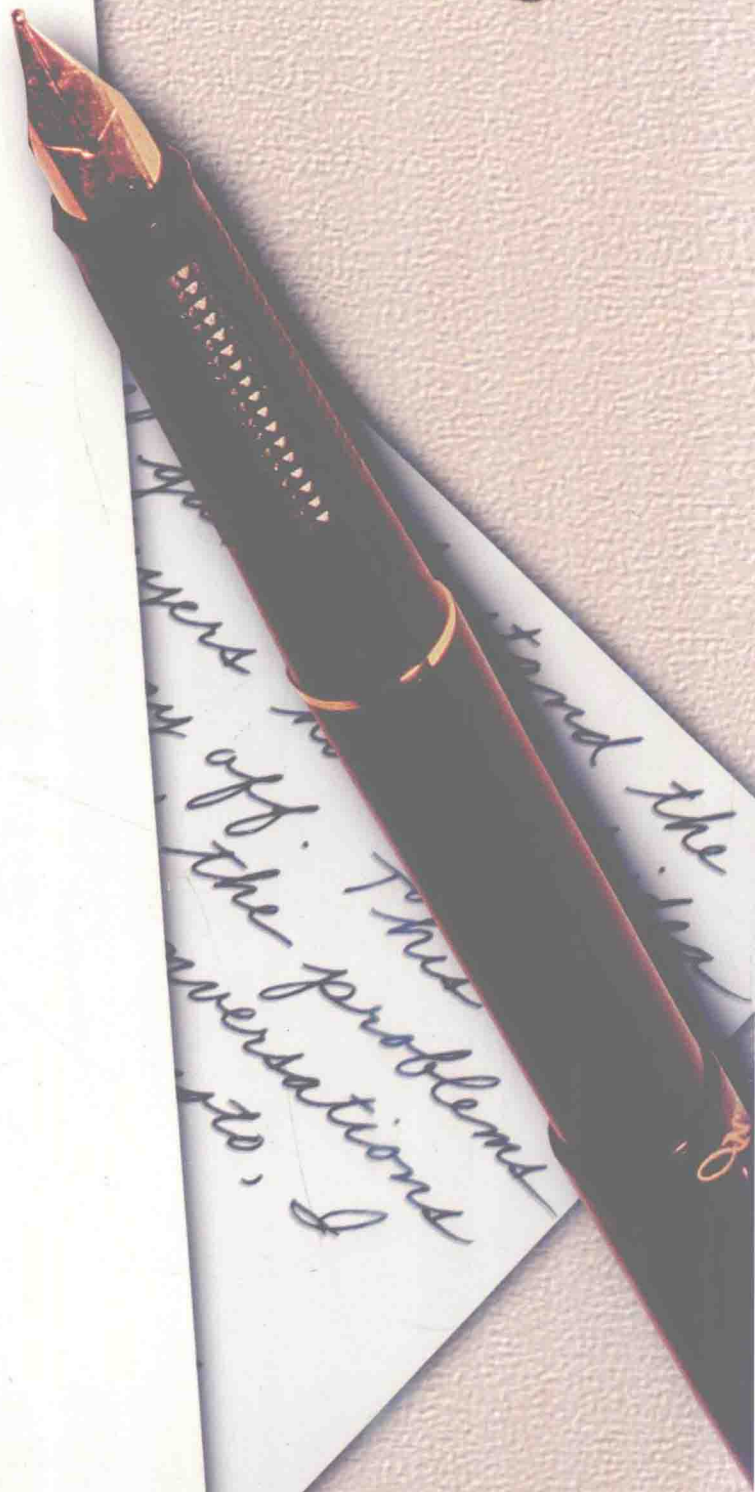


INTERACTIVE ENGLISH

LESSON 1.2

Patterns in Conversations



PERSONAL
ACADEMIC
NOTEBOOK



ACADEMIC
SYSTEMS

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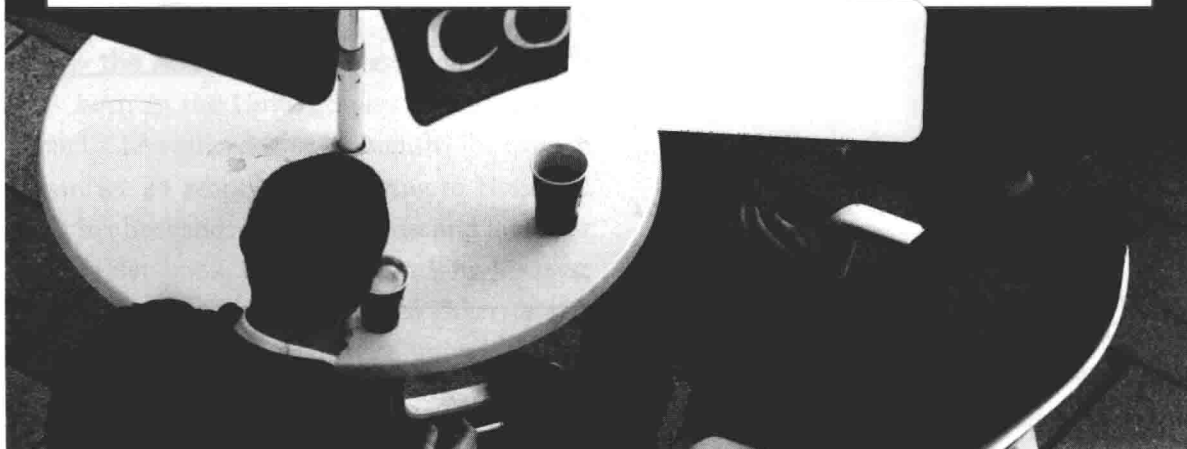
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Patterns in Conversations



How people talk is one important way that language influences identity. This chapter will help you write about patterns in conversation. The materials in this chapter will help you move

through important parts of the lesson. They will supplement your work in **Explore**, **Focus**, **Revise**, **Edit**, and **Conclude** on the computer.

EXPLORE

Experienced writers know that writing is easier when they first explore to discover what they

already know about a particular subject. The more deeply they consider a subject, the more they have to write about.

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

You have been a part of conversations since you were an infant, and so of course you know a great deal about how people communicate. As you begin to explore what you know about this subject, answer questions such as the ones that follow.

If you have not already written your responses in the online journal, write them in the space provided below. When you read what you've written, you will see you have many ideas about conversations and typical patterns speakers use.

❖ When do you find yourself wanting to talk to a friend?

❖ Do men talk differently from women? Do they talk about different things?

♦ What purpose do casual conversations serve?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

If you have a dozen ideas about how people communicate, consider yourself fortunate. Sometimes an idea that occurred to you when you first thought about the topic might be just the thing to write about. However, even while you explore your ideas, keep the assignment in mind.

You can learn something new about language by investigating how you and people around you use language every day.

