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## The role of linguistic ability and business expertise for turn-taking in intercultural business communication

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## **I Introduction**

In intercultural business communication, non-native speakers of English experience difficulty with taking turns freely, partly due to constraints in linguistic competence. In addition to linguistic competence, turn-taking is also influenced by various sociocultural factors such as (national) cultural traits, corporate culture, or power relations resulting in a thoroughly complicated process.

This study investigated factors that influence turn-taking with a special focus on linguistic competence and business experience<sup>1</sup>. It is based on simulated business meetings comprising Japanese business people, Japanese university students, and native speakers of American English. Special attention was given to who initiated and chaired the meeting and who made important suggestions leading to decision-making.

In the next section, the Theoretical Review, definitions of turn-taking and previous studies on turn-taking behaviour in the business field will be reviewed; then the methodology and analysis will be discussed in Section III and Section IV, respectively. In the next section, the Discussion, the topics highlighted from the previous section will be discussed: linguistic ability vs. business expertise, BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca), and the native speaker problem.

## **II Theoretical Review**

Turn-taking is a very complicated process. Therefore, in this section, first, basic rules for turn-taking will be reviewed. Previous studies on turn-taking in the business field, especially ones including Japanese participants, will then be summarised. In addition, how to define and measure the two main factors influencing turn-taking—linguistic ability and business expertise—will be discussed.

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## 1 Definitions and basic rules for turn-taking

The term, *turn*, can be defined as “a single contribution of a participant in a conversation, preceded and followed by speech from other participants” (*The Penguin Dictionary of Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1999). It is, however, fairly difficult to analyse turn-taking precisely in data because of its complexity. The study of turn-taking was pioneered by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) who tried to abstract the “context-free” rules about the organisation of turn-taking from “context-sensitive” conversational data. In their article, turn-taking was explained as “the distribution of talk among the parties” or “the sequences in which the talk shifted from one to another or was retained by a single party” (p.697), and several important notions were presented such as “transition-relevance place (TRP),” which is the point at which the speaker can change or “local management system” in which turn-taking is locally managed “on a turn-by-turn basis” (p.725). Also, basic rules for turn-taking were presented. At the initial TRP, 1) if the “current speaker selects next” technique is used, then “the party so selected has the right and is obliged to take next turn to speak”; 2) if the technique is not involved, then “self-selection for next speakership” may be instituted; and 3) if the 2) above does not work, the current speaker may continue “unless another self-selects” (p.704).

In intercultural communication, in addition to these basic rules, linguistic ability strongly affects turn-taking behaviours. For example, Long (1981) compared NS-NS (native speaker and native speaker) discourse patterns and NS-NNS (native speaker and non-native speaker) discourse patterns and disclosed the differences between the two. In NS-NNS interaction, the mean number of topic-continuing moves per topic initiation is significantly lower; the proportion of topic-initiating moves utilising a question is significantly higher; the proportion of questions per T-unit is significantly higher. Considering the suggestions of this study, in NS-NNS interaction, one topic is not as fully developed as in NS-NS discourse; therefore, topics shift more quickly. Also, a sequence of the NS’s question and the NNS’s answer is more frequently observed rather than a sequence of statement and statement by both participants.

In business meetings, different dynamics may work for NSs and NNSs; for example, those in a higher position or with more business expertise may take

turns more easily and hold the floor longer. These factors further entangle turn-taking behaviours in business scenes.

## **2 Turn-taking behaviours in intercultural business meetings**

With regard to turn-taking behaviours, different studies with varied foci have reported different aspects of turn-taking.

Regarding cultural (specifically national) differences, Yamada (1990) observed that Japanese participants were less active in turn-taking than American counterparts based on intra-organisation business meetings. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) reported that in collective cultures including Japan, turns are distributed relatively equally while in individualistic cultures they tend to be distributed unevenly. These studies suggest some possible linkage between national cultural traits and turn-taking behaviours.

Du-Babcock (1999, 2006) analysed Hong Kong bilinguals intra-organisation meetings and observed that members of the meetings participated more actively in meetings when using their first-language (Cantonese) than their second language (English). In addition, they used a spiral topic management style in Cantonese but used a linear one in English.

Cultural differences in topic management were also reported between Asian countries. Du-Babcock and Tanaka (2010) compared the action of disagreement between Hong Kong Chinese NS and Japanese NS, revealing that Hong Kong participants showed disagreement more obviously while Japanese counterparts used interrogative forms to avoid direct confrontation and waited until the end of the meeting before showing disagreement.

Other studies (Miller 1994, Fujio 2004) reported that in intercultural business meetings, cultural traits based on Hall (1976) or Hofstede (1991) are not necessarily observed, and different elements may influence turn-taking more strongly. For example, Fujio (2004) reported an opposite tendency from Hall or Hofstede based on the data of an authentic in-house meeting: The American manager used rather indirect and polite expressions while the Japanese counterpart chose more direct and even aggressive expressions partly due to rank in the company. This study also reported different perceptions between Americans and Japanese about long pauses occurring in the meeting; Americans who looked at the video felt the long pauses to be very

uncomfortable. In the current study, this point will be picked up again in Section V, the Discussion.

