

# *The semi-structured interview in educational research: issues and considerations in native- to non-native speaker discourse*

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## **Abstract**

*This study has looked at the use of semi-structured interviewing in educational research between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. It has viewed this type of interviewing from various perspectives, particularly focusing on context, topic control, turn-taking and the interview as a speech event influenced by classroom discourse. It has argued that the role of context lays at an interface between conversation analysts and linguistic anthropologists who dispute the manner of its application in the process of interpreting interview discourse. Of particular significance in this discussion is the work of Briggs (1986) whose work in ethnographic interviewing is seen in this study as having important lessons for the semi-structured interviewer.*

## **1. Introduction**

This compilation of considerations on interviewing in educational research firstly opens with a **definition** of the 'research interview' and then focuses on one particular type of interviewing, the **semi-structured** interview. The discussion of this particular speech event involved then requires consideration of its own physical setting and its

participants, i.e. where and between whom the interviews are conducted - the **context**. The use of context leads to discussion of the work of Briggs (1986). This discussion, entitled **lessons from ethnographic interviewing**, is important since it highlights aspects of ethnographic interviewing thought to be relevant for semi-structured interviewing. I then turn to a discussion of the issue of **topic**, concentrating on who controls it and why and conclude with a discussion on the **differing perceptions on interviewing**, in which I examine where the interview is positioned in relation to other speech events and what function it performs. Throughout the discussions, references are made to my own interview-based research conducted in Thailand which originally focused upon a content-based study of the data and then moved on to a discourse analytic investigation of the interaction involved in the interviewing itself.

### **1.1 Definition**

Turning firstly to a definition, the research interview is described by Cannell and Kahn (1968) as "a two-person conversation" for data collection purposes. Since research interviews on student behavioural issues may often be carried out by those with a vested interest in the outcomes, i.e. teachers themselves, it is doubtful though that such a speech event can be regarded as a conversation. Indeed, McCarthy (1991) notes that symmetry in the turn-taking of casual conversation between teachers and students is difficult to achieve since, as informal and relaxed an atmosphere the interviewer may attempt to establish, there will often exist the danger of "overlap" (ibid.: 124) from the classroom to the interview setting. Furthermore, if the objectives of the research interview are indeed only to procure responses from students, then it is presumably the sole right of the interviewer to initiate and follow-up turns as in the IRF (Initiation -

Response - Feedback) mode (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). It is a situation bound by its intrinsic formality, making the interviewees (and interviewers) feel they are compelled to "abide by certain communicative norms" (Briggs 1986:2). Such constraints are manifested in an apparent "pre-allocation" (Sacks et al 1974: 729) or "pre-determined" (van Lier 1988: 105) turn-taking system. The argument against interviews being likened to conversations is perhaps further compounded by the potentially differing cultural background of the interviewees and their relatively lower status alongside the interviewer.

## **2. Semi-structured interviewing**

In ascertaining the effectiveness of semi-structured interviewing as a means of research, I refer to Cohen and Manion (1994) and Nunan (1992), who maintain that the semi-structured interview is perhaps the preferred choice for researchers wishing to 'interpret' responses from interviewees. This type of interview does not need to have a list of pre-determined questions, there being a "flexibility" involved which allows the interviewer, as Nunan (*ibid.*: 149) indicates, to steer the interview topics rather than simply rely upon set questions. Numerous probes, prompts and open and closed question forms can be created which result in the researcher having the ability or "free form" (Drever 1995: 13) to diverge and change or omit areas previously raised in interview. As opposed to other interview types, such as an unstructured one which is a completely "open situation" (Cohen and Manion 1994: 273), the semi-structured type has sufficient structure embedded in its compilation of topics and issues to act as a guide through the interview.

However, it should be noted that the validity of any chosen approach to conducting research may be affected by not only the altered interview structure and cultural factors involved in being interviewed by a NS teacher, but also by common problems inherent in any interviewing in which the interaction is recorded on tape (as in my research). Nunan (*ibid.*: 153) points out that such interviews carry the

dangers of being "off-putting", "time-consuming to transcribe" and "masked by irrelevancies". Furthermore, there is the "possibility of data overload" and no record of the "context", the latter point being one to which I will return later in this study. Drever (1995) also notes that transcription carries the danger of bias and advises that proof-reading may reduce this. Duranti (1997) addresses this issue by suggesting that interview data should not be regarded as static after one listening but should be allowed to evolve over time and further considerations (including presumably listenings). This seems to suggest that any interpretation of interview data is based upon the awareness of those who analyse it at that moment in time. Following this claim of potential inconsistency, the same recording may in fact be interpreted, as well as transcribed, differently at a later time.

