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I declare:

a) that this submission is my own work;
b) that this is written in my own words; and
c) that all quotations from published or unpublished work are acknowledged with quotation marks and references to the work in question.
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Name: Andrew J. Lawson

Date: 20th September 2009

FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE BAR-ROOM: EXPRESSIONS OF DISAGREEMENT BY JAPANESE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

by

ANDREW J. LAWSON

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, more and more researchers and teachers have called for a greater emphasis on teaching EFL/ESL students the pragmatic aspects of language, to ensure that learners no longer merely learn the language, but that they also learn how to use the language effectively. This is particularly crucial in areas of language where there is a high potential for causing anger or embarrassment to either oneself or one's speech partner. This dissertation examines the literature connected to this theme, with a particular focus on previous studies on Japanese use of argumentation. It proceeds to investigate the ways Japanese Speakers of English (JSEs) express disagreement, and how they differ from native speakers of English (NSs). It also discusses the various factors which influence both JSEs and NSs in their choice of strategies to express disagreement. Finally it considers ways in which EFL/ESL teachers can help students to develop their pragmatic English discussion abilities, allowing them to ultimately enjoy argument and debate in informal English-language contexts, with less fear of 'losing face'.

DEDICATION

To

Kaori and the Monkeys

with love and affection

for missing all those days at the park

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CONTENTS

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

For the purposes of this paper, I have elected to employ several abbreviations and labels to refer to key terms in the discussion:

NS(s): *Native Speaker(s)*. Used here to refer exclusively to Native English Speakers which, for the purpose of this study, are those who learned English from birth, and have always spoken English as their 'first language'. Block (2003: 32) and others would dispute this term, along with its other variants.

NNS(s): *Non Native Speaker(s)*. Used to refer to all those who are not NS(s), as defined above.

JSE(s): *Japanese Speaker(s) of English*. This is used to refer to the participants in this study who are Japanese citizens, and all have a command of English which would be classified as intermediate or above. It was chosen in preference to NNS or JLE (Japanese Learner of English) to highlight the nationality of all members of the group, and their ability to each communicate in English at a relatively high level.

VAT: *Value Added Tax*. For ease of comprehension, I have taken the liberty of employing the UK term and its abbreviation as a substitute for the Japanese Consumption Tax.

3rd-person pronouns

In referring to the undetermined single third person, the grammatically dubious but gender-neutral plural third person terminology will be employed. While far from ideal, the use of *they* and *their* is deemed to be less problematic than the alternatives.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1873, shortly after Japan opened up to the western world, the nation's first minister of education, Mori Arinori realised the need for English language proficiency, in order for Japan to interact with the West on an equal footing. While most would vehemently disagree with Mori's assessment of his native tongue as a "meagre language" (Stanlaw, 2004: 65; Kachru and Nelson, 2006: 171), his belief that the knowledge of foreign languages is imperative for economic and social development on the global stage remains valid today. With the continuing growth of English as a world language, Japanese people are becoming increasingly aware of the need to become more proficient in English communication skills.

This required foreign language competence is not limited to vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. An awareness of the variations in culture and conversational patterns is imperative when communicating in a foreign language (Canale and Swain, 1980). Without this, we are susceptible to accepting the negative stereotypes which Yamada refers to, such as the "sneaky and evasive" Japanese, or the "loud and pushy" Americans (Yamada, 1997: viii).

One would hope that this extreme view of the Japanese people as "sneaky and evasive" is not a widespread one. However, numerous scholars (both Japanese and native English speakers) have lamented the difficulty which Japanese speakers of

English encounter in trying to express themselves effectively, particularly in situations where they are expected to offer their opinions in the L2 (Matsuoka, 2003). A key aspect of communicative competence is in understanding the differences in offering opinions and expressing disagreement, as it is undeniable that cultural variations do exist (Long, 2003). As a case in point, Belcher comments on the Japanese notion of *omoiyari* ('intuitive empathy') and the negative impact it has on communication in the "Western agonistic academic context" (Belcher, 1997: 8). Thus, there is a strong argument for teaching critical thinking to learners of English.

The intention of this paper is not to argue that the Western interactional style is in any way superior to the Japanese style (or vice-versa). It merely seeks to contribute to the field of cross-cultural argumentation, and assist Japanese learners of English in their efforts to become more adept at cogently establishing their views and opinions in communications with native-speakers. Having identified a current gap in the literature, it examines the speech act of disagreement by Japanese Speakers of English (JSEs), and more specifically, the act of spontaneously expressing disagreement with statements made by power-equal individuals in a non-formal setting, using the deontic 'should be', in the standard passive modal simple structure (e.g. "Smoking should be permitted on airplanes"). The study aims to identify some of the ways in which JSEs differ from native speakers of English (NSs) in their use of mitigation strategies and intensifiers, and to consider some possible explanations for these variations.

This study focuses on 'sociable argument' (Locher, 2004: 94). It was inspired by live observation of informal conversation between English speakers and Japanese people in social settings (e.g. bars, restaurants, home parties, corporate social events)

over the past decade. On several occasions, a JSE was seen to be actively engaging in a group conversation, until a contentious topic was raised. At this point, the JSE became significantly quieter, and drifted to the periphery of the group, as the NSs enjoyed an impromptu debate.

Do these JSEs have the appropriate linguistic knowledge to express their discord coherently, and if so, are they able to transfer this knowledge from the controlled environment of the classroom, allowing them to make spontaneous, effective use of it when faced with utterances that they fundamentally disagree with? Furthermore, are there specific aspects which teachers of ESL / EFL would do well to place greater or less emphasis upon?

Chapter 2 of this paper examines the relevant literature in the field, relating not only to argumentation, but the wider area of potentially conflict-inducing speech acts. It then goes on to discuss studies more directly related to Japan. Chapter 3 explains the study in more detail, including the rationale behind its design. Chapter 4 analyses the results of the study, loosely based on Kreutel's framework of 'desirable' and 'undesirable' features. In chapter 5, the results will be analysed with regard to some additional issues which were raised in the course of the study. Chapter 6 examines the implications which the results of this study may have on the teaching of argumentation and offering opinions in the EFL/ESL classroom, before the paper's conclusion in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1 The speech act of disagreement

Since the 1970s, there has been a large volume of discussion related to the need for a communicative approach to language teaching, and a focus on pragmatic competence to match the efforts devoted to grammatical and lexical competence (Leech, 1983; Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Wierzbicka, 2003). After all, "native speakers are more likely to forgive a grammatical mistake than a pragmatic one" (Wolfson, 1989, in Charlebois 2004: 3). This has been accompanied by a widespread acknowledgement of the general difficulty in assessing pragmatic competence (Thomas, 1983).

But given the importance of learning how to express one's discord effectively through the medium of the target language, there has, to date, been a relative paucity of research into how non-native speakers of English express disagreement in informal discussion. Other aspects of 'politeness phenomena' (Meier, 1997), such as apologies, requests, and thanks have been the focus of several prominent studies over the past 30 years (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). The website of the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) devotes a section of its website to 'Pragmatics / Speech Acts', and lists the speech acts currently being researched at CARLA: 'apologies', 'complaints', 'compliments / responses', 'refusals',

'requests', and 'thanks'. But once again, the speech act of refuting opinions is notable by its absence.

