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The Role of Particles in Japanese Gossip*
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I. Introduction

In Japanese conversational interaction, participants use various sentence particles (Uyeno 1971:50, Clancy 1985:427, Oishi 1985:7) which index the speaker's affective and epistemological stance toward the statement he or she is making. These particles generally occur in utterance-final position, and convey additional information about the speaker's attitude toward what he or she is saying (Martin 1975:914, Oishi 1985:7). Although there have been some descriptions of the meanings of these particles (e.g. Uyeno 1971, Martin 1975, Tsuchihashi 1983), there is very little information on how they are actually used by speakers in interaction (for exceptions, see Oishi 1985, Seki 1987, Cook 1988). The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a conversational analysis showing how these particles are used by two interlocutors to influence each other's stance about a particular topic as well as to maintain solidarity in the course of the interaction. I will focus on one type of conversational activity, gossip, in Japanese.

II. The particles

The particles to be discussed are *yo*, *sa*, *ne* and *na*. Based on previous descriptions of these particles using intuitive and natural data, I came up with a distillation of the meaning of each of these four particles: *Yo* gives the flavor of 'authority' to the speaker about the statement he is making; *sa* is an 'insisting' particle, with which the speaker tries to convince the listener of the claim he is making; *ne* seeks the listener's 'agreement'; and *na* has the effect of 'contrasting' one's statement without imposing it on the listener.

These four particles are very commonly used in Japanese gossip discourse, defined here as a series of assessments about an absent third party. A number of interesting questions arise: When interlocutors' stances toward the absent third party are different, do they try to influence each other's stance? Do they also try to negotiate the tension between them? And if they do, what role do the particles play in negotiating stance differences in gossip?

The data are a twenty-minute, audio-taped conversation between Hiroshi, a Japanese male graduate student, and Sachiko, a Japanese female graduate student, both studying in the U.S. Hiroshi and Sachiko are good friends. The conversation takes place in the living room of Sachiko's apartment in Los Angeles. They are talking about another Japanese male student, Takao, who is also studying in the States and Takao's attitude towards his female married classmate, Mariko, who has approached him by bringing him food every day. Mariko's husband has read her diary and found out that she likes Takao. So the husband has accused Takao of encouraging the relationship and has put pressure on Takao through the school administration to quit graduate school. In the data, Sachiko starts telling Hiroshi the story of what happened to Takao. Hiroshi and Sachiko have different stances

toward Takao: Hiroshi criticizes Takao for not firmly rejecting Mariko, the female classmate. Sachiko does not criticize Takao at all at the beginning, but comes closer to Hiroshi's stance as the conversation proceeds.

The analysis shows that the particles strongly interact with the functions of the statements in the discourse.

(1) **Yo**, the particle of 'authority'

Sachiko uses **yo** mostly when she tells Hiroshi the story she heard from Takao, as we see in Example 1:

#1

Sachiko: Demo kurasumeeto de mainichi kao awaserunda tte **yo**.

'But (they are) classmates and see each other every day, (he told me) **yo**.'

By adding the authority particle at the end of the information she directly heard from the central figure of the gossip, Takao, Sachiko actually presents herself as an authority on this information, and uses the information to support her stance that Takao is not to blame. On the other hand, Hiroshi is a recipient of the information, and he uses **yo** when he makes critical assessments of Takao's behavior. Hiroshi thereby presents himself as an authority on the morality of what Takao is doing, as in Example 2:

#2

Hiroshi: Sore wa sekinin-nogare dekinai to omou **yo**.

'(I) think (he) cannot avoid taking responsibility **yo**.'

It has been pointed out that **yo** presupposes that the speaker assumes the hearer does not know the information (Clancy 1985:430, Cook 1988:130). Oishi (1985:177) and Cook (1988:151), through the analysis of natural conversation, found that **yo** is used by a specialist to exert power over an ordinary person who does not have the knowledge in question. The use of **yo** in the present gossip data confirms their findings: Sachiko tries to exert power by using information she heard from Takao that Hiroshi does not know. Cook (1988:140), who observed mother-child conversation, found that **yo** can be used when the speaker points out a wrong assumption held by the addressee. Hiroshi's use of **yo** shows that he tries to be authoritative by attaching **yo** to his stance and further, pointing out that Sachiko is wrong.

