Interaction of Self-Disclosure by Japanese English Language Learners： Challenges and Pedagogical Implications

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1．Introduction

In this study, we explored conversations in which English was used as a lingua franca（ELF）to uncover the characteristics and issues related to self-disclosure by Japanese English learners. Subsequently, we discuss the challenges faced in teaching English interactions in Japan.

The difficulties faced by Japanese English learners when communicating in English extend beyond deficiencies in language knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary, expression, and pronunciation. In addition to these linguistic challenges, individuals may also struggle with differences in their interactional styles. For instance, even those who score relatively high on English proficiency exams often struggle to engage in conversations, facing issues such as the inability to participate effectively or take turns during dialogue（Terauchi et al., 2008）. Furthermore, observations from English speakers suggest that Japanese individuals may appear overly reserved in conversations（e.g., Yamada, 1992; FitzGerald, 2002）. These issues seem to stem more from a lack of English interactional ability than linguistic knowledge.

Such interactional challenges not only impede effective information

exchange, but also have the potential to disrupt interpersonal and trust relationships. Otani（2007）highlighted a case in which American individuals expressed feelings of distrust after conversing with Japanese persons in English. Although the conversation appeared to end amicably on the surface, the follow-up interview revealed the Americans' dissatisfaction, stating that the Japanese persons were perceived as "rude" and expressing a desire not to engage in further conversation. Otani attributes this misinterpretation to the Japanese individuals' lack of understanding of the proper English interactional style, resulting in a failure to establish a good interpersonal relationship with Americans.

An objective of foreign-language education, including English education, is to cultivate the ability to build harmonious relationships with people from diverse cultures by communicating in the target language. Therefore, instruction in interactional style for fostering trustworthy relations with others is crucial.

Furthermore, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages（CEFR）, a guideline for European foreign language education policy, emphasizes the importance of interactional competence, distinct from mere speaking proficiency. However, regarding English education in Japan, issues and teaching methods for interactions have received limited attention. This study focused on the self-disclosure interactions of Japanese English learners and revealed their characteristics and challenges using experimental conversation data. Subsequently, we discuss how to teach interaction in Japanese English classrooms.

2．Literature Review

2.1 Self-disclosure

The term "self-disclosure" was originally used in psychology and is defined as "the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so that others can perceive you" (Jourard, 1971, p.19). According to Jourard, individuals may find others intimidating if they cannot understand them. By contrast, through self-disclosure, individuals can comprehend the extent of their similarities or differences, understand the needs of others, and gauge how much alignment or deviation exists from moral and ethical standards. Consequently, self-disclosure is associated with attitudes of trust and love and is essential to build intimate relationships and establish trust.

In psychology, research on self-disclosure has been conducted from various perspectives, such as quantity, depth, gender differences, and effects since the 1970s, revealing its characteristics.

Moreover, it is revealed that the appropriateness of self-disclosure is heavily influenced by the social norms of each culture. Appropriateness refers to when, to what extent, and how self-disclosure should occur. Those who deviate from these norms tend to be evaluated negatively (Enomoto, 1997).

2.2 Self-disclosure by Japanese people

What characteristics define self-disclosure in Japanese society if intertwined with social norms? We explored cross-cultural research that compares self-disclosure between Japanese and non-Japanese people.

Barnlund (1989) investigated the degree of self-disclosure in Japanese and Americans using questionnaire surveys. The results indicated that regardless

of the intimacy level with the other person, Japanese people disclosed less about themselves than Americans. Kito（2005）conducted a survey of university students in Japan and the United States to explore the extent to which individuals disclose themselves in various relationships such as friendships and romantic relationships. The findings revealed that, irrespective of the relationship, Japanese students disclosed less than Americans.

Several studies have compared self-disclosure between the Japanese and other Asians. Nakagawa（2003, 2010, 2011）compared self-disclosure in Japanese and Korean individuals, who are often grouped together under the broad category "Asians," through surveys and interview investigations targeting business professionals. The results suggested that, although there are commonalities between the two groups, Koreans tend to engage in greater self-disclosure. Conversely, Meguro et al.（2017）conducted a comparative survey on self-disclosure among university students in Japan, China, and Korea using questionnaires. They concluded that the extent of self-disclosure varies based on the conversation partner and topic, making it challenging to definitively state which country exhibits higher levels of self-disclosure.

2.3 Interactional sequence of self-disclosure

Many of the aforementioned investigations used surveys and questionnaires. By contrast, conversation and discourse analysis fields emphasize on studying the conversations themselves to elucidate how participants engage in mutual interaction for self-disclosure.

Svennevig（1999）identified the following self-presentational sequence commonly observed during instances of self-disclosure from conversation analysis perspective.

