Dealing with Misunderstanding:
An argument between an American husband and a Japanese wife

Yuzuru Takigawa
Osaka Jogakuin College

Abstract

Employing Conversation Analysis (CA) as a research framework, this study explores argument in Japanese in intercultural marriage. Previous studies in intercultural communication have examined only cultural differences between Japanese and Americans to discuss communication problems under the assumption that cultural differences are the source of the problems in intercultural communication. This study looks into an extended single case of naturally-occurring interaction between an American husband and a Japanese wife in order to examine the process of how a dinner table conversation develops into an argument, focusing in turn on the opening, developing, and closing stages. If communication problems in intercultural marriage are due to a couple's different cultural backgrounds, this should be recognizable through analyzing their interaction. However, this study identified that the argument occurred when the husband and the wife had contested claims on a language-related issue that had no relation to the cultural differences between them.

本稿は、会話分析（CA）を研究手法として用い、国際結婚での日本語会話における夫婦喧嘩（口論）について考える。異文化間コミュニケーション研究では文化的背景が要因でアメリカ人と日本人の会話には問題が起こるという前提のもとに日米文化の差異の比較検討に留まり、会話そのものに着目しない。そこで、この研究ではアメリカ人の夫、日本人の妻という構成の夫婦１組の夕食の席での口論の過程を３段階（口論の兆し、口論、口論の終わり）に分け、細かく観察した。もし、国際結婚における口論も文化の差異に起因するのであれば何らかの文化的側面が会話分析において見つかるはずだが、本稿で分析したデータでは、口論は会話中に話し合われた内容について、夫、妻それぞれの主張がぶつかりあって起こるものであり、夫婦の文化的背景とは何ら関わりのないものだということが判明した。

Introduction

This study explores a particular discursive event, an argument, within the context of an intercultural couple speaking in Japanese. Employing Conversation Analysis (CA) as a research framework, it examines the process of how a normal dinner table conversation between a married couple develops into an argument and then returns to non-confrontational interaction again. The data used is one argument segment taken from five hours of naturally-occurring conversation audio-recorded between an American

husband and a Japanese wife speaking in Japanese at home while they were having dinner.

A number of studies have examined communication problems between Japanese and Americans (e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Szatrowski, 2004). However, these studies have assumed cultural differences as a source of communication problems and limited their discussion of conversation participants' differences to their cultural backgrounds. The current study provides instead a turn-by-turn micro-analysis of conversational data, and examines the argument sequence by illustrating how it managed to start, develop and end. If the couple's cultural differences are in fact the source of their argument, this should be identifiable through a careful analysis of the interaction. This study aims to provide a new way of understanding communication problems in intercultural marriage by accounting in detail for misunderstandings and disagreement in terms of the action accomplished during natural conversation, a process which has been missing from previous intercultural communication studies.

Literature Review

Conversation Analysis (CA) examines talk-in-interaction [i] based on recordings and transcripts of actual interaction. A primary purpose of CA research is to explore what is going on in and through naturally occurring talk, and not to test a hypothesis of certain interactional behavior (Sacks, 1984). The data collected can be analyzed through a collection of cases of the same phenomenon or through a single case analysis. Collections aim to describe some single interactional phenomenon by gathering together a set of exemplary fragments from a variety of conversations, while a single-case analysis, on the other hand, attempts to make sense of one extended segment of talk by explaining how a range of interactional phenomena are brought to bear on it (Schegloff, 1987a).

Although compiling a collection is at the center of CA research, researchers also see value in "looking at a single conversation or a section of one" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998: 121). Single case analysis has the potential to inform our understanding of general patterns and features that may be common in a particular type of talk (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998) and "show the development of a piece of a social action as it accumulates over the length of episode" (Antaki & Horwitz, 2000, p.157). A variety of CA researchers have used single case analyses to apply CA findings on interaction to an analytically interesting stretch of talk (e.g., Antaki & Horwitz, 2000; Greer, 2007; Schegloff, 1987a; Takagi, 1999). This approach is especially beneficial for describing talk such as argument (Takagi, 1999), which develops gradually and builds over and extended sequence of turns.