There are also studies that have referred to hierarchical power as an important element influencing turn-taking. Tanaka (2008) maintained that turn-taking style and power relations influence each other: Not only did power relations influence turn-taking style but the less frequent turn-taking of the Japanese participants disempowered them.

Thus, various factors and various different results have been reported regarding turn-taking. However, how participants take turns more actively by utilising their business expertise has yet to be explored, and this is one of the research questions of the current study.

### **3 Linguistic ability**

It is reasonable to infer that one of the reasons why Japanese participants' turn-taking tends to be less active in intercultural meetings stems from their linguistic ability. Therefore we must work to understand how we can measure linguistic ability precisely and what terminology is accurate for this study.

Skehan (1998) pointed out three core elements: fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Since the current study investigates oral communication ability in business meetings, fluency was chosen as the main element to measure the participants' linguistic ability.

Fluency is regarded as the "processing of language in real time" (Schmidt, 1992, p. 358) or as "an impression on the listener's part that the psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and efficiently" (Lennon, 1990, pp. 390-391). The measurement of fluency, however, has been controversial. For example, Riggensbach (1991) maintained that speech rate and the number of unfilled pauses were the most predictable indicators of fluency. In contrast, Towell, Hawkins, and Bazergui (1991) pointed to the mean length of run (how many words are spoken without a pause) as the best indicator. Fujii and Tomoda (2005) reported, however, that this is not necessarily a useful measure for second language learners as the number becomes too small and difficult to compare.

Among possible elements, Lennon (1990) singled out two key areas

important for fluency: speech-pause relationships and frequency of occurrence of dysfluency markers such as filled pauses (non-word vocalisations). He also pointed out three elements as core indicators of fluency: speech rate, (filled) pauses, and mean length of run.

In this study, speech rate is used mainly to discuss the fluency of the participants.

#### **4 Business expertise**

In addition to linguistic ability, expertise can be another big factor influencing turn-taking. Expertise has also been studied in various ways and various fields. For example, in the field of psychology, Ericsson (2000) viewed expertise as “the mechanisms underlying the superior achievement of an expert, i.e., one who has acquired special skill in or knowledge of a particular subjects through professional training and practical experience” (p.1), suggesting that both training and experience underlie expertise. Carr (2010), in the field of anthropology, explained four processes to describe expertise: socialisation (how to learn to be an expert and communicate one’s familiarity in one area), evaluation or authentication (how to establish asymmetry between experts and laymen), authorisation (how to institutionally authorise experts) and naturalisation (how to organise and naturalise expertise). In business communication, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) referred to “shared professional area of expertise” as one of the contextual features of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca), viewing it as knowledge involving “special concepts and terminology” and shared by the “relevant discourse community” (p.391).

In this study, the term *expertise* is used as insightful and accumulated knowledge based on one’s professional training and experiences, and the coding schemes of Goodwin (1994) were referred to for an analytical method, as will be elaborated on in Section III.

### **III Methodology**

In this section, the methodology of the current study is explained in the following order: research questions, data collection, methods of data analysis,

and basic stance for discourse analysis.

## **1 Research questions**

- 1) What kind of factors most influence turn-taking? Especially, given the choice of two factors, linguistic ability and business expertise, which factor is more important?
- 2) How do the participants who are not good at English make up for their relatively poor English ability? For example, of the capabilities used to facilitate understanding, do business people utilise their business experiences or expertise in turn-taking?

## **2 Data collection**

The types of data used to investigate business discourse research are categorised into three groups: authentic, simulated, and manipulated data (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken 2007). In the current investigation, the greatest advantage of using simulated data is a greater control of variables that enables us to investigate a specific aspect of communication, even though simulated data may not reflect complicated factors as will be observed in actual communication. Planken (2002) discusses the advantages of simulated data as follows:

There are considerable advantages to using simulation as a method of data collection. The use of simulation as opposed to observation in an authentic setting, for example, allows for greater control of stimulus conditions, as well as comparisons and generalizations across data produced in any number of interactions elicited by a particular simulation game. Also, simulation serves as the best alternative, in terms of data collection, in situations where access to authentic data in an authentic setting—for example, access to authentic negotiation discourse, produced in an authentic organizational environment—is difficult, because participants are protective of potentially sensitive corporate information, or because they are reluctant about being observed and recorded on the job. (p. 51)

As this study tries to specify factors influencing turn-taking, using simulated data is reasonable because the stimulus conditions could be controlled. It also allows collection of business meetings unavailable otherwise because of conditions of confidentiality.

The data were collected in a seminar where the author was invited to give a short lecture on business presentations and meetings. All the participants were invited through Facebook by the coordinator of the seminar. Therefore, participants met in the seminar for the first time, and no previous power relations existed among them. The participants consisted of three American participants, three Japanese businesspeople, and six Japanese university students. They were divided into three groups which created groups with the same constituents:

- 1) A native speaker of American English (AU)
- 2) A Japanese businessperson (JB)
- 3) A Japanese university student with higher English ability (JUH)
- 4) A Japanese university student with lower English ability (JUL)

All the three groups were instructed to conduct the same assignment: a mock business meeting to select one of the four candidates for General Manager of SLIM GYMS, a company owning health and leisure clubs in Manhattan, taken from a textbook for business communication, *Market Leader* (Cotton, Falvey & Kent, 2005).

