1993). In terms of the relationship between language and culture/society, it has been argued that subjects are “omitted” or not explicitly stated because the listener understands what the speaker means from the context (Hasegawa and Hirose 2010, Hinds 1982, Hinds 1986, Ide 2006) or the ground (*‘ba’*) which governs the context (c.f. Fujii 2016, Ide 2020, Fujii 2020); the speaker is grounded in the context as one of the elements of conversation and assumes each element involving the listener in the field is shared knowledge, resulting in not explicitly stating the subject of the self.

Despite the fact that a number of studies reveal the uniqueness of the Japa-

nese personal pronouns including the first-person singular pronouns, as well as its markedness in conversations, few studies focus on the actual usage, especially in the cases of the first-person singular pronoun. Ono and Thompson (2003) discuss how the overt first-person singular pronouns work beyond its referential consideration in conversation by presenting the “emotive” and “frame-setting” functions. Furthermore, Lee and Yonezawa (2008) add the functions of “contrast” and “emphasis.” While these two studies show the usage from discourse analytical perspective, Ozawa (2019) adopts sequential analysis in her interactive data, demonstrating that the overt form can be used in the “dispreferred response²” as the speaker offers an account for disagreement. These previous studies suggest that the overt first-person singular pronouns in Japanese conversations, which are marked, are relevant to expressing the speaker’s subjectivity or contrastive sense to others including the listener. In addition, to my knowledge, sequential analysis has not been usually adopted to investigate the use of the first-person singular pronouns in interaction. The current study, therefore, focuses on the “opinion-negotiation sequence” where the co-participants show subjectivity and contrast by claiming their internal and evaluative position about circumstances, which might be different from others.

3. Analytical Frameworks and Analytical Focus

3.1. Analytical frameworks: Interactional Linguistics and Conversation Analysis

The study adopts methodologies of Interactional Linguistics (IL) and Conversation Analysis (CA). IL and CA observe sequences of turns in social interaction that are collaboratively co-constructed by the participants. Sequences refer to courses of action that are implemented by adjacency pairs. Actions are what the turn is performing in talk-in-interaction, which include, in the case of opinion-negotiation sequence, assessing, (dis)agreeing, (dis)aligning, (dis)affiliating³ and so forth. The classification of an action type performed by each turn is treated in the following turn. The sequential analysis is concerned with how a turn is composed, as well as where that turn is produced as part of a sequence of turns/actions.

While both IL and CA investigate language used in naturally occurring interaction, their goals differ due to the different origins. IL, developed in

linguistics, aims to discover how “the linguistic structures and practices that participants themselves deploy and orient to” are reconstructed (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017, 16). CA, grounded in sociology, on the other hand, has a primary interest in understanding how interaction works and uncovering the mechanisms of “how turns at talk are coordinated, how actions are constructed and recognized and how they are made to cohere in sequence of interaction” (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017, 4). Since the current study investigates how the first-person singular pronouns are used in conversational interaction and how it contributes to the execution of a particular action in a given sequence, both IL and CA are relevant. By looking at the use of the first person pronoun vis-a-vis the sequential context and ongoing action formations, rather than looking at just the utterance by itself, we can uncover the nature of the usage of the first-person singular pronouns in Japanese daily conversations.

3.2. Analytical focus and related concepts

3.2.1. “Opinion-negotiation sequence”

The study uses a term “opinion-negotiation sequence” defined by Mori (1999): the sequence in which co-participants negotiate the individual’s internal and evaluative position about circumstance, which has been shared and is accessible to them. In the opinion-negotiation sequence, co-participants may show their stance toward different aspects of the same target (i.e. circumstance) or toward multiple related objects by “assertion” (Vatanen et al. 2021; Vatanen 2014) and/or other semiotic resources (c.f. Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). “Assertion” in this study borrows the definition by Vatanen et al (2021) and Vatanen (2014), which is where “the speaker asserts, claims, or states something about the world and typically also evaluates it” (Vatanen et al. 2021, 311).

As suggested by Mori (1999), in the opinion-negotiation sequence, different features are associated with whether and how participants align with the previous assertions, which indicates the participants’ orientation towards or preference for agreement (c.f. Pomerantz 1984). For example, straightforward agreement tends to be initiated with prompt timing, which can be followed by

elaboration. On the other hand, features of disagreement include being delayed, having qualification, and making account to avoid direct assertion or straight assertion. In addition, when the recipient shows disalignment, the speaker might pursue an alignment. The opinion-negotiation sequence, with these features, develops until the participants find a middle ground, acknowledge co-existing multiple perspectives, or change the topic to terminate the discussion (Mori 1999, 138).

