**Achieving consensus through professionalized head nods: The role of nodding in service encounters in Japan**

Abstract:
While the interactional functions of head nodding in everyday Japanese conversation have been frequently studied, a discourse on head nodding as a professional communicative practice has yet to be explored. With the method of multimodal conversation analysis, the current study examines the role of nodding in a particular professional-client setting, namely hair salon interactions. My interest specifically lies in the frequent occurrence of synchronized head nods during the "service-assessment sequence", where both service-provider and customer inspect and determine whether the completed work is adequate. I pursue mechanisms of synchronized head nods by revealing exactly how participants collaborate in producing a nod, and how their verbal actions may at times be designed accordingly. In doing so, the study provides insight into what consensus may look like at service encounters in Japan, and discuss how such nodding practices may contribute to a satisfactory closure of a business negotiation.

**Introduction**

The significant aspects of head nodding have been highlighted in a wide range of studies, such as its psychological and persuasive effects (Briñol & Petty, 2003; Tom, Pettersen, Lau, Burton, & Cook, 1991; Tom, Ramil, Zapanta, Demir, & Lopez, 2006), its relation to the interactive effect of gender and status (Dixon & Foster, 1998; Helweg-Larsen, Cunningham, Carrico, & Pergram, 2004), its potential for making a competent non-human conversational agent (Cassell & Thorisson, 1999; Cowie et al., 2010), and its function in relation to speech (Allwood, Cerrato, Jokinen, Navarretta, & Paggio, 2007; Dittmann & Llewellyn, 1968; Hadar, Steiner, Grant, & Rose, 1983a, 1983b; Hadar, Steiner, & Rose, 1984; Kendon, 2004). Yet one field with a growing body of research is the study of head nodding in Japanese conversations. The frequent use of head nods among Japanese conversants has been noted, especially compared to that of American English speakers (e.g. Maynard, 1987). Accordingly, various functions of nodding in Japanese conversation have been identified, including soliciting backchannels (Maynard, 1987), establishing social bonds (Kita & Ide, 2007), and obtaining differentiated actions from recipients (Aoki, 2011). While these works show head nods as a reliable communicative practice among Japanese conversants, a discourse on head nodding as a professional communicative practice has yet to be explored.

In my study of client-professional interactions, I look at beauty salon interactions by focusing on the "service-assessment sequence". In this sequence, both hairstylist and customer inspect and determine whether or not the completed work is adequate. This is a crucial moment in the service encounter, as its successful completion can bring satisfactory closure to the event, and may even help retain clients. As I observed the data collected in Japan and the U.S., the frequent use of head nods among the participants in Japan became particularly noticeable. For example, within a sequence spanning six seconds, the customer and the service-provider nodded six times each, sometimes overlapping one another. With microanalysis of several sequences similar to the one mentioned above, this study uncovers the participants' careful monitoring and coordination of each other's head movements. In doing so, the study provides insight into what consensus may look like at service encounters in Japan, and suggests nodding as valuable communicative practice for achieving consensus and creating a satisfactory end to business encounters in Japan.

**Interactional Functions of Head Nods**

Several studies have found head nodding to be an orderly and efficient interactional resource in Japanese conversation. One feature of Japanese conversants is showing their strong orientation to supporting the current speaker's floor and performing backchannels (Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki, & Tao, 1996; Hayashi, 1990; Maynard, 1990; Yamada, 1992), and studies have shown the close relationship of backchanneling actions and nodding practices (Hosoma & Tomita, 2011; Kogure, 2007). Not only does nodding serve to produce backchannels, but it may be used by the speaker to solicit backchannel utterances from listeners (Kita & Ide, 2007; Szatrowski, 2000). In addition, Maynard (1989) identified various other functions of head movements that enabled smooth turn-taking negotiation and conversation management among Japanese interactants. While these studies made convincing arguments on nodding practice as a systematic and reliable communicative practice among Japanese conversants, its interactional

feature is not unique to the context of Japanese conversation. Stivers (2008) studied the sequential functions of head nods in the activity of story-telling among American English speakers, and argued that recipients' head nods contributed not only to the work of alignment but also to that of affiliation[1] in the mid-telling position. Similarly, Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) showed that an assessment recipient displays one's strong agreeing position with the speaker by accompanying the verbal turn with nods. McClave (2000) also analyzed head movements of conversations between native speakers of American English, and argued that they are "both an integral part of language expression and function to regulate interaction" (p. 856). Her analysis also revealed that speaker head nods often functioned to solicit backchannels from the listeners, and the predictable patterns of head movements allowed listeners to attend to and respond to the speaker's head movements.

The research presented above documents head nods as an interactional resource in the contexts of both Japanese and non-Japanese conversations: Speaker and listener head nods are both monitored and treated as a communication modality[2]. However, one phenomenon that has been witnessed particularly in the context of Japanese interaction is a recurring synchrony of head nodding behavior. For example, Maynard observed more frequent synchronization among Japanese speakers than among speakers in the U.S., and claimed its function as "a sign of constant and consistent rapport building on the part of both participants" (1989, p. 212). She argued that this phenomenon of a joint, "rhythmic ensemble" helped Japanese interactants "feel comfortable with each other and helps them make their way through the complex social and verbal entanglement of face-to-face encounters" (1987, p. 601). Similarly, Kita and Ide (2007) concluded that simultaneous nodding established rapport and "a socially positive feeling among the participants" (p. 1250). These studies highlighted synchronized head nods as a unique feature of Japanese conversations, but without a thorough examination of exactly how they were achieved. In a recent study of Japanese speaker head nods, Aoki (2011) showed how the Japanese conversants prepared for a synchronized head nod by carefully monitoring each other's head movement. Yet, this was not the main focus of her study[3], and much room remains for exploring synchronized head nods as a communicative phenomenon. Furthermore, as seen in the studies surveyed in this section, nodding has been examined as a tactical "everyday" practice, but its potential as a professional practice and its possible function of facilitating business encounters has yet to be discussed. I aim to pursue mechanisms of synchronized head nods by revealing exactly how the participants collaborate in producing one, and how their verbal actions may be at times designed accordingly. In addition, by analyzing the interaction of a service-provider and a client, I discuss how such nodding practices may contribute to the satisfactory closure of a business negotiation.