The American participant of Group 3 had some business experience while the American participants of Groups 1 and 2 were both graduate students without business experience; therefore, this study focused on Groups 1 and 2 in order to analyse the data under the same conditions.

### **3 Data analysis**

All of the conversational data from Group 1 and Group 2 were transcribed by the author and confirmed by the American participant in each group.

First, in order to measure their participation in the meeting and their linguistic ability (with a special focus on fluency), the floor-holding time, the number of words spoken, and the speech rate of each participant were

calculated. For precise measurement of the time taken, the computer software, Praat, was used to investigate the exact time with an accuracy of fractions of a second.

Then, the overall flow of the meeting was compared to indicate how the meeting proceeded.

Then, discourse analysis was conducted with a focus on the scenes of chairing the meeting, giving important suggestions and deciding the candidate. In order to make the analysis and interpretation as objective as possible, a multi-method was used: In addition to the discourse analysis, retrospective comments by the participants were collected for more precise and objective interpretation of their utterance.

With regard to expertise, referring to Goodwin (1994), professional frames of reference used in each excerpt were analysed. Goodwin (1994) discussed how to analyse professional discourse and used frames of discourse as part of the coding schemes; for example, criminal discourse was analysed with specific frames of reference such as “tools” or “frequency of beating.” In the current study, as will be elaborated on in Section IV, Analysis, professional frames of reference such as “target customers” or “corporate size” were observed.

#### **4 Basic stance for discourse analysis**

Much discourse analysis depends on two basic approaches: little *d* discourse and big *D* Discourse (Gee 1996). The former is roughly equivalent to a linguistic approach developed in Europe based on conversation analysis, ethnography, or speech act theory. The latter is to an approach developed in North America based on rhetorical studies or organisational communication, which refers to Discourse as something more than linguistic action—including culture—and tries to use “culturally standardized interpretative frames” (Jian, Schmisser, & Fairhurst 2008: 306).

Recently, the third approach is emerging that tries to intersect these two approaches (Aritz & Walker 2012). The author takes this third approach; therefore, although based on discourse analysis, she tries to incorporate cultural or sociocultural factors to interpret the linguistic actions observed in the data.

## IV Analysis

All three groups were instructed to read the case study about SLIM GYMS and start a meeting as soon as they finished their preparation. Group 1 spent 1,578 seconds or 26 minutes and 18 seconds in their meeting; and Group 2 required 1,661 seconds or 27 minutes and 41 seconds.

In this section, the analytical results will be presented in the following order: the attributes of the participants, their participation in the meeting, how the meeting proceeded, and the way of chairing the meeting and making suggestions.

### 1 Attributes of the participants

In both Group 1 and Group 2, the attributes of the participants, which were briefly mentioned in the previous section, can be summarised as in Table 1:

Table 1: Attributes of the participants

	Nationality	Proficiency (Fluency)	Expertise
AU	American	High	No
JB	Japanese	Low	Yes
JUH	Japanese	High	No
JUL	Japanese	Low	No

Thus, every participant was not identical in his/her attributes, and these differences are easily identifiable. For example, the difference between JUH and JUL is identified as linguistic ability and between JB and JUL as business expertise.

The linguistic ability was measured by fluency, which was calculated by dividing the number of words spoken during the meeting by the floor-holding time (Lennon, 1990; Riggensbach, 1991) (See Figures 4 to 9 for reference).

Figure 1 clearly shows that a large gap exists in the speech rate between AU1 and JUH1, and JB1 and JUL1. (Hereafter, AU1 and AU2 refers to the AU in Group 1 and Group 2, respectively. The same way is used for the JB, JUH, and JUL). Considering that speech rate is one of the most important elements indicating one's fluency, as discussed in Section II, AU1 and JUH1 are the

more fluent speakers in Group 1.

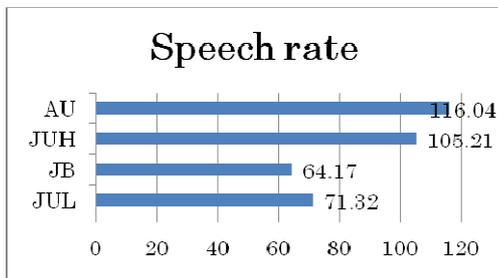


Figure 1: Speech rate (Group 1)

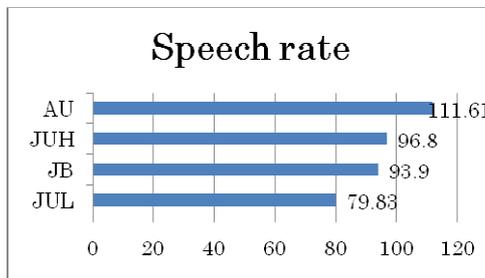


Figure 2: Speech rate (Group 2)

Figure 2, on the other hand, shows a much less clear difference between JUH2 and JB2 in speech rate. However, the speech rate of JB2 should be interpreted with caution; since JB2 made only short sentences in each turn, his cognitive load was much lighter than JUH2, and consequently this facilitated the JB2’s speech rate. In fact, the average number of words per sentence of JB2 was 5.33 and that of JUH2 was 9.13 (excluding sentences consisting of only reactive tokens such as “yeah”).