1)	A:	Presentation-eliciting question

2)	B:	Self-presentation

3a)	A:	Acknowledgement token
3b)	A:	Continuation elicitor
3c)	A:	Self-oriented comment

Figure 1　The move of the self-presentational sequence
（Svennevig, 1999, p.100　　Simplified by Otani）

The first sequence involves speaker A initiating an interaction by posing a question that encourages self-disclosure from the interlocutor, termed as "Presentation-eliciting question." Next, speaker B responds by engaging in self-disclosure（Self-presentation）. Following this self-presentation, speaker A has the potential to respond in three ways: The first option is providing minimal acknowledgments such as "Yeah" or "right"（Acknowledgement token）. Alternatively, speaker A may seek more detailed disclosure from speaker B（Continuation elicitor）. Finally, speaker A may initiate comments or begin their own self-disclosure（Self-oriented comment ）.

Mimaki（2013）analyzed Japanese self-disclosure interactions, providing a detailed examination of their characteristics from various perspectives. Notably, the study revealed that, in addition to the three moves identified by Svennevig, there are sequences in which speakers spontaneously engage in self-disclosure. Furthermore, she illuminated the instances within Svennevig's sequence of self-presentation where intentional non-disclosure is deliberately chosen.

In Iwata's study（2015）, a comparative analysis of Japanese and English conversations using discourse analysis revealed that Japanese individuals tend to disclose less about themselves than English speakers. Furthermore, the study highlighted a significant difference in the role of listeners in self-disclosure interactions between English and Japanese speakers. English

speakers actively engage in prompting comments and questions that encourage the interlocutor to disclose, fostering a proactive mutual exchange that contributes to the construction of self-disclosure. She also insists that there is concern that if Japanese individuals rely on the interactional style of self-disclosure in Japanese during English conversations, they may not be able to establish sufficient interpersonal relationships. Therefore, to address this potential challenge, she emphasizes the need for instruction in interactions.

2.4 Self-disclosure in intercultural communication

If differences in the extent of self-disclosure and styles of interaction arise because of linguistic and cultural variations, what implications do these have for intercultural communication? In a study conducted by Iwata (2010), an analysis of English-language interactions between Americans and Japanese individuals was carried out. The results revealed a significantly higher level of self-disclosure among Americans than Japanese participants. As a result, conversations were predominantly led by Americans, with Japanese individuals assuming more passive roles as listeners. She pointed out that the divergent norms of self-disclosure between the Japanese and Americans make it challenging to expect equal levels of self-disclosure from both parties.

3．Research Question

From most previous studies, it is evident that the level of self-disclosure among Japanese individuals is comparatively lower than among English native speakers and Asians such as Korean and Chinese people. As highlighted by Iwata (2010), potential challenges can arise during intercultural conversations. As self-disclosure is crucial in building human

relationships, Japanese individuals may face difficulties in establishing smooth interpersonal connections in intercultural conversations.

This study aimed to illuminate the dynamics of self-disclosure in conversations between Japanese and Asian individuals using English as a lingua franca (ELF). Specifically, by focusing on the interactional sequences, we quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed their characteristics. Particularly, this study seeks to reveal the following points concerning Japanese English learners.

1. The amount of self-disclosure
2. How interactions take place when self-disclosure occurs
3. What issues arise in the process

Subsequently, based on these results, the study will reflect on

4. The kind of interactional instruction that may be necessary.

4．Methodology

In this study, we analyzed data from five English conversations between Japanese and Asian exchange students (Chinese and Korean) in Japan and follow-up interviews conducted after each conversation. As conversational partners for Japanese students, we deliberately avoided selecting native-English speakers and instead chose non-native English-speaking Asian students. This decision aimed to eliminate the potential unequal power dynamics that may arise when Japanese non-native English speakers engage in conversations with native-English speakers. By analyzing conversations among individuals in more equal relationships, we sought to clarify the characteristics of English interactions among Japanese individuals. Additionally, considering the anticipated increase in English usage among non-native speakers in the future, we aimed to highlight the challenges faced

in such situations.

The participants were women recruited from a university in Kyoto, Japan. The choice of exclusively female participants stemmed from previous research indicating gender-based variations in self-disclosure (Enomoto, 1997; Mimaki, 2013). By focusing on female participants, we aimed to minimize the potential impact of sex differences.

The participants included undergraduate and graduate students aged 19–34 years who attended universities in Japan. They self-reported their English proficiency at CEFR A2–B1 levels. However, upon observing their conversations, some exhibited variations, with a few appearing at the B2–C1 levels. All participants used English as a foreign language, and the Japanese students were specifically majoring in English. While the Japanese and Asian exchange students met for the first time, some exchange students were already acquainted with each other.

The conversational setting was a first encounter at a house party hosted by a university professor. The initial meeting is a crucial moment in relationship formation, and negative impressions during this phase can hinder the development of subsequent relationships. Therefore, it is important to examine how Japanese individuals behave during their initial encounters.

Conversations were unstructured, allowing participants to engage in casual conversations while drinking. Each group consisted of three participants— one Japanese student and two Asian exchange students. The conversations lasted for 30 min, and both audio and video were recorded which were later transcribed for data analysis.

Following each conversation, individual follow-up interviews were conducted with both the Japanese and exchange students to address their impressions, difficulties, interesting points, and other aspects of the conversation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for data utilization.

Table 1 presents the participants in each group, with "J" representing Japanese, "C" Chinese, and "K" Korean participants.