Some may consider this absence to be quite justified. Pearson (1986) appears to question the wisdom of textbooks giving equal emphasis to disagreement, given the far higher incidence of agreement in her data. But this equal weighting is surely fully merited, as there is no question that the pragmatic act of expressing disagreement is far more complex than that of expressing agreement. The ability to convey one's dissension without causing the other party to lose 'face' (Brown and Levinson, 1987) requires an extensive combination of linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Originally constructed a generation ago, Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is based upon the concept of 'face'. Each of us strive to 'keep face', but interaction with our fellow human beings is fraught with potentially face-threatening situations. Brown and Levinson (1987: 58) examine the 'face' of their 'MP' ('model person'), based on the assumption that he is a rational individual, and that he has both 'positive' and 'negative' face. Positive face is the desire to maintain a positive self-image, and to have others hold a similar appreciative view of us. Negative face claims the freedom to make our own decisions, determine our own actions, and to reject the impositions of others. As participant members of a developed society however, we appreciate "the mutual vulnerability of face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 61) and accept that keeping 'face' often requires compromise in the short-term, allowing our own negative face to be sacrificed to some degree in order to protect the face of another. This politeness allows us to maintain social harmony, ultimately furthering our own self-interests.

Brown and Levinson's theory accepts the occasional inevitability of 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs), and claims that their rational MP will consider three issues before embarking on any FTA:

- the desire to communicate the content of the FTA
- the desire to be efficient or urgent
- the desire to maintain the Listener's 'face' at all costs.

This leads to a list of suggested politeness strategies intended to minimize the threat of FTAs, a significant branch of which are of course, expressions of disagreement. Though lauded as a highly-influential study within the field, Brown and Levinson's work has encountered considerable criticism from various angles (see chapter 2.2). There are several other theories pertaining to linguistic politeness (Bowe and Martin, 2007: 32), and a few which relate more directly to argumentation.

In a discussion of what is referred to as a *pragma-dialectic* method for analysing critical discourse, Richardson and Atkin (2006) consider that those engaged in argument strive to meet two objectives. One is the dialectic aim of resolving the difference of opinion which exists, and the other is the rhetorical goal of having one's own position accepted as correct.

Examining how to achieve the rhetorical goal and 'win' the argument, Richardson and Atkin utilise van Eemeren and Grootendorst's Decalogue, or "ten commandments for reasonable discussants" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004: 190) to compile their rules of critical discussion. Richardson and Atkin proceed to discuss the reality of argument, where it is often difficult to effectively establish the

rules. But they reiterate van Eemeren and Grootendorst's assertion that the theory of argumentation must be primarily focused on those arguments which occur in the course of normal, everyday life: "We believe that incorporating the prior/passing theory enables us, as pragma-dialecticians, to better relate to, and explain, ordinary argumentation" (Richardson and Atkin, 2006: 156).

Given the combative language used in these rules above ('attack' or 'defend', 'advance' or 'retract'), or indeed Brown and Levinson's notion of FTAs, it is understandable why some would claim that the speech act of disagreement is always undesirable in standard friendly conversations (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989). However, this may be overly simplistic. Tannen claims that "many cultures of the world see arguing as a pleasurable sign of intimacy" (Tannen, 1994: 44), and cites people of East European Jewish backgrounds, Greeks and Germans as examples (Tannen, 1994; Tannen, 1998; Tannen, 2003). Schiffrin's 1984 study of argument between a group of Jewish Americans and Kakava's 2002 examination of Greek opposition strategies provide further evidence. This writer's own experiences as a British male support this theory, of affable, yet often intense verbal jousting among intimates as a way of honing one's linguistic skills in a relatively secure environment.

What must be borne in mind is that general attitudes towards argumentation differ not only by language, but also between cultures which share a common language, and perhaps even a race or nationality. Is it therefore possible to have a definitive set of rules for critical discussion which are universally applicable? Richardson and Atkin's 10th rule echoes Grice's (1975) maxim of Manner, which stresses the need to avoid ambiguity and obscurity of expression:

> *the ambiguity, or usage rule*: participants must not use any formations that are not sufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they must interpret the formations of the other participant as carefully and accurately as possible.
>
> *(Richardson and Atkin, 2006: 154)*

Whether an utterance is deemed to be either 'sufficiently clear' or 'confusingly ambiguous' will depend greatly on the person to whom it is being addressed. It is widely acknowledged that ambiguity is far more prevalent in Japanese discussion than it is in English (Bowe and Martin, 2007; Bachnik and Quinn, 1994). Ben-Ari, Moeran and Valentine (1990) provides a fascinating perspective on Japanese conversation, and the need to locate the meaning within all the honorifics and allusions which provide the crucial 'wrapping'.

There are a myriad number of factors which may come into consideration when choosing how to express one's discord. Brown and Levinson's 'sociological variables' (1987:74) would be crucial, but by no means the only issues to consider:

- Social Distance of Speaker and Hearer
- Relative power of Speaker and Hearer
- Absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture.

Building on this, Rees-Miller (2000) examines disagreement within the context of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Focusing on the choice of linguistic markers used in natural oral data collected at a large U.S. university, it supports Brown and Levinson's theory in so far as that power and rank can certainly play an important role in determining one's strategy for expressing disagreement. However, Rees-

Miller's study concludes that the manner in which strategies are affected by a power-imbalance is far from predictable, and that it is therefore unrealistic to claim a universal theory of politeness. While power relationships did not appear to influence the use of negative politeness markers to soften disagreement, professors talking to students tended to use positive politeness strategies more frequently than either students talking to professors, or those in power-equal relationships.

Strauss (2004) published an interesting paper on the need for speakers to mark the 'cultural standing' of their opinion, cultural standing being Strauss' label for "the location of a view on a continuum that ranges from highly controversial to completely taken for granted in the relevant opinion community" (Strauss, 2004: 161). This appears to echo 'the social norm view', described as a view which "assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms" (Fraser, 1990: 220). This is a notion which we shall return to at a later stage in the paper.

Other studies of disagreement have included Liang and Han (2005), who conducted a study into disagreement strategies in American English and Mandarin Chinese "from the perspectives of pragmatics and socio-linguistics at the private interpersonal level". (Liang and Han, 2005: 2). Liang and Han found evidence to support the commonly-held notion of East-Asian societies being more collectivist, and valuing harmony far more than the individualist U.S. society:

> "With the increase of social distance (from friend to classmate to stranger), the contradictory statements from American students are on the rise while the politeness strategies in decrease. To the Chinese students, the results are just the opposite. The rates of disagreement decrease with the increase of social distance."
>
> *(Liang and Han, 2005: 8-9)*

While the method of data collection employed by Liang and Han is the frequently used Discourse Completion Test (DCT), Edstrom (2004) elects to base her analysis of Venezuelan expression of disagreement on audio recordings of six organised, but informal conversations where the all-female participants were free to discuss any topic of their choosing. Edstrom argues that "generalizations about politeness orientation and conversational style which attribute differences primarily, or exclusively, to cultural distinctions must be reconsidered" (Edstrom, 2004: 1500). She questions the concept of labeling cultures as being oriented towards either positive or negative politeness, given that these are "relative notions that depend on one's vantage point" (Edstrom, 2004: 1502). This is a position supported by Bowe and Martin (2007: 37), and will be examined further in the following section.

2.2 Disagreement in the Japanese context

Recent studies relating to Japanese speakers of English (JSEs) and their expression of disagreement are particularly rare. Claiming that it is not simply a matter of overtly agreeing or disagreeing for native speakers, and that "neither response is natural" (Pearson, 1986: 51), Pearson's 1986 study of Japanese male university students in an oral English class found that agreement or disagreement would often be explicitly verbalised in the L2, or not expressed at all. Beebe and Takahashi (1989) encountered the same phenomenon, as well as a tendency for JSEs to employ their common native-language tactic of questioning the speech partner, rather than overtly disagreeing with the stated opinion. Nakajima (1997) observed opinions being offered with a lack of personalization, contributing to a general appearance of being rude and excessively direct. Horne (2004) found that while

even young Japanese college students seemed to be very reluctant to express disagreement with their peers, many believed it necessary to be much more direct in English. Arguing that there is no need for Japanese to abandon their own cultural values when using English, Horne advocates heightening students' awareness of those "strategies in English for expressing opinions in a non controversial way" (Horne, 2004: 91).