Figure 3 shows the percentage share of the number of words expressed per sentence between JB2 and JUH2. Nearly 60% of the sentences by JB2 were composed of fewer than five words (such as “She’s honest”) while a quarter of JUH2’s sentences used more than eleven words including many complex clauses. In addition, sometimes JB2 did not make a full sentence; instead, JB2 just put words, such as “So, small business and big business, big difference” or “Everybody OK.”

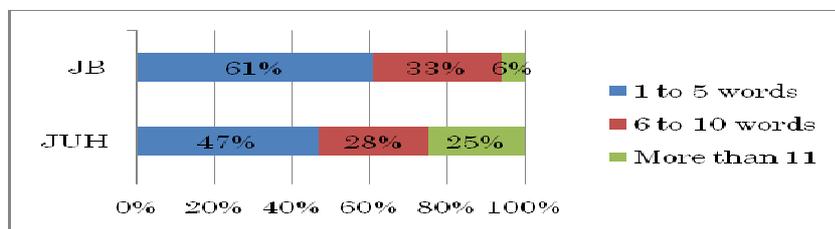


Figure3: Percentage of the number of words per sentence (Group 2)

Taking these differences into consideration, the AU and JUH were judged to be fluent speakers in both groups.

Furthermore, it is sometimes difficult to separate the contribution of linguistic ability from overseas experience. Table 2 summaries the participant’s overseas experience.

Table 2: Overseas experience of each participant

Group1		Group 2	
JUH1	1 year in UK / 6 months in China	JUH2	1 year in Ireland
JB1	2 years in Taiwan / 5 years in China/ 2 years in Hong Kong	JB2	1 year in Canada
JUL1	None	JUL2	None

As for the Japanese university students, their fluency level corresponded to their overseas experiences. However, considering that JB1’s experience was longer and JB2’s was the same as JUH1 and JUH2, overseas experience does not necessarily guarantee linguistic ability. Therefore, in this study, the difference taken into consideration is regarded as linguistic ability (fluency) rather than the length of overseas experience.

## 2 Participation in the meeting

The participant’s contribution in the meeting will be shown in the order of the floor-holding time, the number of turns, and the number of words spoken.

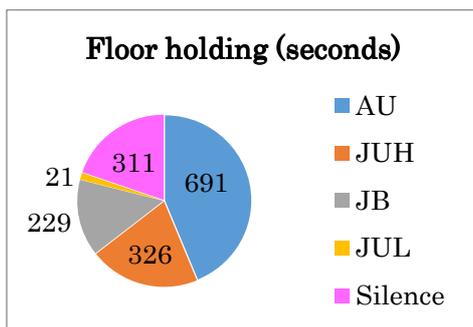


Figure 4: Floor holding (Group 1)

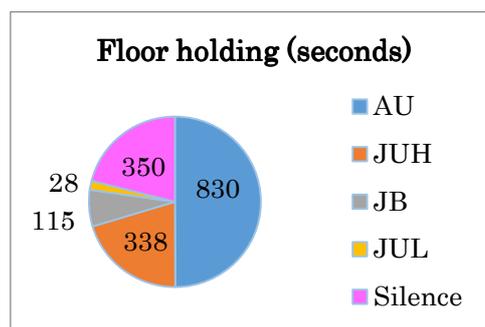


Figure 5: Floor holding (Group 2)

As Figures 4 and 5 indicate, the structure of the floor-holding was very similar between the two groups: The American speaker (AU) dominated the floor for

nearly half of the meeting; the Japanese university student with higher proficiency (JUH) took the floor for the second longest duration; the Japanese businessperson (JB) was ranked third; and the Japanese university student with lower proficiency (JUL) hardly participated in the meeting. In this meeting, pauses between turns accounted for a big portion, nearly a quarter of the whole meeting time, during which all of the participants were thinking about their decision. Differences in perceptions about silence have been reported between American and Japanese research participants (Ishii & Bruneau 1994; Fujio 2004) with American participants being less tolerant of long pauses as their Japanese counterparts. In the current study, however, AU1 and AU2 revealed in the retrospective comments that they did not try to rush the other participants to speak. This point will be further discussed in Section V.

Figures 6 to 9 that show the number of turns and the number of words spoken indicate exactly the same tendencies. As expected from the previous studies (e.g., Yamada 1990), the AU spoke the largest portion, followed by the JUH and the JB, and the JUL hardly participated in the meeting.

