Conversation for co-learning in the *eikaiwa* classroom

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the concept of co-learning and the pedagogy of vulnerability (Brantmeier, 2013) can explain shifts in participation in a language classroom. Its empirical evidence is from our investigation of interactions in an *eikaiwa* (English conversation) classroom in Japan where small groups of Japanese learners of English are encouraged to converse with a language teacher. Using multimodal Conversation Analysis, we found that the participants showed more active engagement when the teacher reversed his role from a language authority to a cultural novice and when the participants drew on their experience and expertise. In this way, conversation for learning becomes conversation for knowledge co-construction, conversation for perspective-taking, and conversation for co-learning. Fundamental to the conversation for co-learning approach is the pedagogy of vulnerability, in which the traditional authoritative and subordinate relationship between teachers and learners are challenged and reversed.

Keywords: L2 classroom interaction, contingent learning opportunities, co-learning, conversation-for-learning

1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of participation of both the teacher and learner in a language learning classroom, first through a microanalysis of the interaction, and then through an examination of the findings with reference to the co-learning approach and the associated pedagogy of vulnerability (Brantmeier, 2013). The learning context concerned is *eikaiwa gakko/kyoshitsu* (英会話学校/教室; literally, English conversation school/classroom) in Japan, where small groups of learners are encouraged to engage in conversations in English with a language teacher typically speaking English as a first language (L1). These commercial language learning setups account for a substantial portion of an estimated $2,400-million commercial language school industry (Yano Research Institute Ltd, 2018) in Japan and operate under the purview of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Typically consisting of a combination of free conversation and guided learning around textbooks, their pedagogy is grounded in the communicative language teaching approach (Mathieson, 2018). The available research on *eikaiwa* schools have taken a critical perspective by highlighting their inherent nature of commodification, deeply-rooted social cultural motivations behind their popularity and native speakerism (e.g., Appleby, 2013; Bailey, 2006; Hooper, 2018; Hooper et al., 2020; Kubota, 2011). Despite their critiques, these studies seem to point to the existence of interactional practices built around a social relationship between teachers and students at *eikaiwa* schools. This observation is indeed borne out in Banwell's study (2010). Through focus group interviews and classroom observation, Banwell finds that the students and teachers followed mutually understood rules and behaviour and formed unique socio-pedagogical relationships. Detailed analyses of the actual interaction that takes place at these schools, however, have not been undertaken.

The paucity of classroom research on interaction in *eikaiwa* schools is not surprising as, unlike formal educational institutions, conversation schools are under the purview of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and therefore not expected to report on their educational achievements. While these commercial enterprises may assess teachers' classroom practices and student satisfaction for internal review and sales promotion, there seems to be little incentive for expending their resources on generating or contributing to academic research. The stigmatisation of teaching *eikaiwa* (Hooper, 2018) and the sceptical discourse of the existing research on the *eikaiwa* industry as seen in some of the studies above may also discourage *eikaiwa* schools and teachers from allowing researchers into the classroom. However, considering *eikaiwa* schools represent a large proportion of English language teaching in Japan, and similar commercial language schools thrive in many so-called outer circle countries, it would be of academic, pedagogical, and societal interest to examine how teaching and learning take place within the classrooms of this private sector language school setting and where the possibilities for changes are.

2. Background

2.1. Conversation-for-learning

In setting their goal as learning through conversation, *eikaiwa* schools share a similar foundation as "conversation-for-learning". Conversation-for-learning is used as an umbrella term to describe an interactional context where language learners converse with others in the target language and whereby they engage in a kind of informal learning. Conversation-for-learning setups are dedicated interactional spaces referred to as English corners, conversation clubs, etc and usually organised as a supplement to other more formal language courses. They aim to promote language learning exclusively through

conversation with a partner (usually an L1 user of the target language), with the understanding that learning opportunities contingently arise over the course of conversation (Kasper & Kim, 2015). Despite their informal nature, studies have shown that the interaction in conversation-for-learning has a clear orientation toward fulfilling institutional goals. The conversation partners open and close the sessions (Kasper, 2004), engage in "serial questioning" and "pivoting" to ensure progressivity of topic and equal distribution of turns (Hauser, 2008). Hauser observes that while the conversation partners are not solely responsible for asking questions and managing turn-allocation, they exercise control to fulfil their institutional responsibility as conversation partners. In another study focusing on the use of gaze in examining the turn-taking practices of second language novice speakers of Japanese in a conversation-for-learning setting, Ikeda (2008) notes that when a selected next speaker fails to respond, another learner self-selects in the original responder's place. She argues that this illustrates the participants' strong orientation to maintaining progressivity of the talk which is specific to this setting.

The learning opportunities created in pursuit of mutual understanding and progression of conversation may differ in the degree of overtness. For example, one conversation partner may embed a corrected version of the other party's utterances in conversation and thus offer corrections implicitly, whereas, on other occasions, the conversation topic may shift to a language learning activity whereby a correct word is offered and then acknowledged between conversation partners. Similar to what has been reported in conventional language classrooms (Kasper, 2009; Seedhouse & Walsh, 2010), such contingent learning opportunities are collaborative achievements of the participants (Kim, 2019).

