Japanese interactional particles as a resource for stance building☆

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Abstract

The Japanese interactional particles (IPs) *ne* and *yo* are often described as discrete attitudinal, affective, and/or epistemic stance markers that directly index particular 'interior cognitive states' or 'psychological domains'. Conversely, this paper argues that such particles are instead irreducibly public resources that conversationalists employ to negotiate their respective *positioning* within the ever-shifting participation frameworks structuring real-time face to face interaction. It demonstrates, in particular, how various stance 'meanings' emerge by virtue of the placement of the IPs in a particular sequential position within an on-going activity first and foremost. I also demonstrate how different *levels* of 'stance' (i.e., reading of one's interlocutor's self-positioning) can manifest as they are linked together by local interactional agendas, interpersonal concerns, sociocultural preferences, and linguistic ideology. Such publically displayed 'stances' range from speakers' concerns regarding micro-level contingency issues to higher-level accomplishments that are built upon such micro-level negotiation, such as the formation of membership categories, the forging the affiliative alliances, and the socially sanctioned displays of 'politeness' and 'respect'.
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1. Introduction

Japanese linguists have long been interested in examining the linguistic resources that speakers deploy in order to make known their subjective propositional attitudes to their interlocutors (e.g., Tokieda, 1951; Maynard, 1993; Iwasaki, 1993). Such studies examine the ways that certain words and phrases denote particular types of attitudes, affects, or modalities – usually in the context of the proposition at that moment being deployed. Existing Japanese linguistic studies have shown how such subjective stances are marked morphologically, lexically, and syntactically in everyday talk. Among various such linguistic resources that have been attributed as stance-markers in Japanese, the particles *yo* and *ne* have drawn the attention of numerous linguists. As these particles are often thought to add some additional meaning for interpreting the proposition of the sentence to which they are appended, various explanations were sought in cognitive, psychological, as well as interactional approaches (for a comprehensive literature review of this research, see Morita, 2005[1]). Indeed, studies of such particles in Japanese conversation have advanced our understanding of the

importance of speakers' explicit stance-marking behaviors as means to highlighting the various aspects of meaning necessary to accomplish everyday interaction.

In my work (Morita, 2005, 2008), I refer to these particles as *Interactional Particles* (henceforth: IPs) because their particularized meaning at any particular moment of interaction is only understandable from its interactional context and contingent talk. As the rest of the paper will reveal, my claim is that such particles are *resources* for stance marking (along with several other resources, such as prosody, paralinguistic features and gesture) – however, I believe that their interpretation is only possible *in situ*, contingent to the ongoing context, rather than pre-given, as if each particle carried its own context-free meaning onto the proposition to which it is attached.

Discussions of the two most frequently occurring such particles, *ne* and *yo*, however, often still revolve around a set of pre-given 'meanings' regarding the information or the propositions that these particles are thought to 'mark'. Indeed, occurrences of these particles are often claimed to be the result of speakers' subjective decisions regarding how to frame the propositions that they deploy in ways that also display their own epistemic stance toward that 'information'. Other explanations posit that such IPs are deployed to mark speakers' attitudes (e.g., 'strong assertion' or 'accommodation') toward the changing of their interlocutor's cognitive state. Yet, while scholars seek explanations of the 'meanings' of such IPs in various specific domains, the 'meaning' of the utterance to which these IPs attach itself changes depending on the sequential positions – leading to numerous disjunctive explanations of what each of these IPs really 'mark' (see Morita, 2005, 2012a for various meanings associated with *ne* and Morita, 2012b for *yo*).

Not surprisingly, what we are left with is a disparate list of the various possible meanings and functions of IPs – each of which function as satisfying explanations in some instances of the particle's use, but none of which can account for the higher-order logic that likewise allows for very different 'meanings' to be heard in other instances.

Moreover, such IPs are often said to function as paired contrastive stance markers of a particular modality; for example, Masuoka claims that *ne* is used when the speaker judges that the listener shares the same opinion, but *yo* is used when the speaker believes that the hearer has a different opinion (Masuoka, 1991:96). Yet this dichotomy hardly seems resolvable in the many recorded instances where these two particles appear in different positions within one utterance, as shown below.

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(1)  [M&H]


1     M     dakara    ne: hokano tokoro to kurabete mo:
            therefore IP  other  place  to compared EMPH

2           (  ) no shinsensa ga   zenzen chigau[yo?
            (  )ATT freshness NOM at-all different IP


            'Therefore, ne, when compared with other places, the freshness of (  ) is
            completely different, yo'.
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Here, *ne* appears toward the beginning of the utterance, immediately after the conjunctive *dakara*, which projects that the turn will have an explanatory nature. *Yo* appears at the end of the same turn constructional unit (TCU), yet the whole turn constitutes one coherent turn, both grammatically and pragmatically. Too, when an IP is appended to a component bit of talk less than a complete TCU (such as ''*dakara* (therefore)''), the notion that it is marking the conversationalists' relative ''territory of information'' (Kamio, 1997) regarding propositional content must be abandoned.

Instead, the above example forces us to see such talk as being built piece by piece by the careful monitoring of (and reaction to) one another's moves. It is my strong claim that in order to better understand how IPs such as *ne* and *yo* are really functioning in spoken conversation, we should stop thinking of them as single-meaning stance 'markers' that provide a speaker's meta-comment on the immediately preceding talk to which they are appended, but rather, as content-independent resources for the ongoing stance 'building' *between* participants as they collaborate in micro-second joint choreography that is the co-construction of their talk.

Indeed, rather than 'stance' being seen as a specific 'attitude' or 'opinion' about the propositional content *in the first instance*, I wish to argue instead that 'stance' retains its original *positional* connotation, and that it is this moment-to-moment communication *about* each participant's current positioning in the context of the developing talk that is the primary function of 'stance' display (and of the various linguistic, paralinguistic, and visual resources used to instantiate it, of which IPs constitute one important class, through by far not the only one). The subsequently posited interpretations such as 'strong assertion' or 'accessing shared information' are thus but the secondary *products* of such more primary communication about the in-progress coordination of the ongoing talk. Thus this paper is not at all meant to discredit past