Table 1　Participants

Group	No.1	No.2	No.3	No.4	No.5
	J1	J2	J3	J4	J5
Participants	C1	C1	C3	C1	C3
	C2	C2	K1	C2	K1

5．Findings

5.1 Amount of self-disclosure

First, we examined the amount of self-disclosure among participants in each group. We extracted and counted the number of words in the utterances containing self-disclosure from each participant. Any expressions of hesitation or retraction were removed from the utterances. Self-disclosure of utterances was defined as:

・Statements related to oneself (such as name, place of origin, hobbies, preferences, and experiences).
・Statements related to the group one belongs to (such as family, school, hometown, and country).
・Expressions of one's thoughts, opinions, impressions, etc. (Note: Short utterances like "good" or "great" uttered in response to the interlocutor's speech, typically serving a lexical backchanneling, were excluded).

Consequently, the quantity of self-disclosure in each group is presented in

Figure 2. The level of self-disclosure among Japanese participants consistently ranked lowest in all groups, except Group 3. Even in Group 3, the Japanese participant ranked second to the Korean student K1 in terms of the lowest self-disclosure. The percentage of self-disclosure by Japanese participants in each group varied from 10% (Group 5) to 21% (Group 4). Moreover, except for Group 4, there was a significant imbalance in the participants' self-disclosure levels, revealing that one international student in each group disclosed a substantial amount.
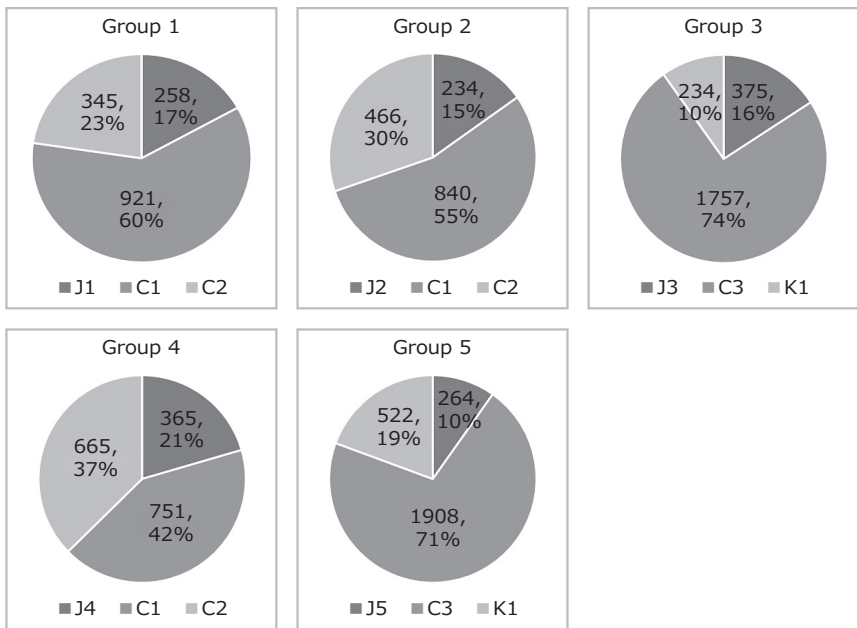
Figure 2　Amount of self-disclosure by each participant (words)

5.2 Frequency of presentation-eliciting question

Next, we explored the reasons for the imbalance in self-disclosure. To this end, we examined the sequence of interactions in detail. First, we compared

the frequency of presentation-eliciting questions, as indicated by Svennevig. The total number of questions eliciting self-disclosure in each group varied from 30 (Group 3) to 62 (Group 5) (Figure 3). However, considering that the participants had no prior information about each other in the first-encounter conversation, it can be inferred that a relatively large number of questions were posed to alleviate this uncertainty.

No consistent pattern existed in the frequency of questions asked by the Japanese participants. Despite this lack of uniformity, most Japanese participants actively posed questions and sought to encourage their conversation partners to disclose information about themselves. J2 from Group 2 and J4 from Group 4 posed nearly half the questions, both of which aimed to prompt the disclosure of information from conversation partners. Even in Groups 1 and 5, Japanese participants did not exhibit an extremely
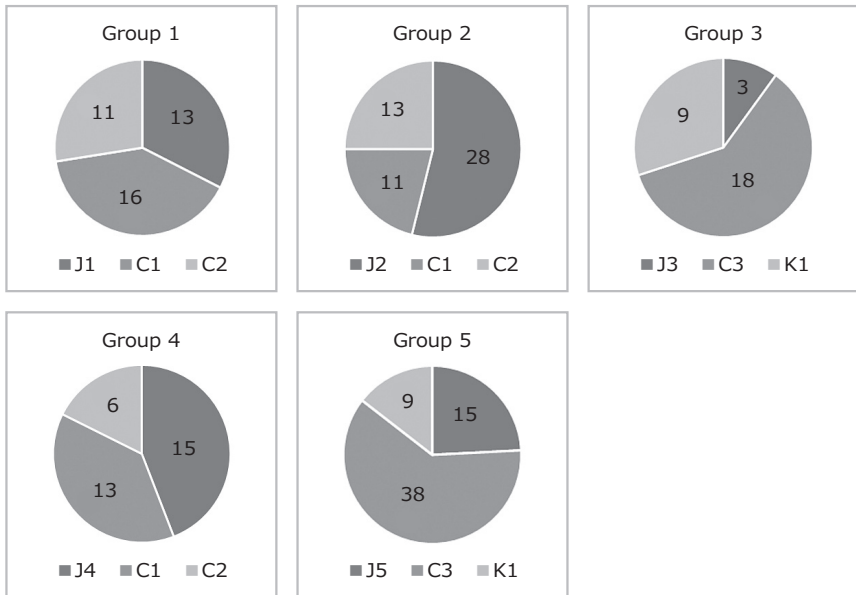
Figure 3　Frequency of presentation-eliciting questions by each participant