Much of the focus has been on the effect of status and position in the efforts of Japanese speakers of English to express disagreement, particularly with regard to decision-making in business contexts (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989; Nakajima, 1997). There have also been some recent papers which have discussed English language disagreement involving Japanese people in the academic context. Young's 2003 study of Korean and Japanese graduate students and their instructors found that power and cultural context were major factors in shaping and reflecting disagreement strategies. Notably, some aggravated disagreement was found in Japanese students arguing with instructors.

However, there appears to be an absence of studies which examine the common, yet highly complex speech act of offering an opinion in everyday conversation with a dialogue partner of relatively equal status or power. This paper seeks to partially address this gap in the literature.

One article of particular note is Kreutel's 2007 study into expressions of disagreement by non-native speakers of English (NNS), and the manner in which they vary from native speakers. There were several interesting findings in this paper, which examined the variation in use of several features of disagreement, which were divided

into ‘desirable features’ and ‘undesirable features’. Based on the work of several linguists (including Pomerantz, 1984; Pearson, 1986; LoCastro, 1986; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Nakajima, 1997; Locher, 2004), these ‘desirable features’ were classified as ‘native-like’, and the ‘undesirable features’ considered more likely to be found in the responses of the NNSs:

a) Desirable features (assumed to be native-like):
(A) token agreement
(B) hedges
(C) requests for clarifications
(D) explanations
(E) expressions of regret
(F) positive remarks

b) Undesirable features (associated with NNS):
(G) message abandonment
(H) total lack of mitigation
(I) use of the performative *I disagree*
(J) use of the performative negation *I don't agree*
(K) use of the bare exclamation *no*
(L) blunt statement of the opposite

Figure 2.1: from Kreutel 2007: 5

The results of this research did support several previous results, but they also deviated from some widely accepted findings. There were very few examples of ‘token agreement’ among NS responses, and a complete absence of ‘expressions of regret’. NNSs used both of these desirable features more frequently, although the expression of regret in every case was the linguistically simple “I’m sorry”. Kreutel’s study also reported a lack of use of the performatives “I disagree” and “I don’t agree”.

This study is one of few produced in recent years which have focused closely on the speech act of disagreement, and it provides the basic framework for the analysis of data in this paper. However, Kreutel’s findings must be treated cautiously,

particularly regarding the degree to which they inform about expression of disagreement by JSEs. Just six of the 27 NNS respondents in this study were Japanese. The method of data collection for this study was written Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs), the effectiveness of which has been called into question. And the DCT scenarios in this study could be interpreted as decision-making scenarios, rather than situations requiring an expression of either agreement or disagreement.

When Kreutel initially divided her results into 'Responses Expressing Disagreement' and 'Message Abandonment', she classified both silence and responses expressing agreement as message abandonment (Kreutel, 2007: 8). Respondents had been given the option of checking a box marked 'I wouldn't say anything'. But in several of Kreutel's scenarios, message abandonment, or even an expression of agreement may well be considered a judicious choice. Take the following for example:

> Situation 1:
> You are clothes shopping with your friends Janet and Josh. Josh tries on a sweater that you find very, very ugly, but Janet says to Josh: "You have to buy that sweater! It looks so good on you!"
>
> *(Kreutel, 2007: 26)*

In such a situation, one has a multitude of factors to consider, not least the relationships between each of the three protagonists. We would normally assume 'Janet' to be a female, and 'Josh' to be male, therefore an element of sexual tension would be likely to exist between some or all of those involved. The gender and sexuality of the respondent may also be significant. If a heterosexual male is aware that his friend Josh is sexually attracted to his platonic female friend Janet, then actively encouraging the purchase of the sweater may be the most judicious action, regardless of his own personal opinion regarding the aesthetic merits of the garment in question.

In a real-life situation, it is possible that a spontaneous outburst (e.g. "God, no! That's hideous!") would occur before one had taken the time to consider the implications. But in a DCT, the respondent has the luxury of being able to fully consider their response prior to committing it to paper.

Although based upon 900 minutes of recorded spontaneous conversation, and avoiding some of the pitfalls of the DCT, the results of Pearson's 1986 study must also be examined critically. The high frequency of token agreement is perhaps explicable, given the stimulus. Viewing a Magritte painting, and hearing "That's beautiful" is unlikely to elicit unmitigated discord (as in the performative 'I disagree'), as we appreciate that the appraisal of art is highly subjective. We may well have a differing opinion, but we also accept the right of our speech partner to hold and express their own view. There is no quantifiable evidence to support or refute the beauty of a painting. Thus, there is less at stake for us in failing to vocalise our fundamental disagreement.

In a study of the conversational differences between American and Japanese university students, Viswat and Kobayashi (2008) examine the contrasts in disagreement strategies. This was a relatively large-scale study, with 106 Japanese and 97 American respondents. However, only one item of the study related directly to disagreement, and the method of data collection was essentially a DCT, with a choice of four responses presented, or the option to write one's own. Also interested in the differences between American and Japanese university students, Kamimura & Oi's 1998 analysis examined the differences in English language argumentative strategies using essays on the topic of capital punishment. While some of the results of this study

are of great interest, they relate to English in the written form, and thus can have only limited implications for the examination of oral argumentation.

There is a great deal of other literature which refers to opinion, argumentation and politeness in Japan. The Japanese language culture is widely considered to have a strong correlation between politeness and indirectness (Bowe & Martin, 2007; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993), and has often been described as a 'feminine' culture (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Belcher 1997) But much of this is anecdotal, and there is precious little evidence to support many of these findings. Matsumoto (2002) claims that the stereotypes of Japanese people which have long been held by Westerners (and encouraged by Japanese themselves to a large extent) are no longer valid for the recent generations.

CHAPTER 3: THE SVR STUDY

3.1. Introduction to the Study

What makes the study of JSE disagreement in speech acts particularly fascinating is that there are two well-established truisms which seem to be directly opposed to one another within this context. It has long been argued that non native speakers of English lack the pragmatic language skills to argue in a native-like manner, making sufficient use of desirable features such as modifiers, hedges and token agreement. On the other hand, it is a commonly-held belief that Japan is such a highly collectivist society and Japanese said to be attentive to the feelings and opinions of others (Davidson 1995; Long 2003).

The few prior studies of English-language expressions of disagreement by native Japanese (Kreutel, 1997; Walkinshaw, 2007) in 'everyday' contexts have invariably examined data gathered by DCTs (Discourse Completion Tests). While these have yielded a great deal of enlightening results, it is inevitable that written replies to stimuli provided on paper will be less spontaneous than immediate verbal responses. Asking someone what they WOULD say in any given context may (and it could be argued, most likely will) produce a response quite different from the actual real-time utterance. Beebe and Cummings (1996) highlight the likelihood that DCTs only provide the researcher with a small number of the larger range of responses to be

found in naturally occurring speech. Rose (1994) questions the appropriateness of using DCTs to collect data in non-western contexts, and Japan in particular.

Role-play is another common form of data collection. It is relatively easy to administer and allows the researcher to see live speech, complete with its pauses, overlaps, corrections and non-verbal cues. But role-play remains open to many of the criticisms levelled at DCTs. Just how realistic is a situation where one is explicitly instructed to behave like a different person? And how spontaneous are the participants' speech acts, given that they are told the scenarios in advance?