"Argument" in this paper refers to a "quarrel or dispute over different stands on a case" (Antaki, 1994, p.214). An argument is a sequence consisting of at least three turns (Antaki, 1994; Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998). In the first turn, the first speaker makes a claim of some sort. The second speaker in the second turn disagrees with the claim. Then in the third turn, the first speaker makes the sequence argumentative by making an opposing claim, such as a challenge, counterclaim, or contradiction to the immediately prior speaker's utterance in the second turn (Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998).

In CA, opposition claims (or disagreement responses) are discussed within the framework of "preference organization" (Pomerantz, 1984). Preference organization does not involve the speaker's likes or desires, but instead refers to the way that conversation participants construct their turns-at-talk in order to sequentially accomplish various social actions. Both sequence-initiating actions and responses can be considered

as either preferred or dispreferred types based on their actions and turn shapes. A preferred response action is, for example, an acceptance in an invitation sequence, not a rejection. For a request, granting is preferred and denying is dispreferred. A dispreferred turn shape may include delays, hedging, repetitions and so forth as opposed to a preferred response shape which is prompt and sometimes even latched onto the previous turn (Pomerantz, 1984).

Disagreeing is, in general, considered to be a dispreferred action and agreeing is preferred. Thus, a turn that involves disagreement can be identified with a dispreferred turn shape when it is marked with some of the above hesitation indications. However, there are some occasions when disagreement is preferred, such as in response to negative actions as a challenge, a criticism, or an accusation. Once an argument sequence is underway, for example, disagreement becomes a preferred response as the conversation participants adopt opposing stances. In sum, as shown in Table 1 below, an argument sequence includes disagreement actions in the second and third turns and those disagreement actions are delivered as preferred responses.

Table 1: Preference organization in an argument sequence

Turn	Speaker	Preferred Turn Action	Turn Shape
1	1st	Claim	—
2	2nd	Disagreement	Preferred
3	1st	Disagreement	Preferred

There is usually some sort of interactional indication when an argument opens and closes. It may start as a friendly affiliative conversation and gradually develop into disaffiliative talk. For example, when conversation participants face confrontation with each other in interaction, they may keep disagreeing with each other by displaying some kind of hesitation, i.e., dispreferred responses. However, at one point, they may " begin to formulate their positions and stances in unmitigated forms by being prompt in their response, even overlapping" (Schegloff, 2007, p.73) instead of producing their utterance in a dispreferred way. An argument may be terminated by such means as at least one party voluntarily losing the quarrel, withdrawing from the conversation, or changing the topic of conversation (Vuchinich, 1990). Weak agreement, such as "well, maybe" (Mori, 1999a) is often observed in the closing stage of an argument sequence. It is not unusual in a family setting for conversation participants to retain contrary views to each other even upon termination of the argument (Vuchinich, 1990).

This section has briefly examined some of the previous CA investigations into disagreement, argument and preference organization that will be brought to bear on the analysis of the couple talk in this study. Although such prior scholarship is valuable in informing and grounding the discussion, it is important to remember that the CA approach is "radically emic" (Markee & Kasper, 2004), meaning that the most central basis for its claims is procedural consequentiality, the process by which the participants make public their turn-by-turn understandings in their next-turn responses (see Schegloff, 1992).