Looking at the semi-structured interview in terms of a 'speech event' in its own right, Sacks et al (1974) regard it as fundamentally a formal event in which the subject under discussion is agreed and, as Drever (ibid.) points out, "on record". It differs from the ethnographic interview in that the interviewer shares a "common frame of reference" (ibid.:15) with the interviewee. In ethnographic interviews, the interviewee creates a path through the interaction, determining topics which the ethnographer follows. Any probing in ethnographic interviewing, according to Drever (ibid.), is conducted in order to confirm the interviewer's own assumptions and understanding which is possibly similar to that of the semi-structured interviewer at times. I would argue that although there are clear differences in objectives and the methodology of interviewing, there are commonalities perhaps at the topic level between ethnographic and semi-structured interviewing. If a topic is examined throughout the course of the semi-structured interview, there may often be allowances by the interviewer to let the interviewee control sub-topic direction in a similar way to the ethnographer. Clearly, as a teacher in more student-centred interaction will look to students to determine some control over topic development,

the semi-structured interviewer also reasserts control to engineer the turn-taking back to the original theme and then "frame" the exchange, i.e. close it down. The ethnographer may see no need to engineer the interaction back to a "pre-determined" (van Lier 1996) set of questions because they do not exist. Before that point, however, turn-taking within loosely arranged topics in semi-structured interviewing may resemble that of an ethnographic interview.

However we may categorise the interviewing though, McCarthy (1991: 136) believes that the differing status of participants who are "trapped in their roles" will inevitably influence the discourse. This is exhibited clearly in interview settings characterised by the chains of question - answer sequences in which interviewees appear bound by real, or perceived, lack of status to a respondent's role in turn-taking (Silverman 1993). This may be so, yet from a conversation analyst's point of view, surely the objective of analysis is to view how speech behaviour is affected by a lack of symmetry in the interview, rather than to strive towards symmetrical relations. This raises the issue of why the data was collected originally. In my research conducted in Thailand, the purpose of the interviewing was to investigate student learning strategies. Later, the same data was used to analyse the turn-taking behaviour in the interview discourse - these are intrinsically two different objectives. One may even suggest that the original purpose was to interview students whilst attempting to create at times symmetrical relations in the proceedings. If the same interviews had been conducted with a variety of topics (not necessarily those of learning strategies) to only concentrate on turn-taking, then the results of asymmetrical relations would have represented a different focus to the research. Remaining "trapped" (*loc. cit.*) in such roles would possibly have resulted in differing turn-taking behaviour. In brief, this represents a "shift of interest" (Silverman 1993: 117) from obtaining data by means of interviewing to a focus on how interview talk itself is organised. I will now turn to a discussion of the issue of

'context' in the analysis of the interview data.

### **3. Context**

The context of the interview and the background cultural context of the participants are two areas which need to be considered carefully in the interpretation process. Both Duranti (1997) and Briggs (1986) differentiate between these two contexts, Duranti in particular outlining the debate between conversation analysts and linguistic anthropologists concerning the issue of contextuality in analysing data. Duranti (1997:103) notes the potential weaknesses of interviews in providing "culturally informed linguistic analysis" and reminds us of the dangers of the "participant-observer paradox" (ibid.: 118). He draws our attention to the type of awareness of local norms and customs related to questioning rights - "the ecology of questioning" - as experienced by Briggs (1986) in research in Mexico. He also outlines the criticisms made of conversation analysts' "disinterest in the larger context" (ibid.: 266), yet points out their retort of opposing the use of "a priori" (ibid.: 271) cultural context in analysis. Schegloff's (1972) advocacy of only "relevant context", i.e. the context emanating from the talk that the conversation analyst is investigating, is further defence of the narrower use of context. In essence, conversation analysts are primarily interested in localized peculiarities of interaction itself and seek to explain that interaction, not before it takes place, but after the talk has been transcribed, by use of the elements of context relevant or appropriate to that talk itself. This points to a "context-free yet context-sensitive" (Silverman 1993: 141) perspective on its use. As a consequence of this, there is a more limited objective in analysing the talk than those which anthropologists - linguistic anthropologists in Duranti's case - pursue.