Few people could argue with Wolfson and Manes (1980) in claiming that the best method of data collection is to collect samples of entirely spontaneous speech in natural settings where none of the participants are aware of being observed or studied. But this is largely impractical, given the issues of time, resources and the ethics of recording without consent. Cleary, the data which the following study is based upon is not taken from 'casual conversation', defined by Eggins and Slade (in Edstrom, 2004: 1501) as "talking just for the sake of talking". The need to control a sufficient number of variables in order to allow us to identify any notable patterns or differences, and the constraints upon available resources led to the selection of SVRs (Spontaneous Verbal Responses) as the method for data collection in this study.

3.2. Methodology

This study focuses on the negative verbal responses to ten controversial statements of the deontic modal "...should be..." structure. The ten statements were taken from real-life conversations, during which all provoked strong expressions of disagreement within the group (as several of them were no doubt intended to). All statements are in the third person, making them less direct, and perhaps less threatening to JSEs. Crucially, in contrast with several of Kreutel's DCTs, they are matters of public concern which people would generally be expected to hold an opinion on, whether or not they were directly affected by them. There is a certain moral imperative to give an explicit opinion on each of them, as neglecting to do so would imply a "failure to defend one's position" (Hayashi, 1996: 230) or even an acceptance of the stated viewpoint.

While some of the statements appear in the study in their original form (taken directly from genuine casual conversation), several were reworded to ensure clarity. There is a possibility that the question "What's the problem with women going topless?" could be perceived (particularly be as relating to health issues, such as skin damage, rather than to the cultural taboo in many developed societies, as the original speaker intended. Thus, it was presented as statement (i) (see figure 1 below). "They should ditch kanji" was adapted to statement (f), given the likelihood of comprehension problems for JSEs.

a) **"The driver's licence should be abolished and anyone should be allowed to drive a car."**
b) **"Men should be paid more than women doing the same job."**
c) **"Homosexuality is a terrible crime, and the penalty for it should be death."**
d) **"Keeping dogs as pets should be banned."**
e) **"Smoking should still be permitted on airplanes."**

f) **"The use of kanji in the Japanese writing system should be abolished."**
g) **"Consumption tax in Japan should be raised to 20%."**
h) **"Japanese children should go to school on Saturdays."**
i) **"Women should be allowed to go topless in public."**
j) **"School uniforms should be compulsory in Japanese elementary and junior high schools."**

These statements were interspersed with ten other statements of differing grammatical patterns, as well as varying levels of gravity and potentiality for controversy. 60 subjects in Japan were each asked to give spontaneous verbal responses to each of the 20 verbal statements. The order of statements was randomized each time in order to control for a potential order effect. Afterwards, students were given the 20 statements in a written survey, and asked to confirm whether they agreed, disagreed or were undecided about them. This was done in order to confirm instances of sarcasm or humour, or in the event of message abandonment in any verbal responses. The audio-recorded responses indicating disagreement to these 10 statements were then examined.

3.3. Subjects

The 60 subjects were made up of 30 native speakers of English (NS) and 30 Japanese speakers of English (JSE), both groups divided equally by gender, of a relatively similar range of ages (*see Figure 3.1*), and comprised of people employed in education, hospitality and the airline industry. Although all subjects were known to the interviewer prior to the study being administered, none were involved directly as students, colleagues or work superiors. This was ensured in order to minimize the effects of power distance and rank. The four involved in the initial conversations were omitted from the study.

Figure 3.1

Age-range of Participant Groups

Group	Age-range	Mean Age
Male NSs	25 - 63	39
Female NSs	25 - 60	37
*Male JSEs	27 - 74	44
Females JSEs	23 - 66	39

**The selection of participants for the study was constrained by the availability of volunteers with a sufficient proficiency in the target language. The data from some initial subjects was deemed invalid for this study, due to regular lack of comprehension. Regrettably, the anomaly in the age range and mean age of the Male JSE group was considered to be unavoidable.*

The 30 native speakers were from a variety of countries, divided into the following admittedly arbitrary regional groupings *(Figure 3.2):*

Figure 3.2
Composition of Native Speaker Group

	UK & Ireland	North America	Asia & Oceania
MALE	5	5	5
FEMALE	5	5	5

The 30 Japanese speakers of English who participated in the study were all of intermediate proficiency or higher. This was considered vital, in order to limit the volume of responses which would breakdown on account of language incomprehension. The 10 statements were tested with several classes of intermediate level students, to ensure that they would be comprehensible to the vast majority of respondents.

3.4 Prior awareness of limitations

Obviously, the data collection method employed here is also inherently unnatural as this study merely focuses on the listener's initial step in registering concord or discord with the first speaker's statement. The administrator of the initial statement does not make the following speech turn in the conversation, as would

normally occur in a genuine conversation after one's opinion has been refuted. It is also possible that some answers were actually longer than normal, given the lack of interjection by the initial speaker, perhaps leading to the respondent feeling a need to offer more remedial work (hedges, reasons etc).

However, given the importance of this 'first step' in social argument, in which one strives to make their position clear, without causing unnecessary offence to any of the other participants, it is believed that this data will provide some useful insights into the nature of social argumentation by JSEs.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Of the 600 responses recorded, 436 were expressions of disagreement, confirmed by the results of the survey administered after the SVR exercise.

These responses can be broken down as in Figure 4.1 below:

Figure 4.1
Total Number of Expressions ofDisagreement

Native Speakers of English	213
Japanese Speakers of English	223

The average length of audio recordings was approximately 3% minutes for native speakers, and 4% minutes for Japanese respondents. The termination of each speech turn was determined by the observation of the appropriate non-verbal cues, and a brief time-lapse of approximately 2 seconds.

Results will now be examined, according to Kreutel's framework of supposed 'desirable, native-like' features and 'undesirable, non native-like' features.

4.1. 'Desirable Features'

4.1.1 Token agreement

Contrary to the findings of several previous studies (Leech, 1983; Pomerantz, 1984; Brown and Levinson, 1987), token or partial agreement was rarely present in the responses gathered for this study. There were only 3 occasions of its usage, twice by NSs, and once by a JSE *(Figure 4.2)*:

Figure 4.2

Cases of token agreement in responses

Statement	Group	Response
(a) Abolish driver's licence	NS	"Yeah no because you have to look at the age, the age limitations of the licence."
(d) Ban pet dogs	NS	"Eh, certain types of dogs, maybe, yeah. Dogs in general, I don't know. I'm split on that one."
(c) Death for homosexuals	JSE	"Uuh...Yeah... No, I don't think so."

Kreutel (2007) also found a relative lack of token agreement in her study. She speculated that this was attributable to her written mode of data collection: "Spontaneous role-plays or other oral activities may possibly have yielded a higher amount of NS token agreement" (Kreutel, 2007: 9). However, this was obviously not the case here. Therefore, we must consider other explanations. One possibility is that the context of this study was simply perceived by respondents as far less 'face-threatening' than in previous research. The JSEs were aware that their opinions were clearly being sought, and felt that there was less danger inherent in expressing those opinions in a relatively forthright manner. This obviously has implications for the other results to follow.

4.1.2 Hedges

Lakoff, widely revered for his work on metaphor, foregoes the use of such linguistic eloquence and defines hedges as "words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy" (Lakoff, 1972: 195). Strauss (2004: 178) says that when people feel the need to make a comment that they expect to be less than readily accepted by the

intended recipient, "very often they hesitate, stumble over their words, whisper, stretch out their words." Yamada (1997: 90) remarks that this is a very typical Japanese thing to do, calling it 'stretch-talk'. Thus, we would expect to find hedges to be widely used by both the NS and JSE groups. This was indeed the case.

