

# Holding a Floor During a Meeting

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

People do not pay attention to the moment of speaker change during a meeting, especially when the meeting language is their mother tongue. Two years ago, I studied English in Toronto, Ontario state, Canada. Then we discussed on some topics in English in our class; in addition, I always found it difficult to identify when to start my talk, and the speaker changes. If I wait for my turn, sometimes I lose my chance to speak out.

After I came back to Japan from Toronto, I took part in the Tanaka seminar, which is one of my department's seminars. A lot of Tanaka seminar members experienced study abroad. During the seminar, we discuss many times, and I feel the atmosphere is similar to that of my classroom in Canada because in the seminar; one can say one's opinion whenever one wants to. This atmosphere is different from the most meetings conducted in Japanese because generally participants wait to say their opinions until other speakers' speech finish; moreover, presenters usually allocate question and answer period; for this reason, I feel the Tanaka seminar meeting atmosphere is similar to that of my classroom in Canada. When I speak in Japanese, my mother tongue, I am not conscious about turn-taking; however, speakers change very smoothly even if the meeting's atmosphere is similar to that of my Canadian classroom. Speakers may show a kind of signs to the listeners then the speaker agrees to change to other speakers.

During the conversation, speakers and listeners recognize adequate timing for speaker change, so speakers change smoothly. 'Turn-taking' is one of the important concepts in the conversation. Turn-taking is defined as "it is one of the basic mechanisms in conversation which help to maintain talk" (Jun, 2008, p.15). Moreover, the notion of 'floor' is also an important concept. According to Edelsky (1981), who is

a conversation researcher, floor is the right of speaking that the speaker recognizes during the term, which includes the psychological time and space. These concepts are related to each other, and all conversation has “transition-relevance place, at which the first two priority options involve transfer of turn to a next speaker” (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974, p.706).

Turn-taking behavior is complex; however, interesting for me. In addition, the mechanism has not really been studied in the past research especially that of Japanese student meetings. Therefore, in this research I focus on Japanese language speaker changes and consider how do participants hold a floor during a meeting.

## **Chapter 2: Conceptual Frameworks**

In examining team meetings, I used the following three concepts. The first concept is turn-taking which is explicated by Jun (2008). The second conceptual framework is floor which is discussed by Edelsky (1981). The third concept I used in this research is transition-relevance place (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). These are three important concepts to frame the group interaction of the meetings. I summarized the concepts of turn-taking, floor, and transition-relevance place in the following the section.

### **2.1. Turn-taking**

As I have briefly defined turn-taking in Chapter 1, turn-taking is a basic mechanism in conversation. Jun (2008) summarized Sacks et al. (1974)’s turn-taking three social rules:

- i. when a current speaker selects a next speaker, that next speaker has the right and the obligation to take the next turn;
- ii. if a current speaker does not select a next speaker, any one of the participants has the right to become next speaker. This is regarded self-selection;
- iii. if neither is the case, a current speaker may resume his/her turn.

During the conversation, speaker and listeners follow unconsciously these rules, so people do not pay attention to the moment of speaker change.

## **2.2. Floor**

In this research, the notion of floor is the most important thing. I have already mentioned the definition of the floor in Chapter 1. According to Edelsky (1981), floor is the different notion from turn by participant-sense. Sacks et al. (1974) argued that turn is a syntactic unit, and it is speaker's order. On the other hand, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, floor is defined that speaker recognizes psychological time/space. In addition, floor holder recognizes what's-going-on during the conversation. "What's-going-on can be the development of a topic or a function (teasing, soliciting a response, etc.) or interaction of the two" (Edelsky, 1981, p.405). The examples are "he's talking about grades" or "she's making a suggestion" or "we're all answering her" (Ibid, p.405). There are two kinds of floors which are 'singly developed floor' and 'collaborative venture'. Edelsky proposed that:

The two kinds of floors were differentiated objectively by such features as quantity and frequency of participation, language functions, number of non-turn utterances, overlaps, and pauses. There were indeed sex/language differences, but these were related to the type of floor being developed.

(1981, p.383)

The concept of floor is complicated because it is composed of various elements; however it is useful for my research.