(2) **Sa**, the 'insisting' particle

Sa is very frequently used by Hiroshi. **Sa**, as well as **ne**, is used not only at the end of the utterance, but also right after an NP or conjunction in the data:

#3

Hiroshi: Soo iu rifujin na te o tsukau tte iu no wa **sa**,

'That (the husband) did such an unreasonable thing **sa**,

(attention sa)

datte sonoo gakkoo o tooshite **saa**,

'going through the school (administration) **saa**,'
 (attention sa)
 koo atsuruyoku o kakeru tte iu no wa **sa**,
 'putting pressure (on Takao) **sa**,'
 (attention sa)
 sonna no moo juubun me ni mieteru ja nai.
 'it is self-evident that such a thing could happen.'
 Nihon tte soo iu shakai nandashi **saa**.
 'Japan is that kind of society (as you know) **saa**.'
 (insisting sa)

Sa, rather than seeking agreement from the listener, has a different type of effect when used utterance-internally. The first three uses of **sa** in Example 3 are inserted in the middle of the statement. Hiroshi has not finished making his point yet. **Sa**, the 'insisting' particle, when used repeatedly in this way, signals 'keep paying attention to the following.' The fourth **sa** is attached to statement of a generalization. Hiroshi warrants his stance by making a clear generalization, and furthermore, pushes this generalization by adding **sa**, and generates the flavor of the 'obviousness' of his statements.

(3) **Ne**, the 'agreement' particle

Ne is the most frequent particle used by Sachiko, and the second most frequent particle used by Hiroshi. **Ne** is used not only utterance-finally, but can occur utterance-internally, for example, right after an NP, adverbial or conjunction. **Ne** functions on two levels. First on the level of content, **ne** occurs when the speaker shows agreement with, or acceptance of, what the other speaker says. **Ne** is also used when the speaker seeks the listener's agreement with what he is saying. Second, on an interactive level, the speaker uses **ne** to seek the listener's agreement on his holding the floor (Cook 1988:170, Clancy p.c.). **Ne** inserted in utterance-internal positions typically serves this function. Example 4 shows the use of **ne** on both content and interactive levels:

#4

Sachiko: Dakara kondo wa ojisan o tsujite puresshaa o kakete kite,
 'So this time (the husband) put pressure on (Takao) through (the wife's)
 uncle,'
 nanka adomission no hoo kara **ne**,
 'well the admission office **ne**,'
 (interactive ne)
 Takao-san wa kore ijoo tsuzukerarenai yoo ni tte iu puresshaa o **ne**,
 'put pressure on Takao so that he cannot continue (his studies) anymore
ne,'
 (interactive ne)
 kakete kitanda tte.
 '(he said.)'

Hiroshi: Soryaa shooganai daroo **ne**.

'(I) guess it cannot be helped **ne**.' (content ne)

The first and second **ne** used by Sachiko utterance-internally are seeking agreement with Sachiko's holding the floor as well as seeking the listener's agreement with Sachiko's stance that Takao is a victim. Hiroshi reveals his stance by also using **ne**, seeking agreement from Sachiko.

(4) **Na**, the 'contrasting' particle

Na seems to serve an interesting function in gossip discourse in which the participants' stances are constantly projected. **Na**, the 'contrasting' particle, is less imposing than **sa** or **yo**. However, similar to the primary stress on I in English, **na** in gossip highlights the contrast between the speaker's stance and the listener's. Example 5 contains both the attention sa (as in Example #3) and the 'contrasting' **na**:

#5

Hiroshi: Ma sorya datte **saa**.

'Well, however **saa**.'

Sonoo.

'(How shall I say it.)'

Jibun no- jibun ni ii zairyoo shika hanasanai deshoo.

'(He) only says things advantageous to him- himself (don't you think).'

Ano hito tte **saa**.

'That guy (=Takao) **saa**.'

Kyakkanteki ni mitara,

'From the third party's point of view,'

yappari soryaa are da to omou **naa**, aa.