In addition to such opportunities for learning linguistic and interactional skills, it has been noted that conversation for learning often involves a form of "descriptions of

culture-specific practices and with culture-specific lexical repertoires" (Kasper & Kim, 2015, p. 400). While studies on contingent learning opportunities in conversation-for-learning have focused on learners' linguistic and interactional skills, learning opportunities that arise as a result of engaging in talk on culture is less researched. These kinds of conversations, which we refer to as "cultural talk" (Zhu Hua, 2021) in this paper, not only allow participants to use their memberships in different languages and communities as resource for holding a conversation, but also create opportunities for intercultural contact and sharing of views. For example, Herfurth (1993, p. 157; cited in Woodin, 2018, p. 21) argues that a tandem arrangement, in which a pair of participants learn each other's languages, constitutes intensive intercultural experience, and allows for "different thoughts, feelings and action dimensions to 'bump into each other' as different cultures come into contact". Woodin (2018) further demonstrates that while talking about word meaning with their partners, those taking part in tandem learning engage in a range of perspective-taking strategies, including emphasising shared experience and decentring from one's own perspective.

The close link between learning linguistic and interactional skills, on one hand, and cultural awareness and perspective on the other requires us to revisit the goals of language learning and most important of all, to recognise that learning is not confined to the mastery of the language as encapsulated by the notion of communicative competence (e.g., Hymes, 1972). In addition to intercultural communicative competence as much debated in the literature (e.g., Byram, 1997), learners need to develop "symbolic competence" in recognition of the symbolic power of language and that of multilingual individuals not just as communicators and problem solvers, but whole persons with experience and identities (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 664). Specifically, symbolic competence is the ability to understand the symbolic value of different symbolic systems

and to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used. It includes the following:

> "the ability to judge when to speak and when to remain silent, when to talk about the inequality of the ongoing talk and when to let them pass, when to complain or counter-attack, and when to gently but unmistakably readjust the balance of power through humour or irony. [...] the ability to frame and re-frame the distribution of symbolic power in conversational encounters" (Kramsch 2016: 526).

Given the collaborative nature of conversation for learning and its broader goal of developing symbolic competence aimed at reframing the distribution of symbolic power in conversations, the question remains as to the appropriateness of the conventional conceptualisation of the relationship between the teacher and the learner with the former assuming the role of authority. We will discuss this in the next section.

2.2. Co-learning and pedagogy of vulnerability

Vygotsky's social development theory (1978) with its emphasis on the role of social interaction in cognitive development and construction of knowledge has had profound influence on the development of a series of pedagogical models that promote learning together. These models, described by different terms such as collaborative learning, cooperative learning, collective learning, peer learning, or team learning (see Naujokaitiene & Passey, 2019), represent a shift towards placing students at the centre of learning to take responsibilities of their own and each other's learning and an emphasis on equitable access to resources. Benefits of such a co-learning approach include expansion of social networks, increase in self-esteem, development of positive attitudes towards learning, improvement in academic ability and assessment performance and emergence of new conventions through mutual adaptation (Li Wei, 2014). However, so far, the main

focus of “learning together” has been on peers or learners themselves (Kirschner, 2001; cited in Naujokaitiene & Passey, 2019) with the exception of a small number of studies which examine “learning together” between teachers and students (e.g., Brantmeier, n.d. cited in Li Wei, 2014, p. 170; Li Wei, 2014).

For Brantmeier (2013, n.d.), co-learning between teachers and students requires a fundamental change in the conceptualization towards the relationship between teachers and students, in particular, the traditional role sets often described in the dichotomy of teachers as authority/dominant vs. students as novice/subordinate. The teacher would become a facilitator, a scaffolder and a critical reflection enhancer who guides the process of student learning, and the student would become an empowered explorer, a meaning-making and a responsible knowledge constructor. Furthermore, the roles of the teacher and the learner could be reversed, whereby the teacher does “vulnerability”, i.e., acknowledging limitations or gaps in their frames of knowing, feeling and experience. In addition to shared power among co-learners including teachers and learners, a co-learning classroom environment is characterised by social and individualised learning, collective and individual meaning-making and identity exploration, community of practice with situated learning, and real-world engagement and action (Brantmeier, n.d.).

Co-learning and the practice of vulnerability, as Brantmeier argues, are particularly useful in the context of learning about diversity, democratisation of knowledge, and discussing power, oppression, and privilege. He gives an example of how he starts the conversation with his students on power and privilege by sharing his story as a white, male, heterosexual whose privilege is not achieved by something he has done but granted by the wider society. This kind of self-disclosure holds promise for deep learning and greater learning benefits in lived classroom conversation where people talk about cultural practices and differences. Within the context of language learning, Li Wei (2014)

demonstrates how co-learning of language and cultural practices takes place through employment of multilingual resources and funds of knowledge ("the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills", Moll et al., 1992, p. 133) in Chinese complementary schools, where teachers and learners have different proficiency in English and different varieties of Chinese and different knowledge of and preferences for cultural practices. Tai & Li Wei (2021) and Hansen-Thomas et al. (2020) provide further empirical evidence on how co-learning through mobilisation of multilingual resources helps to produce desirable learning experience and outcomes.

The current study aims to understand the interaction in an *eikaiwa* classroom with reference to co-learning in language classrooms. Setting the development of symbolic competence as the goal of language learning, we explore the role of participants including both teachers and students in co-constructing contingent learning opportunities in and through conversations. We will use multimodal Conversation Analysis (CA) and undertake a detailed analysis of video recorded classroom interaction. CA is well positioned to unveil the social-interactional aspect of learning *in situ* and *in vivo* (e.g., a special issue of the Modern Language Journal edited by Eskildsen & Majlesi, 2018; Hellermann et al., 2019). The application of multimodality in CA studies have drawn attention to and provided a means of describing the embodied and multimodal nature of interactional space and learning (Mondada, 2013, p. 248) and thus opened up a new way of understanding how and to what extent participants are engaged in interactions. As an example, a study of an ESL setting (Tai & Brandt, 2018) has uncovered instances where student-initiated questions elicited a teacher's embodied enactment of imaginary contexts. The authors emphasise that the embodied enactments do not merely reinforce verbal explanations but allow the teacher to physically represent language used in situational contexts outside the classroom. Through multimodal CA, we hope to provide a nuanced

understanding of the dynamics of interactions around the socio-pedagogical relationship between teachers and students.