Methodology

The participants in this study have been given the pseudonyms "Sam" (the American husband) and "Yoko" (the Japanese wife). They speak Japanese at home, since in their

own words, "Sam's Japanese is better than Yoko's English". Five hours of naturally occurring conversation data were collected via audio-recording while they were having dinner. Both participants willing agreed to take part in the study, recording the data at times that suited them. They were free to retrospectively delete any conversations that they wanted, and the author later verified with the participants agreed to make public the particular sequence of talk analyzed in this paper. The researcher was not present during the recordings, so background information about the setting and context

The data were transcribed based on the CA transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (see Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007), which have been summarized in Appendix 2. While transcribing the recordings, I found several notable segments involving arguments. One of the argument sequences was then selected for the current study and analyzed in detail through a single case analysis. This analysis consists of a deep description of the argument sequence as it gradually develops over multiple turns. It focuses on the action involved in each turn and illustrates the development of the conversation as it goes from being ordinary friendly talk into an argument and then returns mundane conversation.

Summary of the interaction

While it is not possible to cover the entire conversation, a transcript of the complete segment can be found in Appendix 1. We will begin by offering a brief summary of the conversation in order to provide an overview of the conversation content. Some of the background information in this section was obtained through personal communication with Sam after the recording was made. This member check was undertaken not as part of an ethnographic study, but rather simply to contextualize the focal segment in terms of prior talk that is shared and relevant knowledge for the participants themselves.

Prior to the segment of conversation used in this study, Sam called Yoko while he was still at work and they discussed the night's dinner plan on the phone. Sam told Yoko that he would bring home *obento*,[ii] which he received in a meeting at work, to share with Yoko for dinner. Sam did not specify how many *obento* boxes he was bringing home but Yoko assumed that Sam was bringing at least two *obento* boxes. In fact, Sam only brought home one, assuming that Yoko would prepare something to go with the boxed food and as a result they had to share the one *obento* (a single portion) and Sam did not have enough to eat.

Yoko explains to Sam at the dinner table that she understood the earlier phone conversation to mean that he would bring more than one *obento* box for dinner. She also attempts to correct his use of the Japanese verb, '*wakeru*'. Sam shows the he understands '*wakeru*' to mean 'sharing one item between two or more people', which is an incorrect use of the verb according to Yoko. She claimed that it is 'to divide multiple items into two or more groups' and that is why when Sam had told Yoko earlier on the phone that they could '*wakeru*' the *obento*, she had assumed that there were at least two of them. Essentially the argument stems from a misunderstanding of the nuance of 'to divide' and 'to share'. Note that the verb '*wakeru*' can be used to convey both of these definitions in Japanese (c.f., Kondo & Takano, 2001). Thus, Sam and Yoko are both correct in terms of their understanding of its meaning.

Data Analysis

This section discusses three stages in Sam and Yoko's argument sequence: the opening, developing, and closing stages. The opening stage includes the topic change to talk about the dinner food situation and initial confrontation. The argument stage shows how the

argument is conducted in their on-going talk, and in the closing stage, I will show how their argument is resolved.

The opening stage

While Sam and Yoko are having dinner, they have been engaging in typical "news-of-the-day" talk. Then, in segment 1, they start talking about the situation with the dinner that night:

Segment 1

```
01       (4.0)

02  Y:   Sam tariru?

         "Sam, do you have enough?"

03  S:   ((laugh))

04  Y:   no?

05  S:   no. demo daijoobu =honto ni

         "No, but I'm OK really."

06       (.)

07  S:   kimi yoku kikanai to ikemasen.((laugh)) demo-=

         "You must listen carefully.  ((Laugh.)) But,"

08  Y:   =ki:ta yo.

         "I did listen."

09  S:   =demo chigau chigau jugyo: no mae ni toka ni chotto

         "But no, no. Before the class or whatever, a little bit…"

10  Y:   yoku ki:ta.

         "I listened carefully."
```