'(I) think it is evident **naa**.'

Sachiko: Suki ga atta tte?

'(You mean Takao) allowed (Mariko) to approach (him)?'

Hiroshi: Ano hito ni wa sootoo sekinin ga atta to omou **naa**.

'(I) think that guy was pretty much to blame **naa**.'

While insisting on his interpretation of the protagonist's behavior with **sa**, Hiroshi finally gives an assessment adding **na**, which strongly emphasizes the speaker's stance with the flavor of 'I think'.

In sum, each particle serves to signal the function that the utterance preceding the particle has at the particular sequential point in the gossip discourse.

(5) The clusters of particles

In the following sections, I will point out how Hiroshi and Sachiko use each particle to influence each other's stance toward the protagonist, Takao. There are several 'clusters' of the same particles used by one or both speakers across several utterances in various places in the discourse. At the beginning, the 'authority' particle **yo** and the 'insisting' particle **sa** are actively used by both Hiroshi and Sachiko in contrasting their stance differences toward Takao, Hiroshi being critical,

Sachiko being rather sympathetic, as we see in Example 6. This exchange occurs right after Sachiko has finished telling a story she heard from Takao:

#6

- 1 Hiroshi: Demoo hi wa yappari okusan to socchi no hoo ni aru daroo **naa**.
'However, (I) still think that the wife and that side (=Takao) are to blame.'
- 2 Sachiko: Deshoo?
'(You think so, too,) right?'
- 3 :A Takao-san?
'Oh, (you mean) Takao?'
- 4 Hiroshi: Takao-san ni aru daroo.
'Takao is to blame.'
- 5 Sachiko: ((Laugh))
- 6 Hiroshi: Arunja nai no?
'Isn't (he)?'
- 7 Sachiko: ((Laugh))
- 8 Demo **sa**,
'But **sa**,
- 9 okusan ga mainichi onigiri o motte ku kurunda tte.
'the wife brings riceballs every day, (he told me).'
- 10 Takao-san wa "iyada" tte ittanda tte **yo**.
'Takao said "No thanks", (he told me) **yo**.'
- 11 "Dakedo soredemo motte kurunda."
"But (she) still brings them (to me)."
(Takao said)
- 12 Demo yappari Takao-san warui no kashira.
'But is Takao still to blame, (I) wonder.'
- 13 Hiroshi: Sore wa waruinja nai yappari.
'(He) is still to blame, (don't you think).'
- 14 Aite wa hitozuma dakara **sa**.
'The other person is someone else's wife **sa**.'
- 15 Sachiko: Jaa [doosuru]
'Then how could (he)'
- 16 Hiroshi: [Sorenari] no atsukaikata attanja nai?
'There should have been a way to handle (her), (don't you think)?'
- 17 Kanpeki ni kyozeitsu suru toka **sa**.
'To refuse (her) completely, for example **sa**.'
- 18 Sachiko: Demo kurasumeeto de mainichi kao awaserunda tte **yo**.
'But (they) are classmates and meet every day, (he told me) **yo**.'
- ([] indicates overlap)

Hiroshi clarifies his stance with **na** in line 1. Sachiko and Hiroshi's stance differences become clear when Sachiko gives him a 'dispreferred' response of laughter instead of a quick response of agreement in line 5. In lines 8, 9 and 10, Sachiko tries to convince Hiroshi by using the information she heard from Takao. She attracts Hiroshi's attention with utterance-internal **sa**, and with the authority particle **yo**. In

line 13, however, Hiroshi does not change his stance. He further warrants his claim that Takao is to blame by using **sa** in line 14. Hiroshi uses **sa** in suggesting an alternative action Takao could have taken in line 17. In line 18, Sachiko again uses information from Takao in conveying her stance that Takao is a passive victim.

Although they both agree that the wife, Mariko, is responsible for what happened, they have different stances toward her husband's action of putting pressure on Takao through the administration to quit school. Hiroshi thinks it is quite a natural and understandable action for a Japanese husband, whereas Sachiko thinks it is extreme to involve the school administration in a private matter. Sachiko tries to pull Hiroshi's stance closer to hers. What we see in Example 7 is her switch from 'agreement seeking' **ne** to 'insisting' **sa** clusters:

#7

1 Sachiko:Soo **nee**.

'Well **nee**.'