Your investigation will lead to an essay. To prepare to write this essay, plan to tape record or write down at least four different conversations that you take part in or overhear. Study the conversations you collect to discover how some people communicate. Did one of the participants keep changing the subject or ask a lot of questions? Did anyone repeat certain words? Was English mixed with another language? Did one person's voice begin to get louder or softer at a certain time? These are ways people communicate that can lead to one or more patterns in conversations.

Write an essay in which you identify and describe a language pattern. Then propose an hypothesis—your "best guess"—about why you think these people use the pattern you've discovered. Use conversations that illustrate the pattern. Explain how these examples illustrate your hypothesis about why people used language the way they did in that situation. Provide concrete details that allow the readers to "see" and "hear" the conversational patterns and the situations.

READING TO EXPLORE

These reading selections by authors Nancy Sakamoto, Judith Lindfors, and Deborah Tannen may suggest interesting and useful ideas about patterns in conversations for your essay.

Know the Author. Nancy Masterson Sakamoto was born in the United States and graduated from UCLA with a degree in English. She lived in Japan for 24 years before moving to Honolulu with her husband, a Japanese artist and Buddhist priest. Her book, *Polite Fictions: Why Japanese and Americans Seem Rude to Each Other*, is still used as a textbook in Japanese universities. In the reading selection which follows, she tells what she has learned about how people in Japan and people in America communicate.

Prepare to Read.

Watch for the way this author uses illustrations and examples to explain an idea.

Your Reading Goal is to discover how this author explains conversations.

Prepare to Make Reading Notes. As you read, quickly mark several sentences that stand out for you. One sentence may show you something about conversations you had never thought of before, and another one may seem just plain wrong. A chart for your reading notes follows the reading selection.