low frequency of questions. In summary, Japanese participants were relatively proactive in asking questions to encourage their conversation partners to disclose information, indicating that they were not necessarily passive or less interested in conversations.

Next, we explored how the Japanese participants encouraged the disclosure of personal information through their questions during the interactions. The following is a segment of the conversation in Group 4 that occurred shortly after each participant introduced themselves. In the subsequent excerpts, grammatical errors present in the utterances are preserved exactly as they appeared in the original dialogue.

〈Excerpt 1〉 Group 4 (as for transcription conventions, see Appendix)

01　J4 :　**Why do – why do you come – come in – in Japan?**
02　C1:　Ah – we came here for study.　But – but I – I like Japanese an –
03　　　　animation and cartoon.　So, I came to Japan.　@ @
04　C2:　Me too – I am – first I came for study and then maybe out of
05　　　　study, I can do some sightseeing.　I travelling to everywhere
06　　　　in Japan.　So, I think it's interesting.
07　J4 :　Mm.　**Do you went – did you went to Kiyomizu temple?**
08　C1:　Ah – there's a lot of people.
09　J4 :　Ah-hah.
10　C1:　Mm – I went there once.　But – uh – really a lot of people there.　I
11　　　　think I've never – I've never come to twice.　@ @

In line 01, J4 asks why C1 and C2 came to Japan despite grammatical errors. In the response (lines 04–06), C2 communicates that besides studying, she also enjoys sightseeing in Japan. Promptly, in line 07, J4 asks if she has already visited the famous tourist site in Kyoto, Kiyomizu Temple,

encouraging further self-disclosure. Thus, except for J3 in Group 3, the Japanese participants actively prompted their counterparts to disclose more about themselves by asking questions.

However, J3 posed only three questions (Figure 3), and exhibited minimal engagement with the interlocutors. In a follow-up interview, she explained her limited interaction, stating, "I wasn't sure if it was okay to insert questions or comments during the other person's talk. I thought it would be inappropriate to immediately ask questions as soon as the other person finished speaking. I felt it was better not to ask too many questions." It appeared that she refrained from asking questions and deemed them potentially impolite. This reluctance to pose questions is a relatively common response among native Japanese speakers, as noted in previous studies (Otani, 2015; Shigemitsu, 2021). This perspective stems from the belief that questioning may force the other person to answer the question or threaten their territory (Shigemitsu, 2021). J3 seems to have transferred the norms of interaction in her native Japanese language to English, resulting in hesitation to ask questions.

5.3 Other presentation-eliciting strategies

The data in this study revealed instances in which self-disclosure was elicited through strategies other than direct questioning. The following excerpt has been reviewed for further clarification.

〈Excerpt 2〉 Group 5

01　K1:　I love it your T-shirts.

02　C3:　Actually.

03　J5 :　Your friend wrote?

04　C3:　Actually, my – my friend had – had a picture of her but there is

05		something magical.
06	All:	@ @
07	K1:	Oh my god.
08	C3:	Yeah, like this.
09	All:	@ @
10	K1:	**It's cute.**
11	C3:	Yeah. Actually, there is a real cat at the museum that I use – use
12		to work, a whole beautiful white cat with ponytail, yellow.

In line 01, K1 notices a cat illustration on C3's T-shirt and comments, expressing admiration with "I love it your T-shirts." This signifies an interest in her t-shirt and serves as a compliment. Furthermore, in line 03, J5 inquires about the illustration ("Your friend wrote?"). This prompts C3 to reveal that the design of her t-shirt is based on a photo of a cat from her previous workplace (line 04–05). Thus, K1's expression of interest and J5's question serve as catalysts for C3's self-disclosure. Additionally, the comment "It's cute" in line 10 also acts as a trigger for C3's subsequent self-disclosure from line 11 onwards. This illustrates that a presentation elicitor is not limited to questions; compliments or expressions of interest from the interlocutor can also stimulate self-disclosure.

5.4 Self-presentation

How do participants engage in self-disclosure in response to presentation-eliciting questions? We analyzed the utterances of the self-presentations. The following excerpt illustrates the differences in the self-disclosure sequences of Japanese and international students.