Immediately prior to this segment, the couple had been talking about one of Sam's students. After a 4 second lapse in conversation, Yoko in line 2 asks Sam if he has enough food. Here, she initiates a new topic of conversation by asking Sam a question that is designed in a yes/no format. The preferred answer to such an interrogative would be "Yes" (Pomerantz, 1984). Sam, however, responds to it in a dispreferred way, delaying his response by laughing (line 3). Yoko takes this instance of laughing as a negative response to her question and checks her assumption with Sam in line 4. In line 5, Sam confirms Yoko's assumption directly by agreeing with her turn by repeating it with falling intonation (Schegloff, 1996). However, he then attempts to mitigate this agreement by

adding a further turn increment ("but I'm OK really") that works to counter his own claim and so shapes the turn as dispreferred. Normally agreement would be a preferred act, and so it would happen smoothly, but here we can see that Sam is being careful about the way he chooses his words. By treating Yoko's question as a 'delicate' (Haakana, 2001), Sam makes public his understanding that his negative response could be potentially taken as criticism (of the food and, by extension, of his wife). By mitigating his agreement, Sam initiates an attempt to keep the interaction as an ordinary friendly one, but already we can see that the potential for disagreement has been occasioned.

In line 7, Sam then takes this opportunity to raise a different but related topic, namely, the couple's earlier phone conversation. This has a bearing on the lack of food, since Sam had assumed Yoko would prepare something else to go with the *obento*. After a short gap, Sam addresses Yoko with the pro-term *kimi* ('you') to mark the topic change, then tells her that she needs to pay more attention in conversation. It is possible to hear this turn in a number of ways, all of them negative. It could be a 'noticing' that acts as a negative assessment (a criticism), a warning or an accusation. One preferred response to an accusation is disagreement, which is what Yoko does in line 8; she produces her self-defense quickly, latching it on to Sam's turn before it has come to completion. In line 9, Sam prefaces his turn with disagreement-projecting connector "but", and then follows this immediately with perhaps the most direct way of doing disagreement in Japanese, "*chigau*". So at this point :we have witnessed the first three turns of Antaki's prototypical argument sequence (Antaki, 1994): the claim, counterclaim and disagreement.

And so the argument begins. In line 10 Yoko upgrades her disagreement from line 8, using the emphatic adverb *yoku* ('well') and dropping the sentence-final *yo*, a particle that denotes friendliness (Cho, 2000). By doing so, she holds her position against Sam's accusation, but is yet to provide an account for that position, the sort of action that might become relevant in ongoing talk of this kind. Sam moves on to initiate such an account by checking what Yoko actually heard in the earlier phone conversation.

Segment 2

```
11   S:   nani kikimashita ka

          "What did you hear?"

12        (0.5)

13   S:   [obento: ]

          "Bento box?"

14   Y:   [dakara::] dakara: (0.6) sore o wa/ke\te to itta

15        =daka: hu/ta\tsu  aru to omotta

          "Because, because you said to wakeru them, I thought there were two."

16   S:   N↑:=

          "Oh!"

17   Y:   =hitotsu /zu\tsu
```

"One for each."

Line 11 is grammatically recognizable as an interrogative; however Sam evidently does not intend to simply ask what Yoko heard on the earlier conversation; instead this is an expansion of his earlier accusation. For her part Yoko likewise displays he does not take Sam's turn as a question but as a challenge. Takagi (1999) claims that interrogative utterances in Japanese argument contexts are not "designed/interpreted as doing questioning" (p. 418), but are routinely employed to accuse or challenge the recipient. By using the interrogative form, Sam is blaming Yoko attributing her with responsibility for some negative action by implying that she did not pay adequate attention to what he mentioned in the phone conversation. This occasions Yoko's account (line 14), in which she explains why she thought there would be two *bento* boxes. Note that this response is not just a direct answer to Sam's question, but also how an elaboration on how she interpreted it, further providing evidence that Yoko has heard the interrogative in line 11 as part of the accusation.