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[1] Stivers (2008) distinguished alignment and affiliation as: "*alignment* is with respect to the activity in progress", such as when a recipient produces continuers agreeing that the teller is still holding the floor (p. 34). On the contrary, with *affiliation* "the hearer displays support of and endorses the teller's conveyed stance, … taking a stance that matches the teller's stance toward event(s) being described" (pp. 35-36).

[2] While Maynard (1990) observed more frequency of nodding in Japanese conversations than American conversations, findings of previous studies seem to imply more similarity than difference, in terms of communicative functions of nodding, between American and Japanese conversants.

[3] By looking at speaker head nods in three different positions (in turn-final positions, in the vicinity of turn-initial prosodic unit boundaries, and in the midst of prosodic units), Aoki (2011) argued that speakers use head nods to "monitor recipients' current understanding of the emerging course of activity" (p. 93).

**Data and Method**

The data was collected as a part of my larger project that investigated the practices for agreeing in client-professional interactions. The examples presented in the current study feature 5 stylists (2 male and 3 female stylists) and 6 customers (5 female and 1 male customers), and are drawn from 30 video-recorded sessions at 9 different beauty salons, collected in Japan in 2007. I approached participants through both formal (by posting a public call for participants) and informal networks (through friends and acquaintances) and obtained their consent orally.[4] Each session was videotaped in its entirety with some sessions finishing within 30 minutes, and others taking as long as three hours (e.g., for coloring and/or perms). In general, a session began with an exchange of greetings between the stylist and the customer, followed by a consulting session, hair wash, cutting/coloring/perming, drying and styling. Among the collected data, the session always ended with what I identified as the service-assessment sequence, where hairstylists and customers inspected and determined whether or not the completed work in a given session (i.e. a new haircut) was adequate. The sequences were sometimes found in the middle of a haircutting session, such as when a stylist moved from cutting one area of the head to another, or between the cutting and drying/styling sessions. In every case, the entire session was closed upon the completion of a service-assessment sequence, even when the participants had already gone through a few of them in through course of cutting and/or styling.

Each salon offers its own distinctive flair, but they share some general characteristics as well. One common element found in hair salons visited by the researcher was the participants' use of two mirrors: a large, fixed mirror towards the front of the participants and a hand-held mirror, usually set aside for evaluation or viewing of hard-to-see areas. When comparing with salons in the U.S., one distinct physical feature of the service-assessment sequences documented in Japan was that the customers did not hold a hand-held mirror on their own. In the data collected in the U.S., customers themselves held the hand-held mirror to look at the back of their haircuts (Image 1)[5]. In Japan, on the other hand, the stylists routinely position a hand-held mirror behind their customers who face forward, towards a large mirror (Image 2). Thus in Japan, once a stylist positioned the mirror, and a customer adjusted the position of his/her head if necessary, they began examining the new haircut. Stylists usually followed a certain order to move the mirror; they first showed one side of the back of the cut, and then moved the hand-held mirror to reflect the other side.

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[4] While I collected written consent forms from the participants in the U.S., I collected mostly oral consent in Japan, where people were not used to – and hesitant to – provide their signatures on paper.
[5] The faces of participant in the images have been anonymized through blurring.

Image 1



Image 2

I adopt the method of conversation analysis in analyzing this multimodal interaction (e.g. Heath, 1997; Jarmon, 1996; Mondada, 2007; Stivers & Sidnell, 2005; Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011). While my focus is on the participants' use of head movements, this visual event should not be examined in isolation. Instead, I focus on "the systematic practices used by participants in interaction to achieve courses of collaborative action with each other" (Charles Goodwin, 2000, p. 160). In light of this, I rely on a fundamental tool of conversation analysis, the "next-turn-proof-procedure":

> throughout the course of a conversation or other bout of talk-in-interaction, speakers display in their sequentially 'next' turns an understanding of what the 'prior' turn was about. That understanding may turn out to be what the prior speaker intended, or it may not; whichever is the case, that itself is

something which gets displayed in the next turn in the sequence. We describe this as a *next-turn-proof-procedure*, and it is the most basic tool used in CA to ensure that analyses explicate the orderly properties of talk as oriented to accomplishments of participants, rather than being based merely on the assumptions of the analyst [emphasis in original] (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 13).

This point also draws attention to another crucial element of microanalytic investigation, transcribing, which "provides the researcher with a way of noticing, even discovering, particular events, and helps focus analytic attention on their socio-interactional organization" (Heath & Luff, 1993, p. 309). I use the system developed by Gail Jefferson (1989) as well as transcription conventions provided by Have (1999) and Goodwin (2000). For the participants' head movements, I adopt the conventions developed by Aoki (2011), and further added different sizes of arrows to indicate the different degrees of nods (e.g. a smaller arrow indicates a lighter/shallow nod, whereas a deeper arrow indicates a deep, more distinctive nod)[6].

**Preliminary Observations**

We begin with some preliminary observations of a service-assessment sequence taken from the data of a customer (Jun) and her stylist (Ken). Ken has just finished cutting and drying Jun's new haircut, and he now seeks the customer's approval through the service-assessment sequence. As the stylist begins physical inspection by holding up a hand-held mirror, he describes how the cut looks different from the prior one and presents the new haircut to the customer. As seen below, the two participants constantly make head movements throughout the sequence.

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[1] Jun and Ken (00:06-00:17)

1     Ken:  ((picking up a hand-held mirror)) mae    mitai ni chotto=
                                              before like  P  a little

                                       ↗                ↘
2     Ken:  =kacchiri shita kanji jyanai n desu kedo mo::=
             formal     PAS impression NEG  P CP    but   P
           it doesn't look as formal as it did before, but
                └─────────────────────┴──────────┘        |
            ((Ken pads the back of Jun's hair,   ((Ken places the mirror
             looking at her in the large mirror))  behind Jun))

            ↘ ↘↘
3     Jun:  =a,[hai.
             oh, yes.

                              ↘
4     Ken:      [konna   kanji    na n desu yo:
                 like-this impression P  P CP  FP
                 it looks like this, you know
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[6] A complete list of transcript conventions used in the current paper is provided in the appendix.