Figure 4.3

Usage of hedging devices

Statement	**NS statements of disagreement utilising one or more hedging devices**	**JSE statements of disagreement utilising one or more hedging devices**
(a) Abolish driver's licence	6	18
(b) Pay men more	4	18
(c) Death for homosexuals	6	15
(d) Ban pet dogs	7	16
(e) Allow smoking on planes	5	17
(f) Abolish kanji	8	16
(g) Raise VAT to 20%	12	10
(h) Have school on Saturdays	11	10
(i) Allow women topless	6	10
(j) School uniform compulsory	3	11
TOTALS	**68**	**141**
% OF TOTAL EXPRESSIONS OF DISAGREEMENT	**31.9%**	**63.2%**

One of the most fascinating findings of this study was the discrepancy between the frequency of 'I don't think so' in NS responses, compared with JSE replies *(Figure 4.4).* JSEs were almost ten times more likely to employ 'I don't think so' as an expression of disagreement. In interviews which were conducted with respondents after the study, several JSEs stated that this was a phrase they had been taught

explicitly throughout their English language education as a natural, native-like way to voice a rejection of another's opinion. This would appear to be borne out in textbooks commonly used among ESL learners in Japan (e.g. *English Firsthand 2*, 2004; *Impact Conversation 2*, 2009).

Figure 4.4

Different types of hedge employed

Hedge	**Number of times employed by NS**	**Number of times employed by JSE**
INITIAL PAUSE	6	17
MID-SPEECH PAUSE	29	69
'meaningless' fillers (e.g. Uhm / Eh)*	27	54
'meaningful' fillers' (e.g. Well...)	1	7
(I) don't think	14	58
(don't think so)	(6)	(57)
I think	22	18
I guess	1	1
I'm sure	1	0
appears	1	0
seems	1	0
maybe	7	6
a bit	4	0
probably	2	1
somewhat	1	0
kind of (inc.'kinda')	1	1
possibly	1	0
don't know	1	1
not sure	1	2
not aware	1	0
doubt	1	0
difficult	1	1
wouldn't have thought	1	0
wouldn't say	1	0
never thought about	0	1
too much	0	1
bit strong	1	0
extreme	1	1
TOTAL	**128**	**239**

*L1 fillers (e.g. 'etto..', 'ja...') were not included here. Multiple items in the same response were only counted once.

We teach this to our students as a useful, native-like expression of disagreement, but just how native-like is it? Interestingly, in informal conversations after the completion of the study, many NSs said that they believed "I don't think so"

to be a common native-speaker response in scenarios similar to those used in the study. Several even believed it was highly likely that they had used the phrase in their own responses, and expressed disbelief that it had occurred only 6 times in 213 NS expressions of disagreement. This lends credence to the view of Wolfson (1990), that native speakers and even those with widespread experience in language teaching are often mistaken in their assumptions of how they themselves use their own language.

4.1.3 Pauses

The number of hedges employed by JSEs was almost double the number used by NSs, but if we examine the type of hedges used, we can see *(Figure 4.4)* that the number of pauses present in JSE responses is far greater than in the NS data.

However, it is questionable whether these pauses were actually being employed for the most part as deliberate hedging devices. It would seem reasonable to assume that in a situation where a spontaneous response is called for, NNS are far more likely to pause than NS, given their need to process and recall the appropriate foreign language items they require.

> 'He who knows does not speak
> He who speaks does not know'.
>
> (*Lao Tzu, in Kim & Markus, 2002: 432*)

Another point worthy of consideration is that in several East Asian cultures, including Japan, a quick, spontaneous answer is often considered rash, and valued less than a reply which is apparently given after greater consideration (Kim and Markus, 2002; Kobayashi and Viswat, 2007). It is a common source of cultural misunderstanding, whereby the westerner is frustrated by the interminably long time

which it takes a Japanese person to make a relatively simple decision, and his Japanese counterpart is irritated by the haphazard manner in which the westerner makes a choice which many may be affected by.

Silence is far more positively regarded in Japanese culture than in English-speaking cultures. Despite the view of 19th Century Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle, that "silence is more eloquent than words" (Carlyle et al, 1993: 79), the western norm is to consider silence as awkward. In the event of needing to take time before making a response, fillers are typically employed to 'buy time'. These may be either the 'meaningless' variety (e.g.'Err'), or more 'meaningful' phrases (e.g. 'What should I say?', 'You know...').

4.1.4 Fillers

Having said this, JSEs used these meaningless fillers twice as often as NSs (54 times, versus 27), and did so quite effectively. The use of the common meaningful filler 'well' was only in evidence once in the NS data, but was employed seven times in the JSE responses. Although three of these uses were by the same individual (meaning only five JSE respondents actually used 'well'), they were all used in an appropriate manner. This suggests that it is relatively easy to teach students to use this tactic to successfully 'buy time' when speaking English.

4.1.5 Requests for clarifications

Again, clarifications were utilised relatively rarely by the respondents in this

study. This may be partly explained by the fact that the statements were prepared beforehand, deliberately worded and pre-tested for clarity, and the oral delivery was thus more clearly enunciated than perhaps what would be normal in a completely spontaneous, natural conversation.

There were only two occasions where a NS requested clarification, and both instances were identical (Statement (g), the initial response to which was "20%?"). It is difficult to know in this case whether the respondents used this because they felt a genuine need to confirm the number involved in the statement, or whether they were again simply 'buying time' to allow them to fully form their thoughts. Among the JSEs, there were 15 occasions where clarification was requested. An additional reason for non-native speakers to 'buy time' would be once again to allow them to search for the correct language to articulate their thoughts in a foreign tongue. Although native speakers do on occasion experience a 'tip-of-the-tongue experience' (Schwartz, 2002), and fail to immediately recall a desired word or phrase, they are more likely than a non-native speaker to signal the problem and fill the retrieval interval with typical comments such as 'What's that word again...', 'You know...', 'It's on the tip of my tongue..'.

4.1.6 Positive remarks, explanations and regret

It may be worthwhile to pause for a moment to consider what is a 'positive remark' within the context of expressing one's disagreement, and how does this differ from token or partial agreement? The distinction is far from clear. Takahashi and Beebe (1993: 141-144) give a long list of examples. These include praise,

compliments and what they refer to as 'positive adjuncts' (e.g. "That sounds good, but..."). The following four responses (*Figure 4.5*) are thus regarded as containing positive remarks:

Figure 4.5

Cases of positive remarks in responses

Statement	Group	Response
(b) Pay men more	NS	"I'd like that to be the case, but I'm sure it's unfair."
(c) Death for homosexuals	JSE	LAUGHTER For a time, homosexual is very is very strange for me... but now, I'm very understandable their feeling of homosexual.
(i) Allow women topless	JSE	LAUGHTER To me, it is good. But not to everybody! LAUGHTER
(j) School uniform compulsory	JSE	PAUSE Discipline is necessary...It's difficult to answer that question.

Expressions of regret were entirely absent from NS responses, and only appeared in five JSE replies, three of which were responses to Statement (e) "Smoking should still be permitted on airplanes". These could be attributed to the relatively high tolerance of public smoking which remains in Japan, and that the respondents considered that the SVR administrator could be a smoker. Four of the five expressions of regret were "I'm sorry, but...", and the fifth was "I'm afraid..." These findings echo Kreutel's results, which highlight the tendency of NNSs to overuse 'sorry', as "it is acquired relatively early and used as a general means of avoiding confrontation by expressing humbleness and deference" (Kreutel, 2007: 10).

Explanations were the most common of the desirable features, with JSE usage only marginally smaller than NS usage (*Figure 4.6*). These JSE explanations were generally extremely effective, even if occasionally grammatically imprecise. This

would imply that the JSEs are certainly aware of the pragmatic value in providing explanation to support their disagreement.