For example, in Excerpt (1) below, four participants talk about the restaurant *Kamome*, which they all know. Kaneko starts asking whether *Kamome* is still open, which initiates the opinion-negotiation sequence. Ogata asserts at line 2, negating the existence, followed by confirmations by Hamada (line 4) and Koga (line 5). Ogata again asserts at line 6, saying *tsubureta ppoi* ('seems like they are closed'). To this assertion about the existence of *Kamome*, Hamada reacts *uso* ('(you) are lying') showing disalignment. Hamada then accounts for not being able to align at line 13. The opinion-negotiation sequence continues until they reach a middle ground.

(1) *Kamome*

- 01 Kane: *Kamome tte mada anno?*
'Is *Kamome* still open?'
- 02 Ogat: [*naiyo*.
'no']
- 03 Hama: [*a=*
- 04 Hama: *=e. na[ino*.
'what, are they closed?'
- 05 Koga: [*nai/no?*
'are they closed?'
- 06 Ogat: [*tsubure[ta ppoi*.
'seems like they are closed']
- 07 Hama: [*uso*.
'(you) are lying']
- 08 Koga: [*a. sounanda.=*
'oh (I) see']
- 09 Ogat: *=nan[ka*.

- ‘well’
- 10 Kane: [ma:ji:de..
 ‘really?’
- 11 Hama: [e.=
 ‘but’
- 12 Ogat: =iya.=
 ‘well’
- 13 →Hama: =ore tsui konaida made sonzai kakunin shiteta
 ‘I have confirmed (their) existence until recently’
- 14 →Hama: [kiga shitandakedo.
 ‘(I) feel like’
- 15 Ogat: [e. datte konomae
 ‘but because the other day’

3.2.2. Epistemics in interaction

In analyzing interactions by IL and CA, ‘who knows what’ turns out to be an object of extreme importance to participants as they go about trying to make sense of their interactions together. Knowledge (i.e. ‘epistemics’) in interaction means the participants’ right and obligations to know or not know certain things. Therefore, orienting knowledge over the course of interaction may change the action that a turn is being understood to convey. In this regard, orienting knowledge becomes procedurally consequential for social interaction; it becomes consequential for what’s happening now, and therefore for what (should) happen next.

In “opinion-negotiation sequence,” knowledge of the target(s) discussed is crucial because co-participants negotiate their internal and evaluative position based on the information they obtain with regard to the target. Whether one has access to the target or not is referred to epistemic access, which is expressed by epistemic stance, that captures the moment-by-moment positioning of participants with respect to each other in and through the talk (Clift, 2016, p.203). Relative epistemic access to the target are schematically encapsulated as K+ (more knowledgeable) and K- (less knowledgeable) (Heritage 2013, 376). In general, when relatively unknowing (K-) speakers ask questions, relatively knowing (K+) speakers make assertions (Heritage 2013, 378). Fur-

thermore, when the speaker indicates greater familiarity with the referent better compared to the interlocutor, the speaker has a relative right to know and claim about the target, or relative authority of knowledge, which is referred to as “epistemic primacy” (c.f. Stivers et al. 2011). Epistemics are shown in utterances, such as in the referential form, determiners, tense, and evidential markers, and the co-participants negotiate their opinions with the attention to the epistemic stance displayed in moment-by-moment fashion.

Excerpt (1) above, for example, shows how the participants orient themselves to the conversation with their epistemic stance in negotiating the existence of the restaurant *Kamome*. Kaneko, who asks a question at line 1, indicates her K- stance, which is followed by the assertion by Ogata at line 2, showing his K+ stance. Ogata again asserts at line 6 with K+ stance after Ogata and Hamada’s confirmations at line 4 and 5. Hamada indicates that he cannot agree with the assertion, by uttering his personal experience of confirming the restaurant the other day at lines 13 and 14. To the extent that personal experience is “owned” by the speaker, the speaker has the relative right and authority of his/her experience. In this sense, Hamada displays epistemic primacy in his account at lines 13 and 14. As we will see in the analysis section, the participants’ epistemic access to the target is relevant in the use of overt first-person singular pronouns in opinion-negotiation sequences.

4. Data

The study uses two sets of video-recorded naturally occurring conversations, involving two, three, or four friends, in Japanese⁴. One of the sets are six conversations from the monitor version of Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation from National Institute for Japanese Language (NINJAL) and Linguistics; and the other sets are four conversations video-recorded by myself in Tokyo and Kanagawa in 2018. The description of these two sets of data is summarized in Table 1 and 2:

Table 1. Six conversations among two to four close friends from CEJC

Conversation	Participants (gender, age)	Approximate length of the conversation (mins)	Place of the conversation
K003_012a	Sacchi (female, 20–24), Shiori (female, 20–24)	12	A restaurant
K003_012b	Sacchi (female, 20–24), Shiori (female, 20–24)	32	A restaurant
T005_008	Nagai (male, 35–39), Okamura (male, 35–39), Nakata (male, 35–39)	27	A restaurant
T006_002	Ogata (male, 25–29), Aoki (male, 20–24), Tominaga (female, 20–24)	46	A classroom in a university
T006_008	Ogata (male, 25–29), Kaneke (male, 25–29), Koga (male, 25–29), Hamada (male, 25–29)	17	A bar
T006_009	Ogata (male, 25–29), Nemoto (male, 25–29)	14	A bar

Table 2. Four conversations between two friends video-recorded by myself

Conversation	Participants (gender, age)	Approximate length of the conversation (mins)	Places of the conversation
1	Toshi (female, 25–29), Mika (female, 25–29)	16	At an apartment in Kanagawa
2	Nao (female, 25–29), Kana (female, 25–29)	32	In a room at a university in Tokyo
3	Maya (female, 25–29), Taka (male, 25–29)	31	In a public room in Tokyo
4	Maya (female, 25–29), Yuu (male, 25–29)	36	In a public room in Tokyo

In these conversations, the participants negotiate their opinion toward a wide range of topics including some events they participate in, particular foods, mutual friends or acquaintances, and so forth.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Overview of the overt first-person singular pronouns observed in opinion-negotiation sequences

Among the data, what is identified as “opinion-negotiation sequences” include 31 overt first-person singular pronouns, whose forms are *watashi*⁵ (20 cases), *atashi* (four cases), *ore* (five cases), *boku*⁶ (one case), and *uchi* (one case). The overt first-person singular pronouns with these forms are assembled in different social actions depending on how the co-participants align with other’s assertions toward the target(s) they are discussing. A morpho-syntactic feature of these overt forms in opinion-negotiation sequences is that more than 80% of the cases are in the nominative position, which comprises of the one with zero postpositional particles⁷ (54.8%), a highlighting particle *mo* (‘also’) (9.7%), a topic marking particle *wa* (3.2%), and a case particle *ga* (nominative) (12.9%)⁸. The distribution of the postpositional particles attached to the overt first-person singular pronouns are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Distributions of the postpositional particles attached to the overt first-person singular pronouns

	n	%
∅	17	54.8
<i>mo</i>	3	9.7
<i>wa</i>	1	3.2
<i>ga</i>	4	12.9
<i>ne</i>	1	3.2
<i>to</i>	2	6.5
<i>niwa</i>	2	6.5
<i>nimo</i>	1	3.2
<i>kara</i>	0	0.0
<i>Total</i>	31	100.0

5.2. Types of actions observed with the overt first-person singular pronouns in opinion-negotiation sequence

In opinion-negotiation sequence, what the utterances with overt first-person singular pronouns do differ depending on how the co-participants align with the previous assertion(s). When the speaker or the co-participant does not align with the previous assertion, the utterances with the overt first-person singular pronouns display epistemic access to the target(s) in account. More specifically, they display either lack of epistemic access or epistemic primacy to the target. On the other hand, when the speaker or the co-participant aligns or partially aligns with the previous assertion(s), the utterances with the overt first-person singular pronouns (a) display a personal and strong internal descriptive in a new assertion or agreement, (b) initiate a topical talk in a new assertion, or (c) exclude the speaker(s) from the category invoked in a new assertion.⁹ 13 out of 31 cases are observed in the first type, namely “displaying epistemic access to the target in account.” In the following section, we will see the first type, which is the most frequently seen among all.

5.3. Displaying (lack of) epistemic access to the target(s) in account

There are 13 cases where the overt first-person singular pronoun is used in account. These overt first-person singular pronouns, with one exception¹⁰, occur when the speaker shows either lack of epistemic access to the target (5.3.1) or epistemic primacy toward the target (5.3.2). These first-person singular pronouns are seen in the recipient’s account for not being able to align with the co-participant(s) or in the speaker’s account to pursue an alignment.

In terms of the composition, there are notable characteristics observed in this type. First, all of the overt first-person singular pronouns occur in a single utterance. This is different from the cases observed when the participants align, which will be discussed in the later section. Second, all the overt first-person singular pronouns with one exception are nominative.

The sections below provide illustrations of the examples.

5.3.1. Lack of epistemic access to the target in account

Among the 13 cases, four cases appear in the utterance which displays lack of epistemic access to the target in account for not being able to align with the

co-participants. For example, in Excerpt (2), where Kana and Nao negotiate their views on the danger of playing in the river, the first-person singular pronoun *watashi* is used (line 4) in the accounting utterance for not being able to align with the co-participant's assertion about the scariness of playing in the river (line 1).