2 Nan te iu ka,

'What shall (I) say,'

3 gakkoo kara yamesasero tte itte kuru no wa chotto ikisu- ikisugi tte iu ka
ne,

'(I think) it is too radical that (the husband) told (Takao) to quit school
via the administration **ne**,'

4 uuuun to,

'uhm,'

5 gakkoo o tooshite Takao-san no gakugyoo o tsuzukerarenai yoo ni suru
tte iu yori mochotto mae ni anoo-

'before preventing Takao from continuing school through the
administration, uh-'

6 Hiroshi:Doko de?

'At which point?'

7 Doko de shori suru?

'At which point should (the husband) take care of (the matter)?'

8 Sachiko:Nnnnn.

'Hm.'

9 Iya dakara **sa**.

'Well **sa**.'

10 Feisu tuu feisu de **sa**.

'(he should have dealt with Takao) face-to-face **sa**.'

11 Hanashiatte.

'By talking.'

12 Hanashiatte tte iu ka,

'By talking or rather,'

13 donarikomu no wa jiyuu da to iu ka,

'(I think) (the husband) has a right to come up to (Takao) furiously,'

14 seetoo da to omou, watashi wa.

'that is justifiable, I think.'

15 Watashi dattara to omou kedo **sa**.

'I would, I think **sa**.'

In lines 1 and 3, Sachiko uses **ne** to seek agreement, and in line 9, she switches to **sa** to push her point that what the husband did is too radical.

Finally, a few turns after Example 7, Hiroshi wraps up the discussion by asking Sachiko whether she thinks the husband has the right to blame Takao. She says he does. Then Hiroshi confirms Sachiko's stance toward Takao. What we see in Example 8 is the 'agreement' particle **ne** clustering in the wrap-up portion of the gossip discourse:

#8

1 Hiroshi: De soo iu kanari wa aru to omou.

'So (you) think so (=Takao is very much to blame).'

2 Sachiko: Un.

'Yeah.'

3 Hi wa aru to omou.

'(I) think (Takao) is to blame.'

4 Soo iu jookyoo o tsukuchattanda kara.

'Because (he) has created such a situation.'

5 Hiroshi: Un.

'Yeah.'

6 Soo desu **nee**.

'That's right **nee**.'

7 Kanari hi wa aru **nee**.

'(Takao) is pretty much responsible for (what happened), isn't (he) **nee**.'

8 Sachiko: Un.

'Yeah.'

9 Hiroshi: Dakara .. gakkoo o tooshite **ne**,

'So .. through the school **ne**,

10 maa **ne**,

'well **ne**,

11 soo iu ... are suru no wa ikisugi kamo shinnai kedo **nee**.

'to do that (the husband putting pressure on Takao) may be too radical **nee**.'

12 Sachiko: Aaa.

'Yeah.'

13 Hiroshi: Danna ni shitara **nee**.

'But for the husband **nee**.'

14 Datte mensu marutsubure dashi **nee**.

'(He) completely lost face (don't you think) **nee**.'

15 Sachiko: Aa, soo **nee**.

'Yeah, that's right **nee**.'

In lines 3 and 4, Sachiko finally accepts Hiroshi's view that Takao is responsible for what happened. Now Hiroshi takes the initiative in this wrap-up portion. He starts using the 'agreement' particle **ne** frequently towards Sachiko, a defeated defender of Takao. In lines 6 and 7, Hiroshi confirms what Sachiko has said by showing agreement using **ne**. From lines 9 to 11, Hiroshi even shows a compromise in his view toward the husband's action. He takes into account Sachiko's stance that the

husband's action was too radical. Then in lines 13 and 14, Hiroshi makes comments from the husband's perspective and uses **ne** to seek Sachiko's agreement on his comments. Sachiko agrees with him, using **ne**.

This **ne** cluster shows that Sachiko accepts Hiroshi's stance towards Takao, and Hiroshi accepts Sachiko's stance toward the husband's action. In other words, the cluster of the 'agreement' particle **ne** in the wrap-up portion indicates that the participants' stance differences are finally resolved.

