

# Co-occurrence of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors:

Single case analysis of Japanese EFL learners' allo-repetition and gazing<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Repetition is one of the most effective means of achieving cohesion in communication (Halliday and Hasan 1976) and has also received attention in English as a foreign language (EFL) (Sawir 2004; Pon, Medve, and Takač 2018). Among these, Sawir (2004) stated that in the interactions between Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Japanese EFL learners and native English speakers, allo-repetition contributes to conversational development, maintenance, and coherence, and can be a strategy for demonstrating active participation in situations where conversational skills are not equal. Subsequently, Pon, Medve, and Takač (2018) showed that word repetition is more frequent than repetition of word fragments, sentences, and clauses, and that repetitive expressions are used as a means of achieving coherence in sentences written in a second language.

Furthermore, Brennan and Clark (1996) suggest that repetition of words and constructions by speakers, other than the person who delivered the original utterance (hereafter referred to as “allo-repetition”) contributes to clarifying the process of establishing mutual understanding in spoken dialogue. This indicates the importance of focusing on repetition in relation to the acquisition of coherence in interaction and the strengthening of “common ground” (Clark 1996). However, the relationship between repetition and the enhancement of common ground in second language interaction has not been ade-

quately examined.

Furthermore, non-native speakers of English may not have a high level of proficiency in terms of vocabulary, expressive content, or pragmatic aspects (Rose and Kasper 2001) that facilitate the smooth development of conversation with place-appropriate expressions in communication. It is therefore essential to explore teaching methods that improve their ability to interact.

Therefore, this study focused on English conversations among Japanese EFL learners to explore how grounding is carried out by continuous allo-repetition in relation to gaze distribution<sup>2</sup>. This study then analyzed the process of construction and monitoring of mutual understanding and discussed how this process provides cues for learners to communicate effectively in a second language. To help clarify the process of establishing “common ground” (Clark 1996,92) from emic perspectives, I adopted a single case analysis (Schegloff 1987; Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008; Konakahara 2020) to “identify interactional resources utilized and organized in the extended sequences of talk” (Konakahara 2020, 301).

## **2. Previous Studies**

### ***2.1 Attunement and grounding***

Clark (1996) argued that the common ground between individuals is strengthened when they express their understanding of a certain statement and share it with their interlocutors. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the grounding of interactions from both verbal and nonverbal perspectives (Enomoto and Okamoto 2010). To date, few previous studies have focused on both verbal and nonverbal aspects in a single study.

Brennan and Clark (1996) suggested that attunement in verbal expressions, including allo-repetition, is integrated with attunement in concepts. They described allo-repetition as grounding or establishing “common ground” in the process of mutual understanding among students (Clark 1996, 92). Their description emphasizes the importance of repetition in relation to the achievement of coherence and the discovery of “common ground” (Clark 1996, 92). Oben (2018) detailed attunement and grounding in this interaction act from the lexical to the nonverbal level. However, second language repetition and

grounding in interaction by speakers is limited to studies of task-attainment discourse by Tanimura and Yoshida (2017) and Yoshida (2018), who found that the basis for joint action is built on the coordination of pragmatic and nonverbal aspects.

Furthermore, studies of English as a lingua franca (ELF) have also focused on allo-repetition, suggesting that it enhances mutual understanding through intelligibility and explicitness (Cappuzzo 2015; Lee 2016). While these studies show that mutual understanding is an important feature of ELF communication, this idea shows different features from the norms used by native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei 1998) and L2 interactions in which some meaning-making negotiation should take place (Cappuzzo 2015).

## ***2.2 Relationship between speech and gaze***

In relation to the way speakers and listeners gaze in response to speech, Kendon (1967) reported that listeners gaze longer at interlocutors. Rossano, Brown, and Levinson (2009) reported that gaze distribution is established by the relationship between conversational sequencing and action progression.

Furthermore, Kataoka (2006), focusing on the relationship between utterance and gaze in task achievement discourse in Japanese and English, stated that Japanese speakers' gazes often originate from the speaker's own utterance and arrive in the middle of utterance, while English speakers' gazes often arrive after utterance in response to the utterance of others. However, there is still insufficient discussion of the relationship between the way allo-repetition is operationalized and gazes in a second language.

## **3. Data and Methodology**

The analysis used excerpts from a three-minute conversation videotaped in an English class. The participants were 14 groups of 28 first-year university students (beginner-intermediate level: TOEIC 450–550) in information system and communication engineering in the Kanto region. Based on my judgments regarding the students' relief and comfort, familiar topics such as their hobbies and favorite food were chosen.