(2) Playing in the river

- 01 Kana: *hutsuuni watashi¹¹ kawaasobi de shinu jishin ga aru*
'I am confident I will die by playing in the river'
- 02 Nao : *ehhehehehe* ((laugh)) ((putting her hand on her mouth))
'hahaha'
- 03 Nao : *uso?*
'seriously?'
((Kana is putting her hand on her mouth and probably open
her mouth to say
something, but nothing is heard/ audible))
- 04 →Nao : *ya watashi sonnna kawa itta koto nai.*
'well I haven't played in the river that much'

To Kana's assertion about playing in the river, Nao laughs (line 2) and asks "seriously?" (line 3), which delays and projects a dispreferred response. At line 4, Nao displays her lack of epistemic access to the river, which shows her inability to make a judgment as an account for not being able to agree with Kana's assertion about the scariness of playing in the river (line 1).

In terms of claiming lack of epistemic access as an account, Mori (1999) discusses that such cases are seen when excusing themselves for not expressing their opinion or evaluation toward exaggerated or controversial opinions stated by the co-participant (p.120). Claiming lack of epistemic access works as a strategy to account for disagreement rather than a simple display of the state of unknowing because, according to Mori (1999, 120), the speaker could still state their opinion or evaluation, or agree with the prior speaker based on their limited knowledge. In this sense, displaying lack of epistemic access is a strategy for avoiding overt disagreement but still doing disagreement.

5.3.2. Epistemic primacy to the target in account

Among the 13 cases, the rest of the nine cases display the speaker's epistemic primacy to the target in account for not being able to align with the co-participant(s) or to pursue an alignment. The epistemic primacy, which indicates greater familiarity with the referent better compared to the interlocutor, can base on something personal to the speaker including their experience and situation, which are not accessible to the other. As we will see in Excerpt (3), one of the contexts where the overt first-person singular pronoun is observed is when displaying the speaker's personal experience or situation as an account for not being able to totally affirm or agree with the assertion.

(3) *Ebikuriimu raisu* ('Shrimp cream rice')

Context: Four participants, who are old friends from the same junior high school, are at a restaurant in their neighborhood. Kaneko found *ebikuriimu raisu* ('shrimp cream rice') on the menu, which is nostalgic to them.

- 01 Koga : *are kyushoku igai de tabeta koto nai* [yo.
'(I) haven't eaten one except at the school lunch.'
- 02 Kane : [na!
'(I) haven't'
- 03 Koga : *ebikuriimu raisu tte.*
'shrimp-cream-rice'
- 04 Ogat : *un.*
'yeah'
- 05 Kane : *dokoni ittara kuennoka tteyuu.*
'where the heck can (we) eat (such food)?'
- 06 Hama: {laugh}
- 07 Koga : *ne.*
'right'
- 08 Ogat : *a*
'oh'
- 09 Koga : [*youshoku nano? nannano mitaina.*
'Is it a western food? Or what?'
- 10 →Ogat : [*ore tsukuttayo.* ((pointing at himself when saying *tsukuttayo*))

- ‘I made it’
- 11 Kane : *__tsukutta* hahahaha
‘(you) made it? hahaha’
- 12 Ogat : *__tsukutta __tsukutta*
‘I made it’
- 13 Kane : *e. jibunde?*
‘by yourself?’
- 14 Ogat : *un.*
‘yeah’
- 15 Kane : *£ jisakuka £*
‘self made’

At line 5, Kaneko doubts the availability of shrimp cream rice in the form of a rhetorical question. This is followed by a laughter by Hamada at line 6 and alignment by Koga at line 7. Ogata, on the other hand, displays that he is not able to agree with Kaneko’s assertion about the availability of shrimp cream rice by bringing his personal experience of making ones with the first-person singular pronoun *ore* (line 10).

The utterance with the overt first-person singular pronoun *ore* at line 10 shows disalignment considering the fact that other three participants moved forward to agree with the fact that the shrimp cream rice is rare up until Ogata says *a*. The token *a* is so-called a change of state token, which shows that the preceding inquiry was unexpected and has a shift in awareness (Hayashi and Hayano 2018). Ogata’s utterance at line 10 preceded by *a* does not cooperate by facilitating the proposed activity or sequence, accepting the presuppositions and terms of the proposed action or activity, nor matching the formal design preference of the turn. In this sense, the overt first-person singular pronoun *ore* is in a disaligned utterance.

Another context where such overt first-person singular pronoun is observed is in the account of the speaker’s previous assertion in order to pursue the co-participant’s agreement. The overt form here again appears in expressing the personal experience or situation as an account for assertion. In the following excerpt, Shiori asks Sacchi the size of the home stadium of each baseball team in Japan. According to their conversation, the size of the stadiums correspond

to how popular they are. Sacchi says that Giants have a big one because they are popular (lines 1 and 3). Shiori then questions the case of Yokohama Stadium (line 5), indicating that she is less knowledgeable (K-) and Sacchi is more knowledgeable (K+) about Yokohama Stadium. Although Sacchi answers at line 7, the discussion of the size continues as Shiori clarifies (lines 10 and 11). Sacchi repairs (lines 18, 20, and 22) to which Shiori does not show any uptake (lines 23).