Figure 4.6

Use of explanation in responses

Statement	NS uses of explanation	JSE uses of explanation
a Abolish driver's licence	10	10
b Pay men more	10	8
c Death for homosexuals	7	8
d Ban pet dogs	7	9
e Allow smoking on planes	8	7
f Abolish kanji	9	13
g Raise VAT to 20%	13	9
h Have school on Saturdays	11	7
i Allow women topless	3	2
j School uniform compulsory	4	9
TOTAL	**82**	**82**
% OF TOTAL EXPRESSIONS OF DISAGREEMENT	**38.5%**	**36.8%**

4.2 'Undesirable features'

4.2.1 Message abandonment

This was less of an issue, given that all data was collected face-to-face, making it far more difficult for the respondents to refuse to answer. There were however, seven responses which were incomplete *(Figure 4.7).* It is important to distinguish

between an incomplete speech turn and message abandonment. The two incomplete speech turns from NSs had already clearly expressed their disagreement. There were also 2 responses which were entirely non-verbal, but given that their disagreement was expressed clearly, it would also be inaccurate to label these as 'message abandonment'.

Figure 4.7

Incomplete speech turns

	No. times employed by NS	**No. times employed by JSE**
incomplete speech turn	2	5

There were only three responses which could be defined as genuine message abandonment (*Figure 4.8)*, and they were confirmed as such after the follow-up written survey was conducted. Each came from different JSEs, who confirmed afterwards that they strongly disagreed with the statement in question:

Figure 4.8

Cases of message abandonment

Statement	**Group**	**Response**
(e) Allow smoking on planes	JSE	"Smoking? Uhh... It's too difficult... I don't smoke so I'm afraid I...."
(g) Raise VAT to 20%	JSE	Twenty??? Eeehh? (*Doh ka na*) No... I don't know (LAUGHTER)
(i) Allow women topless	JSE	(PAUSE) (LAUGHTER) (PAUSE) No comment. (LAUGHTER)

The first two of these may be attributed to pragmatic language failure, whereby an otherwise capable speaker is unable to spontaneously articulate their thoughts. The third would appear to have been a consequence of simple embarrassment, with a 31-year old male highly reluctant to verbalise his thoughts on the issue of whether women should be allowed to expose their breasts in public places.

There was also one response which was predominantly in the L1. As a response to Statement (j), a respondent said "Nnn... (moto) free (de ii to mou)." But the single English word used within the L1 made the respondent's feelings quite clear to the interviewer, and for this reason it is not classified as message abandonment.

4.2.2 Total lack of mitigation

Given that a statement of the opposite delivered in a 'blunt' manner would surely by definition be entirely devoid of mitigation, it would seem appropriate to treat the former as a subset of the latter. The bare exclamation 'no' would also surely qualify as an unmitigated expression of disagreement. Figure 4.8 lists all types of statement which utilised a negative, without any form of mitigation.

Figure 4.8

Unmitigated negative responses

Negative form employed	**Number of times employed by NS**	**Number of times employed by JSE**
'No'	32	18
No	*14*	*2*
No!	*9*	*9*
No-oo!	*9*	*7*
'No way'	8	4
Multiple 'no'	3	1
'not at all'	1	1
'not true'	1	0
'definitely not'	5	0
'of course not'	1	0
'absolutely not'	1	0
'never'	1	2
'shouldn't'	7	1
TOTAL	60	27

These results question the conventional wisdom that NSs are far less likely to express

unmitigated disagreement. In fact, not only did NSs commonly express their opinions without any form of mitigation, they also employed several 'strengtheners' to increase the force of their disagreement.

Another interesting issue noticeable in the audio data, was the variation within the single word 'no' answers. These could be quite easily divided into three types: the simple 'No' with a falling tone, the exclamatory 'No!' with a rising tone, and the elongated 'No-oo!'. Curiously, NSs used the simple, unstressed form on 14 occasions, but the JSEs only twice. Usage of the other forms was similar. Holmes (1988: 21) refers to fall-rise intonation as one of the many ways to express doubt and certainty in English. This is another area for future study.

4.2.3 Use of the performatives *I disagree / I don't agree*

According to the findings of Pearson (1986), and Beebe & Takahashi (1989), native speakers rarely use the performative 'I disagree', and that strategies for the expression of disagreement are generally characterised by mitigation (Brown & Levinson refer to this as performing the face-threatening act 'off-record').

Contrary to previous findings though (particularly Pearson, 1986), the use of the performative 'I disagree' was quite prevalent among NS responses in this study. Furthermore, it was completely absent in the JSE replies *(Figure 4.9):*

Figure 4.9

Responses utilising a form of 'agree'

	Number of times employed by Native	**Number of times employed by Japanese**
disagree	18	0
don't agree	9	10
can't agree	0	4

First, we must consider the discrepancies in these findings, compared with those of Pearson. The use of 'disagree' occurred 18 times, a frequency of 8.5%. If these results are examined more closely, we can see:

Figure 4.10

Closer analysis of Responses utilising a form of 'agree'

Statement	**NS exps. of disagreement**	**NS 'disagree'**	**JSE 'disagree'**	**NS 'don't agree'**	**JSE 'don't agree'**	**NS 'can't agree'**	**JSE 'can't agree'**
(a) Abolish driver's licence	29	2	0	2	4	0	1
(b) Pay men more	29	4	0	0	1	0	1
(c) Death for homosexuals	27	4	0	2	1	0	0
(d) Ban pet dogs	24	1	0	1	0	0	1
(e) Allow smoking on planes	26	2	0	1	2	0	0
(f) Abolish kanji	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
(g) Raise VAT to 20%	23	0	0	1	1	0	0
(h) Have school on Saturdays	21	2	0	1	1	0	0
(i) Allow women topless	9	0	0	1	0	0	1
(j) School uniform compulsory	9	3	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	**213**	**18**	**0**	**9**	**10**	**0**	**4**

In three of the ten statements, (f), (g) & (i), there is no use of the performative. Both statements (f) & (g) relate specifically to aspects of Japanese culture, and would

have a direct impact on the lives of all the participants, were they to become realised. However, NSs were reluctant to express such forthright opinions on matters which they felt they had less authority.

Now turning to the complete absence of the performative in the JSE responses, the question is whether this is a consequence of a lack of linguistic knowledge (of the word 'disagree'), or whether it is at least partially because the Japanese equivalent would be deemed too strong in L1. Japanese-language expressions of disagreement tend to employ words such as '*chigau'* ('to differ'), or '*hantai'* ('opposite'), which itself conveys a strong, and rather aggressive stance. The most literal translation of 'agree' is '*sansei suru'*, therefore 'disagree' would be '*sansei shinai'*. However, the use of '*sansei shinai'*, or even its more polite form '*sansei shimasen'* is highly uncommon. The expression '*sansei dekimasen'* ('cannot agree') is more likely to be used if a Japanese speaker feels a need to express their discord in unambiguous terms. Interestingly, 'can't agree' was present in four JSE responses, and while this represents only 1.8% of all acts of disagreement, it should be noted that 'can't agree was entirely absent from NS responses. Further examination of this in a larger study would be welcomed.

Language transfer can remain an issue for foreign language speakers, even when they attain a high level of competency in the target language. This manifests itself in the reluctance of Westerners to conform to the Japanese language norm when leaving work, to utter the ritual '*Osaki ni shitsurei shimasu*', which is often translated literally as 'Excuse my rudeness, leaving before you'. After fulfilling the number of hours they are contracted to work for, or completing all their work tasks for the day,

many Westerners feel no compunction to apologise for leaving the office before colleagues. They fail to appreciate the validity of the expression as a standard farewell, which more pragmatically translates as 'I'm leaving now', to be met with the ritualised response '*Otsukare sama deshita'!* (which literally means 'You must be tired!', but at a pragmatic level, would translate as 'Good work today!').

