

Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

Title	A Research on Disagreements in 4-Person Discussions of Japanese and Chinese Graduate Students: From the Viewpoint of Intercultural Collaboration
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This dissertation is a discourse analysis of disagreements in Japanese conducted during 4-person discussions by Japanese and Chinese graduate students. It focuses on three main aspects: 1) strategies of disagreements, 2) patterns in discourse structure following disagreements, and 3) awareness of norms regarding disagreements. This dissertation adopts an intercultural collaboration perspective, viewing discussions as the activities where participants from different nationalities acknowledge each other's differences and strive to build an equal, cooperative relationship to achieve a common goal (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2006). These discussions are also seen as collaborative activities characterized by the elements of equality, dialogue, creation, process, and mutual benefit (Ikeda & Tateoka, 2007).

In this dissertation, “disagreement” is defined as verbal behaviors and paralinguistic elements, such as laughter and equivocation, that convey a message or implicature of disapproval or non-acceptance, either wholly or partially. Previous studies mainly view disagreements in Japanese contexts as face-threatening acts so that many studies focus the negative effect of disagreements without considering context or situation. However, in group discussions, the emphasis on task accomplishment can sometimes necessitate disagreements. Therefore, considering interpersonal relationships and goal achievement both important, this dissertation aims to clarify how expressing and managing disagreements can promote discussion without offending others.

The dissertation addresses three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Strategies of disagreements - What types of utterances and linguistic expressions are used to convey disagreements while showing consideration?

RQ2: Patterns in Discourse Structure following Disagreements - How do people handle disagreements in discussions? What characterizes the discourse structure in these situations?

RQ3: Awareness of Norms Regarding Disagreements - What norms do participants recognize about disagreements, and how are these norms chosen and utilized in specific discussion contexts?

The dissertation comprises 10 chapters, and the summary of each chapter is as below.

Chapter 1 introduces the background, purpose, and philosophy of intercultural collaboration underlying this dissertation. Based on these viewpoints, three research questions (RQs) are presented, followed by an overview of the dissertation's structure.

Chapter 2 is a literature review. It begins with the historical evolution of discourse analysis related to disagreement from the 1980s to the 2020s, positioning this dissertation within these trends. Theoretical frameworks in pragmatics, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology are discussed, to clarify the nature of disagreements in universal linguistic theories. The chapter summarizes empirical studies, including Japanese linguistics and intercultural studies, focusing on disagreement characteristics and unresolved issues. Based on these points, this dissertation's originality is established through its focus on 1) multi-participant (4-person) discussions, 2) a unique approach to disagreement analysis, using “section” as the unit, but not a turn or an utterance, and 3) the dynamic use of norms in discussions, without viewing awareness of norms as static items.

Chapter 3 lays the foundation for the analytical framework. For RQ1 and RQ2, the Japanese discourse analysis approach, primarily based on Szatrowski (1993), is explained. This approach involves using the unit “section” and “utterance function” to mark and categorize strategies of disagreements and the patterns in discourse structure. For RQ3, language management theory provides a framework for analyzing the awareness of norms. In intercultural interactions, participants’ choice and adaptation of norms can be examined by follow-up interviews (FUI), also the dynamism of norm awareness in language management.

Chapter 4 describes data collection and analytical framework. Data from 5 group discussions conducted in Japanese among Japanese and Chinese graduate students, totaling 2 hours and 56 minutes, were collected via Zoom. The chapter details the discussion tasks (a travel plan in Tokyo), questionnaire information, and individual FUIs which were conducted by the participant’s first language, 55 hours and 14 minutes in total. For analytical framework, the definitions of terms, and methods applied for analyzing the research questions are explained.

Chapter 5 sets the stage for analyzing RQ1 to RQ3 by outlining the general structure of discussions and disagreements. The development of discussions is segmented into three stages, which are 1) Beginning stage, 2) Main stage, and 3) Ending stage. Specific discourse types are identified in the 2) Main stage, showing that how the participants prepared for the discussion, provided ideas, organized the whole plan, managed the progress, confirmed and submitted their plan. This chapter also examines how many disagreements are used, and what these disagreements are targeted at.

In Chapter 6, the analysis of RQ1, i.e., strategies of disagreements, is presented. Seven types of strategies used in discussions are identified, with differences in their usage by Japanese and Chinese speakers. These strategies include 1) correcting mistakes or misunderstandings, 2) showing opposite opinions, 3) recommending an alternative idea, 4) pointing out problems, 5) showing that the

conditions for concession are not met, 6) showing concern and ask others to reconsider the plan, 7) indicating disagreements implicitly through frequent laughter, hesitation, special tone, and intonations. The chapter also clarified the frequency and context of these strategies, offering insights into their impact on discussions.

Chapter 7 addresses RQ2, focusing on the patterns in discourse structure following disagreements. Using the “section” unit of analysis, the chapter explores how disagreements are handled, identifying five types of responses and categorizing disagreement discourses into single and complex types. In single and complex types of disagreement discourses respectively, the chapter examines how these patterns influence the resolution of conflicts.

Chapter 8 is the analysis for RQ3, exploring participants' awareness of norms regarding disagreements. FUI data is analyzed based on the context of discussions. As a result, it categorizes participants' awareness of norms into three types, highlighting how participants apply these norms in discussions and how these norms are dynamically adjusted based on the context.

Chapter 9 is a further discussion based on the analysis results of discourse (RQs 1 and 2) and awareness (RQ3). It emphasizes that participants used disagreements not only as face-threatening acts but also as tools for maintaining conversation, balancing participation, and resolving misunderstandings. The chapter also explores the collaborative efforts in using disagreements for task accomplishment and showing consideration of interpersonal relationship at the same time.

The concluding chapter, chapter 10, summarizes the dissertation's findings and offers recommendations for discourse researchers, Japanese language educators, and discussion participants who are to take part in intercultural interactions in future. The limitations of this dissertation and future research directions are outlined, focusing on multinational discussions, the comparative analysis of disagreements conducted in one's first language and second language, and the impact of disagreement on final outcomes. Finally, this chapter sets a long-term goal of developing a multifaceted mechanism for expressing and responding to disagreements.

References

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