3. Methods

3.1. The school and the lesson

The *eikaiwa* school taking part in this study has branches in several cities in Japan. Although this institution is not a formal educational institution (as explained above), the terms "school", "teacher" and "student" were used frequently in the conversations during the data collection and in the general discourse. We therefore follow this practice when referring to the roles of participants and the setting in this paper. Like many *eikaiwa* schools, the school offers private and small group lessons for improving conversation in general as well as lessons with a specialised focus (e.g., business, science, conference presentations). A flexible scheduling system is adopted for the regular conversation lessons which means each 40-minute lesson potentially consists of a different combination of teachers and students. The students are not told in advance which teacher will be teaching the lesson they have signed up for. The lesson starts with a "chat" or warm-up, which is "not necessarily connected to the lesson", according to an interview with one teacher. He added it is like "talking with friends". The session then moves into the lesson proper with a topical/grammar focus taught from a commercial textbook. There is no formal assessment for tracking progress: the teachers are responsible for determining the level appropriate for each student based on classroom participation.

3.2. Participants

The lesson analyzed in this paper consisted of one teacher and three adult learners who gave consent to take part in a lesson that was to be recorded for research purposes

with an observer present. It is one of five 40-minute lessons recorded at the school. This paper focuses on the interaction of one lesson to gain an understanding of the participation of one group. The group uses the Upper Intermediate Coursebook of Lifestyle: English for Work, Socializing and Travel (Barrall & Rogers, 2012). The participant profiles are summarised below. All names are pseudonyms.

> The teacher, Dave, is from the UK and has been teaching at this school for several years.
>
> Emma is a pharmacist. She lived in the US as a child. She does not use English at work but hopes to do so as a sports pharmacist in the future.
>
> Fumi is a medical technologist in a university lab. She uses English a couple of times a week at work to speak to an American professor.
>
> Taka, the sole male student in this group, is a natural sciences researcher. He needs English for his research and to talk to his American assistant.

Dave and the three students know each other from previous lessons. The three students have been enrolled at this school for some time, with Fumi having the shortest history of five months.

3.3. Recorded data

The recording devices used included one audio recorder, three audiovisual recorders (two JVC camcorders, one 360° King Jim Meeting Recorder). See Figure 1 for placement of devices.

One of the challenges with multimodal CA is how to resemiotise rich multi-dimensional data into conventional presentation, i.e., texts and images. For the purpose of this paper, the transcription focuses on embodied acts alongside what is said by whom, how and when. The recording was transcribed by the first author, an English-Japanese bilingual speaker, following CA transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004; Sidnell,

2010) with some modifications (see Appendix). To facilitate the reporting of analysis, sketches were generated from video stills using FotoSketcher, a freely available software. The teacher's frontal images are not included as agreed.

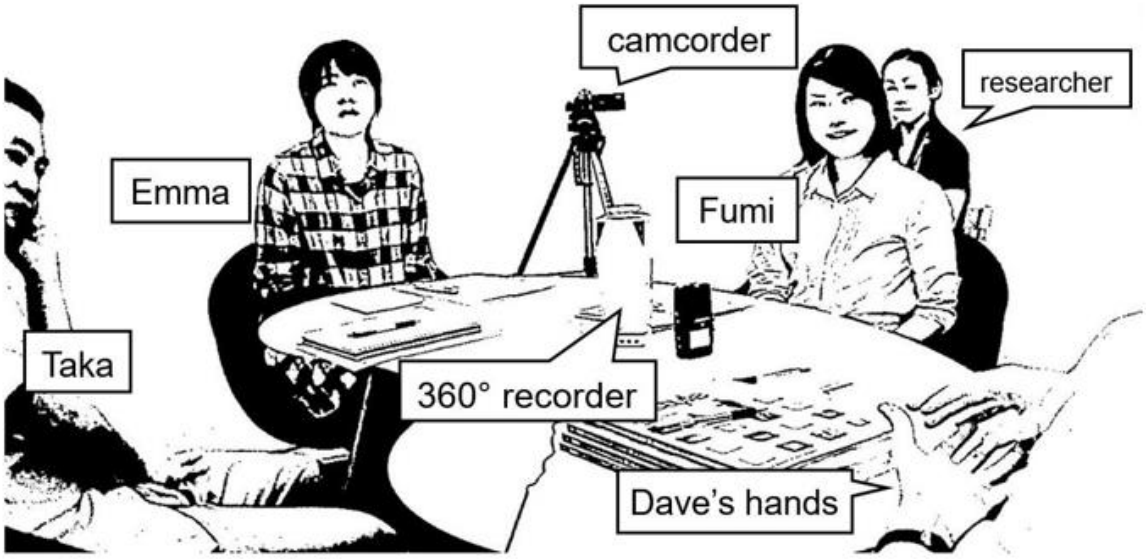

Figure 1. Participants and recorder placement (image taken by second camcorder)

4. Analysis and findings

In the following sections, we present an analysis of extracts taken from both the warm-up and the lesson proper with the aim of understanding the role of participants in constructing the interaction. We first describe the interactional features of the two parts of the lesson and then focus on moments when the participants are engaged in cultural talk, which we will argue is a shift to a co-learning approach. These analyses are followed by a brief account of the participants' views towards the lesson in their own words.