CONVERSATIONAL BALLGAMES

by Nancy Sakamoto

After I was married and had lived in Japan for a while, my Japanese gradually improved to the point where I could take part in simple conversations with my husband and his friends and family. And I began to notice that often, when I joined in, the others would look startled, and the conversational topic would come to a halt. After this happened several times, it became clear to me that I was doing something wrong. But for a long time, I didn't know what it was.

Finally, after listening carefully to many Japanese conversations, I discovered what my problem was. Even though I was speaking Japanese, I was handling the conversation in a western way.

Japanese-style conversations develop quite differently from western-style conversations. And the difference isn't only in the languages. I realized that just as I kept trying to hold western-style conversations even when I was speaking Japanese, so my English students kept trying to hold Japanese-style conversations even when they were speaking English. We were unconsciously playing entirely different conversational ballgames.

A western-style conversation between two people is like a

game of tennis. If I introduce a topic, a conversational ball, I expect you to hit it back. If you agree with me, I don't expect you simply to agree and do nothing more. I expect you to add something—a reason for agreeing, another example, or an elaboration to carry the idea further. But I don't expect you always to agree. I am just as happy if you question me or challenge me, or completely disagree with me. Whether you agree or disagree, your response will return the ball to me.

And then it is my turn again. I don't serve a new ball from my original starting line. I hit your ball back again from where it has bounced. I carry your idea further, or answer your questions or objections, or challenge or question you. And so the ball goes back and forth, with each of us doing our best to give it a new twist, an original spin, or a powerful smash.

And the more vigorous the action, the more interesting and exciting the game. Of course, if one of us gets angry, it spoils the conversation, just as it spoils a tennis game. But getting excited is not at all the same as getting angry. After all, we are not trying to hit each other. We are trying to hit the ball. So long as we attack only each other's opinions, and do not attack each other personally, we don't expect anyone to get hurt. A good conversation is supposed to be interesting and exciting.

If there are more than two people in the conversation, then it is like doubles in tennis, or like volleyball. There's no waiting in line. Whoever is nearest and quickest hits the ball, and if you step back, someone else will hit it. No one stops the game to give you a turn. You're responsible for taking your own turn.

But whether it's two players or a group, everyone does his best to keep the ball going, and no one person has the ball for very long.

A Japanese-style conversation, however, is not at all like tennis or volleyball. It's like bowling. You wait for your turn. And you always know your place in line. It depends on such things as whether you are older or younger, a close friend or a relative stranger to the previous speaker, in a senior or junior position, and so on.

When your turn comes, you step up to the starting line with your bowling ball, and carefully bowl it. Everyone else stands back and watches politely, murmuring encouragement. Everyone waits

until the ball has reached the end of the alley, and watches to see if it knocks down all the pins, or only some of them, or none of them. There is a pause, while everyone registers your score.

Then, after everyone is sure that you have completely finished your turn, the next person in line steps up to the same starting line, with a different ball. He doesn't return your ball, and he does not begin from where your ball stopped. There is no back and forth at all. All the balls run parallel. And there is always a suitable pause-between turns. There is no rush, no excitement, no scramble for the ball. 11

No wonder everyone looked startled when I took part in Japanese conversations. I paid no attention to whose turn it was, and kept snatching the ball halfway down the alley and throwing it back at the bowler. Of course the conversation died. I was playing the wrong game. 12

This explains why it is almost impossible to get a western-style conversation or discussion going with English students in Japan. I used to think that the problem was their lack of English language ability. But I finally came to realize that the biggest problem is that they, too, are playing the wrong game. 13

Whenever I serve a volleyball, everyone just stands back and watches it fall, with occasional murmurs of encouragement. No one hits it back. Everyone waits until I call on someone to take a turn. And when that person speaks, he doesn't hit my ball back. He serves a new ball. Again, everyone just watches it fall. 14

So I call on someone else. This person does not refer to what the previous speaker has said. He also serves a new ball. Nobody seems to have paid any attention to what anyone else has said. Everyone begins again from the same starting line, and all the balls run parallel. There is never any back and forth. Everyone is trying to bowl with a volleyball. 15

And if I try a simpler conversation, with only two of us, then the other person tries to bowl with my tennis ball. No wonder foreign English teachers in Japan get discouraged. 16

Now that you know about the difference in the conversational ballgames, you may think that all your troubles are over. But if you have been trained all your life to play one game, it is no simple matter to switch to another, even if you know the rules. Knowing 17

the rules is not at all the same thing as playing the game.