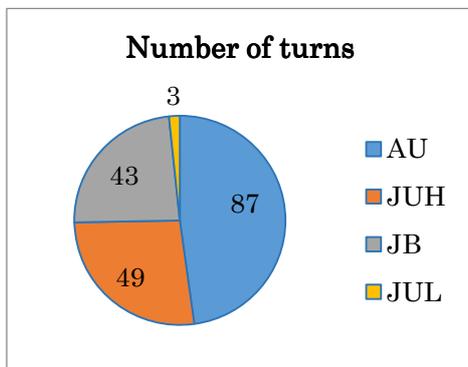


Figure 6: Number of turns (Group 1)

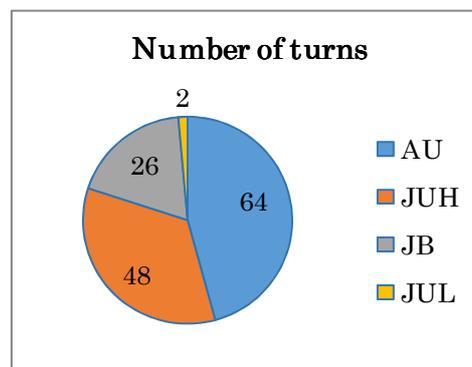


Figure 7: Number of turns (Group 2)

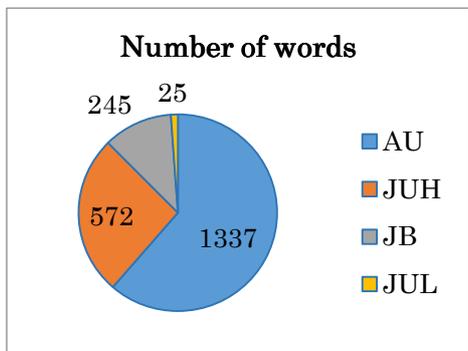


Figure 8: Number of words (Group 1)

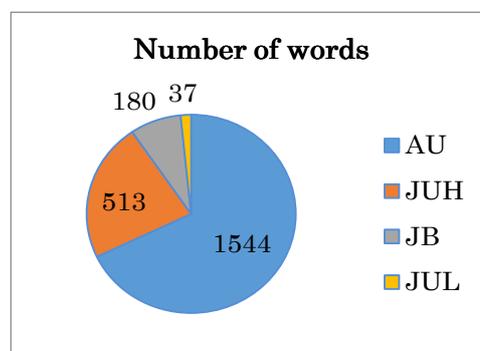


Figure 9: Number of words (Group 2)

These figures disclose that the first and the second dominant speakers in each group were high proficiency speakers, implying that language proficiency was the largest factor to influence floor-holding and turn-taking.

### 3 The structure of the meeting

When the meetings were over, the author asked each group to select one person to summarise the meeting. From both Group 1 and Group 2, the JUH was chosen. JUH1 revealed that they first discussed who the target customers were, and then they eliminated the candidates one by one. On the other hand, Group 2 chose to review the qualifications needed for the position and both the advantages and disadvantages of each candidate first, and then they tried to pick out the final candidate. Their flow of the meeting is summarised below.

Table 3: Flow of the meeting

	Group 1	Group 2
0 to 5 minutes	Clarify the purpose of SLIM GYMS	Discuss qualifications Review the first candidate
5 to 10 minutes	Clarify the target customers	Review the first candidate Review the second candidate
10 to 15 minutes	Clarify the target customers	Review the third candidate
15 to 20 minutes	Eliminate the first candidate	Review the fourth candidate
20 to 25 minutes	Eliminate the second candidate	Discuss who is the best
25 to 30 minutes	Eliminate the third candidate	Discuss who is the best

These two groups conducted their meetings in a different way and reached a different conclusion. Group 1 chose the oldest Italian man, Guido, because of his work experiences and linguistic ability (an Italian, Spanish, and English speaker) while Group 2 chose a younger Chinese man, David Chen, because of his master's degree in business administration, his passion for sports, and his language ability in Chinese and English. Group 1 reached the conclusion a little earlier than Group 2, but the difference was marginal (1 minute and 21 seconds).

## 4 Discourse Analysis

In this section, two distinctive scenes will be highlighted: chairing the meeting and making important suggestions.

### 4.1 Chairing the meeting

Analysing who chairs the meeting and sorts out turn-taking is especially important to observe the overall flow of the meeting.

In Group 1, only AU1 and JUH1 were engaged in sorting out the participants' ideas and chairing the meeting. The transcription in the following excerpts refers to the Du Bois System (1993), which is based on intonation units<sup>2</sup>.

<Excerpt 1> (starting the meeting)

JUH1: Shall we start? Where do we begin?

AU1: Wherever you like.

(6.95 )

JUH1: OK. On first impression, which one do you think is the best for the manager?

(7.58)

JUH1: Is there, some like first impression?

AU1: Before we get into the actual people, we should try to figure out the purpose of the organisation? So, what do we want from SLIM GYMS ...

In this scene, JUH1 initiated and chaired the meeting, and then AU1 suggested how to progress the meeting. Even in this short part, two long pauses were observed which indicated the other two did not actively participate in the conversation.

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<sup>2</sup> In the following excerpts, therefore, a comma (,) shows a continuing intonation, a question mark (?) a rising intonation, and a period (.) a falling intonation. Due to space limitation, however, each intonation unit is not separated by line. The number in the parentheses shows the length of the pause, and @ shows laughter.

In the following three excerpts, Group 1 was talking about which candidate should be eliminated.

<Excerpt 2> (Eliminating the first candidate)

AU1: OK, so we can all agree? This is no good right? She's no good.

JUH1: Yeah, compared to the other guys.