Perhaps most necessary in recognising both participants' roles throughout the discourse is some kind of qualitative framework to assess the context in which surface-level turns are taken without

imposing a set of prescribed contextual criteria onto the analysis. This would, as Stokoe (2000) indicates, move away from the conversation analyst's focus on the talk itself and bring a potential source of bias to the assessment of turn-taking behaviour. Instead, the perspective taken should be, according to Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) and Maynard (1991), to show to what extent features of the participants' turn-taking behaviour are typified by and shape the institutional nature of the interaction. Heritage and Greatbatch (1991: 95) argue that the "fingerprint" of the interview data created during the course of a potentially nebulous and ever-changing context is one which is fundamentally a comparative study to what would occur in non-institutional interaction. This comparison, though, is perhaps distracting in that it is unclear as to what the talk - the interview data - should actually be compared to. To draw comparisons with an everyday conversation between the same participants (a NS teacher- and a NNS student) would entail firstly an extra analysis of turn-taking behaviour of interaction in which the relative non-parity of status would still exist. Inequalities would also exist if examining NNS-NNS everyday conversation since some students may not deem it as their role or responsibility to seek parity in interaction. The focus of analysis of institutional talk as suggested by Heritage and Greatbatch (*ibid.*) would, I believe, impose the unnecessary demands of seeking identifiable elements of interviewing from the NNS-westerner context in order to make unfeasible comparisons to everyday conversation.

Literature on contextual criteria which can be applied to interviews is scarce, yet some attempts, notably by van Dijk (1977) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) exist. Van Dijk (*ibid.*) concentrates on criteria underpinning pragmatic theory, those being "positions" (roles and status), "properties" (gender, age), "relations" (dominance, authority) and "functions" (father, waitress, judge). These categories may form a basis for the qualitative supplement to the surface-level interactional analysis of turn-taking, but need perhaps to be adapted with other

criteria. Among these criteria, elements of local NNS sociolinguistic behaviour, Gumperz's "contextualisation cues" (1982) representing "aspects of language and behaviour (verbal and nonverbal signs) that relate what is said to contextual presuppositions", and awareness of the "tactics" and "strategies" of "Foreigner Talk Discourse" (FTD) as outlined by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 126) could be added. Such notes on either individual sequences of communicative breakdown, whole interviews or groups of students may broadly be categorised under ethnographic "sociolinguistic transfer" (Chick 1996: 332), referring to "the use of rules of speaking of one's own speech community or cultural group when interacting with members of another community or group".

Moreover, such considerations raise the issue of how the NS interviewer shifts speech style to that of the interviewee. In everyday conversation, this is termed as "accommodation theory" (Giles and Powlesland 1975). If such compensation takes place in the interview context, each interview conducted can be considered as failing to attain any constant degree of standardisation of questions. This may be due to the fact that the interviewer, if sufficiently sensitive to how those questions are understood by the interviewee, will attempt to make linguistic adaptations to the elicitations which he or she perceives as being inappropriate for the present interview. The intrinsic process of adaptation to each interview context (differing age of participants, relationship, rapport etc.) will result in every interview creating its own separate identity - its own context. Gordon (1969) calls this a standardisation of meaning, a concept which inevitably challenges the concept of interview reliability.

Overall, this seems to concur with what Wolfson terms as the "emergent" context of the interviewing process, making standardisation of interviewing technique impossible to achieve in the same way that Tannen (1981) opposes the "universality" of turn-taking behavioural rules as claimed by Sacks et al (1974). We could also then refer to a

non-universality in interview context despite any attempts to standardise questions. Interview context in this sense is even more clearly separate from background context, a point frequently referred to by Briggs (1986). Further discussion of his research in intercultural research settings is provided below.

