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**INTERPRETATION OF CONTEXTUALIZATION CUES
IN JAPANESE CONVERSATION:
BACK-CHANNEL CUES AND TURN-TAKING CUES**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics and Second Language Teaching
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates receptive strategies used by learners of Japanese, focusing on their on-line knowledge of three back-channel (BC) cues (*uun*, *asoo na n desu ka* and *ee*), and two turn-taking cues (one relating to initiating speech, and the other relating to yielding a turn to speak), as they occur in spontaneous conversation between native speakers of Japanese. A contextualization cue (CC) is any feature of language and behaviour including verbal and non-verbal signs which a speaker uses to signal his/her communicative intent, as demonstrated in the work of Gumperz (1982a, 1982b, 1992, 1996). In this study, learners' perception and interpretation of CCs are compared with those of native speakers of Japanese. In addition, the study aims to explore different levels of the receptive competence of learners by making use of a range of tasks with varying degrees of complexity.

The data for this study was collected from 11 Japanese native speakers and 14 learners of Japanese, using five video clips as stimulus material and five types of tasks. A semantic differential (SD) stimulated recall task was designed to examine their perception and interpretation of CCs. SD items in the task for each clip were carefully designed on the basis of native and non-native informants' comments on each cue. A stimulated recall (SR) task was developed to elicit comments on the cue under study by pointing to a very short excerpt. A multiple-choice task was designed to elicit interpretations of the meaning of each cue based on the explicit highlighting of the cue along with a written description of the dialogue and background

A rating task was developed to examine subjects' judgements on the importance of verbal and non-verbal cues. A ranking task was developed to examine their judgements about the main functions of conversation.

The analysis reveals differences between the two groups in the perception and interpretation of CCs. Japanese subjects tend to judge BC cues as indicators of 'listening' or 'understanding', whereas learners of Japanese have a strong tendency to judge them as indicators of 'interest' or 'agreement'. In addition, those native speakers' interpretations lead to the interpretation of 'making the speaker feel comfortable', while those of the learners do not. Moreover, the difference in the perception of CCs, participants' appearances and setting (e.g., where the conversation takes place) causes different interpretations of the formality in conversation and the social distance of participants.

Theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications of the study are presented. The study indicates four concrete areas which need to be focused on in Japanese language teaching: 1) verbal cues; 2) prosodic features; 3) non-verbal features; and 4) cultural values. Suggestions for future research are discussed as part of the conclusion of the study.

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