Even now, during a conversation in Japanese I will notice a startled reaction, and belatedly realize that once again I have rudely interrupted by instinctively trying to hit back the other person's bowling ball. It is no easier for me to "just listen" during a conversation, than it is for my Japanese students to "just relax" when speaking with foreigners. Now I can truly sympathize with how hard they must find it to try to carry on a western-style conversation.

If I have not yet learned to do conversational bowling in Japanese, at least I have figured out one thing that puzzled me for a long time. After his first trip to America, my husband complained that Americans asked him so many questions and made him talk so much at the dinner table that he never had a chance to eat. When I asked him why he couldn't talk and eat at the same time, he said that Japanese do not customarily think that dinner, especially on fairly formal occasions, is a suitable time for extended conversation.

Since Westerners think that conversation is an indispensable part of dining, and indeed would consider it impolite not to converse with one's dinner partner, I found this Japanese custom rather strange. Still, I could accept it as a cultural difference even though I didn't really understand it. But when my husband added, in explanation, that Japanese consider it extremely rude to talk with one's mouth full, I got confused. Talking with one's mouth full is certainly not an American custom. We think it very rude, too. Yet we still manage to talk a lot and eat at the same time. How do we do it?

For a long time, I couldn't explain it, and it bothered me. But after I discovered the conversational ballgames, I finally found the answer. Of course! In a western style conversation, you hit the ball, and while someone else is hitting it back you take a bite, chew, and swallow. Then you hit the ball again, and then eat some more. The more people there are in the conversation, the more chances you have to eat. But even with only two of you talking you still have plenty of chances to eat.

Maybe that's why polite conversation at the dinner table has never been a traditional part of Japanese etiquette. Your turn to talk would last so long without interruption that you'd never get a chance to eat.



Activity One: Reading Notes

Use the space below to write your response to the sentences you marked. Copy each sentence into the column on the left. Then in the right column, explain why you marked it and what you thought about it.

As an example, here are reading notes done by one student. When you have finished making your reading notes, discuss them with a partner if possible.

Author Says	My Response
<p>We were unconsciously playing different ball games.</p>	<p>Hmmm—Sakamoto is right. I don't have to think about the way I communicate most of the time. But when I am in a new situation, I have to pay attention to how people communicate in that setting. It would be crucial (!) to do it if I lived in another country.</p>

Author Says

My Response

Activity Two: An Experienced Reader's Thoughts While Reading

Experienced readers use particular reading strategies when they recognize that an author has an idea he or she wants to illustrate and explain.

The left column shows what an experienced reader thought about as he read Sakamoto's essay. The right column tells what this reader did so that you can use these strategies.

The title "Conversational Ball Games"...sounds strange. Ball games are one thing and conversations are something else. So why is she putting them together? Probably something about Japanese and American baseball players; I remember hearing that both countries love baseball.

First paragraph done—now I understand the title of a conversational ball game. My first idea about American and Japanese players having arguments on the baseball field—way off. This is about everyday conversations and the problems the author has had "playing ball" in conversations in Japan. With a last name like Sakamoto, I thought she was Japanese. Not so.

Cruising along, reading fast about Sakamoto's life. This essay's going fine; I imagine what the people look like, Nancy having problems talking to her husband's family or teaching students who don't participate

Ask questions and predict what the essay will be about from the title. This guessing motivates this reader to check out his best guesses against the author's comments, the way television viewers sometimes test their skills against those of the contestants on a quiz show.

This reader tries to fit his idea about the title with new information. When it doesn't fit, he discards it at once. **Guess while reading. It costs nothing to be wrong.**

in class. Then I hit the sentence “unconsciously playing entirely different conversational ball games.” Screeech—I put on the reading brakes, change channels on my mental TV set to the one with the split screen; time to watch for features of Western style and Japanese style conversations. Time to pay attention to patterns I bet.

Yep, right. Patterns. American conversations rapid-fire, like a tennis game, everybody trying to keep the ball going. Okay I know what she means. I’ve been at lots of dinners where people will say anything just to keep talking. It doesn’t matter who talks, but if I don’t want to look like a dummy I better think of things to say.

Conversations like bowling??? How... let’s see. In Japan, each person has a place in the line-up. The most important person starts to talk, or bowls the first ball. Everyone watches (or listens, maybe she means) until the person is finished. And then the next person makes a long speech on a different subject. Okay, I got what Sakamoto describes. Good writing. What I know about bowling helps me imagine Japanese conversations.