AU1: So, no her, right? OK, throw her out. So one of these out of three.

<Excerpt 3> (Eliminating the second candidate)

AU1: OK, if that's the case, then,

JUH1: Which one is suitable?

AU1: Yeah, which one is the best? Because this one's gone.

<Excerpt 4> (Eliminating the third candidate and choosing the final one)

AU1: OK, I mean @@@ , shall we do it? All right?

Is that our decision? Yeah?

JUH1: It's done.

AU1: All right, good job, team. @@@@ We've got a new manager.

In these three scenes, they crossed out the candidates one by one. AU1 confirmed each time, and only JUH1 responded to her. Also, AU1 simplified her English, such as "no her," to facilitate clear understanding in these decision-making scenes. Her intentional simplification was confirmed in her retrospective comments.

Thus, in Group 1, in all decision-making scenes, only AU1 and JUH1 spoke out and sorted out the opinions.

In Group 2, basically the same tendency was observed as seen in Excerpt 5.

<Excerpt 5> (Starting the meeting)

AU2: I don't know, if you guys are still reading or ready to start.

JUH2: Maybe let's start.

AU2: Yeah, let's talk about who is the best candidate. ...

(5.21)

AU2: So your task is to find someone, who can help improve sales and profits of this gym. So...

(6.03)

AU2: For candidates, they have very different educations.

(20.1)

AU2: So, has everyone read what what their skills are? Who do you think, what kind of what kind of abilities and background is the best xx ((indecipherable)) like this.

JUH2: Actually language, language skills.

AU2: Language skills.

JUH2: And probably their experiences.

Basically, this part shows the same tendency as Group 1. Only the AU (AU2) and the JUH (JUH2) were involved in initiating and starting the meeting, and long pauses were observed. Also, when they moved on to comparing candidates or trying to decide who would be the best candidate, all the turns were initiated either by AU2 or JUH2 with the exception of one by JB2. The list below indicates who the initiator was and what that participant said.

Table 4: List of the initiator and expressions in Group 2

Situation	Initiator	Expressions
Reviewing 1 <sup>st</sup> candidate	AU2	So let's talk about each person, starting with Martin.
Reviewing 2 <sup>nd</sup> candidate	JB2	The next? Who's next?
Reviewing 3 <sup>rd</sup> candidate	JUH2	Next?
Reviewing 4 <sup>th</sup> candidate	JUH2	So last person, David Chen.
Reaching the final candidate	AU2	OK, what about everyone else?
Reaching the final candidate	JUH2	What do you think?
Reaching the final candidate	AU2	I think we need to make a decision. So David?
Reaching the final candidate	JUH2	Or Gloria?
Reaching the final candidate	AU2	David or Gloria?

Thus, in both groups, the AU and JUH were almost solely involved in chairing the meeting. This tendency possibly implies that high proficiency plays an especially important role in chairing, which requires many capacities other than producing sentences such as understanding the flow of the meeting or coordination. In other words, those who are filled with linguistic production alone cannot assume this role.

At the same time, however, another possibility might be considered. As Tanaka (2008) claimed, the participants' turn-taking behaviours may influence their power relations. Therefore, in the current study too, not only did the participants' language proficiency influence their turn-taking behaviours but the less active turn-taking of the JB and JUL might have disempowered them and consequently the rest of the participants—the AU and JUH—might eventually have been prompted to be more involved in chairing. Claiming this point for sure, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

#### 4.2 Making suggestions

Unlike the chairing parts, in the scenes involving making suggestions, it was observed that the JB played an important role in both groups. The following two excerpts are from Group 1.

<Excerpt 6 > (Deciding the target customers)

JB1: I guess, this gym old people like,

AU1: All people, like everyone.

JB1: Yes yes.

AU1: Rich, poor, and not busy.

JB1: Yes yes, and ol people old people, it's not uh because 60 70 old people.

AU1: Ah, old people.

JB1: Old people, because old old people has a time...

AU1: Yeah, that's a good point.

JB1: Has a time, many time many many money.

AU1: That's very very true.

JUH1: Yeah yeah.

This scene disclosed two important points.

First of all, this part reveals JB1's weak English ability; he cannot control counting and non-counting nouns; and even if the AU mistook him, he did not instantly realise it and rather accepted it, answering "yes yes." On the other hand, from a business point of view, this utterance of JB1 played a very important role: It led the group to think about and decide the target customers—older generations—based on the suitability of the candidates.

In the next excerpt near the end, JB1 made an important suggestion when the group was having a hard time deciding the final candidate.

<Excerpt 7> (Eliminating the third candidate and making the final decision)

JUH1: From this mention, we cannot decide like, which one is better in terms of language.

(31:33)

JB1: My opinion. Where is this gym?

AU1: It's in New York.

JB1: New York. This is in New York. So, I think that she is better.

JUH1: He?

...

AU1: Does New York have more Chinese, or New York have more Italians?

JUH1: I think there are more Spanish people.

...

JB1: And he cannot speak Spanish?

AU1: No, he cannot. He can only speak English and Chinese.

JB1: @@@@ Oh.

AU1: No Spanish.

JB1: No Spanish is not good.

