

Japanese Learners' Use of Discourse Markers in Narrative: Before and After a Study Abroad Program

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和文要旨:

英語母語話者は、ナラティブ(narrative)というある程度の長さにわたる一貫性を備えた構造を構成する際に、談話標識を用いる。学習者にとって、談話標識を用いてナラティブを構成する能力を身につけるのは重要なことであるが、文レベルでの形式指導が中心となる教室環境での学習だけでは限界がある。本稿では、研修として英語圏に6週間滞在した日本人大学生27人を対象とし、ナラティブにおける談話標識*but, oh, well*の使用に焦点をあて談話構成能力の発達過程の一端を実証的に示すことを試みた。資料は、学習者が研修出発前と帰国後に母語話者と1対1で行った会話および*The London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English*に収録された母語話者同士の会話を用いた。

まず母語話者の*but, oh, well*の用例を概観し、母語話者は*but, oh, well*を(i)ナラティブを開始する合図や(ii)登場人物の発話を生き生きと再現する装置として利用していたという結果を示した。次に、学習者は、研修前は*but, oh, well*いずれも(i), (ii)として用いていなかったこと、さらに研修後は*but*と*oh*を(i), (ii)として用いるようになったことを明らかにした。以上の結果から、談話標識を用いて比較的大きな談話構造を構成する能力は、海外語学研修という母語話者と接触し相互行為に参加する機会を通して発達が進むと考察した。

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

This study examines Japanese learners' use of discourse markers (DMs) in narratives. DMs are items which bracket various units of talk such as utterances and topics and display the relationships that hold between the units (Schiffrin, 1987; Schourup, 1999). Proper use of a DM in spoken discourse enables a speaker to organize (and a hearer to interpret) the following sequences in a coherent way.

According to Schiffrin (1987), discourse involves two different levels of coherence: one is the local and the other is global level. Local coherence is achieved through relationships between two immediately adjacent utterances, such as adjacency pairs.¹ Global coherence is realized in a larger unit which includes extended stretches of utterances. An example of globally coherent discourse is a narrative, which has been defined as a series of clauses with at least one temporal juncture describing a sequence of past events (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967).²

Developing the ability to organize globally coherent discourse, that is, an ability to tell a well-formed narrative with DMs, is considered to be an important component of second language learning. Such ability may not be fully developed by solely relying on classroom instruction because the explicit focus of instruction in the language classroom tends to be placed on learning the target grammar and vocabulary. One way to supplement classroom instruction is through study abroad programs in communities where the target language is spoken, given the accessibility to native speakers' narrative and the potentially extensive opportunities to construct, and to receive feedback on, learners' own narratives. However, little is known about how learners' narratives and their DM usage in narratives may change after studying abroad.

This study aims to demonstrate how Japanese learners of English develop the ability to use three DMs, *but*, *oh* and *well*, in their spontaneous narratives through their 6-week stay in Australia / New Zealand.³ More

specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) Is there any difference between native speakers of English and Japanese learners before studying abroad in the use of *but*, *oh* and *well*? If there is any, how do they differ?
- (2) Is there any change within the learners before and after studying abroad? If there is any, how do the learners change?

The organization of the paper is as follows. In Section 1.2 the functions of *but*, *oh* and *well* are outlined. Section 2 describes the data and method used for the study. Section 3 and 4 show the results followed by a discussion, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

1.2 Functions of Discourse Markers

In general, a DM is considered to be multi-functional: each DM has one basic core function, besides its bracketing and connection-displaying functions given in 1.1 (Fischer, 2006; Schiffrin, 1987; Schourup, 1999). *But* essentially marks a semantic or pragmatic contrast between two units (Schiffrin, 1987). *Oh* conveys that a speaker undergoes a change-of-state or orientation shift (Heritage, 1984, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987). *Well* portrays the speaker's mental state, that is, "s/he is actively considering whatever it is relevant to consider in determining what should now follow" (Schourup, 2001).