4.1. Collaborative achievement of the pedagogical goals of the lesson

Despite a relaxed atmosphere, it was noticeable from the start of the lesson that the students oriented to Dave, the teacher, as the authoritative figure who assumed the responsibility of allocating turns and topic selection. Throughout the lesson, the participants jointly maintained the flow of the conversation through their embodied participation (e.g., body orientation, gaze, gesture as well as verbal). Collaboratively, they

adhered to a one-teacher-to-one-student-at-a-time pattern, similar to patterns reported in many studies on classroom interactions (Mehan, 1979) and conversation-for-learning (Hauser, 2008).

The participants displayed an understanding that the goal of the warm-up was to keep the conversation going mainly between Dave and a student. This was apparent from the collaborative nature of the exchanges. As see in Extract 1, a student volunteers a thread, Dave follows up, and the student elaborates while the other students remained interested listeners most of the time. Emma's revelation that she took a nap before class is responded to by Dave with incomplete follow-ups (lines 34, 38; Fig. 1.2) and laughter particles (line 34). Dave's perturbations prompt Emma to continue by adding that she is

29	Emma:	[I:'m] >a little
30		bit< tired so: I slept >a
31		+Fig 1.1
32		little bit< before I came
33		[(here).
34	Dave:	[oh real- [hhh
35		+Fig 1.2
36	Emma:	[yeah [hhhh] .h
37	Fumi:	[ah hn]
38	Dave:	how- do you-
39	Emma:	I think I'm okay now. hhh .h
40	Dave:	do you often take naps?
41	Emma:	ah not really. (.) ah today
42		was a really busy day.
43		[so, ((nods))
44		+Fig 1.3
45	Dave:	[I: see ((upward head movement)) so
46	Fumi:	ah[::
47	Taka:	[ah:
48	Dave:	so, what was what was
49		different about today.

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

Extract 1: do you often take naps?

okay now. Dave follows up with “do you often take naps?” (line 40), presumably as an attempt to develop the topic. Emma volunteers an explanation by saying, “ah today was a busy day. so,” (lines 41-43; Fig. 1.3). At the end of this transition relevance place (Sacks et al., 1974), Emma’s continuation overlaps with Dave’s response (line 45) and Fumi and Taka’s discourse marker “ah:” (lines 46-7). Dave keeps the conversation going by asking another follow-up question (line 48-9). Similar conversational exchanges were repeated with all three students in a fashion resembling pivoting in conversation-for-learning settings (Hauser, 2008), a practice to ensure equity of participation.

As soon as Dave declares the start of the lesson proper, the participants’ body orientations and interactional patterns changed abruptly. Dave’s default position becomes that of a knowledge provider. After each student’s response, he evaluates, repeats, rephrases, or interprets the students’ comments, as in the third part of the teacher-initiated three-part exchange characteristic of classrooms (Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) including second language teaching classrooms (Markee, 2000). The students’ gaze was often cast down on their notes or the textbook while Dave’s gaze alternated between the students and the handout, and occasionally the textbook. At times, Taka and Fumi seated next to Dave leaned over to get a better look at his notes.

This interactional change can be seen in Extract 2, the segment after Dave has introduced the topic for the lesson proper, “time and money”. Dave has just asked the students what they think of the expression, “time is money”. Emma is responding (lines 606-9, 611-13; Fig. 2.1) as Fumi occasionally takes notes.

When Dave lets out an “ah:” (line 615; Fig. 2.2) and starts writing, Taka and Fumi turn their heads to look at Dave’s notes. Soon all three are taking notes (Fig. 2.3), treating Dave’s rendition of Emma’s comments as noteworthy and authoritative. In the lesson proper, “taking notes” becomes a ratified interactional feature and an enactment of

606 Emma: I think we shouldn't was:te
607 ti:me because we: can't go
608 back unless we have a time
609 machine or something [so]
610 Dave: [nn.]
611 Emma: ((clears throat)) and ah: time is
612 *nandaro ((what is it))* equal? to
613 everyone. +Fig 2.1
614 (1.2)
615 Dave: ah: ((writing on the handout))
616 Emma: nn:.
617 +Fig 2.2
618 Dave: we actually have a saying in
619 English that expresses this
620 very well. time waits for no
621 man.
622 Emma: time waits [for no man.]
623 Fumi: [°time waits] for >no< man.°
624 Dave: for no man. yes. ((reading notes))
625 (1.3)
626 and if that's from a movie,
627 I'm very very sorry but I
628 +Fig 2.3
629 think it's a nice quote. (.)
630 time waits for no man yes a-
631 time shouldn't be wasted and
632 is equal to everyone, exactly.

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

Figure 2.3

Extract 2: time waits for no man

learning for the students. For Dave, writing on the handout constitutes an interactional move for validating the students' response and drawing attention to the key phrases or structures. Here, we see the social and collective nature of embodied acts in the form of synchronization of note-taking when Dave and the students assume their classroom roles as teacher and student.

4.2. Cultural talk and changing patterns of engagement

In investigating how the teacher and students participate in classroom conversations, our attention was drawn to moments when there were changes in the level

of engagement and when students became more actively involved in the conversation. These were moments when participants brought up cultural talk, when differences in cultural knowledge/experience and views on ways of doing things were on display and attended to, and when Dave rendered his frames of "knowing, feeling, and doing vulnerable" (Brantmeier, 2013). In this section, we will focus on four moments of cultural talk and discuss how the shift to the co-learning approach effects greater learning opportunities contingently.