#### **4. Lessons from ethnographic interviewing**

The work of Briggs (1986) in research conducted in ethnographic interviews in Mexico revealed much on the issue of context and analysis of data, particularly due to his own lack of knowledge of local "metacommunicative norms" (ibid.: 3-4) before interviewing commenced. To impose one's own norms (presumably here meaning western research norms) onto local NNS participants and therefore to ignore local ones is termed as "communicative hegemony" (ibid.: 90). Yet, I would at that point also note, whilst agreeing that ethnographers may be accused of such neglect towards recognition of local interviewing norms, that conversation analysts may not necessarily need to abide by such norms if their objective is to observe reactions to asymmetrical speech behaviour. Interestingly though, Briggs (ibid.: 21) does indicate that attempts to remove all factors possibly inducing bias in NS - NNS interaction somewhat clinically reduces the data to an almost context-free state. It is the "unfolding sequence of co-construction" (Jacoby and Ochs 1995) of that context by participants during interviews which in itself is an added part of behaviour worthy of observation, as well as the data revealed from the content of responses about whatever research objective exists. In a similar vein to Briggs (ibid.: 25), I would also propose that the constant negotiation, re-negotiation and co-construction of the contextual features of the interview are valid, observable elements which reflect on and are mirrored by turn-taking behaviour.

Despite Briggs' (ibid.: 89) criticism that localized turn-taking rules are often broken by interviewers in the interview setting ( for

example when senior figures who are unaccustomed to being asked questions in some societies are suddenly required to answer a multitude of questions in interviews), it is this new speech event for those participants which can reveal valuable information. The objective of any discourse analytic study of turn-taking is not to create a speech event similar to those that the interviewees are used to; it is to observe how they react to the new one.

Returning to Briggs, he particularly notes the failure in interview data analysis to interpret meaning indexically - that is, to look at the meaning as related to the broader context around that utterance (ibid.: 42). This is, as Ochs (1996: 413) points out, the mistake in not considering the illocutionary meaning (Searle 1969), simply taking the perlocutionary meaning as given. Although Briggs cannot suggest a clear framework for such analysis, perhaps the work of Gee (1999: 63) goes some way to the creation of an interpretative structure. In this work, meaning is clearly related to "local, on site, social, and cultural practices". Gee (ibid.: 82) though differentiates between "situation" and "context" for this purpose, preferring to use the term "situation" in perhaps the same sense that we have used it to describe the interview "context" so far. In great detail, Gee advocates the use of "situation networks" involving a system of various aspects: the semiotic, the activity, material, political and sociocultural to analyse meaning. This appears to embrace the interview situation as well as the background of (presumably) both participants. However, the choice of what criteria to employ when assessing the sociocultural background of the participants is potentially problematic since some national cultures cannot be clearly placed - in my own research, one interviewee held dual Thai and German citizenship and several others had experienced lengthy stays abroad. Gee (ibid.: 70) recognizes this difficulty, advocating that these assessments "need not be complete, fully formed, or consistent" because of the various experiences we are exposed to. In fact, the general use of 'culture' as a term leads to the

question as to whose cultural model should be adopted for assessment of the speech event with participants of varying national backgrounds and experiences. To address this, instead of the term 'culture', Clark (1996) proposes the use of "communal" or "personal common ground" as such terminology focuses not on individual nationalities per se but the aspects of experience and interests that the participants together share. Such terminology perhaps better embodies the research objectives as they more readily clarify the relationship in that interview setting with the participants.

## **5. Topic**

At first sight, the issue of 'topic' related to interviewing appears to be a simple matter of determining who determines the topic, who creates the questions, what form those questions take and who holds the rights to steer those topic areas through the interview. This oversimplification of interview topics overlooks much of the discussion concerning what the interview participants themselves really perceive as their roles and responsibilities. Those perceptions will be seen as being crucial in how topics are actually steered and shaped. My discussion will address issues of not just a suitable definition of topic, but also the wider arguments of speaker rights, topic control and NS - NNS turn-taking behaviour, all of which are clearly recurring themes throughout this discussion.