Students were divided into seven groups of four students each. Two of the group participants conducted the conversation, while the other two were in

charge of recording and time-measuring the conversation. At the end of the allotted time, the groups changed places and the process was repeated. For this study, I focused on responses to questions and allo-repetition to acknowledge content or background knowledge regarding the current topic, confirming each interlocutor's comprehension, and letting each speaker continue to speak (Horiguchi 1997; Otsuka 2015).

Note that the notational conventions for utterances were based on the transcription conventions of Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, and Paolino (1993) and Takeda (2019) and those for gaze were based on the transcription conventions of Auer (2018).

#### 4. Results: Eliciting the current topic

It was found that mutual understanding in conversation is achieved through a combination of continuous word-level repetition of others and gaze distribution or nodding. First, a transcript of the linguistic aspect is included.

##### 4.1 Linguistic aspects

[Excerpt: Salmon: Linguistic Aspect]<sup>3</sup>

01 A: What is your favorite food?

02 B: My favorite food is wataame, ah, [cotton candy.

03 A: [Wataame.

(1)

04 B: Cotton candy.

05 A: Cotton [candy.

06 B: [Yes. I, if I went to festival, I would buy it.

07 A: Un, oh.

08 B: How about you? How about you?

09 A: Um, I like sushi.

10 B: Sushi.

11 A: Sushi.

12 B: Sushi *tabetai*. Sushi, what sushi, what kind of sushi do you like?

(2)

- 13 A: I like, um, salmon.  
 14 B: Salmon.  
 15 A: Un, salmon.  
 16 B: Salmon is *Maguro* in Japanese. *Are, magu*, no, no, no *Maguro*.

(3)

Here, “*wataame*” in line 3, “cotton candy” in line 5, “sushi” in lines 10–12, and “salmon” in lines 14–16 are allo-repetitions. From line 10 onward, a series of repetitions of others, each of which is repeated three times, serves as a presentation of understanding and agreement and as a link to the subsequent utterance.

A more elaborate analysis revealed that in the first part (1), student B responded to student A’s question by saying the name of his favorite food in Japanese as “*wataame*” (line 2), and then tried to say its English name correctly (what he said in line 2 is repeated in line 4). During this time, student A repeated the Japanese name of student B’s favorite food (line 3) and its English name (line 5) to deepen his understanding, while accepting the correction from Japanese to English to facilitate the exchange in English.

Next, in part (2), “sushi” from lines 9 to 12 and “salmon” from lines 13 to 16 also show allo-repetition. These iterations of others serve as a means of checking the degree of understanding between the interlocutors, and function as an exchange that prompts questions and comments related to the current topic. Indeed, in the case of “sushi,” the first “sushi” (line 9) is an answer to the question “How about you?” in line 8, implying a change of topic from student B’s favorite food to student A’s favorite food. “Sushi” appears three more times (lines 10–12) after the utterance “Um, I like sushi,” which is both the answer and the trigger (line 9). These allo-repetitions function to monitor each interlocutor’s understanding to locate subsequent utterances and opportunities to develop related questions that follow, as in line 12, “Sushi, what sushi, what kind of sushi do you like?”

A similar exchange occurs in the case of “salmon,” where the answer to student B’s question “Sushi, what sushi, what kind of sushi do you like?” (Line 12) is “I like, um, salmon.” Line 13 is the catalyst for the exchange that follows. Student B then begins to confirm his understanding by repeating

“Salmon” in line 14, and line 15, “Um, salmon.” Student A acknowledges and accepts this as the correct understanding. Observing this response, student B develops a comment related to student A’s favorite food, trying to match the English “salmon” with the Japanese “*sake*,” but he says “*Maguro*” (line 16) and fails to suggest the correct Japanese word “*sake*” (salmon).

To summarize the results of the analysis thus far, “*wataame*” in line 3, “cotton candy” in line 5, “sushi” in lines 10–12, and “salmon” in lines 14–16 all correspond to allo-repetitions. They are used to show empathy and sympathy with the other person. After answering the questions “What is your favorite food?” in line 1, “How about you?” in line 8, and “What kind of sushi do you like?” in line 12, both student A and student B repeat each other’s utterances without adding any relevant content other than agreement.

In all of the conversation parts in (1), (2), and (3), it is always student B who initiates the utterance that moves the conversation to a different topic after the repetition of the other. For example, “How about you?” in line 8, “What sushi, what kind of sushi do you like?” in line 12, “Salmon is *Maguro* in Japanese. *Are, magu*, no, no, no *Maguro*” in line 16, are all by student B. The topics are shifted (or, in the case of line 16, about to shift) to “student A’s favorite food,” “student A’s favorite sushi item,” and “a Japanese translation of the word salmon.”