4.2.1. Reversing roles to doing a cultural novice

The close analysis of interactions shows that when Dave positions himself as the less knowledgeable about local or cultural knowledge (local food, places, and cultural practices), there are more frequent overlaps between turns and exchanges of gazes and turns become more spontaneous, pointing to more active engagement from the participants including Dave himself as in the following segment.

In Extract 3(a), one such instance, Dave refers to *obon*, an annual Japanese holiday period for showing respect to one's ancestors. He asks the name of a bean-paste-wrapped rice cake (*ohagi*), a sweet associated with *obon*, referring to it as "reverse *onigiri*". *Onigiri* is a ball of rice with a savoury filling—the Japanese equivalent of a sandwich.

All three students turn their attention to Dave as soon as they hear him say "I also hear there's some kind of" (line 189-90) showing that the students recognise Dave's words as a pre-telling, i.e., that he is about to tell them something noteworthy. In addition, the micropauses, Dave's reformulation with an elongated indefinite article (line 190), and his hand gesture together with the unusual combination of an English adjective with *onigiri* (lines 189-92, Fig. 3.1) intensifies the students' attention and engagement which is apparent from their gaze, bodily conduct and numerous overlaps. As Dave describes the

sweet and brings his hands up to demonstrate its shape, Fumi leans forward and brings up both her hands to her mouth (Fig. 3.2) and repeats, "reverse [*oni*-]" (line 198). At that moment, Emma, guesses the sweet is *ohagi* (rice cake wrapped with sweet bean paste, line 200; Fig. 3.3). Dave repeats the word rather like a student (line 202). Emma and Fumi exchange glances as Fumi exclaims "ah[:::!" (line 203; Fig. 3.4), a change-of-state token indicating that the word has been found, but the talk then resumes primarily between Dave and Emma around the topic of *ohagi* (Extract 3(b); lines 207-13; Fig. 3.5).

181	Dave:	fantastic andah anz- ah what
182		did you do for *obon*.=did you
183		eat anything special? did
184		you go [anywhere special?]
185	Emma:	[ah::] we:ll just
186		traditional Japanese food.
187		*tempura, soba,*
188	Fumi:	hhhhh
189	Dave:	I also hear there's some kind
190		of (.) it's like ei:
191		+Fig 3.1
192		reverse (.) *onigiri*? but
193		ma[de with]
194	Fumi:	°[ah:] *onigiri*?°
195	Dave:	made- it's like a reverse
196		*onigiri* with *anko*.
197		+Fig 3.2
198	Fumi:	°reverse [*oni*-]°
199	Taka:	°[ah:::°
200	Emma:	[ah!] *ohagi*?
201		+Fig 3.3
202	Dave:	*ohagi*.=
203	Fumi:	=ah[:::!
204	Taka:	[ah:::
205	Emma:	[*ohagi*? sweet beans.
206		+Fig 3.4

Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3

Figure 3.4

Extract 3(a): reverse onigiri

Clearly the other two students dwell on the unexpected combination of words—they mutter "reverse *onigiri*" and exchange glances (lines 214-18; Fig. 3.6). In response, Emma also repeats "rever(h)se *oni*(h)-*"* (line 220) with suppressed laughter and glances at Fumi but continues her conversation with Dave aligning with his opinion of the sweet by repeating "strange" (lines 226, 228).

In Extracts 3(a) and 3(b), Dave's creative hybrid phrase "reverse *onigiri*", pauses, and hand gestures heighten the attention level of all three students. The students' verbal and bodily conduct indicate they are all engaged in a word search and the nonratified students on the verge of breaking into the ongoing talk, but once the word is found, the students orient to a one-to-one pattern and the ensuing discussion on *ohagi* takes place

207	Dave:	mm. I bet- I've heard it's
208		rice on the inside,
209		+Fig 3.5
210		[and it's]
211	Emma:	[>yeah yeah<] yes yes
212	Fumi:	huhuhu huhu
213	Dave:	it sounds [strange ( )
214	Taka:	°[reverse
215		*onigiri*.°=
216	Fumi:	=°reverse
217		[*oni*(h)*gi*(h)*ri*]hihihihi°]
218	Taka:	[°hnnn. °]
219		+Fig 3.6
220	Emma:	rever(h)se *oni*(h)- ah:: well.
221		I re- I- don't really like
222		(.) like it. d(h).
223	Fumi:	[uhahaha]
224	Dave:	[but] is it (.) what do you
225		no-
226	Emma:	stra:nge.
227	Dave:	what do you [not like?]
228	Emma:	[strange for me.]

Figure 3.5

Figure 3.6

Extract 3(b): reverse onigiri

between Dave and Emma. The fact that this segment followed on from Emma's turn to speak, Dave's gaze was mostly on Emma who is sitting across from him, and Emma was the one who came up with the sought-for word may have discouraged the other two from participating more actively in the talk. However, even after the word was found, Fumi and Taka exchanged glances repeating the phrase "reverse *onigiri"* with visible amusement.

Whether Dave's question on *ohagi* was a display question (McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979) or not cannot be known, but the question brought about an increased level of student participation albeit for a short period. By switching from his teacher status to "doing being an eager learner" of local culture and language, Dave creates an opportunity for the students to take on a new role as cultural experts to help him with his word search. By repeating "*ohagi*", he shows his uptake of the new word and displays that he is a learner who benefited from the interaction.