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                                      |
                              ((Ken pads Jun's hair))

                   ↘↘        ↘↘↘
5      Jun:   ˚hai˚.   (0.6)
              yes.
                |
              ((Ken retracts his hand from Jun's head))

6      (0.8)

7      Jun:   ↘

8      Ken:   ((Moves the mirror from left to right))

9      Jun:   a, ii  desu mijikaku te.
              oh good CP   short     P
              oh, it's short and good.

10     (1.0)

               ↗                    ↘
11     Ken:   daijyoubu desu [ka?
              alright    CP     Q
              is it alright?

                                   ↘ ↗
12     Jun:                        [hai.=
                                    yes.

13     Jun:   [↘

               ↘
14     Ken:   [=hai.   ((bows and closes the mirror))
               yes.
```

We see several head nodding practices in this sequence. Ken nods as he makes his comments (line 2), which is seemingly attended to by Jun, who also repetitively nods (lines 3 and 5) while responding to Ken's comments. We also see Jun's deep head nod in line 7, which is made visibly distinctive from the previous head nods. Upon seeing this, Ken progresses the activity of physical inspection by moving the mirror from one side to the other (line 8). Thus, already midway through the physical inspection, we have seen more than one kind of head nodding practice. In fact, the participants' orientation to the different degrees of head nods seems to play an important role in negotiating the service-assessment sequence; Jun employs a deep head nod at the time when advancing the physical inspection is relevant, and Ken attends to it as performing a different kind of action and subsequently moves ahead with the physical inspection. In other words, the participants use different head nods in negotiating the sequence progression.

While the preliminary observations regarding the differentiated degrees of head nods is worth pursuing, the focus of the current paper is the participants' head nodding behavior at the time of completing the sequence. While Ken and Jun have been frequently nodding, they have not done so at the same time. On the contrary, at the time of sequence closure, we can see that their head nods are overlapped (lines 11-14), but does this just happen to overlap?

Having inspected the new cut from different angles and receiving Jun's positive assessment (line 9), Ken now confirms the quality of the service outcome (line 11). As he does so, he raises his chin upward: to be precise, during the utterance "*Daijyoubu desu*" ("It is okay"). He then lowers his chin as he adds a question particle "*ka*" (line 11). Aoki distinguished this type of head nod by naming it "a stretched nod," which is different from a regular nod:

> In a regular nod, the head is slightly lowered and raised back immediately. The entire head movement takes place instantly over the production of a few morae of the utterance... In a stretched nod, on the contrary, the head is first raised slightly upward, then lowered, and raised back to the original position (Aoki, 2011, p. 95).

Aoki argued that a speaker's head moving upward allows the recipient to foresee the speaker's imminent stretched head nod. Accordingly, the recipient can overlap his/her head nod with the speaker's head moving downward and back again to the original position. What we see in lines 11-14 is a similar phenomenon. Ken's stretched head nod allows Jun to overlap her head nod. Seeing Ken's initial head movement, Jun makes a regular head nod (line 12). By *not* producing the exact same action as Ken did (i.e. stretched head nod) and only lowering her head, both participants move downward precisely at once, producing synchronized head nods.

However, that is not the only pair of synchronized head nods found in this segment. In lines 13-14, they produce another set of parallel head nods, along with Ken's verbal and bodily actions that close the service-assessment sequence (i.e. he acknowledges Jun's response, bows and closes the mirror). We can also see that these head nods are prepared; note Jun's head movement right at the end of line 12, where she slightly moves her chin upward. It is not clear to us what motivated Jun to produce another head nod at this point in time; perhaps Jun was emphasizing the completed status of physical inspection, and/or she was avoiding that Ken waits for another response from Jun. No matter what the motivation may have been, the point to be secured here is that Ken uses Jun's action as another opportunity to produce a synchronized head nod. Accordingly, they synchronize a series of head movement actions at the time of closing the sequence (lines 13-14).

Whether the service outcome is satisfactory or needs a revision, the service-assessment sequence should be brought to closure with a consensus between the participants. In the preliminary observations made in this section, we saw that Jun and Ken came to agree on the quality of the service outcome through linguistic means. But in doing so, we also saw their careful monitoring of each other's head movements and step-by-step preparation for their concurrent head nods. This raises a question of the relationship, if any, between sequence closure and participants' collaborative head nods. Does the service-assessment sequence always end with the participants' synchronized head nods? Could it be that such coordinated head movements show the participants' orientation to consensus, thus deeming the service satisfactorily rendered? In the next section, I will examine more examples of participants' synchronized head nods found at sequence completion. Subsequently, I will provide a few examples where the participants' verbal actions are designed for accommodating synchronized head nods. Finally, I will present two unique cases in which the participants successfully complete the sequence despite the limited use of linguistic devices available for them.

**Synchronized Head Movements at Sequence Completion**

The following segment was recorded in one of the most famous regional hair salons in Japan. The salon is composed of two rooms, one for men and another for women, and operates on both a walk-in and appointment basis. A customer, Ikue, walks in to get her hair trimmed on this day. It is not clear whether she is a regular or first-time customer, but judging by how she and her stylist, Emi, communicate with each other, it appears that they are not acquaintances. They talk only about haircutting matters, speak only when necessary, and use polite language throughout the session. When finished with the cutting, Emi initiates the service-assessment sequence by first asking Ikue whether the length of her bangs is okay. After receiving Ikue's approval, Emi proceeds with the sequence by holding up a portable mirror behind Ikue, and they exchange a few "yes/no" questions and answers regarding the quality of the cut. Once they view the cut from both sides and agree on the quality of the service, Emi moves the sequence toward closure by soliciting the final, overall approval from her customer. For the purpose of the current section, the examples presented here will focus on what Schegloff (2007) calls "sequence-closing sequence"[7], but not the whole service-assessment sequence.

```
[2] Ikue & Emi (00:13-00:17)

              ↗              ↘
1     Emi:  daijyoubu des[hou ka.
            right      CP     Q
            is it okay?


                              ↘
2     Ikue:               [hai.
                           yes.