## **2.3. Transition-relevance place**

Sacks et al. (1974) proposed that there is an appropriate point for speakers to change. This point is called 'transition-relevance place'; moreover, "Speaker-change and its recurrence are not automatic" (Ibid, p.706). People usually find transition-relevance place unconsciously during a conversation. According to Sacks et al. (1974), In order to change a speaker smoothly, participants follow the turn-taking rules as I

mentioned in Chapter 1. Moreover, “transition-relevance places provide for the possibility of transitions with no gap and no overlap” (Ibid, p.708). Both transition-relevance place and turn-taking are closely connected each other.

In this research, I employed these three notions as conceptual frameworks in order to analyze my data. By looking into the Japanese conversation, I focused on how the meeting interaction was structured in a certain social situation. I will explore the relationship between the structured conversation and the situated group member’s relationship.

### Chapter 3: Research approach

In this research, I focused on how do participants hold a floor during a meeting in Japanese. I analyzed video recorded data to elucidate the mechanism of my research question. In addition, I employed Conversation Analysis (CA) for my research.

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants were 13 Meisei students who took part in Meisei Summer School Project (MSSP) in 2014. The following table shows the details of the participants.

Group1

Name	Gender	Grade	Times
Midori	Female	4th	2
Fuga	Male	2nd	1
Aya	Female	1st	1
Ayu	Female	1st	1
Chisa	female	1st	1

Group2

Name	Gender	Grade	Times
Kazu	Male	3rd	3
Shu	Male	1st	1
Yukiko	Female	1st	1
Yuina	Female	1st	1

Group3

Name	Gender	Grade	Times
Yumeka	Female	2nd	2
Fumi	Female	1st	1
Itaru	Male	1st	1
Moeno	Female	1st	1

MSSP is one of the projects funded by Meisei University, and this project is a student-centered project. MSSP participants are divided into twelve teams to teach English or Chinese to local children. MSSP participants have to hold meetings to make plans for MSSP classes many times.

In order to collect data for my research, I video-recorded MSSP team meetings because I assumed that there are a lot of TRPs in their meeting.

### 3.2. Data collection method

I used only video-recorded data in this research because I intended to observe a system of speaker change and floor holding during a meeting; for this reason, I needed to use only factual data. It was not important what people thought at that time.

As a consequence of using the video-recorded data, I was able to investigate the participant's expressions, actions, attitude, and their eye contact. These elements are not counted as a turn; however, I believe they might be a clue to change a speaker during a meeting. Thus, the method I chose is the most appropriate way of this research.

In this research, I employed only one data collection method, but video data show obvious facts which ensure the validity of this research.

### 3.3. Methodology

To analyze the data of my research, I employed CA, which is the most suitable approach. "Conversation analysis is characterized by the view that how talk is produced and how the meanings of that talk are determined are the practical, social and interactional accomplishments of members of a culture" (Hutchby and Wooffitt,

1998, p.1). Moreover, CA is the process of uncovering the procedures which make up the systematic process of natural conversation. In addition, speaking is created by specific procedures and methods that are referenced based on the context in which the communication is taking place. This communication style is utilized by those who participate in this specific natural language communication (Ibid, 1998). Hence, in order to analyze present research, I believe CA is an effective research methodology.

## Chapter 4: Data analysis

I divided the floor in my research into three types. All the data collected from MSSP team meetings have different features. In this chapter, I employed three conceptual frameworks as I explained Chapter 2 to analyze my video-recorded data. My data showed naturally occurring discussion in Japanese language. By using data, I investigated how floor is constructed by participants and how floor holders appear.

### 4.1. Single person floor

Data 1 show a team meeting of Group 1 which consists of 4 females and 1 male including 1st grader, 2nd grader, and 4th grader. This group members were talking about teaching duty assignment, and Midori who is 4th grader gave teammates idea and information ; for example, in the utterance 65, 69, and 71. In the utterance 69, Midori said to Fuga, a 2nd grader with a black cap, “じゃあ葵ここにしよう。ゆうくん<囁き>ゆうくんと2人でここ計画して。[So, I chose this part. Yuji <whisper> You and Yuji plan this part.]” After that, Fuga replied “あいっす[Okay.]” (utterance 70). Overlap parts are highlighted in yellow color in my data. During data 1, only Midori controlled the meeting, and other participants used only backchannels to Midori.

#### Data 1

64. Midori: どうしよっかなー

[What should we do?]

(2.5)

65. Midori: ってやりたいのある人？

[By the way, does anyone have a first choice?]

66. Fuga: じゃあ僕一ここのPractice

[Well, I hope this "Practice" .]