〈Excerpt 3〉 Group 1

01　C1:　Do you part-time, you do part-time job?

02　J1 :　**I – I have part-time job.**

03　C2:　Oh⋯

　　　　　（pause）

04　J1 :　Um?

05　C1:　[Part-time job], part-time job.

06　C2:　[Part-time job.]

07　J1 :　Part-time job? **I – I have.**

08　C1:　Ah – do you have any part-time job?

09　J1 :　**Yes, I have one part-time job, restaurant.**

10　C1:　Ah, restaurant is ((Unclear)).

11　C2:　What kind of restaurant do you work in?

12　J1 :　**Tofu, Japanese.**

13　C1:　Ah, that's why.

14　C2:　Ahhhh.

15　C1:　That makes sense.

16　C2:　So, my part-time job is tapioca milk tea. Her part-time job⋯

17　C1:　My part-time job is in kimono rental.

18　C2:　Kimono rental⋯

19　J1 :　Ahhhh.

20　C1:　Kimono rental.

21　J1 :　**Do you wear a kimono?**

22　C1:　**I don't wear a kimono. I don't know how to wear @ @**

23　　　　**I don't know how to wear. I just – I just say "welcome", "thank**

24　　　　**you." @ @**

25　J1 :　Oh⋯

26　C1:　**"That's *nani nani* yen"**　((That's blah-blah yen))

27 J1 :   Yeah.
28 C1:   **"Thank you very much."**

In line 01, C1 asks whether J1 is working part-time, which serves as a presentation-eliciting question that prompts J1's self-disclosure. J1 responds briefly in line 02, "I–I have part-time job." Following this, C2 acknowledges with an "Oh," and a brief pause occurs. This pause suggests that C1 and C2 anticipate a more detailed self-disclosure from J1. However, misunderstanding the significance of the pause, J1 responds with a question "Um?" in line 04, wondering if she misinterpreted the question. Subsequently, lines 05–08 involve a clarification of the question, leading to J1 providing additional self-disclosure about her part-time job at a restaurant in line 09. Notably, this disclosure includes new information about working in a restaurant compared to the initial response in line 02. Despite this new information, C1 and C2 still find the disclosure insufficient, prompting C2 to ask for further details in line 11 ("What kind of restaurant do you work in?"). Finally, after learning that J1 works at a tofu restaurant, in lines 13–15 C1 and C2 seem satisfied.

The miscommunication observed in lines 03–09 can be attributed to differing expectations regarding the amount of self-disclosure between J1 and C1/C2. While the response in line 02 was perceived as insufficient by C1 and C2, J1 may not have deemed it inadequate. In an initial encounter, J1 likely did not intend to make extensive self-disclosure, leading to minimal disclosure in line 02. Only after additional presentation-eliciting questions in lines 08 and 11 did J1 conclude the self-disclosure, revealing that she had worked at a tofu restaurant.

By contrast, we examined the exchange between J1 and C1 starting from line 21. When C1 mentions working at a kimono rental shop, J1 asks whether C1 also wears a kimono at the shop, prompting self-disclosure ("Do you wear

a kimono?"). C1 not only communicates that she does not wear kimonos (line 22), but also discloses her lack of knowledge about how to wear one (lines 22-23) and describes her role in customer service and accounting while mimicking customer service phrases (lines 23, 24, 26, 28). This exemplifies proactive and substantial self-disclosure by C1.

Consider another example in Excerpt 4. Just before this conversation, the participants were talking about J5's dog. Then, in line 01 K1 asks, "Do you have pictures?" and expresses interest in seeing her dog, serving as a presentation-eliciting question aimed at drawing out details about the dog. C3 also expresses strong interest in line 02, praises the dog's cuteness in line 09, and asks if it is intelligent in line 11–12. However, J5 fails to realize the intention behind the question and the compliment, and only responds with "Yeah" while providing minimal information about the dog's love for playing with balls (lines 03, 07, 10, 13). Consequently, the conversation about J5's dog concludes without significant self-disclosure, transitioning to a different topic in line 15.

⟨Excerpt 4⟩ Group 5

01　K1:　Do you have pictures?

02　C3:　Yeah, I'm – I'm looking forward to that.

03　J5 :　**She likes ball. @ @**

04　K1:　Balls.

05　J5 :　Aah.

06　C3:　Balls.

07　J5 :　**Oh, yeah.**

08　C3:　Aaah.

09　C3:　Ah, so cute.

10　J5 :　**@ @ yeah.**

11	C3:	And it – I – I think it's maybe a little rude to ask. But is she
12		clever?
13	J5 :	**Yeah. @ @**
14	K1:	She is clever.
15	C3:	@ @ Actually, one – one – yeah, one of my friend prefer dom cats.
16		@ @. Oh, you – you look so stupid. I love you. She was
17		((Multiple Speaker)) but I prefer clever cats.

The difference in the amount of self-disclosure between Japanese and international students, depicted in Figure 2, can be partially attributed to the fact that Japanese individuals, despite being repeatedly prompted by others, do not disclose themselves sufficiently. Additionally, they may not be aware that questions, compliments, and expressions of interest from others are intended to encourage self-disclosure, as evident from the examples provided.