3     (0.3)

4     Ikue: [↘


              ↘
5     Emi:  [ hahhi suhhimasehn.
              yes    excuse-me
            alright excuse me.
                        |
                    ((Emi bows and puts the mirror away;
                      Ikue looks to the left, smiling, and looks down))
```

As Emi asks the question, she raises her head, signaling her imminent head nod (line 1). Having seen that, Ikue overlaps her response and produces a regular head nod along with it (line 2). Accordingly, their heads simultaneously move downwards. Again, Emi's stretched head nod successfully leads the participants to produce a synchronized head nod. Similar to Example 1, Ikue and Emi coordinate another set of synchronized head nods as Emi closes the sequence (lines

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[7] According to Schegloff (2007), the sequence-closing sequence functions to interactionally close the current sequence, and its basic form is composed of adjacency-pair-based three turns (pp. 187-188).

4-5), and we can see that this set of nodding behavior is visibly prepared. After a slight pause in line 3, Ikue begins to move her head downwards (line 4). Almost at the same time, but slightly after Ikue's initiation in another head nod[8], Emi produces the verbal closure and an overlapped head nod. Similar to Jun in Example 1, it is not possible to attribute a clear explanation of why Ikue produced another head nod after her response in line 2. It can be a re-completion of her response (note the silence in line 3), or she may have in fact somehow predicted Emi's upcoming verbal closure accompanied with a head nod, and thus prepared for another synchronized head nod. In any case, Emi manages to overlap her head nod, which results in a synchronization of a series of actions.

Through Example 1 and Example 2, we have seen the participants' coordinated head movements in producing two sets of synchronized head nods at the time of concluding the sequence. But do the participants always produce the two sets of nods, and are they indeed an interactional outcome of the participants, or could it be attributed to the habitual actions of individuals? We may find the answers to these questions in the next example, where the participants indeed organize their head movements for the sake of synchronization.

The following segment has been taken from the service-assessment sequence of the stylist, Tomo, and his regular customer, Leia. Having gone through a majority of the session, which includes getting a perm, coloring, and trimming, Tomo spins Leia's chair around to face backwards from the mirror, and positions a hand-held mirror in front of her so that she can view the back of her hair through the use of two mirrors. Having completed the physical inspection along with verbal endorsement, she now shifts her posture and gaze, leans on the chair, and looks up at Tomo. Seeing that, Tomo now solicits the final confirmation from his customer.

```
[3] Leia & Tomo (00:10-00:12)

                      ↗↘
1      Tomo: >daijyoubu?<=
               (Is it)okay?
                        |
           ((Tomo smiles and shifts gaze from the large mirror to Leia))


                   ↘
2      Leia: =[daijyobu.
               okay.
                    |
                ((Leia exits from the mutual gaze))

3      Tomo:  [ ↘

4      Tomo: ha::i. ((Tomo puts away the portable mirror))
               ye::s.
```

Similar to the previous examples, Tomo's question in line 1 accompanies a head movement. However, his utterance is quickly produced, and his nodding here is not as quite stretched as seen in the earlier cases. Still, this head nod is also different from a regular nod:
Tomo first slightly raises his chin and brings it back to its original position, indicating the possibility of moving it downward. So, in a way, it is a "half" nod. He also shifts his gaze from

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[8] Note that in the transcript, Ikue's downward arrow (line 4) is placed slightly before Emi's (line 5).

the large mirror to Leia at this point, which, along with his head movement, increases the chance for Leia's prompted visible action to occur along with her response. Evidently, Leia produces a head nod along with her response (line 2). This is overlapped by Tomo's downward head movement (line 3), creating a set of synchronized head nods.

In the previous examples, the customers made another head nod following their synchronized head movements during the customer's response, allowing another set of synchronized head nods to occur during the stylist's verbal move to end the sequence. Leia, however, exits from the mutual gaze during this synchronized head nod (line 2), and does not make another head nod. Upon seeing Leia's gaze shift and no sign of imminent head nod, Tomo also immobilizes his head as he closes the sequence (line 4). Thus, by *not* producing another head nod, Tomo achieves a series of synchronized bodily behavior. Unlike the previous examples, the two sets of nods were not necessary here; rather, this example implies that the practice of head nods is not what the participants are synchronizing *per se*, but a series of the overall visible actions. A synchronization of bodily actions may be so valued that it may overrule the coordination of verbal actions, as seen in the next section.

**Sequence Designed for Synchronized Head Nods**

In what follows, we will observe some examples in which the participants' orientations to the nodding behavior became saliently observable in a way that may have impacted the overall sequence organization. We begin with the first case, in which the stylist closes the sequence after she and her customer have achieved a set of synchronized head nods – despite the fact that she has not received a fitted type of response from the customer. Here, Jun is getting a haircut from another stylist, Tae, who owns a small salon. Jun started to visit Tae for her haircutting several months before this session was recorded. They share some things in common (age group, hobbies), and they chatted throughout the cutting session about various personal matters. Having finished the cutting session, the two are now engaged in the service-assessment sequence. We pick up from the beginning of the sequence, where Tae has lifted a hand-held mirror behind Jun so that Jun can see the back of her new cut.

```
[4] Jun & Tae (00:09-00:15)

1       ((Tae opens up a hand-held mirror behind Jun,
           and Jun looks up in the large mirror in front of her.))


             ↘            ↘
2       Jun:  a, [(.) hai.
             oh      yes

3       Tae:     [konna   kanji    de[su.
                 like-this impression CP
                 it looks like this.
                 └─────────────┬─────┘
             ((Tae slightly moves the mirror from left to right))


                                      ↘
4       Jun:                          [(hai)
                                      (yes)
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                         ↗              ↘
5     Tae:  dai[jyoubu  desu  ka.
            alright        CP    Q
            is it alright?


                         ↗              ↘              ↘
6     Jun:     [a sukkiri  shimashi ta,  [hai.
            oh  refreshed CP        PAS    yes
            oh,(I feel/it feels) refreshed, yes.