67. Midori: 2個め？

[The second one?]

68. Fuga: はい

[Yes.]

(12.6) <紙を見つめる>

[Looking at the paper]

69. Midori: じゃあ葵ここにしよう。ゆうくん<囁き>ゆうくと2人でここ計画して

[So, I chose this part. Yuji <whisper> You and Yuji plan this part.]

70. Fuga: あいっす

[Okay]

71. Midori: はい。誰かここやってほしい。これ普通にSee you tomorrowとか言えばいい。

[Ok. So, someone please do this one. Just say "See you tomorrow" .]

<Fuga笑う>

<Fuga is laughing>

72. Ayu: じゃあこれやる

[I do.]

73. Midori: やる？

[You do?]

74. Ayu: うん

[Yes.]

75. Midori: さんきゅー

[Thank you.]

(1.7)

76. Midori: はい、きーまり

[Okay. Finish.]

77. Fuga: おーけーい。ブラボー

[Okay. Bravo.]

<全員で拍手>

<Crapping hands>

Table 1

Name	Word count	Back channel	Idea/information	Turn
Midori	97	0	3	8
Fuga	25	2	0	4
Aya	0	1	0	0
Ayu	9	1	0	2
Chisa	0	1	0	0
Total	131	5	3	14

Through this data, Midori hold a floor throughout the meeting because she recognized what's-going-on from the data. Midori always asked the team members and instructed them what they have to do because only Midori had experience of MSSP before, and she is the oldest person in this team. Therefore, she controlled the discussion; in addition, teammates employed backchannels; for example, Ayu, a female wearing a blue cardigan, said “うん[Yes.]” (utterance 74). Actually, Aya who has long brown hair and Chisa, wearing black t-shirt, did not speak anything during this data; however, they nodded, smiled, and stared at Midori. From these behaviors, participants seem to acknowledge that Midori was a floor holder. Hayashi (1991) proposed ‘Single person floor’ to describe this kind of conversation structure.

#### 4.2. Transitional floor

Group 2 is in term of gender more balanced, and also there are only 1st and 3rd graders. In this group meeting, participants discussed their teaching plan; nevertheless, Shu, Yukiko, and Yuina are freshmen, and they actually could not have a concrete image as of the meeting.



**Data 2**

18. Yukiko: から、あの、その、今すごい例で言ったけど、野球やりたいからって言うのは言わなくてもいい。いういう言えないと思うここで。だからただ単に、ねえボール持ってる。持ってるよ。はい、どうぞ。ありがとう。って言うのを会話として使えればいから  
[Well, I said just example, so children don't need to say "I want to play baseball". They can't say in this situation. Thus, I would it be ok that they will be able to say "Do you have a ball?" "Yes I have." "Here you are." "Thank you." in the conversation.]
19. Yuina: うん  
[Yes]
20. Yukiko: だからここをカタカナにするのはすごい楽だと思う。  
[So, in this point, using Katakana in the sentence is very easy.]
21. Shu: うん  
[Yes]  
(1.0)
22. Yukiko: うちらが考えるのも楽だし、<他チームの声> <笑い声>、うちらが考えるのも楽だし、子供達もイメージしやすい。  
[If you use Katakana, then it is easy for us to make sentence, and children are also easy to imagine.]
23. Shu: うん  
[Yes]

Table 2

Name	Word count	Back channel	Idea/information	Turn
Shu	4	2	0	2
Yukiko	192	0	1	3
Yuina	2	1	0	1
Total	198	3	1	6

As stated above, Yukiko's word count is the largest among the team members, and she gave the listeners information about their teaching activity. The largest word

count of Yukiko implies that she is the floor holder. However, Shu took over the floor soon after the initial exchange.

### Data 3

34. Yuina: <…>チャンツどこにも使わないの？  
[<…> Aren't you going to use chants?]
35. Shu: かずやさんが使わなければ  
[If Kazu will not use it, I will use.]
36. Yuina: 使うんですか？  
[Will you use it?]
37. Kazu: 使わない。  
[No.]
38. Yuina: えーあれ使いたかったんだよなー。あれでどうにかできない？  
[Well, I wanted to use it. Can you work out using it?]
39. Shu: あれー使えば、あの、その、この前見たYouTubeのやつよりか  
楽しいと思う。じゃないっすか？実際  
[Well, if we use the chants, I think we can make it better than YouTube's  
one, don't you?]
40. Kazu: どういうチャンツ使うの？  
[What kind of chants do you want to use?]
41. Shu: 何でしたっけ。さっきあのーふーちゃんが歌ってたやつ。  
[Well, what was it? Yukiko was singing a short time ago.]
42. Yukiko: <チャンツを歌う>  
<Sing chants>