AU1: OK, I mean @@@, shall we do it? All right? Is that our decision? Yeah?

JUH1: It's done.

AU1: All right, good job, team. @@@@ We've got a new manager.

In this scene, the JB1's question ("Where is this gym?") led the group to reach a conclusion. Although his weak English ability was revealed again (he could not control pronouns and misused "she" for "he" as pointed out by JUH1 in the next line), his suggestion to connect the location of the company and the candidate's language ability became the clincher that decided the final candidate.

When these two excerpts are analysed in terms of a frame of reference as in the study of Goodwin (2004), JB1 incorporated a new idea; in Excerpt 6, the generation of the target customers (the possibility of the older generation for their target customers) and in Excerpt 7, the location of the company (and the candidate's expected language ability), which the other participants did not notice.

Thus, in every decision-making point, by introducing a new and professional frame of reference, JB1 made an important suggestion and changed the focal point of the meeting which contributed to the decision-making significantly. This is in sharp contrast with the JUL who seldom participated in the meeting.

The same tendency was observed in Group 2.

<Excerpt 8> (Talking about the suitability of a candidate)

JUH2: Next?

AU2: About Guido. Guido Passerelli, Italian. Uh his only education is high school. No college. He is 52, I'm sure he has experience or something.

(5.91)

AU2: He runs a small business, he he's a manager.

JB2: Is this a big company or small company?

AU2: This SLYM GIMS? They operate six health and leisure clubs in Manhattan. So not a small business, I would say medium-sized business.

JB2: So, small business and big business, a big difference.

AU2: Yes yes.

<Excerpt 9>

AU2: So who does everyone think? Your first thought after reading everyone, who do you think is the best for the job?

( 11.95 )

JB2: So, the salary is same?

JUH2: Salary?

JB2: Usually older people, a lot of experience people, also need a lot of money to hire.

JUH2: I think the same.

JB2: Oh, same?

AU2: Yeah, I'm sure especially for him. He's older than him ((pointing)). He just graduated from high school too. So, maybe it doesn't really matter. If he applies for this job, he knows xx ((indecipherable)).

JUH2: Just depends on what you do.

AU2: Yes.

In this group, JB2's opinions did not lead the group to the final decision as in Group 1. However, he also suggested a new frame of reference; in Excerpt 8, the corporate size (which influences the leader's management style); and in Excerpt 9, the salary. Again, these were the new viewpoints presented by the JB that had not been touched upon in the meeting.

These excerpts also revealed JB2's linguistic constraints: He simplified his English in several turns. For example, "So, small company and big company, a big difference" or "a lot of experience people" for "people with a lot of experience," in which the syntax was simplified although they are fully acceptable in conversation.

Thus, in both groups, in spite of linguistic constraints, the JB contributed to the meeting with interesting suggestions fostered through business experiences.

## 5 Summary of analysis

In this section, the answers to the research questions will be briefly summarised.

Considering research question 1 (RQ1), the most influential factor for

turn-taking in the data was linguistic ability demonstrated by the fact that the AU and the JUH alone were involved in chairing the meeting and took nearly three-quarters of the total number of turns in both groups.

However, regarding RQ2, the JB in both groups made up for their relatively limited language proficiency with suggestions incorporating a new professional frame of reference, which even led the group to the final decision-making in the case of Group 1.

## **V Discussion**

In this section, the points highlighted from the analytical results will be discussed: 1) variables influencing turn-taking, especially, linguistic ability vs. business expertise; and 2) BELF and the native speaker problem. As mentioned in the last section, the former also provides further explanation about the research questions presented in Section III.

### **1 Linguistic ability vs. business expertise**

Considering that only the AU and the JUH were involved in chairing the meeting and took nearly three-quarters of the total number of turns in both groups, their common attribute, higher English proficiency seems to be the largest factor in controlling the floor. Although both JUH1 and JUH2 were much younger than JB1 and JB2 and had no business experiences, they were not hesitant to lead the conversation because of their strong English ability. Of course, there is a possibility that their initiative might have been developed through their overseas experience; therefore, their contribution was not only due to linguistic skills but also to their overseas experience through which they were encouraged to speak their opinions. However, in terms of overseas experience, both JB1 and JB2 also had the same level or even more experience. Nonetheless, the way in which they participated was completely different from JUH1 and JUH2. In this sense, proficiency can possibly be singled out as a factor to influence turn-taking.

Among those with lower English ability, however, participation in the meeting differed significantly according to business experience. Both JUL1 and JUL2, who have neither high English ability nor business experiences,

hardly participated in the meeting. The participation of JUL1 accounted for only 1.1% and 1.6%, in terms of the floor-holding time and the number of turns respectively. In the case of JUL2, floor-holding and turns were 1.7% and 1.4%. On the other hand, JB1 and JB2, played an important role in the decision-making by presenting questions or suggestions with a different angle or frame of reference which the other participants had not considered.

As pointed out in the last section, both JB1 and JB2 could not speak English as fluently as JUH1 and JUH2. However, they knew how best to use their current linguistic ability. Through discourse analysis, the author observed three specific points or strategies regarding how they utilised their rather limited linguistic ability.