                                                       ↘
7     Tae:                                       [ha:i.
                                                  ye::s.
```

As soon as Tae holds up a hand-held mirror behind Jun, Jun shows an understanding of the ongoing event via verbal and embodied means (line 2), which is overlapped with Tae's verbal presentation of the new cut (line 3). In response to this, Jun first acknowledges the new haircut and possibly marks the completed status of her physical inspection through an acknowledgement token and a deep head nod (line 4). She then provides a service-assessment in line 6 by saying that she feels – or that the haircut looks – refreshed[9]. However, before Jun completes a series of responding actions, Tae mobilizes the preference organization (e.g. Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 2007) by inserting a question that solicits a positive reaction to the haircut as a preferred response (line 5). While Jun's assessment "*a sukkiri shimashi ta*" in line 6 could make a response to Tae's question in line 5, it is not linguistically paired with Tae's yes/no question. In fact, Jun herself does not treat it as an appropriate response and provides another one separately upon the completion of Tae's question: a type-conforming answer, "*hai*", at the end of line 6. Nevertheless, Tae treats Jun's assessment (as opposed to the type-conforming answer) as a matched response by acknowledging it right after it is uttered, as seen in line 7. Was Tae in a hurry, anticipating the earliest opportunity to close the sequence, or was Jun's assessment indeed a fitting paired action in this context? I argue that their synchronized head movements might have contributed to how Tae determined when to close the sequence.

Note that Tae inserts the acknowledgement token for closing the sequence right after their synchronized head nodding behavior. Like other stylists, Tae engages in a stretched head nod with her question (line 5). As seen in the previous cases, the stylist's stretched nod would usually instigate the customer's downward head movement, leading to a synchronized nodding behavior. What distinguishes the current case from the previous examples is that, here, Jun also engages in a stretched nod, slightly raising her chin as she produces her assessment (line 6). Their upward head movements are precisely simultaneous, and it is not observable whether one instigated another, or they happened coincidently. In any case, their concurrent upward head movements are visible to each other, allowing them to project each other's imminent downward head movement. They then together move their heads downward, resulting in a synchronized head nod between them (lines 5-6). As a consequence, while Jun's utterance at the beginning of line 6 was not linguistically paired with Tae's question in line 5, her bodily actions were perfectly matched with Tae's. It may be that Tae has treated this synchronized nodding as an appropriate second paired action, moving the sequence forward to its closure before receiving Jun's verbal, fitted response. In other words, it could be the case that the participants' sensitive

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[9] In this context, it is not clear whether she meant former (she feels refreshed) or the latter (the haircut looks neat and refreshed); the sentence also has no overt subject.

orientation toward the synchronized visible action played a significant role in negotiating a sequence completion point.

On the other hand, when the sequence does not end with the participants' synchronized visible behavior, the participants may organize the sequence to create another opportunity for producing a synchronized visible action. In the following service-assessment sequence, Tae and another of her customers, Yuma, display what can be done if the initial attempt to synchronize head nods is missed. We pick up from the beginning of the service-assessment sequence.

```
[5] Yuma & Tae #1 (00:03-00:10)

1       ((Tae holds a hand-held mirror behind Yuma, and Yuma raises her head a
         little))

2       Yuma: [a,
               oh,

3       Tae:  [˚konna    kanji     de.˚=
                like-this impression P
                like this.
               └───────────────┬──────────────┘
              ((Tae moves the mirror from right to left))

              ↘              ↗
4       Yuma: =hai. a, suk[kiri shimashi ta.
               yes  oh refreshed  CP        PAS
               yes, oh, (it looks) neat.

                              ↘
5       Tae:             [daijyoubu desu ka.=
                          alright    CP   Q
                           is it alright?

              ↘
6       Yuma: =hai.=
               yes.

              ↘
7       Tae:  =h[ai.
                yes.

                   ↗                      ↘
8       Yuma:  [konna    kanji    wo, (.) hhh, [kibou ˚shite ita no de.˚
                like-this impression OB           hope   do   PAS  P so
                I was hoping for a look like this, so.

                                               ↘
9       Tae:                               [ha:i. ((Tae closes the mirror))
                                            ye:s.
```

In line 5, Tae slightly nods as she confirms the positive evaluation from Yuma. Here, unlike the stylists in the previous examples, Tae does not produce a stretched nod along with her question, thus not providing Yuma with an opportunity to synchronize her head. Still, we can see that Yuma quickly follows Tae's head movement by also moving her head (see her upward head

movement in line 4). However, Yuma's move here is that of a stretched nod, starting at the end of line 4 and completes in line 6. Tae's head nod already completes in line 5 before Yuma completes hers in line 6, thus resulting in two separate nods instead of a synchronized set. Then, while Tae moves on to close the sequence, nodding (line 7), Yuma post-expands the sequence by further presenting her satisfaction with the new cut. Note that she carefully organizes her turn here: she uses a micropause and a laughter when she completes raising her head in the middle of line 8. This creates room for Tae to prepare for the collaborative work of producing a synchronized head nod, which is what eventually takes place (line 9). Thus, through post-expansion, the participants finally achieve synchronization of nodding and valid proof of a successful sequence completion; Tae closes the portable mirror immediately after the synchronized head nod, even before Yuma finishes her sentence in line 8.

So far, we have seen the participants' careful and collaborative work in producing synchronized head movements at the time of sequence completion. As seen in this section, the participants may even organize their verbal actions for the service of synchronized head nods. The participants must come to agree on the quality of the service before they can conclude the session, and the use of head nods at its completion seems to largely contribute to this negotiation, and thereby a satisfactory completion of the service encounter. Then, at times, the participants may manage to come to the state of consensus with nodding behavior alone. Before concluding this paper, I will look at two cases in which the participants largely rely on head nods as a sign that the service has been satisfactorily rendered.

**Achieving Consensus Through Nodding**

Among the data collected in Japan, I came across two unique cases of interaction. One was the case of a customer, Kana, a shy 5-year-old girl (at the time of the recording) who spoke very little to anyone other than her mother. Another unique case upon which I will elaborate is a service-assessment sequence between a Japanese stylist, who does not speak English, and a foreign customer, Ethan, who speaks very little Japanese. In their interactions, the use of linguistic devices was much more limited than in previously discussed sessions. Nevertheless, they successfully mobilize and close the sequence by incorporating head nods in their actions.

Kana's session with her stylist, Ai, was filmed in a small salon. As mentioned, Kana is extremely shy and does not usually speak to anyone but her family. Thus, while it is Kana's own desire to come to the salon to get her hair permed, her mother (referred to as Mom in the transcript) communicates with Ai alone at the beginning of the session, explaining what Kana wants from her visit. Throughout the session, which takes a few hours, Kana talks only with her mother. At different times, Ai asks the mother to see if Kana is doing okay. While the mother is getting her hair permed alongside her daughter, Ai finishes the styling of Kana's new haircut, and announces the completion, which leads into a discussion between Ai and the mother about how best to style Kana's new cut. Ai then picks up a hand-held mirror and opens it up behind Kana (as seen in Image 3). It is a long segment, so we will examine how the sequence progresses step by step.

Image 3 (From left to right) Kana's mother, Kana, and Ai)


```
[6-A] Kana & Ai (00:15-00:20)

1     Ai:   konna    kanji    desu.
             like-this impression CP
              it looks like this.

2     (0.3) ((Kana and Ai face the large mirror; Mom is directly looking at Kana))

              ↘
3     Ai:   mieru?
             can see
              can you see?