Table 3

Name	Word count	Back channel	Idea/information	Turn
Kazu	17	1	0	2
Shu	80	0	2	3
Yukiko	0	1	0	0
Yuina	49	0	2	3
Total	146	2	4	8

In this data, Shu and Yuina exchanged information each other; nevertheless, when Yuina spoke out, she always asked Shu and Kazu her ideas. On the other hands, Shu answered every question asked by Yuina and said his opinions. Therefore, I analyzed that Shu was the floor holder from the data. Next, suddenly floor was taken over by another participant.

#### Data 4

45. Kazu: で、さっきのステITCHのやつはどう使うの？使うとしたら。  
[So, how do you use Stitch if you use?]
46. Shu: いや、使いたいなっていうか  
[Well, just want to use.]
47. Kazu: 使いたいな  
[You want to use]
48. Yuina: 使いたいなって  
[We want to use it]
49. Shu: ただ願望ですね。  
[It' s just wishing.]
50. Yuina: 願望なんです。  
[Yeah]
51. Kazu: ただ、あのそういう元々英語の曲、英語という曲ってさー元々それを言うためだけに作られた曲だからー<…>ステITCHとかってシラブルって言い方があるじゃん。  
[But, you know this song' s originally lyric is English, so the sound is also composed for original one. <…> and, you know there is a syllable in the word.]
52. Yuina: そうなんですよね  
[Yes… I know]
53. Kazu: Do you haveとDo you have Do you have[韻律を変えて繰り返し]って違うじゃん。  
[These intonations are different like “Do you have” “Do you have ↑” “Do you have ↓” .]

54. Shu: 変わってますね。

[It' s changed]

55. Kazu: そう。他の曲入れても、How' s the weatherとかはホントぴったりだったけどさ、<Yukiko 頷く>ほんとたまたまだから。他の、多分そういうのだったら、センテンスだったらちょっと無理かな。と思う。

[Exactly. Even if you use another song, it would probably not be suitable because of the sentence. <Yukiko nodding> How' s the weather' s song was fit, but it was just a coincidence.]

Table 4

Name	Word count	Back channel	Idea/ information	Turn
Kazu	218	1	3	5
Shu	29	4	1	3
Yukiko	0	6	0	0
Yuina	22	5	0	3
Total	269	16	4	11

After Kazu speaking, Kazu held a floor even though he mostly kept silence until then. This group's floor holder changed because the first and the second floor holder were freshmen, so they did not know about MSSP teaching systems; conversely, Kazu has much more knowledge and experiences of MSSP, so participants listened to his talk.

I found a different pattern of the conversation which I named 'Transitional floor'. 'Transitional floor' is similar to 'Collaborative floor', which is proposed by Hayashi (1991). According to Hayashi (1991), 'Collaborative floor' is that all the participants participated in all conversation and share the floor. Nevertheless, my data show a slightly different interaction pattern. In 'Collaborative floor', people usually aim at supporting each other, and intentional support others is very important. However, I do not observe any intention of the participant's to support each other rather they tried to tell their ideas to the others. I did not see any sign in the other participants' behavior to support each other.

### 4.3. No floor

Usually, there is a floor holder during a meeting; nonetheless, in this group, no one had a serious purpose of the meeting, and also they did not talk about a concrete idea. The team members of group 3 were talking about the symbol of U.S.A which is one of the contents of their teaching.

#### Data 5

12. Fumi: 自由の女神が一番アメリカらしいじゃん。  
[I think the statue of liberty is best symbol of U.S.A.]
13. Yumeka: え、自由の女神って英語何？  
[Ah- how do you say the statue of liberty in English?]
14. Itaru: そう、でも単語がーむずいんでしょ  
[Yes, but English word is difficult.]
15. Fumi: そう、英語がー難しいの  
[Yes. The word is difficult.]
16. Yumeka: 何ていうの？  
[How do you say it?]
17. Moeno: <…>
18. Fumi: 何かー自分で調べて、は、わけわかんねーってなったから  
[Well, I checked it, but it doesn't make sense.]
19. Moeno: えー  
[Oh…]
20. Itaru: 何かどっかの美術館とかないかな？  
[How about another example, like museum?]
21. Itaru: わかんねーってかわかんねーよな  
[Go figure.]
22. Yumeka: 知らねーな。待って、アメリカ、アメリカでしょ。  
[I don't know. Wait. U.S., U.S. right?]
23. Moeno: フランスはあるけどアメリカに美術館そんなにない。  
[There are museums in France, but in the U.S., there are not so much museums.]