Along with the above basic functions, *but*, *oh* and *well* are reported to have sub-functions that help constructing a narrative. To be more specific, it has been pointed out that *but* and *well* serve to introduce narratives into ongoing conversations, and *oh* and *well* serve to introduce direct speech in narrative (Müler, 2004; Norrick, 2001; Schourup, 1985; Svartvik, 1980). In other words, these three DMs seem to have some narrative-specific functions.⁴ In what follows, their narrative specific functions are explored in detail.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Twenty-seven female Japanese learners who enrolled in a summer abroad program participated in the research.⁵ The learners stayed with English-speaking families either in Australia or New Zealand for approximately six weeks and received twenty-five hours of ESL instruction per week. All of the learners were, at the time of data collection, university students in their first or second year of study. They met a program requirement for English proficiency measured by their TOEIC® test scores.⁶ They were all native speakers of Japanese from monolingual households, who did not speak English on a regular basis outside of a classroom setting.

2.2 Data

This study used three sets of data: two from a single group of Japanese learners and one from a corpus of native speakers of English. Many of the previous studies on English learners' narrative and the DM usages in it (e.g. Fuller, 2003; Kang, 2004; Müller, 2005) rely on (quasi-) experimental methods. The researchers ask learners to self-tape-record or to tell stories without any listeners around, which may under- or over-represent learners' ability to narrate and to use DMs. In addition, apparently no research has investigated Japanese learners' change over time. In order to increase spontaneity in learners' performance and to show change within individual learners, this study used learners' narratives that had been elicited in spontaneous conversation with native speakers before and after their program participation.

2.2.1 The Japanese Learner's Data

Learner-native speaker dyads were recorded six weeks before departing for, and six weeks after returning from, the learners' overseas sojourn.⁷ Each learner had a face-to-face conversation with a native

speaker of English for approximately twenty minutes in each recording session.⁸ They were asked to make a brief self-introduction at the beginning of a conversation, but not given any specific conversation topics to cover or any roles to play. That is, the learners' data represent a half-structured interaction with a native speaker with whom they were not acquainted. All of the dyads were recorded by IC recorders and transcribed throughout.

2.2.2 The Native Speakers' Data

Among various types of spoken data in *the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English*, eighteen sets of face-to-face conversation between British English speakers in their 20's or above with various occupations (including university students) were selected for comparison.

2.3 Method

All of the usages of *but*, *oh* and *well* in the three data sets were extracted with the help of computer programs.⁹ Each DM usage was examined as to whether it occurred in a narrative or not, and then only the usages occurring in narratives were used for the analysis. In addition, learners' narratives without DMs were also extracted when needed.

This study first analyzed the native speakers' data to identify narrative-specific functions shared by the three DMs, and coded all usages of the DMs in the data sets with respect to their functions: It then made comparisons between the native speakers and the learners before studying abroad and within the learners before and after studying abroad.

The results consist of descriptions of quantitative yet non-statistical measurements followed by qualitative descriptions of narrative samples. The statistical significance is not tested because of the skewness of the distribution and the relatively small sample size.

3. Native Speakers' Use of the DMs

The native speakers' data suggested that *but*, *oh* and *well* had certain narrative-specific functions pointed out in some previous studies (see Section 1.2). The functions observed in the data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The narrative specific functions of the DMs in native speakers' data

DMs	Function	Position in Narrative
<i>but, oh, well</i>	(i) signaling narrative initiation	beginning of a narrative: [<i>but / oh / well</i> , (narrative begins)]
<i>oh, well</i>	(ii) dramatizing a speech event	within a quoted utterance in a narrative [Subject says " <i>oh / well ...</i> "]

The three DMs share the function of (i) signaling narrative initiation, and *oh* and *well* also share the function of (ii) dramatizing a speech event. Appearing at a narrative initial position, the DMs help a narrator to explicitly convey that a narrative follows and to attract the other participant's attention. In addition, appearing in a quoted utterance (most typically at its beginning), *oh* and *well* allow the narrator to represent a speech event so that the other participants may experience the event vicariously.¹⁰ Such reproduction or re-play of what has happened is called dramatization, which allows listeners to re-experience the events that took place and thereby share the perspective of a narrator (Goffman, 1974).