(4) Yokohama stadium

- 01 Sacc: *demo jaiantsu wa hiroi.*
 ‘but Giants’ (stadium) is big.’
 ((Sacchi shows the size with gesture))
- 02 (2.4) ((Shiori imitates Sacchi’s gesture))
- 03 Sacc: *ninki dakara* ((Sacchi does the same gesture again))
 ‘because (they are) popular’
- 04 (1.5)
- 05 Shio: *e yokohama koregurai?* ((gesture of showing the size))
 ‘well is Yokohama’s (stadium) about this size?’
- 06 (0.6)
- 07 Sacc: *kongurai.*
 ‘about this’
- 08 (2.2) ((Shiori smiles and Sacchi also smiles back.))
- 09 Sacc: *hun*((laugh))=
 ‘haha’
- 10 Shio: =>*jaiantsu ga koregurai*< dattara
 ‘if Giants’ (one) is that big’
 ((Shiori demonstrates her understanding by indicating the
 different sizes of dishes in front of them))
- 11 Shio: *koregurai.*=
 ‘about this size’
- 12 Sacc: *=sousousou*
 ‘yes yes yes’
- 13 (1.2) ((Shiori tilts her head))
- 14 Sacc: *iya.*

- ‘no’
- 15 Sacc: *sore iisugita na.*
‘that one (I/you) exaggerated’
- 16 (0.5)
- 17 Shio: *E!*
‘what?’
- 18 Sacc: *ko:reno:* ((gesture of showing the size))
‘this’
- 19 Shio: *un.*
‘yes’
- 20 Sacc: *hanbun gurai janai.*
‘about half (of this) maybe’
- 21 (0.8) ((Shiori drinks))
- 22 Sacc: *koreno hanbun.*
‘half of this’
- 23 (2.5) ((Shiori put her drink drink on the table and smiles.))
- 24 Sacc: *ima ninki damon.=*
‘because (they are) popular now’
- 25 →Sacc: **=chiketto torenaimon. atashi.**
‘I cannot get the tickets’
- 26 Shio: *hont[oni?*
‘really?’
- 27 Sacc: [beisuta:zu.
‘Baystar’s’
- 28 Sacc: *sousou*
‘yes yes’
- 29 Shio: *tadade sa: are jyanakute?*
‘isn’t [it because] free and that?’
- 30 Sacc: *un.*
‘no’
- 31 Shio: *ano hamasuta ga yoku- iikara jyanakute.*
‘well isn’t (it) [just] because Yokohama Stadium is good?’
- 32 (0.4)
- 33 Sacc: *hamasuta, sousousousou.*

‘Yokohama Stadium, yes’

- 34 Shio: *hamasuta ga minna sukina dake desyo*
 ‘everyone likes Yokohama Stadium, that’s it right?’

At line 12, Sacchi affirms Shiori’s clarification of the size of Yokohama stadium (lines 10 and 11), but initiates self-repair (lines 14 and 15). Sacchi then repairs at lines 18, 20 and 22 by using gestures to show that the size is actually bigger than indicated by Shiori at line 11. Sacchi’s repair is followed by a (2.5) pause without Shiori’s uptake, and Sacchi continues at line 24 and 25 by accounting for her previous assertion at line 22. The accounting utterance includes the overt first-person singular pronoun, which displays Sacchi’s epistemic primacy to the target (i.e. how big the stadium is); she expresses her own experience of not being able to get the ticket in order to explain how popular the BayStars currently is, which is an account for why their stadium is not too small.

Sacchi’s epistemic primacy about her personal experience (displayed at line 25) plays an essential role in account for pursuing agreement because Sacchi seems more knowledgeable about baseball in general compared to Shiori based on the asymmetrical epistemic stance displayed over the course of interaction. At lines 1 and 3, Sacchi asserts that the size of the Giants’ stadium is big because they are popular in declarative utterances on the basis of direct access to them in the first position, implying a claim of primary epistemic and/or moral rights to assess that state (Heritage and Raymond 2005, 34). In addition, Shiori positions herself as K– by confirming the size of Yokohama stadium (lines 5, 10, and 11) and Sacchi does as K+ by informing (lines 7 and 12). These utterances, which show their epistemic access and right about these elements, suggest that Sacchi is more knowledgeable about baseball in general than Shiori. Therefore, Sacchi’s personal experience of not being able to get the Yokohama Baystars’ ticket at line 25 is a crucial factor which supports her assertion at line 22.