4     (0.5)((Kana looks at Mom))

5     Mom:  ushiro mie ta, jibun no kami no ushiro.
             Back   see PAS   self PS  hair LK  back
              were you able to see the back? the back of your haircut.
                            └_____┘
                            ((Mom positions open palm hands around her face,
                             looking at the large mirror))
                                                |
                                            ((Kana shifts gaze from Mom
                                              to the large mirror))

6     (0.6)((Mom looks at Kana; Kana is facing the large mirror))

7     Mom:  mae to.=
             front P
              (together) with the front (mirror).
            └____┘
       ((Mom points to the large mirror in front of Kana,
         shifting gaze between the mirror and Kana))
```

```
                    |
          ((Kana looks toward Mom))

                ↗  ↘
8     Ai:   =mieta?=
           were you able to see?
```

Ai begins the service-assessment sequence by initiating talk and physical inspection in line 1. She says, "k*onna kanji desu*" ("it looks like this"), which is a statement that stylists often make to present the new cut and initiate a service-assessment sequence. Seeing no reaction from Kana (line 2), she soon modifies her statement into a yes/no question, "*mieru*?" ("can you see?") in line 3, which specifically solicits Kana's yes/no answer or just a head nod, or some sign of engaging in physical inspection can also be a relevant action for Kana to make here. Kana performs neither action, but merely looks at the mother (line 4). The mother then asks Kana if she was able to see the back of her haircut, using gestures to point at the targeted object Kana should be examining (line 5), but Kana still does not show a sign of understanding the ongoing event, nor the relevant actions to be taken (line 6). The mother then elaborates on the instructions via talk and embodied actions (line 7), which elicit no response from Kana, who continues only to gaze at her mother. The situation has become problematic, because the sequence does not progress without the customer's approval. In the next moment, Ai repeats the same question to Kana, except that this time it is with a past tense and a stretched nod (line 8). However, by observing Kana's behavior throughout the session and during this sequence, one could easily predict that Kana will not respond to Ai's questions; by the time Ai makes the utterance, Kana is already in the process of shifting her head and gaze toward her mother. While the combination of a question and a stretched head nod often elicits the recipient's response and overlapped head nod, here, Ai's fails to achieve consensus. Yet, Ai's work does not end in vain, as seen in the mother's actions that follow.

```
[6-B] Kana & Ai (00:21-00:23)

                ↗  ↘
8     Ai:   =mieta?=
           were you able to see?

                ↗  ↘
9     Mom:  =mieta?
            were you able to see?

10    Kana: [↘  ↗  ↘  ↗   ((nods towards Mom and looks back at front and down))

11    Mom:  [        ↘  ↘


                      ↘
12    Ai:   [hhh mieta? hhh
             hhh, you were able to see, hhh.
           └──────────┘
           ((Ai slides the mirror from right to left))
```

As soon as the mother sees Ai's actions in line 8, she reproduces the same verbal and embodied actions (line 9), and that is when Kana finally provides her response by producing a head nod (line 10). It is doubtful that Kana actually was aware of the ongoing event, but the mother's use of head nodding helped Kana see the relevant action to be taken here: repeating her mother's (and thereby Ai's) head nodding. In the service-assessment sequence, where the customer's satisfaction is pursued, just mimicking someone's visible action should not be enough to end the session. However, Kana's head nod is transformed into an appropriate action; as soon as Kana makes the head nod (line 10), both her mother and Ai acknowledge it as a meaningful, responsive action. The mother produces multiple head nods (line 11) immediately after Kana's head nod. Notice also that Ai treats Kana's head nod as a response to Ai's *own* question by providing an acknowledgement token and nodding (line 12). As a result, the mother and Ai produce a set of synchronized head nods in reacting to Kana's head nod (lines 11-12). Their nods are also slightly overlapped with Kana's nod, appearing as if three participants nod in unison (lines 10-12).

The service-assessment sequence is yet to be completed. The first question only asked whether or not Kana was able to see the back of her haircut, but not whether she liked it. Furthermore, Ai has just moved the mirror from right to left, by which the action of providing an assessment based on the new information gathered from the different angle, has been made relevant.

```
[6-C] Kana & Ai (00:22-00:26)

13     (1.0) ((Ai keeps holding up the mirror; Kana looks forward))

            ↗↘
14    Mom:   i:i?
             oka:y?

            ↗          ↘
15    Ai:   ii  desu [ka?
            good CP    Q
             is it okay?
                 |
             ((Kana looks at Mom))

                    ↗    ↘
16    Mom:         [kinii tta?=
                    like  PAS
                     did you like it?

17    Kana:         [    ↘

            ↘
18    Ai:   =[˚un.˚ ((Ai closes the hand-held mirror))