Samples (1) through (5) below represent the two narrative-specific functions of each DM. (1), (2) and (3) show that *but*, *oh* and *well* signal the narrative initiation.

(1) [a theater play - *Forget-me-not Lane*]

11A: you haven't seen. Forget-me-not Lane by any chance have you.

11B: No.

11A: oh that's marvelous it's a sort of ((2 untranscribable syllables))

→ very anti marriage in a way. a terrifying play. *but* I I've seen

it a couple of times. and. ... ((followed by 11A's experience of watching the play))

(2) 【an encounter with David's mother】

→ 7A: m, *oh* I told you who I saw this morning. David's mother. uhm ...
:

7A: she wanted to know how we all were. if we'd had a good Easter.
and she said that ... ((followed by depictions of David mother's behaviors))

(3) 【news on Malcolm】

4B: ... and he drove us there in a car. [so ((giggle))]

→ 4A: [yes.] *well* Laura wrote and said Malcolm has a new flat in N eight. ... this letter came last week from her. and she said Malcolm had arrived at this new flat. ... ((followed by a story on how 4A got to know Malcolm's moving))

By initiating narratives with the DMs, the narrators of (1), (2) and (3) successfully gain the addressees' attention and then state what they want to talk about. The narrator in (1), 11A, first describes the plot of a play and then introduces his narrative. He attracts attention with *but* and signals that he wants to introduce into the ongoing conversation something which contrasts with his previous description of the play and that it is worth listening to. Then he tells his story. The narrator in (2), 7A, suddenly recalls an incident that occurred in the morning. She marks the change of her mental state with *oh*, which indicates that she has something noteworthy to report and an intention to talk about it. The narrator in (3), 4A, needs a few moments before organizing what she wants to talk about. She indicates with *well* that she is consulting her current thoughts, which implies to the other participant that something to follow is important or problematic and thus deserves careful attention.

(4) and (5) show that *oh* and *well* dramatize the speech events in narratives.

(4) [a nice hair style]

→ 7B: ((laughter)) she said *oh* Mrs. Tooley. your hair looks so nice.
((laughter)) so. I. I did tell her actually. ... ((followed by the story on 7B's self-disclosure of wearing a wig))

(5) [an invitation from Leslie]

3A: did you get a letter from Leslie about this.

3B: yes. ((1 untranscribable syllable)) I didn't reply to it. ...

3A: [neither did I. ((5 to 6 untranscribable syllables))]

3B: [((3 untranscribable syllables)) (not.) but I said.] personally. I'm sorry I haven't replied. but I would. I'm going to. because I would

→ like to come. (and) then he said *well* don't bother. ... ((followed by reproduction of interaction between Leslie and 3B))

By placing *oh* or *well* in quotations, the narrators in (4) and (5) vividly convey the quoted speakers' mental states.¹¹ In (4), 7B quotes her friend's comments starting with *oh*, which vividly displays the friends' surprise. In (5), 3B quotes his colleague's speech with *well*, which conveys how deliberate the colleague's reply was.

Summing up, the native speakers' data with the above samples suggest that the native speakers use *but*, *oh*, and *well* to signal the initiation of narrative and *oh* and *well* to dramatize a speech event in a narrative.

4. Japanese Learners' Use of the DMs

4.1 Frequency

The Japanese learners' DM usages before and after studying abroad were examined in order to see to what extent the Japanese learners

were able to exploit the two narrative-specific functions. It turned out that before studying abroad, both of the narrative specific functions were barely used, and that it is after studying abroad that *but* and *oh* came to be used in narratives. Table 2 shows whether the functions were absent (-), observed only one time (+/-), or observed more than once by different learners (+). This notation is used because the data sets vary in size and it is impossible to simply compare the numbers of occurrences of each function among the data sets (see Appendix B for actual counts).