5.3.3. Summary of the findings and additional notes

As we have seen, the overt first-person singular pronouns work to display the speaker’s lack of epistemic access or their epistemic primacy toward the

target as the evidence in account. As mentioned earlier, epistemic primacy means that the speaker has qualitative superiority or priority in knowledge. It often collides with a claim to have independent access to the referent (c.f. Hayano, 2013). Therefore, the overt first-person singular pronouns in account appear either when the speaker has no knowledge or much greater knowledge about the target compared to the co-participant. As such, greater epistemic asymmetry between the speaker and the co-participant(s) are relevant in showing the overt first-person singular pronoun.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, all the overt first-person singular pronouns observed in this type were in a single unit. On the other hand, when the speaker aligns with the previous assertion(s), overt first-person singular pronouns appear to initiate a talk in multi-units. This is especially the case in which the speaker brings up their personal experience as in Excerpt (5) below.

(5) Weddings

Context: Toshi and Mika talk about weddings. Toshi prepares for her wedding in a few months and Mika has already done her wedding a few years ago.

- 01 Toshi: *demo taihendayone mazu teema kimete tte* [*kanji dayo ne*
 'but it is hard, isn't it? First we need to decide the theme right?'
- 02 Mika: [*sou! dane, ato*
nanka donna hunniki ni suruka [*toka*
 'yeah. and it is also necessary to decide what kind of wedding
 we want'
- 03 Toshi: [*un*
 'yeah'
- 04 Mika: *ongaku wa nanikei* [*ni suruka toka*:,
 'for example, what kind of music we want'
- 05 Toshi: [*uun*
 'yeah'
- 06 (0.6)
- 07 →Mika: *soudane. °watashi°* (0.7) *dou da tta kanaa.* (0.8)
 'well when I did, what did I do'
- 08 →Mika: *wata ↑shi wa nanka bakuzen tooo,*

H

‘(I) roughly [thought that]’

09 (1.4)

10 →Mika: *nanka kacchiri kei ni shi tai mitaina imeeji* [*ga atte,*

H

‘(I) wanted to do formally’

11 Tosh:

[*unun*

H H

‘yeah’

12 (0.7)

13 Mika: *de ato ki tai doresu no kanji mo nanka, kima tte te,*=

‘And (I) knew what types of dress (I) wanted to wear’

14 Tosh: *=un*

H

‘yeah’

15 Mika: *tte* [*natta kedoo,*

‘I was like that’

16 Toshi: *nn* ((couching))

In Excerpt (5) above, Mika agrees with Toshi’s assertion about the preparation of weddings at lines 2 and 4. After (0.6) pause, Mika initiates a topical talk from lines 7 and 8 with the overt first-person singular pronoun *watashi*. Her telling of personal experience continues in multi-unit unlike the ones observed in the earlier examples in account.

In this section, we have seen the overt first-person singular pronoun displaying epistemic access as an account in a single unit, which is the most frequently seen context for the overt form in opinion-negotiation sequence.

6. Discussion

The findings in the analysis section show that the overt first-person singular pronoun is relevant to display the speaker’s epistemic access toward the target in disalignment. In this section, we will consider this point in relation to the interactive mechanism as well as the nature of the first-person singular pro-

nouns.

With regard to the interactive mechanism, instead of directly opposing the co-participant by saying such as “*I don’t agree with you,*” demonstrating the speaker’s (lack of) epistemic access to the target in account align with politeness strategy. This is because, first of all, when displaying disagreements or rejections, speakers often delay, qualify or make account instead of direct assertion or a straight negation in the orientation towards or preference for agreement (c.f. Mori, 1999; Pomerantz, 1984). In my data, the speakers make an account to show his/her indirect disagreement to the co-participant. Second, with regard to the account, it is preferred to focus on the external circumstances rather than internal desires so that non-alignment should not be taken as a threat to the first speaker’s positive face (Pomerantz, 1984). In my data, speakers claim his/her (lack of) epistemic access toward the target, which cannot be controlled by both the speaker and co-participant(s). Such claims, therefore, demonstrate an external circumstance which prevents them from aligning by avoiding face threatening in interaction.

Furthermore, the speaker’s displays of lack of epistemic access or epistemic primacy toward a particular target are based on their own states. The speaker has privileged access to their epistemics, which the co-participant does not have the right to oppose or negate. In this sense, the speaker’s display of their own epistemic access lets the speaker avoid being disaligned as well as the co-participant disalign. To the extent that politeness strategy works to avoid face threatening and to build solidarity relations for both the speaker and the co-participant(s), the displays of epistemics with the overt first-person singular pronoun, which we have seen, plays an essential part of that.