First of all, they used short sentences and just focused on key words, such as “small company big company, big difference,” instead of using their time to form accurate, long, complicated sentences. Second, by using fixed words at the turn, such as “So” or “My opinion,” they made their turn-taking easier. Lastly, they concentrated on their role of giving ideas from a professional point of view, instead of trying to be involved in everything such as chairing.

The strategies taken by them, in fact, correspond to the rules of conversation.

Clark and Brennan (1991) listed 11 different costs of grounding (how to adjust one’s background knowledge) and cost trade-offs in communication, maintaining that the required costs vary from medium to medium. In face-to-face communication, “delay costs” or “the costs of delaying an utterance in order to plan, revise, and execute it more carefully” are especially high; instead, speakers can use simpler constructions and often produce “less than perfect utterances” (p.143). In this vein, their strategies were very effective and reasonable in order to achieve their communicative goals.

## **2 BELF and the native speaker problem**

As the number of non-native speakers of English has well exceeded that of native speakers (e.g., Crystal 2003) and English has become a lingua franca, the research into BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) has also been increasing (e.g., Marinell & Nickerson 2009). Among the challenges in using BELF, the native speaker problem (Sweeney & Zhu, 2010) will be an

important research agenda. The native speaker problem can be referred to “the tendency of native speakers to use their language in unnecessarily complicated ways when speaking to non-native speakers” (Victor, 2013, p. 57); and it might possibly cause a situation in which, in spite of the meeting being conducted in English, native speakers might become the least understood participants if all the other participants are non-native speakers. Therefore, grounding or adjusting one’s linguistic ability to the interlocutor becomes essential in intercultural business meetings.

In the current data, both AU1 and AU2 were highly aware of the needs, partly because they are now living in Japan; and their adjustments will be applicable to other business situations. Retrospective comments disclosed that both AU1 and AU2 intentionally slowed down their speech rate and simplified their English in some parts of the meeting. Considering that the average speech rate of native speakers in conversation is about 190 to 230 wpm (Tauroza & Allison 1990), their speech rate of about 110 to 120 wpm reveals their intentional and significant adjustment. Also, they rather accepted long pauses to encourage the Japanese participants to speak out. AU1 clearly commented on this point, indicating an adjustment in style:

I was not uncomfortable with the pauses. In fact, I purposely implemented the pauses in the discussion. I felt that I didn’t want to be the dominant player because it would undermine the participation of the other group members whose native language wasn’t English, so I waited each time until they seemed ready to express their views.

Also, in both groups, direct disagreement expressions were not observed such as “I don’t agree,” not only by the Japanese but also American participants. Even when they showed disagreement, indirect and suggestive expressions were used. For example, AU2 used the expressions such as “Yeah, I’m not sure though,” or “So maybe it doesn’t really matter.” Also AU1 commented that she tried not to directly express disagreement in the meeting but to encourage members by agreeing and offering an alternative solution.

On the other hand, in both groups, agreement was clearly shown by the frequent use of reactive tokens including reactive signals (e.g. “yeah”),

repetition, or even co-construction (e.g., Clancy, et al., 1996). Especially, co-construction in which the second speaker takes the first speaker's utterance and completes it is reportedly hard to use by Japanese participants because it requires both quickness and confidence in taking the latter half of the utterance (Fujio, 2011). In the current data, however, JUH1 used this strategy and showed his understanding and positive reinforcement (See Excerpt 3).

Although Japanese business people are reported not to show disagreement clearly in meetings conducted either in Japanese (Fujio & Tanaka, 2012) or in English (Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2010), they may be able to show agreement more clearly and show their stance more effectively by using these strategies to indicate understanding or positive reinforcement. In this vein, the results of the current study can be applied to many other occasions.

## **VI Conclusion**

The current study based on simulated data tried to specify what factors—especially language proficiency and business expertise—affect turn-taking in business meetings, and if speakers use other factors to make up for an insufficient linguistic ability. Since only two groups were observed in the current study, the data are not large enough for generalisation. However, the two groups disclosed exactly the same tendency: Only high proficient speakers were involved in chairing the meeting while Japanese business people with rather limited proficiency played an important role in decision-making by presenting new frames of reference fostered through their business experiences. This result implies that one's expertise becomes a strong advantage in contributing to business communication, and the rich discursive data in the current study will be transferred to many other occasions.

As for future research, especially two of the topics discussed in this study will be further explored. The first one is a methodological issue; although using simulated data in this study was very advantageous in controlling variables such as the attributes of the participants, the result was seemingly not as serious and aggressive as real decision-making in the business field. If authentic data is observed next time, those who are in the same situation as the JB might take more turns and more actively express their opinions in order to

choose the right candidate. In addition, power politics between the participants might be observed, considering that recruiting someone may frequently influence the future positioning of the participant either positively or negatively.

The second possibility is to observe non-native and non-native discourse. If all the participants had been non-native speakers, the JB and the JUL might have spoken more actively in this simulated data, partly because they would have felt less inferior or felt less apprehension by the absolute differences in language proficiency between the native and the non-native. Conducting another simulation using non-native speakers or collecting authentic data between non-native speakers and comparing the results with those of the current study will provide interesting implications for future BELF research.

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