Table 2. Presence/absence of the DMs before and after studying abroad

	<i>but</i>		<i>oh</i>		<i>well</i>	
	before	after	before	after	before	after
(i) signaling narrative initiation	-	+	+/-	+	-	-
(ii) dramatizing a speech event	N/A	N/A	-	+	-	-

It is evident that *but* and *oh* turned from '-' or '+/-' to '+' after studying abroad. Before studying abroad, the learners did not use the DMs for signaling the initiation of upcoming narratives or for dramatization of speech events (except one learner who used *oh* once as a narrative initiation signal). After studying abroad, more learners came to use *but* and *oh* for these narrative-specific functions.

4.2 Samples of Japanese Learners' Use of the DMs

In this section, several learners' narratives are examined to support the above results.

4.2.1 Before Studying Abroad

Unlike the native speakers, the learners before studying abroad tended to construct their narratives without the DMs. In (6), a learner (Ayaka) tells a story in which she could not watch a World Cup soccer game because of her mother.¹²

(6) Ayaka's narrative before studying abroad

【World Cup Tournaments in Japan】

Chuck: did you go to World Cup games?

→ Ayaka: I tried to get tickets

Chuck: mm

Ayaka: but (1.5) u: my telephone?

Chuck: mm

Ayaka: is (1.5) is (3) is ((laughter)) my mm (1.5) I couldn't (1.5)
call? ((laughter))

Chuck: ahhh too busy.

Ayaka: yeah

Chuck: ahh I'm sorry.

Ayaka: I have (1.5) class. and I ask my mother

Chuck: mm

Ayaka: to call.

Chuck: but ((laughter))

Ayaka: but she didn't ((laughter))

Chuck: oww terrible. terrible. terrible story.

Her narrative begins at an utterance marked with '→', but the utterance does not include any DMs that signal the initiation of her narrative. She abruptly starts her story right after Chuck's question. During her story-telling, she only chains clauses to explain what happened but never quotes her mother or herself. She could have made dramatic quotations such as "I said to my mother '*oh* mom, please get tickets for me!'," or "mom said '*oh* I forgot to call... *well*, sorry." However, no such use of *oh* or *well* was found at all.

The above extract supports the result that the learners prior to studying abroad did not make use of the two narrative-specific functions of the DMs. In the following section the learners' development is illustrated.

4.2.2 After Studying Abroad

After studying abroad, the learners came to deploy *but* and *oh* as a narrative initiation signal and a dramatization device. Samples (7) and (8) illustrate how the learners' narratives begin with *but* and *oh*.

(7) Mami's narrative after studying abroad

【parking violation in Noosa】¹³

Brian: Noosa is nice.

Mami: yes

∴

Brian: it's a nice shopping street isn't it.

∴

Brian: I went there night time so I didn't see the beach.

Mami: uh huh

Brian: so,

→ Mami: *but* when I went Noosa

Brian: mm

Mami: we I went by car?

Brian: yes.

Mami: and we parked the car along the road ((laughter))

Brian: yeah.

Mami: ((laughter)) and when we back there?

Brian: mm

Mami: there's the some ticket... ((followed by her story on being ticketed))

Mami did not use the DMs in narrative at all before but used them after studying abroad. In (7), the sequence before *but* was about the attractiveness of Noosa and the sequence after *but* was Mami's narrative on her blunder in the town. She marks with *but* her orientation shift from positive to negative aspects about the place and signals that her narrative begins.¹⁴

Another learner, Mie, who did not use *oh* as a narrative initiation signal before, demonstrated her ability to use it after studying abroad. In (8), the talk develops from a reciprocal self-introduction between a native speaker (Chuck) and Mie into Mie's narrative on her recent reading experience.

(8) Mie's narrative after studying abroad

[reading novels]

Mie: okay umm my hobby

Chuck: mm

Mie: is uhm reading books

⋮

Chuck: and what kind of stuff do you like to read.

Mie: u: um novels.

Chuck: novels.

Mie: yeah.

Chuck: yeah like uh like uhm like historical fiction, romantic, science fiction, [what kind of]

Mie: [ahw romantic.]

Chuck: [okay, of course ((laughter))]

→ Mie: [((laughter))] *oh* these days, uhh (1) after (1) I came back Japan?