Regarding the frequency / infrequency of the performative 'I disagree', this is also likely to depend on the topic of the stimulus. Emotional expressions such as 'that's beautiful' (Pearson, 1986) are less likely to provoke performative responses than matters of fundamental belief, such as the moral acceptability of capital punishment, or the universal right to free education.

The performative negation 'I don't agree' was present in both groups, and occurred at a similar frequency. 'I can't agree' was also present three times in the JSE responses.

.A final point with regard to performatives was the use of 'I couldn't disagree more' by a NS respondent on one occasion. This is hardly one of the most common ways to express one's discord, but there is a high potential for NNS misunderstanding of this and its positive form 'I couldn't agree more'. It may be prudent to at least encourage an awareness of these more complex forms among our students.

CHAPTER 5: FURTHER INTERPRETATIONS OF RESULTS

5.1 Rees-Miller's taxonomy of disagreement

A more concise way to examine our results is based upon Rees-Miller (2000)'s 'taxonomy of disagreement' (*Figure 5.1*). This permits us to see clearly how many of the respondents elected to soften their disagreement, present it in an unmodified form, or actually chose to intensify their contrary opinion.

Figure 5.1

Results based upon Rees-Miller's taxonomy of disagreement

Type of disagreement	**% of total NS acts of disagreement**	**% of total JSE acts of disagreement**	**Examples of linguistic marker**
Softened disagreement	**31.4%**	**48.4%**	
a) Positive politeness	8.9%	5.8%	Positive comment Humor Inclusive 1st person Partial agreement Questions
b) Negative politeness	22.5%	42.6%	*I think / I don't know* Downtoners *(maybe, sort of)* Verbs of uncertainty *(seems)*
Unmodified disagreement	**32.9%**	**23.3%**	Contradictory statement Verbal shadowing
Aggravated (Intensified) disagreement	**35.7%**	**28.3%**	Rhetorical questions Intensifiers Personal, accusatory *you* Judgmental vocabulary
TOTALS	**100 %**	**100%**	

While these results are interesting, it would be unwise to assume any statistical validity in them, given the small amount of data involved, and the imprecise nature with which they were designated as either 'softened', 'unmodified' or 'aggravated'. There were several instances where a single act of disagreement contained both softened and aggravated disagreement. This NS response contains a rhetorical question, followed by a basic contradictory 'no', and concluded with a partial agreement which makes use of a downtoner:

g) "Consumption tax in Japan should be raised to 20%."

NS Response: "What for? No. Maybe 15%, yes."

There was also on occasion, some uncertainty over whether a question was intended to be rhetorical or not. These responses were categorized after considering the context as well as the tone in the audio recordings, but these may be open to different interpretation.

However, an examination of the data according to Rees-Miller's taxonomy does warrant some examination. Firstly, we can see that the incidences of aggravated disagreement are far higher than in Rees-Miller's results, where the percentage was a mere 8%. If we isolate the 'Peers' group (student-to-student disagreement) in Rees-Miller's study, the percentage of acts of disagreement employing strengthening linguistic markers climbs to 16%, but this remains far lower than either of the groups in our study. There are many factors which could account for this (e.g. power / distance, context).

We can see that the JSEs in this study used a far higher amount of softeners than the previous literature suggested. NSs on the other hand, chose to offer intensified disagreement on more occasions than their Japanese counterparts. Several of these employed epistemic certainty adverbs (e.g. 'definitely', 'absolutely'). The JSEs used far fewer of these strengtheners, but did use the softening epistemic possibility adverbs (e.g. maybe, like) quite frequently. This suggests some support for Kamimura and Oi's (1998) finding of that Americans tend to prefer 'emphatic devices' (or 'Hyperbole') over 'softening devices' (or 'Downturn') which the Japanese students in their study preferred. In a paper which he titles 'Speaking Japanese-ly', Baxter (1980: 51) refers to the Japanese tendency to 'avoid propositional statements, and more frequent use of qualifiers such as 'I think' and 'perhaps'. Personal anecdotal experience would support this view.

5.2 Gender and cultural issues

It should be noted that Kamimura and Oi's 1998 study, along with many others referred to above, was a study of Japanese versus American behaviour. The study presented here was clearly not. Just a third of the NS respondents in the data were North American, and only 6 of the ten were from the USA. We must be careful to generalise, when we are dealing with so many different nationalities, and a selection of varying cultures contained within each. Men and women may also vary in their preferred strategies.

Among the myriad of factors which influence an individual's choice of language in expressing disagreement, gender would also appear to play a significant

role. Liang & Han claim that given their greater sensitivity to the issues of politeness and status, "it is predictable that women will use more politeness strategies than men do (Liang & Han, 2005: 4) Of course, this factor will itself be susceptible to cultural variations. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss gender or cultural variations in any detail, but there are some points worth noting at this stage. The most obvious is that the administrator of the SVR study was in every case, a British male. This alone may have been an affective factor. Had the study been administered by a Canadian female, for example, this may well have caused the respondents (both JSEs and NSs) to react differently. The frequency of expletives in British and Oceania male responses may well have diminished.

Another curious variation was in the use of 'disagree', 'don't agree' and 'can't agree' *(Figure 5.2)*. Male NSs used 'disagree' far more than any other group, with female NSs electing to use 'don't agree'. This choice was shared by JSE males, who were the only group to utilise 'can't agree'. Female JSEs tended to avoid expressing their disagreement through the performative entirely. This is another area of intended future research.

Figure 5.2

Responses utilising a form of 'agree', divided by gender

	NS		JSE	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Number of expressions of disagreement	**118**	**95**	**114**	**109**
Responses utilising 'disagree'	**15**	**3**	**0**	**0**
Responses utilising 'don't agree'	**1**	**8**	**7**	**2**
Responses utilising 'can't agree'	**0**	**0**	**4**	**0**

We can also see (*Figure 5.3*) some significant gender-based variations in the rate of disagreement among certain individual statements.

Figure 5.3

Rate of disagreement by group and gender

Statement	**Number of Expressions of Disagreement**			
	Male NS	**Female NS**	**Male JSEs**	**Female JSE**
a Abolish driver's licence	15	14	15	13
b Pay men more	14	15	12	13
c Death for homosexuals	14	13	14	13
d Ban pet dogs	14	10	14	14
e Allow smoking on planes	14	12	10	12
f Abolish kanji	10	6	14	13
g Raise VAT to 20%	13	10	9	9
h Have school on Saturdays	14	7	6	7
i Allow women to go topless	3	6	11	10
j Make school uniform compulsory	7	2	9	5
TOTALS	**118 (79%)**	**95 (63%)**	**114 (76%)**	**109 (73%)**

The rate of disagreement in male NS responses is noticeably higher than the rate among female NS responses. Although Male JSE responses contained a higher rate of disagreement than female JSEs, the gender variation is minimal. This is slightly surprising, in light of the prevailing stereotypes of the male-dominant Japanese society and its submissive women, and the increasingly assertive Western female. At this stage we can only speculate on the reasons for these results. One possibility is the nature of the ten statements being used as the stimuli for the SVRs. Only two stimuli

provoked a higher level of disagreement among female NSs than their male counterparts, and in both cases, the word 'women' was contained in the statement. This clearly marks them as gender-related issues.