In summary, three sections of particle clusters have been discussed. One is a **yo** and **sa** cluster found where the participants' stance conflict becomes clear, one is a switch from **ne** to **sa** when Sachiko tries to convince Hiroshi of her stance, and finally, we see a **ne** cluster towards the end, where the stance differences are resolved.

(6) The overall flow of the gossip and particle clusters

The chart in the Appendix shows the overall flow of this discourse and the particle clusters found in the data. Immediately after Sachiko finishes telling the story of Takao (A), Hiroshi and Sachiko start exchanging assessments of Takao, Mariko, and her husband, going back and forth. First, they try to influence each other's stances by using **sa** and **yo**, as we have seen in example #6 (B). Then, both of them use **ne** frequently when they talk about the husband's action (C). This cluster shows that Sachiko pushes her stance, seeking agreement from Hiroshi, while Hiroshi uses **ne** to show acceptance, indicating 'I see what you are saying.' Hiroshi and Sachiko not only express their assessments straightforwardly, but also talk about hypothetical situations, putting themselves in these protagonists' shoes (F). Hiroshi uses **sa** and **yo** frequently and criticizes Takao. Then, in order to defend the husband's action, he uses **sa** 12 times (G) both utterance-internally to keep Sachiko's attention, and utterance-finally to push his argument forward. Then Sachiko expresses her critical stance toward the husband using **ne** and then **sa**, as in Example #7 (I). After all these pushing and pulling uses of the particles, their stance conflict is resolved in the final cluster of **ne**, as shown in Example #8 (J).

III. Concluding remarks

These particles, interacting with other linguistic and non-linguistic cues, convey the speakers' attitudes towards their utterances. Further, as the clusters show, the particles serve the function of negotiating stance differences between Hiroshi and Sachiko. As Oishi (1985) and Cook (1988) noticed in their natural interactional data, particles play an important role in constituting discourse in which both participants try hard not only to communicate their own stance, but also challenge their interlocutor's stance.

More broadly, particles in this gossip lead Hiroshi and Sachiko to agreement about the ethics of this situation involving a married couple. Hiroshi and Sachiko, who are members of a small Japanese student community in the States, use the particles strategically to negotiate their views on what is acceptable behavior and what is not for a member of the community.

Brenneis (1984:490) mentions that 'a crucial way of demonstrating one's membership is through sharing what is "common knowledge" in the community -- what "everyone" knows.' When Hiroshi makes a substantial generalization ('Japan

is that kind of society *sa*'), he claims his membership in the community by making his opinion sound like what 'everyone in the community knows.' And by tacitly claiming his membership, he imposes his way of thinking on Sachiko with the particle *sa* and tells her 'That's how you are supposed to think.' In other words, Hiroshi exerts power over Sachiko by evoking his membership in the community.

On another level, the particles serve to maintain the social relationship between Hiroshi and Sachiko. This gossip discourse can be viewed as an example of 'sociable argument' (Schiffrin 1984). Hiroshi and Sachiko are good friends to begin with, and in the gossip, they 'play with' the tension caused by their different views toward Takao and the husband. By insisting on their own stance or contrasting their stances with one another, they put distance between each other. And by seeking or showing agreement, they come close to each other again. In other words, the particles occurring throughout the gossip discourse play an important role in negotiating the participants' social distance as well as their stance differences.

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Appendix
The stream of gossip and clustering of particles

	Hiroshi	Sachiko
A Sachiko tells Hiroshi the story of Takao		
B Assessment of Takao (Example #6)	sa (11) yo (4)	yo (3)
C Assessment of the husband	ne (6)	ne (5)
D Assessment of Takao		
E Assessment of Mariko		
F Assessment of Takao (What Hiroshi would do)	sa (5) yo (3)	yo (3)
G Assessment of the husband	sa (12)	
H Takao would do the same as the husband in Japan		
I Assessment of the husband (Example #7)		ne (3) sa (3)
J Assessment of Takao (Example #8)	ne (7)	ne (1)