This reader notices when the author shifts from telling about her life to explaining the differences between conversations in America and Japan. **Re-set your reading purpose when an author signals a change in direction or a new part of an idea.**

Here this reader checks what he is reading against his own experience.

Note how this reader restates the writer’s example in his own words.

Someone's carrying a bowling ball onto my tennis court... I start to laugh, but then I get it, I get the picture... Say I just served a tennis ball. Someone caught it, ran over to a bowling alley, tossed it on the floor ...bizarre! In conversation, that would be like me expecting the other person to answer. But she waits till I talk for five or ten minutes, then answers for five minutes with something totally unrelated. Oh I see, I got it—two patterns for conversations...two different ball games. Tough! I'd go crazy.

So Sakamoto doesn't always understand her husband—oh right, he's Japanese—he dislikes American dinners because he didn't have time to eat. Huh??? I didn't understand that either, just like Nancy S. said. Especially the part about talking with his mouth full. Yeah but now she's reminded me, Japanese people talk long...if I lectured between bites, I'd be hungry too. Think of all the Japanese visiting America, juggling talk and food. Wow! Do Americans feel weird when people are quiet at meal times in Japan?

When this reader has enough information, the details fit together like the pieces of a puzzle. All at once, he sees the author's point. **Relate details to the author's main idea.**

Once the reader understands the point Nancy Sakamoto has made, he wants to know more; he begins to apply what he has learned to his own life. **Just as "common sense" and personal experiences inform reading, so reading relates to personal experience.**

The experienced reader used several strategies above to understand the essay.

❖ What do you understand about the reading now that you didn't before?

❖ What strategies can you borrow?

On Your Own: Reading Strategies to Use Now and Later

When you read school assignments, you often must read in new ways. Learn from this reader's experience with academic essays. Try one of his strategies as you read the next selection.

1. Read the title and guess what the article is going to be about.
2. Keep your guesses in mind, and read to find out whether you are right.
3. Use what you know from everyday

experiences to help you understand the author's examples and details.

4. Make a list of the author's examples. These details often add up to the author's central point or position.
5. Relate what you read to what you know.

If possible, read the next selection with a classmate.



READING SELECTION TWO

Know the Author. Judith Wells Lindfors studies the way people learn to use language. In this section from her book, *Children's Language and Learning*, Lindfors explores how children use language "as a toy."

Prepare to Read.

Watch for the author's explanations of examples as evidence for main points.

Your Reading Goal is to increase your knowl-

edge about patterns in children's conversations.

The examples in this essay will become clear if you read each of them aloud with a partner.

Prepare to Make Reading Notes. As you read, quickly mark no more than three or four sentences that you think are important. Mark specific sentences where Lindfors explains her examples. A chart for your reading notes follows the reading selection.

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE PLAY

by Judith Wells Lindfors

Adults play—using cards, using tennis racquets, using sailboats, using language. From our corny puns to our sophisticated witticisms, we use “language as a toy” (Garvey 1977). Children do too, and their language play, like our own, reveals substantial knowledge of language elements and relationships....

Consider these examples of language play by four-year-olds in a nursery school class. For each example, try to identify what knowledge the child has about language structure that enables him or her to play in this way.

[Example] a

Child 1: You're a boo!

Child 2: You're a shoe!

Child 3: You're a boo, too!

[Example] b

Child 1: You're a crazy nut head.

Child 2: You're a coo-coo brat head.

Child 1: Well, you're really a boo-boo bat bed.

Child 2: You're a foo-foo fat head.

The children in [Example] a and [Example] b are clearly playing with the sounds of language. The children in [Example] a insert rhyming words into a single frame (“You're a (rhyme)”). The children in [Example] b use a more complex frame that involves rhyming sets of words (“coo-coo brat head,” “boo boo bat bed,” and “foo-foo fat head”). In their final two rhyme sets, they are playing with alliteration as well as rhyme....The knowledge these children have of the sound system of their language is considerable, as demonstrated in their sound play. They know basic sounds of their language, and these are what they substitute as they move from rhyme to rhyme. And when they create new words, they create within the English possibilities for sound combinations. “Foo-foo” is not an English word, but it could be in the sense that that consonant-vowel combination can occur within the English sound system.

[Example] c

Child 1: (hopping along in a squatting position) Guess what kind of animal I am. Rib-bit, rib-bit, rib-bit.