## 4.2 Gaze and nodding

Next, looking at the nonverbal aspect with a focus on gaze and nodding, we see that the gaze that had been averted moves to the interlocutor, and nodding is added as the allo-repetition takes place. Transcripts of the nonverbal aspects are provided for the three areas circled in the transcript of the verbal aspect below.

[Excerpt: Salmon: Non-linguistic Aspect] (1)

- 02 B: My favorite food is wataame, ah, [cotton candy].
- 03 A:
- 04 B: Cotton candy.
- 05 A: Cotton [candy].
- Diagrammatic representation of gaze shifts (A and B) and nodding (AN, BN) for the above lines. In line 02, B's gaze is on A. In line 03, A's gaze is slightly downward. In line 04, B's gaze is on A. In line 05, A's gaze is on B.

Figure 1: A's gaze at line 2 "wataame"

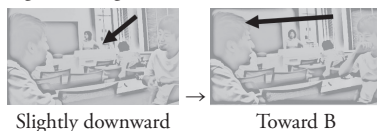
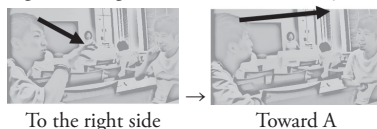


Figure 2: B's gaze at line 2 "cotton candy"



In this fragment, student A or student B's gaze shifts from slightly downward ("wataame" in line 2) or to the right side (the overlap in lines 2–3) to the interlocutor (Figures 1 and 2). After such a gaze shift, we observe that student A and student B nod three times almost simultaneously (see the appearance of 'AN' and 'BN' in lines 4–5).

Let us now look at fragment (2) from line 9.

[Excerpt: Salmon: Non-linguistic Aspect] (2)

- 09 A: Um, I like sushi.
- 10 B: Sushi.
- 11 A: Sushi.
- 12 B: Sushi tabetai.
- Diagrammatic representation of gaze shifts (A and B) and nodding (AN, BN) for the above lines. In line 09, A's gaze is below. In line 10, B's gaze is on A. In line 11, A's gaze is on B. In line 12, B's gaze is on A.

Figure 3: A's gaze at line 9 "I like sushi."



Figure 4: B's gaze at line 10 "Sushi."



Similar to fragment (1), lines 9–10 also show a shift of gaze between student A and student B. That is, in line 9, student A's gaze shifts from below to student B, and student B's gaze shifts from slightly upward to student A in line 10. After these eye movements, in line 10, both student A and student B nod their heads almost simultaneously, although only once, and in lines 11–12, it can be observed that their gazes are focused on each other.

Below is fragment (3) describing lines 13–16, which immediately follows.

[Excerpt: Salmon: Non-linguistic Aspect] (3)

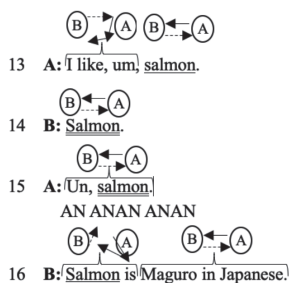


Figure 5: A's gaze at line 16 "Salmon is *Maguro* (in Japanese)."

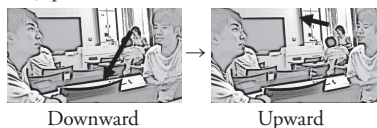


Figure 6: B's gaze at line 16 "Salmon is *Maguro* in Japanese."



In the first half of line 13, student A's gaze shifts from bottom to left, but after the utterance of "salmon," both gazes are directed toward the interlocutor. After these eye movements, student A nodded his head five times in a row in line 15. Student B then moves his gaze from the top to student A in the second half of line 16, and student A also shifts his gaze from downward to student B in response to the word "*maguro*" (which means "tuna" in English).

In summary, in all of the segments, the gaze that had been averted was shifted to the interlocutor. In particular, in segments (1) and (2), the gaze that was averted downward and to the right shifted to the interlocutor, and in segment (3), the gaze that was averted downward and to the left shifted to the interlocutor. Furthermore, focusing on nodding, it was observed that in all segments, nodding was added as the others repeated themselves. Then, nodding was observed between both students A and B (in segment (3), only student A nodded multiple times) at the stage when the content of their utterances was confirmed and understood.

## 5. Discussion

Through the above analysis, this study explored the process of grounding that builds mutual understanding in conversation, focusing on the allo-repetition and gaze distribution. Here, the distribution of eye gaze according to context reveals a high degree of association between the content of speech and



eye gaze, not only in terms of language but also in terms of whether eye contact is made, with common content bringing participants closer to each other and facilitating the grounding of their speech.