Clearly, the pin-pointing of a relevant definition for the institutionalised nature of the research interview is, as Stokoe (2000) notes, problematic. If interviews take place in an institutional setting, then like classroom discourse which Seedhouse (1996) argues as being a sub-genre of institutional discourse, the categorisation of the topic may be decided by the institution's agenda (the curriculum or standardised interview questions). This is, according to Stokoe (*ibid.*:187), a one-sided formulation which ethnomethodologists avoid. Theirs would be determined by the co-construction of the topic. From

my perspective of a teacher-researcher, the focus of interest was not simply how turns are "constructed and patterned" (ibid.: 185), but also the reasons why. This is in direct contradiction of Stokoe (ibid.) who claims the 'why' behind such construction is not sought by conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists.

Additionally, it appears to be a matter of debate as to whether candidates have negotiating rights during interviews about topics raised. This is mentioned by Stokoe (2000), and McCarthy (1991: 133) who differentiates between what topic is important to the speaker - the "speaker's topic" - and whether that topic is accepted as important by the other participant - if so, then making it a "full conversational topic". This question must also be valid for interview topics if the interviewer attempts to introduce higher contingency and more symmetry to the interaction, thereby enabling the interviewee some degree of rights over which topic to expand upon.

Gorden (1969: 41) suggests that the level of control exerted by the interviewer over the topic throughout the interview is related to "the extent to which he takes the initiative in either shifting the central focus of the discussion or changing the scope of the topic". Mischler (1984: 69) confirms this role, expanding on it by adding that the interviewer - in this case, a doctor - "controls the content of what is to be discussed by selectively attending and responding to certain parts of a patient's statements and by initiating each new topic". This final suggestion that the interviewer holds rights over topic initiation aligns itself with the "teachers' pedagogic agenda" in classroom interactions (Da Moita Lopes 1995: 352), where social and classroom discourse are clearly differentiated in terms of the speaker's rights in topic selection.

"Topic management" (McCarthy and Carter 1994: 181) in interview settings seems so firmly under the control of the interviewer that it is difficult to imagine how an interview could ever resemble every day conversation in which topics are not pre-determined, but "negotiated in the process of conversing" (Brown and Yule 1983: 89).

Naturally-occurring conversation, according to Richards (1990: 71), has a kind of "topic behaviour" which involves "rounds of topic turns that are reciprocally addressed and replied to". The interview, or the classroom, seem diametrically different to naturally-occurring conversation in terms of who controls, introduces, shifts and terminates the topic, an issue which from one perspective, is related to the setting, the role and the status of the participants.

Additionally, from another perspective, it can also be viewed as a native speaker (NS) - non-native speaker (NNS) issue. In this respect, Larsen-Freeman and Long (ibid.: 124), in their research of the NS and NNS in conversation, note that the NS employs "devices" to encourage the NNS to produce language and interact smoothly. These are "tactics", which "repair the discourse following a breakdown in communication" and "strategies", which "avoid such a breakdown occurring". Such compensations for the NNS are termed as "conversational adjustments" (ibid.: 125-126) and are accompanied by the following tendencies : a trend towards a "lower ratio of topic-initiating to topic-continuing moves", "a more predictable/narrower range of topics", "more willing relinquishment of topic choice to interlocutor", "more use of questions for topic-initiating moves", and "briefer treatment of topics".

In the research conducted by Larsen-Freeman and Long, it would be interesting to ascertain whether a time limit was intended for the NS-NSS conversations and if the NS had a set of topics in mind before entering into the discussion. If research is conducted under interview-style conditions, in which the NNS is informed that a recorded meeting is arranged with a NS, then perhaps the intended naturally-occurring turn-taking mechanism becomes more akin, in the mind of the NNS, to the formalities of an interview. In this case, the trends described are those more attributable to an interview setting rather than the level of "contingency" (van Lier 1996) seen in a casual conversation. If the trends described are to be accepted, then one could bring into question the authenticity of the turn-taking behaviour of the

NS (rather than focus on the conversational or discourse competence of the NNS), since compensating so generously with the NNS leads us to ask whether that would normally occur in non-educational settings with a NS unaccustomed to repairing or avoiding conversational breakdowns.

I now move on to a discussion of interviews in relation to other speech events and what function they perform.