24. Itaru: 確かに。確かに。  
[True. true]
25. Yumeka : ってか、フランスマジあたし<…>  
[By the way, in France, I (…)]
26. Itaru: あれですね。エリザベス女王ですね。フランス。  
[Well, Queen Elizabeth is Queen of France, right?]

Table 5

Name	Word count	Back channel	Idea/information	Turn
Yumeka	55	1	0	4
Fumi	56	1	1	3
Itaru	79	2	1	5
Moeno	26	1	1	3
Total	216	5	3	15

From the data, nobody managed the conversation. Actually, Yumeka has experience of MSSP 2013, so she had to create ideas or give ideas to the freshmen; however, she also did not either have enough English knowledge nor a teaching plan because Yumeka had participated in MSSP only once. Actually, Yumeka and Midori, a floor holder in data 1, both had only one-time experience; nevertheless, Midori has studied abroad, and she is 3years older than freshmen. In comparison with Midori, Yumeka did not have experience in international settings and knowledge as much as Midori. Other participants also did not try to hold a floor, so each linguistic behavior of the participants do not show much difference among the participants. Thus, I named ‘No floor’ this floor mechanism.

All the data show the different types of floor even though participants talked on similar topics. Furthermore, I was able to analyze that participant’s knowledge ability, social status, and purpose of meeting have affected floors in the conversation.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research was inspired by my own linguistic experience during my study abroad in Canada. Usually people are not aware of the moment of speaker change.

However, I was conscious about this when I studied and spoke a foreign language. Therefore, I set my research question, “how do participants hold a floor during a meeting”, in order to ascertain what mechanism is related with floor holder.

I observed three video-recorded data from three different MSSP teams which consisted of participants of different ages and genders. To analyze my data, I employed three conceptual frameworks. In addition, I utilized Conversation Analysis (CA) in which researchers only considered recorded speech as social behavior. By using CA, I was able to see how the participants ‘construct a floor’ during a meeting. As a result of analysis, I recognized that there are three kinds of ‘floors’ in my data. First, I found ‘Single person floor’ argued by Hayashi (1991). This kind of floor is when only one person controls the psychological space of the meeting, and other team members participate in the space and support the floor holder. A potential reason for this floor formation is that only this floor holder has experienced MSSP before and has studied abroad. In addition, the floor holder is the oldest person in the team, so the floor holder accomplishes leading role of the team.

I coined the word ‘Transitional floor’ to refer to the second type. This floor style is similar to ‘Collaborative floor’ proposed by Hayashi (1991). However, there was a slight difference between ‘Transitional floor’ and ‘Collaborative floor’. The difference exists in the aims of the participants. In the ‘Transitional floor’, the aim is not to support each other but to try to tell their ideas to others; then the floor holder change. Almost all participants of the second group actually did not have any specific knowledge of MSSP; thus, participants who remembered an idea took a floor.

I named the last floor mechanism as ‘No floor’. During the meeting of the third group, there was a topic in the meeting, but concrete and useful information was not shared due to the lack of participants’ knowledge. Therefore, this situation is related with ‘No floor’. In the case of my data, I found that the purpose of the meeting, participants’ knowledge ability and social status affect the floor holding practices.

In the past research, there has always been an individual or a collective floor holder during a meeting. When Nakai (2006) analyzed Japanese conversation to use the floor classification system developed by Hayashi (1991), Nakai’s data showed

that participants always hold a floor. However, in my research, I discovered the new type, ‘No floor’, from the data. I assume that in Japanese conversation, TRP is not clear sometimes, so this unique function has affected this result. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, TRP usually occurs with no gap and overlap. Nevertheless, an overlap occurs and TRP is not clear in my data.

Nowadays, many foreigners study Japanese. Therefore, I believe that this knowledge is useful for Japanese language learners. When they have a conversation with Japanese people in Japanese, foreigners should know that there is a case of ‘No floor’.

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