Finally, I would like to address the nature of the overt first-person singular pronoun in Japanese. Previous studies have pointed out that the overt form is marked especially in conversations due to cognitive, semantic, and socio-cultural reasons. Therefore, it is considered that the overt form is deployed for cause. In the data analysis, we have seen that displaying the speaker’s epistemics has a crucial role in delivering disalignment to the co-participant without threatening their face. In this regard, the overt first-person singular pronoun appears when it is essential to convey their position with the maximum attention of politeness. As such, this study, which focuses on the interactional

dimension of the first-person singular pronoun, shed light on the markedness of the usage of the overt first-person singular pronouns.

7. Conclusion

The research questions addressed in this study concerned the use of the overt first-person singular pronouns in opinion-negotiation sequence. In particular, we were interested in how the utterances with the overt forms contribute to the execution of particular actions. The first and second research questions asked when the overt first-person singular pronoun is used in the opinion-negotiation sequence and what types of actions are accomplished by the utterance with the first-person singular pronoun. By taking the sequential analytical perspective, the study found that they appear in the following four contexts: (1) displaying (lack of) epistemic access to the target(s) in account for not being able to agree or for pursuing agreement; (2) personalization of a relevant assertion in a new assertion or in agreement; (3) initiation of a topical talk in a new assertion; (4) exclusion of the speaker(s) from the category invoked in a new assertion. While the total number of the cases are small, the study shows that type (1) has the biggest number among all, suggesting that it is one of the significant contexts in which the overt first-person singular pronouns are used in opinion-negotiation sequences. For the type (1), we have also seen some compositional features: they are mostly nominative and occur in a single unit.

The third research question concerned how the use of the overt first-person singular pronoun is relevant in showing a speaker's stance about the circumstance. We have seen that the type (1) appears when the speaker or co-participant does not align with the other's previous assertion while type (2), (3), and (4) are seen when they align or partially align with the other's previous assertion. The analysis section, which particularly focused on the type (1), suggests that the usage reflects the nature of contingency of conversation. That is, the usages of overt first-person singular pronouns are attributed to co-participants' negotiation of their epistemic access to the target(s) and/or degree of alignment and affiliation to the previous assertions. We have seen that the co-participants participate in social action with the attention of others' epistemic

and affective stance, and the overt first-person singular pronouns are deployed to convey the speaker's position with the effort of avoiding potential face-threatening. For example, when the speaker does not align with the co-participant's assertion, they demonstrate their epistemic access to the target with the overt first-person singular pronoun and account instead of directly saying "*I don't agree with you*" with the overt form. As such, the overt first-person singular pronouns are deployed in managing the relationship with co-participant over the course of interaction.

While this study tried to provide interactive dimensions of the usage of the first-person singular pronouns as discussed above, there are of course some limitations. First, we have a small collection of examples due to the nature of the overt first-person singular pronoun. That is, as mentioned at the beginning of the study, the use of the overt form is marked in Japanese. Therefore, more examples will lead to a stronger claim about the usage of the overt first-person singular pronouns¹².

Another limitation is the feature of the conversations that we analyzed is among closed friends with similar age groups. Because of this, the participants might have tended to talk about something they have in common or they both know in a rather casual way. Opinion-negotiation sequences among different groups of people including different age groups and different relationships might reveal other interesting characteristics of the usage of the first-person singular pronouns, which will be the future issues.

Despite these limitations, I would finally like to address an implication of the overt first-person singular pronouns used in my data sets. All the first-person singular pronoun is used when the speaker explains his/her (lack of) personal experience, personal situation, or internal states, all of which belongs to the speaker him/herself and personal. Therefore, the speaker has the evidence that the information conveyed is valid and thus able to commit to the validity. In this sense, the first-person singular pronoun is seen when the speaker expresses his or her evidentiality and epistemicity along with other linguistic devices, serving as the speaker as the source of evidence (Raymond and Heritage 2006).

The study as a whole has tried to shed light on the fact that the first-person singular pronouns in Japanese are beyond their canonical and prototypical

meaning (i.e. “I” as a speaker-deictic pronoun), as argued in Ono and Thompson (2003). From the perspective of IL and CA, this paper has tried to show the identification of their action-related properties in social interaction.

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Notes

1 The details are found in Koiso et al. (2022).

2 The notion of “preference” in the sequence of conversation is intimately related to the sequence of turns, that consist of adjacency pairs. In this framework, the term “preference” describes the treatment of certain actions as non-equivalent, or “preferred” over the other (Clift 2016). A “preferred” response builds social solidarity with the speaker of the first pair-part, while “dispreferred” responses threaten that social solidarity (Clift 2016).