## **6. Differing perceptions on interviewing**

In terms of the type of spoken discourse under consideration, that of the interview, various perspectives can be taken. In the analogy of a "linear array" (a continuum of speech events from casual conversation to formal interaction) put forward by Sacks et al (op.cit.: 729), interviewing may be seen to involve more formal turn-taking than casual conversation. Moves to create a less formalised "series of friendly conversations" (Spradley 1979: 58) may, in theory, enable the interviewee to provide more input in a relaxed manner. This would seem to be shifting interviewing along the "array" (ibid.) towards the turn-taking associated with casual conversation, yet the status of the participants, particularly in Asian settings where interviewers (in many cases teacher-researchers) are afforded great respect, could give rise to "hangover from the classroom" (McCarthy 1991: 24). Furthermore, attempts to de-formalise interviewing may be regarded by the student-interviewees as representing a challenge to the 'face' of authority figure. Moves to create the casual "rapport" necessary for ethnographic interviewing (Spradley loc.cit.), along with unfamiliarity with interviews conducted in English, may confuse NNS participants actually expecting a lack of parity in a one-to-one meeting with an older teacher-researcher. The "asymmetrical" (Drew 1991 in Markova and Foppa eds., and Spradley op.cit.: 67) nature of interviews conducted in English which Spradley claims results in "distorted" opinions to be drawn by

the ethnographer is perhaps the "communicative norm" (Briggs 1986: 2) to which some participants would prefer to adhere. In effect, attempts to de-formalise interviewing may create the wrong conditions for the provision of respondent input.

If the interview is itself regarded primarily as a means to gather data on "interior" or "exterior" opinions, knowledge and practice (Baker and Johnson 1998: 229), the perspective, and purpose, of the interviewing process is perhaps open to the criticism of de-contextualisation, in that it avoids consideration of the participants and setting of that interview as a speech event in its own right. In my research into learning strategies, the original purpose of interviewing pre-sessional college students in a Thai setting was indeed confined to that perspective, termed a "metacommentary" or "accounting" by Baker and Johnson (1998). In combination with that original 'metacommentary', I later pursued research into the interview discourse itself, which represented a means to redress that contextual imbalance missing in the original investigation into learning strategies. Continuing the perspectives offered by Baker and Johnson (*ibid.*: 241), they call for their teacher to teacher interviews on teaching and learning issues to be viewed as a type of "social action" which more clearly contextualises the interview, yet it could be argued that they too are subject to their own criteria for criticism as their proposal is merely one based on how the researcher perceives the educational interview, not how the data is analysed. The argument that their investigation constitutes "culture in action" (*ibid.*) is one which still intrinsically focuses on the content of what is produced in interview interaction and proposes no means of analysis for the discourse.

As a final perspective on interviewing, Duranti (1997) argues for a long-term, evolving view of the transcription process of interview data. In concurrence with this approach, I would also propose the employment of various means of analysis - content-based analysis of the interview theme (for example, learning strategies) and an analysis

of the interview discourse itself- both of which could be in their own right re-examined at later dates. This marriage of content and discourse then constitutes a long-term, evolution of the analysis of the data, yet has the possibility of multi-functions - to inform colleagues of interview content and the interactional means by which that content was gathered, for example, the turn-taking behaviour of the interviews. I argue that both purposes are inter-related, and may be regarded separately or intertwined to form a wide view of 'context' of the research.

## **7. Conclusions**

Concluding these considerations of interviewing, I have discussed the potential constraints of its "pre-determined" (van Lier 1988: 105) nature and the weaknesses of transcribed data from a seemingly formal, semi-structured interview technique. However, through comparison with ethnographic interviewing it is argued that there is the possibility of more highly contingent turn-taking behaviour providing more interviewee control over topic management and direction. This flexibility may be dependent upon the extent to which participants feel "trapped in their roles" (McCarthy 1991: 136).

Apart from interpreting turn-taking behaviour from the results of interactional patterns which emerge from transcripts, it has also been proposed that contextual information be involved in interpretations, though which context - that of the interview or that of the background cultural context of the participants - and the timing of its application - a priori or after the interaction has been analysed - needs to be clearly determined. It is stressed that each individual interview possesses its own particular context creating an emergent context through the interviewing process which makes standardisation of questioning problematic.

Discussion of Briggs' (1986) work in ethnographic interviewing has provided the added perspective of viewing interviewing technique

from the NNS perspective of "metacommunicative norms" and an emphasis on the co-construction of the turn-taking behaviour during the course of the interview. Despite this shift in perspective, I have argued that research into turn-taking behaviour does not have the objective of necessarily creating ideal conditions for NNS input. It is intended as a means to observe and assess interactional behaviour in itself, not the topic content of the responses provided.