5.5 Voluntary self-disclosure

In addition to instances in which individuals prompt others to self-disclose, our dataset includes cases in which speakers voluntarily disclose personal information, as highlighted by Mimaki (2013). In this study, we refer to this phenomenon as " voluntary self-disclosure."

The following is an example of voluntary self-disclosure. Three individuals were talking about chocolate. When the topic ended (line 04), a silence of approximately 3-seconds lasted. At this point, C3, in an effort to fill the silence, spontaneously began sharing her interpretation of Japanese pre-meal and post-meal greetings (*itadakimasu* and *gochisosama*), along with her experiences teaching these customs to Americans, starting from line 05. C3 voluntarily initiated the disclosure of her personal experiences to break the silence.

〈Excerpt 5〉 Group 3

01 C3: Yes. I think it's – it's genius to put chocolate and nuts together.

02 K1: Yeah.

03 J3: Yeah. But very – and it is part…

04 K1: Mmmm.

(3-second silence)

05 C3: Ah – I – I was trying to teach the American musicians to well

06 – how – how the Japanese to eat before they eat anything,

07 they will say *itadakimasu*,

08 and what that means. And somehow, it's not prayer, right? It's

09 not something religious.

10 It's just that to thanking for – thanks for the people

11 who made the meal, and after that, we say *gochisosama,* and

12 what that means.

13 J3: Ah – yeah.

14 C3: Yeah, we have finished our meal, and thank – thanks everything,

15 everyone like that.

16 J3: Yeah. Ah – it mean – ah – thank you for all the goods in the world.

17 So, *itadakimas* and *gochisosama*.

Within the data, there were several instances in which a topic was concluded, resulting in several instances of silence, as illustrated by this example. However, attempts to fill this silence through voluntary self-disclosure were rarely observed among Japanese students. The increased frequency of voluntary self-disclosure by international students is likely to contribute to higher levels of self-disclosure on their part.

5.6 Acknowledgement token, continuation elicitor, and self-oriented comment

Next, we examined the sequence of reactions after self-disclosure and how the conversation partners responded to self-disclosures. Svennevig (1999) explained three typical reactions that occur after self-disclosure: an acknowledgment token that accepts self-disclosure with a minimum response, a continuation elicitor that encourages further self-disclosure, and a self-oriented comment mentioning their own ideas or stories.

Here, let us revisit Excerpt 3. In line 01, C1 poses a presentation-eliciting question to J1, asking, "Do you part-time, you do part-time job?" J1 responds in lines 02–12, disclosing that she works part-time at a tofu restaurant. Consider the reactions of C1 and C2 after J1's self-disclosure. In lines 16–17, both C1 and C2 promptly disclose information regarding their part-time jobs. C2 reveals working at a tapioca milk tea shop (line 16), whereas C1 discloses working at a kimono rental store (line 17). This constitutes a self-oriented comment in response to J1's self-disclosure, creating what is referred to as the second story in conversation analysis. Instances in which individuals proactively self-disclose without being prompted are frequently observed among international students.

By contrast, we consider Excerpt 6. In line 01, seeking self-disclosure, J2 asks when the international students came to Japan (a presentation-eliciting question). In response, in lines 02–10, C1 and C2 disclose their respective arrival periods. However, in line 11, J2 responds with "Three years, very long. Yeah." This serves as an acknowledgment token in response to the self-disclosures of C1 and C2. Despite seeking self-disclosure from C1 and C2, J2 neither requests further details nor shares relevant personal stories, concluding the topic with the brief response "Three years, very long. Yeah". As a result, a 6-second silence ensues. This silence indicates that C1 and C2 expected additional questions, further comments, or self-disclosures from J2

and waited for them. However, J2's minimal response indicates a lack of substantial engagement with self-disclosure.

〈Excerpt 6〉 Group 2

01	J2:	When did you come here? When did you…
02	C1:	I came here September, last month, last…
03	J2:	September?
04	C2:	Last…
05	C1:	Last, last year.
06	J2:	Wow! One year.
07	C1:	Almost one year, about.
08	C2:	Mm-Hmm, yeah. I came here two years ago…
09	J2:	Two years?
10	C2:	About – eh – almost three years.
11	**J2:**	**Three years, very long. Yeah.**
		（6-second silence）
12	C1:	And what's your favorite fruit?

In the examples provided, it is observed that Japanese individuals tend to acknowledge and accept others' self-disclosure. However, instances in which they actively seek or engage in additional self-disclosure are exceedingly rare. Consequently, many conversations lack continuity and may be halted. As a consequence, such reactions may be construed as an indication of disinterest in the other party's self-disclosure, potentially leading to an interpretation of rudeness.

5.7 Follow-up interview

Next, we explored interesting responses from the follow-up interviews.