3 This paper uses the term “alignment” as a structural one and “affiliation” as a social one with Stivers et al’s (2011) definition. Aligning responses “cooperate by facilitating the proposed activity or sequence, accepting the presuppositions and terms of the proposed action or activity, and matching the formal design preference of the turn” (Stivers et al. 2011, 21). Affiliative response, on the other hand, is social, and “cooperates at the level of action and affective stance” (Stivers et al. 2011, 21).

4 All of the participants except Taka and Yuu are from the Kanto region, including Tokyo and Kanagawa prefectures, and speak Standard Japanese. Taka is from Osaka and speaks Kansai dialect. Yuu is originally from Gifu and spent several years in Aichi prefecture for his graduate school. However, Yuu’s speech does not have a strong regional dialect.

5 Among 20 cases, two cases are *watashi teki*, which is the combination of the first-person singular pronoun *watashi* and a suffix *teki* (‘like’), which modifies the base, *watashi*.

6 The form *boku* was observed in *boku nanka*, which is the combination of the first-person singular pronoun *boku* and a highlighting particle *nanka*, meaning ‘a person like me.’

7 All the cases with the zero-particle are in the nominative position.

8 For the definitions and categorization of the particles, I refer to Iwasaki (2006, 66–67).

9 There are four exceptions which primarily occur for “referential consideration” (Ono and Thompson, 2003).

10 The exception is in the utterance, *watashi to Kana ni taisuru* (‘toward me and Kana’), produced as a disagreement to the self-deprecation. The overt-first person singular pronoun is attached with the particle *to* (‘and’) to make a comparison with the referent Kana. The utterance is significantly different from the cases introduced in this paper as the overt form appears in oblique primarily for a referential consideration.

11 The overt first-person singular pronoun *watashi* here is not our target of the analysis in this section as it is in a different position from our focus.

12 Some previous literature on the study of language use include interesting examples with the overt first-person singular pronouns that actually fit with the claim that this study is making. See Appendix (3) for an example from Mori (1999).

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Appendices

1) Transcription conventions

The conversational data used in this study has been transcribed based on Jefferson's (2004) transcription. Each transcription utilizes the following conventions:

[Overlap
=	Latching
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuing
?	Rising intonation
↑ ↓	Allows indicate shifts into especially high or low pitch.
WORD	Upper case indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.
° word°	Degree signs bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicates that the sounds are softer than the surrounding talk.
> <	Talk between “more than” and “less than” symbols is compressed or rused.
(0.8)	Numbers in parentheses indicate periods of silence, in tenths of a second. A period inside parentheses is a pause less than two-tenths of a second.
(())	Double parentheses contain transcriber's descriptions.
£ Oh okay £	British pound signs indicate talk produced while smiling.
{laugh}	Laughter accompanied with speech
H	Head-movement (vertical, up to down)

2) Additional notes on transcriptions and English translations

___ Underlines are added for the slots in which overt person pronouns can fit.

() Parentheses mark the added pronouns for the purpose of translation.

[] Brackets mark the part which is not the literal translation.

3) The example below is extracted from Mori (1999, 116–117). In this opinion-negotiation sequence, overt first-person singular pronoun *watashi* (line 11) is used when the speaker displays that she does not have epistemic access to the person to evaluate as an account for not providing any specific comment on the person or not for providing elaborated agreement.

Context: Naoko refers to Miki's former roommate as a trouble-maker or a hysterical person and prompts Miki's evaluation of this person.

- 01 Naoko: (ja) mae no ruumumeeto nanka wa doo datta?=
then before LK roommate like Top how Cop
- 02 =ano:: (.) i-ita jan? ano:: supeingo o hanasu
that existed Tag that Spanish O speak
- 03 hito ya::,=
person or
'then how about your former roommates? uhm (.) You had
that uhm the one who speaks Spanish or,'
- 04 Miki: =ha:: ha:: ha:: [ha::
yeah yeah yeah yeah
'Yeah yeah yeah yeah'
- 05 Naoko: [nanka itsumo mondai o
like all-the-time trouble O
- 06 okoshite, [nanka [ko hisuterikku [datta janai?=
cause like hysteric Cop Tag
'Like she was causing troubles all the time and being
hysteric, right?'
- 07 Miki: [hohohohohohoho
- 08 Tami: [u::n [ha ha ha .hh
uh-huh
'uh huh'
- 09 Miki: =soo da ne:: (0.3) demo:, doo daroo na:::/
soo Cop FP but how Cop FP
'Right. (0.3) but what can I say,'
- 10 Tami: °u::n°
uh huh
'uh huh'
- 11 →Miki: maa kanojo to wa anmari watashi wa banasu kikai
well her with Top many I Top talk chance
- 12 nakatta kara:,
Neg because
'Well I didn't have many chances to talk with her'
- 13 Tami: °u::n°
uh huh
'uh huh'
- 14 Miki: are datta kedo ::.
that Cop but
'you know.'