Gee's (1999) advocacy of "situated networks" is discussed, however, I have noted that alternative views of what constitutes 'culture' need to be provided. To address this, Clark's (1996) "communal" or "personal" "common ground" is seen as a potentially clarifying addition to any network or evaluative body of contextual issues as it appears to redefine the stereotypical concept of national culture affecting personal behaviour.

In terms of the topics running through the interview discourse, I have argued that interviewees may have greater control than expected in what may be considered to be a formal speech event, though due to respect for authority, it is the NS interviewer who finally has the power to engineer sub-topics back to their main purpose, to terminate them and introduce new topic areas.

Wherever interviewing is viewed as belonging on the "linear array" (Sacks et al 1974), it is noted that the NS and NNS may have differing perceptions of where it is to be placed. For the NS interviewer, attempts to create a friendly rapport and semblances of symmetry in the interview relationship may not actually be reciprocated by NNSs who are perhaps culturally pre-disposed to accepting asymmetrical relations in turn-taking behaviour. This is potentially seen as a source of conflict between the participants. Baker and Johnson's (1998) views on treating the interview as a type of "metacommentary" to explain behaviour fit well with the purposes perhaps of ethnographic interviewing but ignore how the data collected is to be analysed. Nevertheless, the perspective taken of regarding interviewing for such

purposes as "culture in action" (ibid.) provide an appealing basis for educational interviews for whatever purpose, both those for conversation analysis or ethnography, yet clearly, it must be determined how 'culture' is defined and what purposes the interviews are to serve - that of observing culture or using it as a means to explain turn-taking behaviour. Finally, Duranti's (1997) long-term view of the interpretation of interview data - that of revisiting the transcripts - allows the researcher to adjust interpretations and means of analysis of the same data at later dates. This is an argument in itself for an "evolving" interpretation of interview data over time.

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## Questionnaire: "What Motivates English Teachers in Japan?"

Author of this Questionnaire:

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If you could spare 10 to 15 minutes of your valuable time filling out this questionnaire, I would be most grateful. Your responses to this questionnaire could help contribute to a greater understanding of the motivation of English teachers in Japan. I believe that such an understanding would be valuable for English language education in Japan. After all, both students and teachers in Japan would likely benefit if some light were shed on what motivates English teachers to try to do their jobs effectively and conscientiously.

If you would like to know the results of this study or if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions about this study, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address above.

### **Purpose of this Study:**

I am currently conducting a study that is designed to reveal factors that may underlie English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher motivation in Japan. While there has been a lot of published research on EFL *student* motivation in Japan and other countries, there are, to my knowledge, no published findings on what motivates EFL teachers in Japan.

### **Eligibility:**

As indicated above, this is a study of what motivates English teachers in Japan. Therefore, while I thank anyone who expresses an interest in this study, I am asking at this time that only those people who are currently conducting *English language education in Japan*

participate in the study.

**Informed Consent (based upon the guidelines from the TESOL Quarterly):**

Participation in this study is, of course, entirely voluntary. Also, since those who complete the questionnaire will remain anonymous and the sample size (over 300 participants) will be quite large, I know of **no risks** to you if you participate in this study.

**Biographical Data**

These data will **not** be used to identify you or your workplace(s). I simply want to ensure that I obtain a broad random sample of English teachers representing various regions, nationalities, age groups, and working situations in Japan.

**Residence:** Please type the name of the prefecture (ken), to, fu, or dou, in which you currently reside: (                    )

**Your Age Range:** Please indicate your age group by deleting all those age groups below which DO NOT apply to you.

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60 and above

**Nationality:** Please type the name of the country (or countries) for which you hold legal citizenship: (                    )

**Place(s) of Work:** Whether you are working full-time or part-time, please indicate your place(s) of work by deleting all those below that **DO NOT** apply to you.

elementary school

university

high school

junior college

private conversation school (eikaiwa school)

junior high school

business English school

other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

### Notes on the Questionnaire Items

I would be grateful for any input you might have on this questionnaire. This is a pilot study and as such, I am trying to develop questionnaire items which (I hope) will measure aspects of English teacher motivation in Japan as effectively as possible. Therefore, please feel free to type (in either English or Japanese) any suggestions you may have in the space provided at the end of this survey (or in the body of the questionnaire itself).