This co-occurrence of the linguistic ‘overlap’ of allo-repetition and the non-verbal ‘overlap’ of parallelizing gazes between the interlocutors in a two-party conversation is a major clue for learners to be able to communicate effectively and promote mutual understanding in a second language. However, how should this point be taught? As a clue, we would like to introduce two aspects of teaching, *implicit teaching* and *explicit teaching*, proposed and discussed by Ishihara and Cohen (2010), McConachy and Hata (2013), and Kosaki and Takeda (2017).

Implicit instruction refers to the awareness of features found in the data and is an instructional approach to exploring what kind of dissimilarities in the use of allo-repetition are found between L1 [native language] and L2 [second or learned language], with and without a focus on the nonverbal aspect. Explicit instruction is a method in which learners are made to realize and apply their findings through role-plays, for example, by preparing conversational examples of L1 speakers’ actual use of allo-repetition and gaze co-occurrence and having learners role-play them to realize what they have noticed as L2 speakers.

When instructors apply implicit instruction to teach functions of allo-repetition and its co-occurrence with nonverbal behavior in their L2 with examples, they will start with using allo-repetition in their L1 and L2 with/without paying attention to nonverbal behaviors. Then, students will identify some differences in interactions between native speakers of English. After sharing their findings with classmates, teachers and students then discuss the relationship between verbal and nonverbal behavior when using allo-repetition.

In contrast, explicit instruction can be applied with a role-play practice of eliciting the current topic or triggering corrections as a resource for actual interactions. In this case, instructors can prepare a dialogue based on the interaction between L1 English speakers. Or, if instructors present an exercise of ELF communication, they can provide a model dialogue based on the interaction between speakers with different mother tongues using English as a second language. This method provides us with a good interaction model but it

should not be regarded as typical.

There is a lively debate about which model to incorporate into instruction from the viewpoint of the effectiveness of these two instructing methods (Nezakat-Alhossaini, Youhanaee, and Moinzadeh 2014; Murata 2015; Godfroid 2016). However, rather than the issue of which approach to start with, it is most important to foster meta-pragmatic awareness (McConachy 2018) through the two instructional methods. According to McConachy (2018), meta-pragmatic awareness sheds light on the assumption and knowledge from the learners' interpretation of their L1 and its linkage to "the consequence for the development of the agency in the L2" (McConachy 2018, 26). The awareness also makes learners comprehend the sociocultural context and promote them to understand how to use specific ways of speaking (and nonverbal behaviors as well) to construct meaning and interpersonal relationships according to what transpires in an interaction.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored mutual understanding in conversation through allo-repetition by focusing on the co-occurrence of allo-repetition and gazing to show interdependency with interlocutors.

In the future, we will examine more broadly how to overcome the differences between the participants in their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and establish smooth interactions when the same language is used. However, the interactional strategies differ according to the culture and community to which each speaker belongs, as well as the environment in which ELF is used. We would like to explore more practical research from the viewpoint of whether the phenomena discussed in this paper are common to native speakers of any language.

At the same time, we need to enrich resources, such as data collection in L1-L2 conversation or L2-L2 (participants from different countries) conversation in English to elaborate the method of how to teach pragmatic aspects in the usage of a certain linguistic and non-linguistic device in ELF or EIL (English as an international language) situations.

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## Notes

1 This is a revised version of my oral presentation ‘Co-occurrence of verbal and non-verbal cues in grounding: A study on allo-repetition and gaze in Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) interactions’ at The 58th JACET International Convention held at Nagoya Institute of Technology in August 2019 and “*Tasha hampuku ni miru gengoteki ‘kasanari’ to higengoteki ‘kasanari’ no kyooki: Nihonjin eigo gakushuusha no deeta kara*” (Co-occurrence of linguistic and non-linguistic ‘overlap’ in allo-repetition: Data from Japanese learners of English) at The Academic Exchange Project Symposium *Soogo kooi to gengo kyooiku* (Interaction and Language Education) held at Japan Women’s University in March, 2020.

2 Conventions for linguistic transcripts (Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, and Paolino 1993; Takeda 2019)

[ : the beginning part of the overlapping utterance

XX: the source of the repetition

XX: the word of the other person’s repetition (allo-repetition)

.: falling intonation

,: continuing intonation

?: rising intonation

3 Conventions for non-verbal transcripts (Auer 2018)

————▶ : Gaze by student A

-----▶ : Gaze by student B      AN/BN:Nodding by participant(s)

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