4.2.2. Orienting to learner status

In another cultural talk in Extract 4, we see Dave and the students make observations on learning languages. During a brief pause after one of Dave's explanations, Emma makes a metalinguistic comment on the difficulty of English prepositions. This leads Dave to align with the students by portraying himself as a learner.

During Dave's explanation on prepositions (lines 993-1001), the students take notes. When Dave uses a hand gesture to solicit the students to join him in completing the sentence using the correct preposition "on", Fumi joins by saying "on." (line 1002; Fig. 4.1), Emma nods, and Taka responds with a Japanese-sounding acknowledgment token. After the short pause that ensues (line 1006), Emma seizes the turn to evoke her language learner identity by commenting with a smile, "prepositions are difficult" (line 1007; Fig. 4.2). Dave's firm affirmation followed by his observation, "yes. a:ll Japanese students I

know hate prepositions" (lines 1009, 1011-2), draws a visible response. Emma shakes in silent laughter (Fig. 4.3) and Fumi bursts into laughter as Taka smiles (Fig. 4.4). Dave, however, instead of dwelling on his evaluation of "all Japanese students" goes on to talk about the difficulty he has with Japanese prepositions (lines 1021-8; Fig. 4.5) possibly to

993	Dave:	for example making money >we
994		could say< I made money to (.)
995		I made time to (.) I invested
996		time in. (1) I saved money by
997		>each of them comes with
998		their< ow:n preposition
999		usually, they- when it's to
1000		waste money >I would say< I
1001		wasted money: o[n.
1002	Fumi:	[on.
1003		+Fig 4.1
1004	Taka:	hn[:
1005	Fumi:	[ah:
1006		(1) ((students take notes))
1007	Emma:	prepositions are difficult.
1008		+Fig 4.2
1009	Dave:	yes.=
1010	Taka:	=hn::.
1011	Dave:	a:ll Japane:se students I know
1012		hate prepositions.
1013	Fumi:	uhahahaha[haha haha haha]
1014	Dave:	[and it's and it's]
1015		+Fig 4.3
1016		okay because Japanese
1017		+Fig 4.4
1018		prepositions are so confusing
1019		to me as well.
1020	Emma:	ah:
1021	Dave:	because (.) you u:se many: you
1022		use the- the same preposition
1023		for one in English where we
1024		have maybe three or four for
1025		+Fig 4.5
1026		example. for example er (what
1027		is it (.) f- for example we
1028		have for of and with

Figure 4.1

Figure 4.2

Figure 4.3

Figure 4.4

Figure 4.5

Extract 4: prepositions are difficult

mitigate his former comment which could have been taken to be disparaging of Japanese students.

In this segment, Emma's orientation to being a language learner prompts Dave's assessment of "all Japanese students," and opens up a cultural talk in which Japanese students are contrasted with other learners. While the students seem to find this assessment amusing, Dave immediately seeks to tone down the essentialising nature of his off-the-cuff comment. He puts aside his expert status as an L1 English teacher and chooses to align with the students as a language learner baffled by prepositions.

4.2.3. Differences on display

Further into the activity, Dave's identity as a language learner resurfaces when he encourages the students to bring in their L1 and culture to explain linguistic differences. Preceding Extract 5a, Emma has made sentences using "lend" and has commented that "lend" can be used with "money," but not "time," to which the other students have agreed. In response, Dave has pointed out that there are times when "lend" can be used with time. He has explained at some length that in the English language the notion of time is linked to the self and thus treated as something that can be given to people. Emma, while saying she follows Dave's explanation, has commented that translating "lend time" into Japanese would sound strange. Extract 5(a) shows what follows.

Dave's indirect request (lines 1375-84; Fig. 5.1) for a translation is followed by Emma's 4-second pause, "hm?" and perturbations (lines 1386, 1388; Fig. 5.2), indicating Emma's confusion about being asked to use Japanese in an English-only lesson. Despite Dave's clarification (lines 1390-2, 1394), Emma sticks to using English by back-translating her Japanese translation into English, "my friend made time for me to move" (line 1396-8; Fig. 5.3). Dave acknowledges this as a satisfactory answer.

1375	Dave:	I know this is very difficult
1376		to translate but if you wanted
1377		+Fig 5.1
1378		to say for example I would say
1379		oh when um (.) when I was
1380		moving house, my friend a:h
1381		lent me their time to: help to
1382		help me move house. (.) my
1383		friend lent me their time to
1384		move house.
1385		(4)
1386	Emma:	hm?
1387	Fumi:	°my friend lent me (.) time°
1388	Emma:	n how- how- do I pr- m?
1389		+Fig 5.2
1390	Dave:	nn. so what might you say for
1391		example in
1392		[Japanese would it be just a different]-
1393	Emma:	[ah: (with X)]
1394	Dave:	a different- a different verb
1395		or,
1396	Emma:	ah my friend made time for me
1397		+Fig 5.3
1398		[to] move
1399	Taka:	[nn]
1400	Dave:	ah I see. I see.