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### **\*\*A note on Items #9 and #11\*\***

These items employ the word "spiritual." If you do not feel comfortable indicating your opinion in response to these items, please write "3" ("no opinion") on the 5-point scale for these two items. For the

purposes of this study, however, (and in my own view), spirituality need not imply adherence to a particular religious doctrine, and it most certainly does **not** refer to the imposition of religious beliefs upon people. In this vein, I feel that teacher educator Parker Palmer (2003) provides a succinct and useful definition of spirituality: "...the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos" (p. 377).

### Reference

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### Motivation and Your Workplace:

In some of the questionnaire items, you will be asked about how certain aspects of your work situation affect your motivation as an English teacher. You may, in fact, work at more than one place. If this is the case, when responding to these items, please think of the items in relation to what you consider to be your primary (main) place of work only.

**Thank you very much for your participation in this study!**

Please rate each of the following according to ***how important this aspect of work is to your motivation as an English teacher.*** Indicate your response for the 52 items by typing the number **1, 2, 3, 4, or 5** below each item. These numbers correspond to the following:

**1 = not important**

**2 = somewhat unimportant**

**3 = no opinion**

**4 = somewhat important**

**5 = very important**

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1. Having a good salary

2. Having flexible working hours

3. Job security

4. Fringe benefits (health insurance coverage, pension fund, etc...)

5. Having clear rules and procedures

6. Having a manageable work load

7. The prospect of being promoted to a senior supervisory job in the future

8. Being fairly treated at my workplace

9. Viewing teaching as a spiritual act

10. Teaching content that is deeply meaningful to me

11. Fostering in my students the integration of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of learning

12. Teaching lessons that have real-world relevance to my students

13. Ethics in English language teaching
14. Viewing English language teaching as a social service
15. Conveying to my students a sense of my core values
16. Teaching topics related to social issues or global education (*for example, topics related to world peace, bullying, the environment, etc...*)
17. Providing a deeply transformative educational experience for my students
18. Having supervisors who are responsive to my suggestions and grievances
19. Having a supervisor who gives clear guidance
20. Having a variety of tasks in my job
21. The prestige level of the English language teaching profession
22. The prestige level of my job
23. Teaching students who enjoy learning English
24. Teaching students who come to my classes because they *want to* (as opposed to them feeling *obligated* to come to my classes)
25. Teaching students who take a strong initiative in their own learning

26. Teaching students who are motivated
27. Teaching students who come to my classes with a positive attitude
28. Teaching students who have a deep love of learning
29. Teaching students who enjoy asking me questions
30. Having the freedom to do what is necessary in my teaching in order to do a good job
31. Being allowed to deal creatively with my students' problems
32. When my core values are similar to the guiding values of my workplace
33. Being included in the decision making processes at my workplace
34. Working for a trustworthy educational organization
35. Being able to introduce changes at my workplace without having to deal with red tape (i.e.: troublesome bureaucratic procedures)
36. Having a job in which I can perform to the best of my ability
37. Having a job in which I am intellectually stimulated
38. Having a challenging job
39. Having contact with professionals in the field of English language teaching

40. Frequent feedback about the effectiveness of my performance
41. Being able to work independently
42. Being recognized for my teaching accomplishments
43. Being evaluated positively by my students
44. Being evaluated positively by my supervisors
45. Seeing concrete improvements in my students' English
46. Having good relationships with my colleagues
47. Having friendly relationships with my students
48. Having good relationships with my supervisors
49. Working with other teachers as a team
50. A job that is fun
51. A job in which I have peace of mind
52. A relaxing atmosphere at my workplace

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Again, thank you **very much** for taking the time to fill out this survey. I want to improve this survey instrument, so if you have comments regarding any of the items on this questionnaire or on its overall appearance, please feel free to type them below in either English or

Japanese.

### **Open-Ended Response**

If it interests you to do so and you can spare a couple of more minutes, please feel free to use the space below to type a few comments about what motivates you (or de-motivates you) as an English teacher. Feel free to respond in either English or Japanese.