19    Mom:   [ ↘↘
```

This time, it is the mother who initiates talk by asking Kana whether her styling looks okay, along with a stretched nod (line 14). At this point in time, Ai also repeats the same question in a polite form, with a stretched nod (line 15). By doing so, Ai can treat Kana's following reaction (in responding to the mother's actions in line 14) as *the answer to her own question* as well, thus

increasing the validity of Kana's actions in the given context (the service-assessment sequence is principally conducted between the stylist and the customer). Moreover, by producing a head nod with her utterance (line 15), Ai somewhat overlaps her head nod with that of Kana's (line 17). In fact, everyone's nods are orchestrated again: the mother also nods again along with her modified question, further pursuing Kana's response (line 16), as soon as Kana looks at her (line 15). By the time she completes this question (line 16), Kana has already produced a head nod (line 17). As a result, Kana's nod here serves as a valid response to: 1) the mother's first question in line 14; 2) Ai's question in line 15; and 3) the mother's second/modified question in line 16. Its validity is proven by the following actions of the mother and Ai. The mother nods and smiles (line 19), and Ai ends the sequence (line 18).

Head nodding is the only practice that Kana produced in this sequence. However, the nods were often a bare repetition of her mother's nodding behavior, and not coordinated with either the stylist's or the mother's head movements. Nonetheless, the mother and the stylist coordinated their own actions so that Kana's simple nodding behavior appeared and served as the *customer*'s actions. The mother, already socialized with the service-assessment sequence, effectively aided the progression of the sequence by soliciting and exploiting – at times retrospectively – her daughter's head nods. In the meantime, the stylist kept herself involved in the sequence by talking and with head nods. She coordinated her verbal and nonverbal actions around Kana's nodding responses to her mother; in this way, Kana's responses were transformed into responses to Ai's questions. Furthermore, the stylist's and the mother's head nods were deployed so that they overlapped with Kana's nodding behavior, which contributed to an agreed and satisfactory sequence completion.

The next segment involves a customer and the stylist who do not speak each other's language. The customer, Ethan, is an American, native English speaker, and the stylist, Ken, is a native Japanese speaker. At times, Ethan and Ken communicate through the videographer, who speaks both Japanese and English, but during the final service-assessment sequence, the customer and stylist carry out the sequence on their own.

```
[7] Ethan & Ken (01:35-01:51)

1      Ken:   ((takes a hand-held mirror and places it behind Ethan))

2      (0.7)

3      Ken:   ↘

                      ↗↘↘↘↘↘↘
4      Ethan:[˚nn˚

5      Ken:   [        ↗↘↘ ↘  ((moves the hand-held mirror from left to right))

6      Ethan: ˚(right)˚

7      Ethan: ((aligns with Ken's movement by adjusting the position of his head))

8      (1.3) ((Ethan and Ken continue looking at the large mirror))

9      (4.9) ((Ethan touches the side of his haircut while Ken keeps holding the
              mirror))
```

```
                       ↘
10      Ethan:˚yes.˚
                   └┬┘
          ((Ethan puts down his hand))

                    ↗   ↘
11      Ken:   [˚daijyoubu.˚
                  (it is) okay.