Figure 5.1

Figure 5.2

Figure 5.3

Extract 5(a): difficult to translate

Following Emma's explanation, in Extract 5(b), Dave's question prompts Taka to step in to offer an explanation. He had attempted to take a turn at line 1401 and had been shifting his gaze between Emma and Dave. He explains that saying "my friend lent me his time" in Japanese would give the impression that you "look down" on the friend (lines 1405-9; Fig. 5.4, Fig. 5.5) and attributes this to culture saying, "this is not Japan (our own) culture" (lines 1414, 1416). Dave reacts enthusiastically to this as a satisfactory explanation saying, "ah. okay okay" (line 1415), "I see now I understand that." (line 1418; Fig. 5.6) and "ah. very interesting" (line 1421). Here Dave is "doing being the eager learner and cultural novice" who benefits from Taka's expertise and Taka takes on

the role of "doing being the cultural insider". It might be pertinent to note, however, that Emma's facial reaction and lack of uptake suggests she is not fully convinced, but this is not picked up by the others. So, while Dave's enthusiastic uptake of Taka's commentary can be interpreted as his personal interest in understanding Japanese language and culture, it may have curtailed a counter opinion by Emma and thus prevented the exchange from turning into a critical discussion on cultural practices.

1401	Taka:	s[o.
1402	Emma:	[that would be natural for
1403		[us ( ).]
1404	Dave:	[nn.]
1405	Taka:	nn. it could be the: there is
1406		+Fig 5.4
1407		no concept in Japan so (.) it
1408		kind (.) seem like ah look
1409		down hhh. the- hu I-
1410		+Fig 5.5
1411	Taka:	I lent to you [or something so=
1412	Fumi:	[nnn: nnn: nnhnhn:
1413	Emma:	[nn:
1414	Taka:	[=this is not Japan=
1415	Dave:	[ah. okay okay.
1416	Taka:	=[(our own) culture. hahahahaha.
1417	Fumi:	nn.
1418	Dave:	I see now I understand that.
1419		+Fig 5.6
1420	Taka:	yeah.
1421	Dave:	ah. very interesting.
1422	Taka:	ahu.
1423	Emma:	nn.

Figure 5.4

Figure 5.5

Figure 5.6

Extract 5(b). no concept in Japan.

4.2.4. Poking fun at the teacher

The extracts above showed moments when the students responded to Dave's question or clarification request, but the extract below shows a moment when Taka interrupts Dave to make a point. It occurs at the end of the warm-up after the students have each talked about what they did over their *obon* holiday. In response to Emma who

has asked him to talk about his holiday, Dave talks at length about how he visited his long-time friends in another town.

Dave's remark that they did "nothing exciting" because one of his friends was pregnant is followed by laughter and Emma's summary, "so just relaxed with them" (lines 507-508; Fig. 6.1). Dave continues to talk about having dinner at an *izakaya* (Japanese pub) with his friends (Fig. 6.2). A moment later, Taka cuts off Dave to point out that Hananomai, a franchised chain of *izakaya*, is a "regular *izakaya*," (line 519; Fig. 6.3). The laughter particles suggest he is teasing Dave's choice of restaurant as rather

499	Dave:	them but because ah m:y
500		frie:nd Samantha is pregnant
501		at the moment we did
502	Fumi:	a[h:
503	Dave:	[noth- nothing exciting.
504	Emma:	ah[:
505	Dave:	[hhhh ((Taka smiles))
506	Fumi:	[hahahaha[hahahaha
507	Emma:	[oh okay so just
508		relaxed with them.
509		+Figure 6.1
510	Dave:	we: we went to: Hananomai to
511		eat, (.) just to eat no
512		+Figure 6.2
513		drinking
514	Emma:	n[n.
515	Fumi:	[nn.
516	Taka:	ah:
517	Dave:	and: she-
518	Taka:	Ha(h)nano(h)mai hh is a
519		t(h)- regular *izakaya*. hhh
520		+Figure 6.3
521	Dave:	[nn. ((nods)) but but we-]
522	Fumi:	[hhhhh]
523	Dave:	we did go, we wanted to go
524		to another restaurant, but
525		they were full.

Figure 6.1

Figure 6.2

Figure 6.3

Extract 6: regular *izakaya*

uninspiring. Taka's interruption shows his eagerness to not miss the timing to tease Dave. By responding somewhat defensively that Hananomai was not his first choice (lines 521, 523-524), Dave displays his sociocultural awareness that Taka is telling him off for his banal choice. Here Dave's recounting of his *obon* holiday allows Taka to move out of their teacher-student roles to poke fun at Dave's judgement with respect to the suitability of the restaurant for a special night out. One additional point to note is the use of "regular" which shows Taka's knowledge of colloquial English expressions.

In the extracts above, we see the conversation becomes much more "lived" with knowledge and views exchanged, experience and subjectivities brought in, and differences marked and acknowledged. While these conversations of cultural talk may appear to have deviated from the on-going local pedagogical task, crucially, they constitute conversation for co-learning that allows both the teacher and the students to cross the existing hierarchy and to co-construct new knowledge. For the students, they also offer opportunities to develop the ability to frame and reframe the context of conversation.

4.3. "You don't have to do anything at all": The participants' views towards the lesson

The micro-analysis of interactions above focuses on what goes on in the lesson. We now turn our attention to the post-lesson interviews with the participants. The students mentioned in an informal chat after Dave left that they particularly enjoyed the supposedly off-task conversation. Taka commented that he was now attending this school because the teachers were "so friendly", "the atmosphere is very good", and "the teacher also very good". The other two responded in agreement. For Emma, the lessons were a form of diversion. Taka and Fumi agreed with Emma's comments, "we get to chat a lot (.) we're talking more stories rather than using textbooks, so we get to learn what we

want. what we want to talk. and the teachers help us how to um express our feelings and thoughts".