Initially, when asked about their impressions of their interlocutors, none expressed a negative impression. Most participants mentioned that the conversation was "enjoyable." However, upon closer examination, some noteworthy comments surfaced, particularly from the international students. One concern that emerged was the confusion regarding the Japanese participants not talking much. Comments evaluating Japanese participants as "reserved" and "having few topics" were frequently heard. By contrast, C3 expressed concern about talking too much, stating, "I tried to liven things up because the Japanese student wasn't speaking." Additionally, both C3 and K1 mentioned, "We thought if we didn't take the lead and fill the silence, the conversation might stall."

Furthermore, regarding the observation that Japanese participants didn't speak much, C1 and C2 mentioned, "If someone talks like that in our home country, I would think she's not interested in me. I wouldn't want to be friends. I would probably not initiate further conversations. This time, I spoke earnestly because it was a conversation task, but in a real conversation, it might not continue, and a relationship might not be established." In other words, given that this was experimental, the international students sustained the conversation; however, in real-life situations, a conversation might not persist with Japanese participants, potentially hindering the establishment of interpersonal relationships.

From these results, it is evident that while international students found the conversations enjoyable, they felt uncomfortable with the way the Japanese participants engaged in the conversation. The success of the conversation can be attributed to its experimental nature.

On the other hand, some Japanese individuals did not mind silence in the conversation. J2 expressed, "I don't care about the silence in conversation. Considering the cultural differences and the fact that it's our first meeting, I

think it's natural to need some time to think." Tolerance for silence in the middle of a conversation varies significantly across cultures. Studies have revealed that, in Japan, compared to English-speaking cultures, silence tends to be longer and more tolerated（Otani, 2022）. This difference also seems to be observed between Japanese and Asian students. Owing to this differing perception, international students tried to fill the silence with more words, while Japanese students seemed less concerned about it.

However, many Japanese students noticed and regretted their limited speaking, realizing that they had become listeners in conversations. Reasons for reduced speech included statements like, "I can usually speak, but today the words wouldn't come out," and "I appreciated that the other persons spoke a lot, but I wished they spoke a bit more slowly." All the Japanese students majored in English and received numerous conversation-based classes from native English-speaking instructors. However, in conversation practice in regular classes, conversation partners are mostly Japanese students from the same class. Consequently, even though they could communicate in English with their Japanese classmates, they struggled when their conversation partners were non-Japanese.

Next, we examined the topics of conversation. The international students participated in multiple conversations with various Japanese students. After the first conversation, C1 expressed concern about the lack of lively conversation, asking the author, "I wanted to talk about more varied topics, but I'm not sure what is appropriate. Could you ask the Japanese students in advance about topics they would like to discuss or perhaps conduct a survey on topics?" However, as this study aimed for a natural conversation, the request was declined. Nevertheless, this indicated that C1 felt that there was an issue with topic selection. After another conversation, C1 mentioned, "Sometimes, the conversation didn't progress. I wondered if I chose a bad

topic." As these data were from initial meetings, most topics involved typical self-disclosed information common to self-introductions. C1's sense of stagnation in conversation was likely owing to a lack of self-disclosure among the Japanese participants, hindering the development of topics.

6. Discussion

Studies have noted that Japanese individuals tend to engage in less self-disclosure during English conversations with native speakers (Iwata, 2010). Interestingly, the current study revealed a similar phenomenon in conversations with non-native English speakers. This suggests that limited self-disclosure by Japanese individuals is not solely attributed to the dynamics of being a language host versus a guest (Fan, 1994). In other words, the explanation that native English speakers act as language hosts, thereby reducing the self-disclosure of Japanese guests who are non-native English speakers, is insufficient.

Why do Japanese people exhibit low levels of self-disclosure? One possibility is that their insufficient linguistic knowledge of English prevents them from engaging in adequate self-disclosure. Although this seems to be a plausible explanation, our study indicates that the English language proficiency of Asian international students did not differ significantly from that of Japanese participants. This was evident in the conversation excerpts provided earlier in which both parties made numerous grammatical and expressive errors. However, international students demonstrated significantly higher levels of self-disclosure and took a leading role in conversations compared to Japanese participants.

One reason for low self-disclosure among Japanese individuals may be the potential transfer from Japanese self-disclosure norms. Mimaki and Namba

（2010）compared self-disclosure in the native languages of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese individuals. Mimaki and Namba classified self into "social self," related to aspects like name and occupation, and "private self," related to personal areas such as romance and marriage. They claimed that the boundaries between these categories differed across the three languages, with Japanese individuals having the broadest range in the "private self" domain. Consequently, when faced with a demand for self-disclosure, Japanese individuals often opt for minimal or ambiguous responses.

Iwata（2015）compared self-disclosure in Japanese first-encounter conversations with that in English conversations and illustrated differences in timing. In Japanese conversations, non-committal disclosures such as names and majors are made at the beginning. By contrast, English conversations involve more detailed disclosures related to names, majors, and additional information or experiences from the outset. Moreover, while speakers of both languages commonly disclose information such as place of origin and hobbies throughout the conversation, English speakers also engage in self-disclosure of negative information about themselves or their opinions and thoughts, elements seldom present in Japanese first-encounter conversations.