12      Ethan:[        ↘
                         |
                  ((Ken starts folding the mirror))

13      ((Ethan and Ken bow concurrently))
```

Ken initiates an evaluation by unfolding a hand-held mirror (line 1), and then slightly nods (line 3). His embodied actions are followed by Ethan's repetitive nods (line 4). Ken soon overlaps with Ethan by also producing repetitive nods and then slides the mirror from the left to the right (line 5). Through the use of head nods, they move the physical inspection forward to the next step, which is the evaluation of the other side of the haircut. There, Ethan spends approximately 6 seconds looking at and touching his hair (lines 8-9), and then nods deeply while speaking softly, "yes" (line 10). Ethan's verbal and embodied actions are treated as an opportunity for Ken to move the sequence toward its closure, who says "*daijyoubu*," meaning "(is it) okay," (line 11). At this moment, Ken also lifts his chin upward, indicating a stretch head nod to come. As soon as Ethan sees Ken's head movement (their head movements are visible to each other, as they are both reflected in and looking at the large mirror in front of them), Ethan nods once again (line 12). This is followed by Ken's action of folding the hand-held mirror. As a result, the sequence was organized by their close monitoring of each other's head movements, leading to a successful completion.

        The two examples shown in this section indicate that nodding can be at times a primary resource for achieving a consensus. Ethan assumed the customer role by actively using head nods and displaying an understanding of the situation's context[10]. We cannot, however, say that Kana was fully aware of her situation. Rather than producing head nods as meaningful actions as a customer, Kana probably practiced them simply to respond to her mother. Because of the mother's and the stylist's interactional work, Kana's head movements transformed into relevant actions in a given context; they were treated as qualifying responses to the stylist's questions regarding the service outcome. Ultimately, both Kana and Ethan accomplished their task of evaluating the new cut with nodding practices.

**Discussion**

This paper has examined how participants in Japanese service-assessment sequences use head nods. Specifically, the analysis focused on the participants' synchronized head nods at the

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[10] This was Ethan's first haircutting experience in Japan, but he had visited the country a few times prior, and thus was somewhat familiar with Japanese culture. He is also an Asian American and grew up experiencing different aspects of Asian culture in general. This background might have helped Ethan with relevantly orienting to Ken's nodding behavior and exercising the nodding practices himself.

sequence completion, and how the participants monitored each other's head movements and designed their own movements accordingly. There, we saw that the participants engaged in not only a set of synchronized head nods, but also a series of synchronized visible actions. In some examples, participants synchronized two successive sets of head nods (segments 1 and 2), and in another example, a stylist withheld a head nod at the time of sequence closure when a customer showed no sign of another head nod to be made (segment 3). Either way, the participants ended the sequence with a set of synchronized behaviors, and this was a common feature of sequence completions found in Japanese service-assessment sequences. Indeed, the participants sometimes attended more strongly to their synchronized head movements in determining the sequence completion, than to the logic of verbal sequence (segment 4). When they failed to achieve synchronization, the customer re-completed a sequence and created another opportunity to synchronize their nods (segment 5). In the last set of examples, nodding played such a powerful communicative role that participants were able to complete the whole sequence despite having limited verbal resource available (segments 6 and 7).

It may be that head nodding practices were a particularly useful resource available in this specific setting. Clients remained in their chairs with hands usually set on their laps (they were not commonly asked to touch their hair in the process of getting it cut, as well as during the service-assessment sequence itself). In addition to the unavailability of a hand-held mirror in their possession, they could not practice a noticeable gaze-shift either. While they could still shift their gaze from their new haircut to the stylist (as customers in the U.S. often did when lowering the hand-held mirror), both the haircut and the stylist in the Japanese service-assessment sequences were reflected in the large mirror, possibly making the customer's gaze shift between them less visible. Similarly, stylists' hands, holding a portable mirror, were often too occupied to make gestures, and they could not exercise clear gaze shift for the same reason the customers could not. In such an environment, with seemingly limited bodily practices at one's disposal, head nods may become a "handy" communicative resource. Also, because the service-providers held the hand-held mirror for the customer, the participants in Japan were both reflected in a large mirror in front of them; this might have made it easy for them to observe each other's current and imminent bodily movements, and to coordinate parallel bodily movements. Nonetheless, these features of the physical and material setting had to be actively exploited by the participants in order to achieve synchronized head movements. The analysis has shown the participants' sensitive orientation toward each other's head movement, as well as their step-by-step preparation work for producing synchronized head movements. It is this collaborative work that contributed to a smooth completion of the sequence, and, therefore, also ensured a successful service encounter between the participants.

The participants in the Japanese service-assessment sequences used fewer verbal practices for communicating their degree of consent than in the sequences filmed in the U.S.[11] – both in terms of variety and frequency. In that sense, the examples shown in this paper may be perceived to confirm a widely documented characteristic of Japanese communication style: a

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[11] In the U.S. service-assessment sequence collected by the author, stylists engaged in more verbal (e.g. explaining the work that has been done on a customer's hair, complimenting the new cut, post-expanding the sequence by asking additional questions, etc.) and bodily (e.g. fixing the hairstyle in the middle of a service-assessment sequence) actions. Customers were then often led to provide a verbal display of overt satisfaction toward the quality of the service, often through positive assessments and comments, as well as accounting for their satisfactory feelings.

preference for ambiguity and indirectness. This notion has been recurrently visited in the studies of Japanese business communication, often as one of the major concerns for non-Japanese engaging in business with Japanese and thus as a barrier in intercultural communicative settings (e.g. Haneda & Shima, 1982; Nishiyama, 1999; Peltokorpi, 2007). Underlining these studies is a suggestion for non-Japanese to understand the reasons for Japanese ambiguity, and to properly interpret a Japanese worker's "true" intentions from different communicative strategies they use – for example: "subtle nonverbal signals such as avoiding eye contact, prolonged silence, and scratching the head" (Nishiyama, 1999, p. 96). However, multimodal conversation analysis of the sequence allowed us to capture that the consensus was not made because of the participants' equipped skills of reading each other's inner-states such as their "hidden" feelings and "real" intentions. Rather, the participants systematically worked on creating the status of being in consensus through a constant, moment-by-moment monitoring of each other's visible movement. Example 5 even demonstrated a client's pursuit of an *un*ambiguous state of shared consensus, showing how she created another opportunity to make a synchronized head nod beyond the sequence completion point. In the examples shown in this paper, the nonverbal movements that may be typically considered as subtle, indirect, and ambiguous, were indeed visible in public, and designed for interactants to respond to and collaborate on. Thus, we may want to be careful about overemphasizing the ambiguous and indirect characteristics of Japanese communication, as such a notion may result in adding another, perhaps unnecessary, hurdle for non-Japanese to conduct business with Japanese.

A familiar Japanese expression, "*a-un no kokyuu*," comes to my mind, which literally means that if one person breathes out, another breathes in. This refers to the perfect timing of actions conducted by two or more participants in an activity without speech (*Exceed Japanese-English Dictionary*, 2004). The expression does not necessarily indicate the perfect timing of the visible/auditable actions, but reflects the participants' inner feelings: that is to say, the Japanese people's well-coordinated actions are *the result of* their harmonized feelings. On the contrary, the current study has revealed that such "matched" feelings are not necessarily the product of people's pre-existing similar states-of-mind nor of their ability to read and interpret one anothers' inner states. Rather, the participants systematically constructed a sense of consented feelings through interaction; we cannot prove that all participants in the Japanese service-assessment sequence had similar states-of-mind, but they publicly demonstrated "*a-un no kokyuu*" through their coordinated actions, especially through head movements. By synchronizing their visible actions, they achieved an elucidation of their feelings as one and the same. This may be one way of creating a satisfactory feeling among participants, and an effective way to come to a consensus at the time of a business negotiation.

**Appendix: Transcript Conventions**

**1. Symbols used in original line**
The glossary of transcript symbols given below has been adopted from the descriptions provided by Have (1999: 213-4).

| | |
|---|---|
| [ | *A single left bracket* indicates the point of overlap onset. |
| = | *Equal signs*, one at the end of one line and one at the beginning of a next, indicate no 'gap' between the two lines. This is often called *latching*. |
| (0.0) | *Numbers in parentheses* indicate elapsed time in silence by tenth of seconds, so (7.1) is a pause of 7 seconds and one tenth of a second. |
| (.) | *A dot in parentheses* indicates a tiny 'gap' within or between utterances. |
| word | *Underscoring* indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude. |
| : | *Colons* indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound. |
| - | A *dash* indicates a cut-off. |
| . | A *period* indicates a stopping fall in tone. |
| , | A *comma* indicates a continuing intonation, like when you are reading items from a list. |
| ? | A *question mark* indicates a rising intonation. |
| ↑↓ | *Arrows* indicate marked shifts into higher or lower pitch in the utterance-part immediately following the arrow. |
| WORD | *Upper case* indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk. |
| ° | Utterances or utterance parts bracketed by *degree signs* are relatively quieter than the surrounding talk. |
| < > | *Right/left carets* bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate speeding up. |
| w(h)ord | A parenthesized *h*, or a *row of hs within a word*, indicates breathiness, as in laughter, crying, etc. |
| ( ) | *Empty parentheses* indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said. The length of the parenthesized space indicates the length of the untranscribed talk. In the speaker designation column, the empty parentheses indicate inability to identify a speaker. |
| (word) | *Parenthesized words* are especially dubious hearings or speaker identifications. |
| (( )) | *Double parentheses* contain transcriber's descriptions rather than, or in addition to, transcriptions. |

**2. Symbols used for transcribing head movements**
The following symbols are based on the conventions provided by Aoki (2007).

| | |
|---|---|
| ↗ | An upward head movement |
| ↘ | A downward head movement |

The sizes of the arrows indicate the degrees of head movements. For example, a smaller/larger downward arrow indicates a lighter/deeper downward head movement.

**3. Abbreviations in the interlinear gloss**
The following abbreviations were used for transcripts of Japanese data, and have been adopted from Ikeda (2007).

| | |
|---|---|
| CP | various forms of copula verb *be* |

EMP     emphatic marker
FP      final particle
LK      nominal linker
N       nominalizer
Neg     negative morpheme
O       object particle
P       particle (other)
Pass    passive
Q       question particle
QT      quotative particle
SB      subjective particle
Tag     tag question-like expression
TP      topic particle

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