The students' preferences over learning through "chats" concurred with that of Dave who believed that the best classes are those that "you don't have to do anything at all":

> "I think one of the things that most of the teachers agree on um is that the best classes are the ones (.) for the warm-up for example not so much the lesson body work but for the warm-up. .hh you don't have to do anything at all. maybe you bring up the subject and then you can just sort of wheel you chair back as the students talk among themselves and …"

Dave's words point to the need to decentralise the teacher's role in *eikaiwa* classroom and the need to get the students talking to create maximum learning opportunities. This is in line with *eikaiwa* teachers' concerns over inactive students reported in Banwell (2010).

5. Discussion and conclusion

While the microanalysis of the interaction of this *eikaiwa* lesson has demonstrated how the teacher and students played their default roles, i.e., teachers as the authority and turn-allocator and students as "receptacles of knowledge" (Brantmeier, 2013) and willing supporters, there were moments when the participants stepped out of their default roles and adopted a co-learning approach. Through a focus on cultural talk and off-task conversations, our analysis shows that the participants showed greater engagement when the teacher reversed his role from a language authority to a cultural novice, when the conversation became meaningful exchanges of information and views, and when the

students' funds of knowledge about their languages and cultural practices were brought in. These moments were the key ingredients that made this a good lesson.

The best lessons, as the students aptly expressed in their interviews, are those in which students talk about their "stories" rather than merely doing the exercises in the textbook, get to learn what they want to learn, and express their feelings and thoughts. But what learning opportunities do these kinds of talks create? Moving beyond the conventional focus on competence, what we see here is the confidence as well as the ability to make a point, to shape the direction of the conversation and the very context of communication where differences are displayed and discussed, and potentially to change the power dynamics between the participants. These are the very essence of symbolic competence, an ability "not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used" (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 664).

What role does the teacher play in the lesson? The best lessons, according to Dave, are those in which teachers do not have to do anything. This may seem ironic, but what Dave hints at is about letting go, making oneself "vulnerable" and going for co-learning. From time to time, Dave is willing to move away from his perceived role as an authority in the target language. Enquiring about culture-related topics such as the name of a Japanese sweet is often a way to generate topics for talk, but unlike the partner in the conversation lounge for undergraduates at a Japanese university who appears frustrated as she struggles to remain a provider of knowledge on things western and receiver of things Japanese (Nao, 2011), Dave does not present himself to be completely ignorant of Japanese language and culture. He uses his cultural knowledge to come up with an attention-getting hybrid phrase, "reverse onigiri". He goes a little further in the metalinguistic talk in the lesson proper by revealing how he has trouble with Japanese

prepositions and asks for a translation of an English sentence. He thereby portrays himself as someone with shared language learner experiences with an interest in the local language and culture. He even recounts his personal experience with friends which creates an opportunity for a student to tease him about his choice of restaurant. By reversing the teacher-student roles, Dave created opportunities contingently, allowing students to deepen his understanding about the local ways of doing things through English.

Asking "who's teaching whom", Li Wei (2014) demonstrated that the co-learning pedagogical beliefs have the potential to enable both teachers and students to draw on their multilingual resources and related funds of knowledge in the teaching and learning process. In this *eikaiwa* classroom, there are chunks of interactions in which the conventional role of teachers and students is transcended: the teacher moves away from an authoritative, pivoting role to facilitators, scaffolders, or genuine partners in lived conversations who are inquisitive about the local cultural practice; students become cultural and resourceful meaning-making informers. When the roles are reversed, conversation-for-learning becomes conversation for experience sharing, conversation for perspective-taking, and conversation for co-learning. While our participants are not novice language learners as such, co-learning with its emphasis on mobilising students' funds of cultural knowledge and linguistic resources is likely to apply to all learners irrespective of their status and stages in language learning. Fundamental to the co-learning approach is the pedagogy of vulnerability, in which teachers and learners switch their positions and the hierarchy between the teacher and students is reversed.

Finally, it has to be said that cultural talk in which teachers and students discuss culture-specific practices and repertoires is not problem-free. By using the etic categories of culture such as Japanese culture, participants can inadvertently bring in static and *a*

priori notions of culture. They also risk essentializing with categorical comments such as "it is not Japan (our own) culture". The teacher and the students may not have the opportunity to fully discuss differences in opinion, as shown in Extract 5b when not everyone seems to agree with the comment made by one participant. Further research in conversation for co-learning needs to take these complexities into consideration.

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Appendix: Transcription Notation

The extracts for this research follow CA transcription conventions (Jefferson 2004, Sidnell 2010) with some modifications and additions as given below:

Temporal and sequential aspects

[]	The beginning and end of overlapping utterances
=	No pause between adjacent utterances
(.)	Indicates a very brief untimed silence
(3)	Numbers in parentheses indicate the duration of silence in seconds

Aspects of speech delivery

?	Rising intonation
,	Low-rising intonation, suggesting continuation
.	Falling intonation
!	Animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation
-	An abrupt cut-off or self-interruption
__	Underscoring indicates stress
::	Colons indicate prolongation of sound preceding them.
°word°	Softer than the surrounding talk is given between degree signs
<word>	Slower than surrounding talk
>word<	Faster than surrounding talk
.hh	Audible in-breath
hh	Audible out-breath or laughter
(h)	Aspiration within a word (possible laughter)
( )	A pair of parentheses with nothing in-between indicates unintelligible utterances
(word)	Words in parentheses indicates uncertainty over the transcription

Other aspects

((nods))	Words in double parentheses indicate description of events
hai ((yes))	Non-English words are italicized and followed by English translations in double parentheses
Dave	Proper nouns are capitalized
+Fig 1	A plus sign followed by "Fig" and a number indicates the moment in the transcript line above at which the corresponding sketch shows