In summary, the interactional style of self-disclosure by Japanese students, even when speaking English, aligns with the style identified in the research on Japanese conversations. Therefore, Japanese individuals' limited self-disclosure in English must be attributed, in part, to the transfer from their native language.

We explored another potential challenge in teaching method of English in Japan. Although Japanese English education places strong emphasis on grammar instruction, little emphasis is placed on instruction in interaction. As figure 3 shows, Japanese students often ask questions to prompt self-disclosure. This result stems from rigorous grammatical instruction of

interrogative sentences at an early stage of English education. As a result, Japanese students found it relatively easy to pose questions, but lacked sufficient guidance on how to respond when questioned. This gap exists because the responses to questions often involve simple, declarative sentences that are not marked in grammar. Therefore, the ways to respond to questions are not of grammatical interest. For example, an exchange like "Do you work part-time?" "Yes, I do" as seen in Excerpt 3 is common in Japanese textbooks. However, there is a lack of guidance on what to say beyond "Yes, I do," as it involves considerations of interaction rather than strict grammatical rules—a facet often overlooked in Japanese English education.

Additionally, while adjacency pairs like question-response or compliment-thanks are taught as grammatical constructs in Japanese English textbooks, they do not adequately address their functional aspects. In everyday conversations, questions are asked not only to extract information but also to express interest in the interlocutors, understand the other person, and build rapport. Similarly, responding to questions involves disclosing personal information or thoughts, aiming to foster understanding and bridge interpersonal gaps. This study emphasizes that instructing an interrogative sentence merely as a grammatical item, without connecting its interactional functions, can cause the problems observed in our data.

If the interactional functions, styles, and underlying norms of the native and target languages are aligned, instruction on how to interact may not be necessary. However, significant disparities exist in self-disclosure interactions between Japanese and English. The cultural norms observed in our conversational data and follow-up interviews suggest that Japanese students refrain from prying too deeply into their interlocutors or revealing too much about themselves, thus adhering to Japanese norms of modesty. Consequently, it would be very difficult for Japanese learners to acquire

English interactional styles and understand the norms that prioritize self-disclosure through classroom conversation practice alone.

Comments from J3 in the follow-up interview are emblematic of this issue. J3 noted that although she could converse in English when paired with fellow Japanese classmates, she struggled when paired with international students. This difficulty arises because interactions with fellow Japanese students share common Japanese norms and styles, which make modest self-disclosure less problematic. However, communication becomes more challenging when faced with diverse norms. We suggest that conversing solely in English among Japanese peers is insufficient for acquiring effective interaction styles.

The crucial point is the necessity for explicit instruction in the styles and functions of English interaction, also the underlying norms and values of English. Although Japanese participants have opportunities to converse with native English instructors in their classes, they may not be aware of the differences in them clearly. Explicit instruction is essential because of the subtle nature of these differences, which may not be apparent through mere exposure to the target language.

In social conversations such as the one discussed in this study, unlike business negotiation dialogues, there is not necessarily a clear goal. If one were to pinpoint the purpose, it would likely be to establish a positive relationship with interlocutors. While the importance of improving English conversation skills is widely acknowledged in Japan's English education, discussion on the purpose of engaging in conversations is limited. The essence of conversation education lies in instructing students on how to build good relationships with others, considering the differences in building relationships between Japanese and English and the corresponding variations in interactional styles. This not only improves English proficiency but also contributes to intercultural understanding.

On the one hand, engaging in such discussions may invite criticism from the perspective of World Englishes. In other words, there is an argument that because English is an international language, Japanese speakers do not need to conform to native English speakers' norms. This suggests that the Japanese people's manner of speaking is integral to their identity and thus, should be maintained. However, intercultural communication requires an effort to bridge the gap between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is important for learners to understand and be able to navigate the norms and interactions of both their native and target languages to discern when to employ each set of norms based on the context and how to accommodate their interlocutors.

7. Conclusion

This study highlights the limited extent of self-disclosure among Japanese students during conversations with Asian international students. Particularly, Japanese students tend to provide minimal self-disclosure in their responses to presentation-eliciting questions. Consequently, international students were confused and did not necessarily seem satisfied with the conversation.

One of the identified factors contributing to this phenomenon is rooted in the transfer of interactional style from their native language. In Japanese culture, individuals tend to hesitate in making significant self-disclosures in initial encounters and exhibit a tendency to maintain a certain distance from others, as observed in previous studies and in the results of our follow-up interviews. This social norm is transferred to their English conversations.

Another contributing factor is a deficiency in interactional instruction in Japan. It is crucial to explicitly teach the styles of English interaction and the associated norms and functions. Looking ahead, there is a need to develop

instructional plans and methods effective in addressing these challenges faced by Japanese English learners.

The limitations of this study include the exclusive focus on female participants and a limited number of conversations. It is important to recognize that variations in factors such as gender and proficiency among participants in the future may yield different results. Additionally, while the quantity of self-disclosure was measured based on word count, capturing the quality of self-disclosure requires separate analyses using alternative methods.

Appendix

【Transcription symbols】
  @   laughter
  [   ]   speech overlap
  (( ))   note by the author

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キーワード

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