Chuck: mm hm

Mie: ah I try to read umm English book.

Chuck: uhhh yeah.

Mie: I read two books. ((followed by the details of how she ended up reading))

Mie's utterance on her hobby invites questions from Chuck. The question-answer sequence soon terminates because, by inserting *oh*, she successfully lets Chuck know that she has something noteworthy to tell and turns him

from a questioner into an attentive listener and herself into a narrator.

Sample (9) illustrates that Mami also began to use the dramatization function of *oh* after studying abroad.

(9) Mami's narrative after studying abroad

【whale watching】

Brian: that's cool.

→ Mami: yeah dolphin mm swim by many dolphin. so *oh* there's a dolphin there's a whale

Brian: mm mm mm

Mami: we were busy ((laughter))

In (9), Mami's story may be paraphrased as follows: many dolphins and whales were swimming around our boat, so we shouted "*oh*, there's a dolphin right there, look, a whale over there!" As *oh* appears in a quotation of her own exclamatory remark, her surprise and excitement are vividly represented.

4.3 Discussion

The present study first showed that, while the native speakers used the DMs *but*, *oh* and *well* for signaling their narrative initiation and for dramatizing speech events in the narratives, the Japanese learners before studying abroad barely used them for such functions. It then made a before-after comparison on the overall frequency and samples of learners' narratives and showed that the learners after studying abroad came to exploit *but* and *oh* for these narrative-specific functions. Because the learners' use of the two DMs (i.e., *but* and *oh*) clearly changed after studying abroad, it seems in order to explore what may facilitate native-like usage of the DMs. It also seems important to investigate why the other DM (i.e., *well*) rarely used even after the study abroad experience. The following discussion takes into consideration the effect of interaction

with native speakers and that of the core meaning of a DM on the learners' DM usage.

The results gained with respect to *but* and *oh* may be due to the interactions in which the learners engaged during the study abroad program. In general, interactions with native speakers provide learners with ample opportunities and resources to develop their knowledge and skills in the target language. More specifically, learners are likely to be exposed to considerable amounts and variations of native speakers' usages of DMs and also encouraged to use them while they speak. It is likely that the learners learned from the interactions how to deploy *but* and *oh* in their narratives.

As for the learners' non-use of *well* before and after studying abroad, it can be suggested that interactions during their six-week sojourn were enough for the learners to achieve its native-like usage. In addition, the fact that *well* was rarely used may be due to the difference in the core-meanings among the DMs. That is, the core meaning of *well* may be more difficult for the learners to master than that of *but* or *oh*.

The core meaning of *well* is to convey that the speaker is actively considering what to say next (see Section 1.2). To use *well* in a native-like way, the speaker is required to engage in multiple tasks at the same time, which involve considering what to say next, monitoring their own mental state, and portraying that state in English. Learners may often find it too challenging to monitor their mental states and to demonstrate the states in English in the middle of consideration. That is, it is more difficult for learners to use *well* while considering what to say next or how to say it than to think silently or to simply fill the pause with unlexicalized fillers or fillers in their first language. In fact, the learners examined in this study remained silent or inserted unlexicalized or Japanese fillers such as "uh", "mmm" and "e::to" when they have difficulty in thinking of what to say next.¹⁵ On the other hand, the core meanings of *but* (contrast marking) and *oh* (marking speaker's change-of-state or orientation shift) do not

require such multiple-tasks. In this sense, they are relatively easy for learners to use in conversation and to achieve a more native-like usage within a short sojourn.

5. Conclusion

The present study examined Japanese university students' use (and non-use) of *but*, *oh* and *well* in spontaneous narratives and showed that they achieved more native-like use of *but* and *oh* after their 6-week stay in English speaking communities. The result proved that a 6-week study abroad program did help the learners develop their ability to use these two DMs in narratives, a sort of ability to construct globally coherent discourse. This result suggested that the development of the learners' ability to use DMs, and thus the ability to achieve global coherence, was prompted by the interaction available in the target communities. It was also pointed out that, unlike *but* and *oh*, the learners did not show any improvement in the use of *well* even after studying abroad. The observed differences between *well* and the other two DMs suggested that not only the interactions but also the core-meanings, i.e., the linguistic properties, of the DMs may have affected the learners' development.