In their responses to issues pertaining specifically to Japan, female NSs were more likely to take a neutral position. Statements (f), (g), (h) and (j) were all Japan-specific, and we can see that male NSs disagreed more frequently. This could be a common male trait, as Tannen believes:

> Are men more likely to engage in ritual opposition, nonliteral attack? Are they more likely to take an oppositional stance toward other people and the world? Are they more likely to find opposition entertaining – to enjoy watching a good fight, or having one?
>
> The short answer is, Yes.
>
> *(Tannen, 1998: 173)*

5.3 Setting, context and social norms

In chapter 2.1 above, there was a brief reference to Fraser's 'social norm view'. This perspective appears to be perfectly logical. Within each culture or society, there are accepted norms of behaviour for specific situations. What may be acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another. And what may be acceptable within a particular context, may be unacceptable in another context even within the same culture. For example, a formal debate setting clearly encourages opposition, but audience participation in a public lecture obviously makes it difficult to raise one's personal points of disagreement. Thus, "the occurrence of conflict, at least as it is expressed overtly in talk, will undoubtedly vary according to the situation" (Saft,

2004: 549). Even the very simple issue of whether it is a one-to-one discussion, or an utterance in front of a group, will have a profound impact.

5.4 Laughter

The use of laughter is an issue which merits very little attention in the literature. Perhaps due to the informal setting where the SVR study was conducted, laughter was frequently present in both JSE and NS responses (*Figure 5.4*). Laughter can fulfil a wide variety of functions (Bowe and Martin, 2007: 72) But do Japanese use it to mask embarrassment or uncertainty more? NSs tended to use laughter in response to the initial statement, to express their rejection of its validity, or following their own jokes. JSEs very often laughed at the end of their utterances, even if they were of a serious nature.

Figure 5.4
Expressions of disagreement containing laughter

	NSs	JSEs
number of expressions of disagreement	213	223
Number of responses utilising laughter	32	41
Percentage of total	**15%**	**18%**

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

It must be acknowledged that both individualist and collective societies bring strengths and weaknesses to the task of critical discussion (Davidson, 1995; Matsuoka, 2003). Westerners working in Asian contexts must strive to encourage students' strengths and build up those perceived 'weak areas'. The presence of students who are not explicitly opinionated does not necessarily mean they are failing to think critically. Indeed, several studies over the past decade clearly show such students are not just passively accepting everything they are told (Littlewood, 2000; Stapleton, 2002).

However, we should at least make our students aware of cultural variations in the expression of disagreement. In the discussion of hedges in Chapter 4.1.2 above, the remarkably high frequency of the expression 'I don't think so' in JSE disagreement was discussed. In Japanese culture, setting and social norms play a significant role in determining a person's choice of behaviour. This manifests itself in the large volume of formulaic expressions in the language which extend to potentially face-threatening acts such as apologies (Sugimoto, 1998) and even disagreement. Thus, there is a need to teach students that English places greater importance on non-formalised speech, which gives a stronger impression of sincerity. This is crucial in expressing our disagreement, as someone whose comments are deemed to be lacking sincerity will no doubt be dismissed as lacking in gravitas.

Cots (1990) makes a fascinating claim that some words and expressions, "because of their common appearance in speech have become somehow devoid of their original semantic force" (1990: 90). This is what leads to the need for intensifiers or softeners. Regarding argumentation, the continuous use of the same simple, common expressions of agreement or disagreement can lead to a loss of force in one's delivery of opinion. Again, these are issues which if brought to the attention of English learners, would be of great value.

A final thought with regard to implications of this study for the classroom: If we can help our students to learn to effectively express their disagreement in English, perhaps the next logical step would be to focus on a better understanding of the intended meanings of the NS expressions. JSEs may venture out on to the battlefield of English-language critical discussion, armed with their newly acquired, state-of-the-art linguistic weapons, but if they do not have the armour to cushion the blow of the first 'No way!', 'That's ridiculous!' or the first exhortation calling on them to explain their disagreement, they may well soon retreat back to the security of the passive, noncommittal listener. Such acts are common in English language argument and discussion, and generally not intended to sound as harsh as they may appear to NNSs, and JSEs in particular.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The manner in which an individual chooses to express disagreement is affected by a multitude of variables. The status of one's relationship with the interlocutor is clearly a factor, although the manner in which it influences the response is highly dependent on a host of other issues (Liang & Han, 2005). The potential for loss of face (for either participant) is something which is normally taken into account, and this itself depends on various matters, including the setting, proximity to other third parties, the history of discord between the participants. Gender and age are influential in one's choice of response, as is the gender and age of the interlocutor.

This paper sought to examine the ways that Japanese speakers of English chose to express their disagreement in a particular context, and how that differed from native speakers of English. Results showed some significant variations between the two groups, but also failed to support previous findings relating to JSE disagreement. Expressions of mitigated disagreement came from JSEs just as frequently as NSs, if not more so. NSs were able to make slightly more use of 'positive politeness' features, such as partial agreement, humour and positive comments (*Figure 5.1*), but the difference was not so pronounced. Hedges were in fact used far more often by the JSEs, than by NSs.

The most striking findings of this study were in the examination of the *type* of hedges being used. Although they used less hedging devices in the course of this study (which may be attributed to several factors previously discussed, such as setting, power/distance, perceived potential for loss of face), NSs used a far greater variety of devices (*Figure 4.4*). This was also true of the 'intensifiers' employed by the NSs, compared to those used by JSEs.

The emphasis placed on formulaic expressions in Japanese Language culture may well lead JSEs to assume that a degree of this is also quite acceptable in English. To wish for such would be quite natural, as limiting one's expression of disagreement to standard, comfortable phrases would certainly limit the potential for a loss of face on either side. However, the use of formulaic expression, particularly in critical discussion has negative implications within an English-language culture. Students who have attained intermediate–advanced competency in the language should be made explicitly aware of this.

This is not to say that Japanese people must become excessively bellicose when they switch to the English language. After all, critical thinking' does not always involve being critical (Matsuoka, 2003; Long: 2003). Many teachers are painfully aware of the student who has heard the language stereotype of the need to speak directly in English, and taken it to the extreme (Beebe & Takahashi, 1990; Nakajima, 1997). English language does indeed tend to be more direct than Japanese, but this depends enormously on the context, and we should bear in mind that Cots' (1990) call for more enriched language applies to softeners as well as intensifiers. The effective use of greater directness also requires an extensive knowledge of softening strategies.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Name: _____Nationality: _____

First Language: _____Age: _____

Please express your opinion on the 20 statements below, giving a rating from 1-5 according to the following scale:

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

	STATEMENT	OPINION
1	People should **not** be allowed to ride their bicycles on the pavement.	**1 2 3 4 5**
2	Koizumi is more attractive than Brad Pitt.	**1 2 3 4 5**
3	Foreigners with permanent residency should have the right to vote in Japan.	**1 2 3 4 5**
4	Smoking should still be permitted on airplanes.	**1 2 3 4 5**
5	Pre-marital sex is wrong.	**1 2 3 4 5**
6	Men should be paid more than women doing the same job.	**1 2 3 4 5**
7	The driver's licence should be abolished and anyone should be allowed to drive a car.	**1 2 3 4 5**
8	The use of kanji in the Japanese writing system should be abolished.	**1 2 3 4 5**
9	Consumption tax in Japan should be raised to 20%.	**1 2 3 4 5**
10	Cats make much better pets than dogs.	**1 2 3 4 5**
11	School uniforms should be compulsory in Japanese elementary and junior high schools.	**1 2 3 4 5**
12	People should be free to marry someone of a different race or nationality.	**1 2 3 4 5**
13	Eating meat is wrong.	**1 2 3 4 5**
14	Japanese children should go to school on Saturdays.	**1 2 3 4 5**
15	Global warming is a serious problem.	**1 2 3 4 5**
16	Women should be allowed to go topless in public.	**1 2 3 4 5**
17	Summer is the best season of the year.	**1 2 3 4 5**
18	The government should pay for university education.	**1 2 3 4 5**
19	Homosexuality is a terrible crime, and the penalty should be death.	**1 2 3 4 5**
20	Keeping dogs as pets should be banned.	**1 2 3 4 5**

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