These findings point to the need for better understanding of the factors that facilitate or prevent development of learners' abilities to construct coherent spoken discourse. This study only allows for limited generalizations due to the modest sample size of a single learner group. Further studies examining more DMs and other linguistic items and involving more participants with varied proficiency levels need to be done.

Appendix A: Transcript conventions

(Adapted from Jefferson, 1979)

? rising intonation	. falling intonation
, continuing intonation	: extension of the sound or syllable it follows
(#. #) timed pause	[] simultaneous or overlapping utterance

- ∴ omission of intervening turns ... omission of a part of the turn
- (()) detail of the conversational scene, various characterization of the talk or transcriber's comment
- () transcriber's doubt

Appendix B: Frequency of *but*, *oh* and *well* in narrative

	<i>but</i>			<i>oh</i>			<i>well</i>		
	native speaker	learner- before	learner- after	native speaker	learner- before	learner- after	native speaker	learner- before	learner- after
(i) signaling narrative initiation	2	0	4	4	1	5	9	0	0
(ii) dramatizing a speech event	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	0	13	13	0	0
total	2	0	4	9	1	18	22	0	0

Note. The native speaker's data set contains a total of 28, 506 tokens. The learner data sets before and after studying abroad contain a total of 20,433 and 30,326 tokens respectively.

Notes

This study is being conducted as a part of my doctoral dissertation research, Yamamoto (2009). An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2009 Annual Conference of The Association of International Behavioral Studies in Kyoto.

- 1 An adjacency pair consists of two sequentially ordered utterances by different speakers. The second is usually a response to the first, e.g. question-answer (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).
- 2 A typical narrative includes the following six components: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating action, Result (or Resolution), Coda and Evaluation (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967).
- 3 Yamamoto (2009) shows that the Japanese university students used *but*, *oh* and *well* in adjacency pairs in a more native-like way after their 6-week stay in Australia / New Zealand and that proper use of the DMs enabled them to interact with native speakers more smoothly.

- 4 *But*, *oh* and *well* also help both a speaker and hearer(s) to manage the turn-taking system (Heritage, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987).
- 5 The participants of the study abroad program may be unique as a research sample with respect to factors identified in the previous research on individual differences in second language learning (e.g. Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). For example, they might have stronger motivation for English learning and positive attitudes toward the language and toward risk-taking of living abroad and interacting with native speakers.
- 6 The learners were required to achieve at least 500 on the TOEIC® test. The mean score of the learners analyzed in this study was 623.15 (SD 91.19).
- 7 Due to the constraints of students' coursework and examinations, it was impossible to schedule the recording sessions without 6-week intervals before and after the program.
- 8 Native speakers matched to the learners were all males in their 30's to 40's, professionals in secondary education for English speaking children.
- 9 AntConc 3.1.3 and the Search function of Microsoft Excel® were used.
- 10 Quoted utterances may be preceded by not only *say* but also *go* or *be like*.
- 11 The use of these DMs in quotations may be the narrators' fictitious demonstration, who might aim to entertain the other participants. The original speech events might not have included *oh* or *well* (or the original utterances themselves might not have existed), because a quoted utterance may not be a verbatim record of its original utterance (Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Tannen, 1989).
- 12 (6) includes two instances of *but*. They do not occur at the narrative initial position but conjoin two adjacent clauses in the middle of the narrative, and thus they have been excluded from the analysis.
- 13 Noosa is a famous resort in Australia.
- 14 In (7), *but* does not conjoin the two adjacent utterances. The utterance before *but* is a fragment ("so" by Brian).
- 15 The following is an example of a learner's narrative initiation using unlexicalized fillers, "uhhm" and "uhh".
→ Mari: uhhm strange thing (1.5) uhh mm my homestays family has dog? 2 dogs?
David: mm hm
Mari: one is mm like this. ((followed by Mari's story on the "strange" pets))

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