Yoko tells Sam what she has heard ("You said we'll divide *obento*.") and explains what she understood from listening to him ("I thought there were two *obento* boxes."). Here, Yoko is implicitly displaying that her definition of the verb *wakeru* may be different from Sam's definition. She indicates that it needs to involve two items to perform the action of '*wakeru*' and that is why she thought Sam would bring home two *obento* boxes. In line 16 Sam responds to Yoko's explanation by acknowledging receipt of the information and marking it as newsworthy (Heritage, 1984; Local, 1996) by using emphatic stress and a louder volume in his response. Sam recognizes that Yoko understood differently what he told her due to differences in their verb definition.

From lines 1 to 17, then, we have seen that a new topic of conversation introduced by Yoko gradually developed into a discussion of the phone conversation that they had earlier in the day, which further developed into an accusation against Yoko for not listening to Sam, and its implied blame for the couple's present predicament. Then, Yoko showed her opposition to this action through her explanation of what she had heard and understood based on what Sam said on the phone. In the process, they have discovered that their definitions of the verb *wakeru* are different. These topics are all different but related under the general rubric of "the current food situation". A new topic in conversation is often introduced cohesively by linking it to what has just been talked about (Jefferson, 1984). As the topic proceeds in this section, we have seen that Sam and Yoko are gradually reaching their main concern, the reason for not having enough food on the dinner table.

The Developing Stage

In the opening stage, we have seen that Sam and Yoko had a misunderstanding due to the difference in their definitions of the verb *wakeru*. In the next segment, we will see that this difference becomes the source of their argument.

Segment 3

```
14  Y:   [dakara::] dakara:(0.6) sore o wa/ke\te to itta =daka:

15       hu/ta\tsu  aru to omotta
```

"Because, because you said to *wakeru* them, I thought there were two."

16 S: N↑:=

        "Oh!"

17 Y: =hitotsu /zu\tsu

        "One for each."

18 S: >kanga'ete, wa'ketta, moshi hu'tatsu aru,< na'nimo

19   wakema'sen

        "Think about it. We *wakeru*-ed. If there are two, we don't *wakeru* anything."

20 Y: hu/ta\tsu aru kara hitotsu /zu\tsu wa [ke-]

        "Because there are two, we *wakeru* one each…"

21 S: [A:] CHI'GA:U

                                            "Oh, that's not right."

22   (0.4)

23 S: /SO\RE wa wa'keru:: koto: tsukaimasen.

        " You don't use *wakeru* for that."

Yoko has implicitly displayed her definition of the verb in lines 14, 15 and 17, receiving a highly-marked news receipt from Sam in line 16. In line 18, Sam then begins his turn with explicit disagreement, indicating that, according to his definition, only one item is needed to do the action of *wakeru*, as opposed to Yoko's definition that requires two or more items. Yoko in line 20 initiates a counter-disagreement, telling Sam that *wakeru* can also be used in the way she is using it, to which Sam overtly and strongly disagrees by interrupting her (lines 20 and 21). The sequence from lines 15 to 19 is recognizable as a series of argument moves (e.g., Antaki, 1994; Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998), as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Argument Structure in Lines 14 to 23

Line	Speaker	Turn Action	Turn Shape
14 -17	Yoko	Provides an account that includes her definition of the verb	
18-19	Sam	Disagrees with Yoko	Preferred
20	Yoko	Disagrees with Sam by reiterating her definition	Preferred
21 & 23	Sam	Strongly disagrees with Yoko by interrupting her	Preferred (overlapped)

   While Yoko presents her definition of the verb *wakeru* in lines 14 to 17, Sam implicitly displays his definition as being different from hers by disagreeing with her (lines 18-19). As Yoko continues to attempt to convince him about her definition, Sam upgrades his disagreement by self-selecting in overlap at a point at which Yoko's turn is grammatically incomplete, meaning that speaker transition should not normally take place. In other words, he interrupts her and the sequential context has become clearly established as an argument. From here on, Sam and Yoko continue to argue about the definition, orienting to each other's claims and counterclaims: Sam insists that *wakeru* means 'to share one item between two or more people' while Yoko claims it as 'to divide multiple items into two or more groups'.

The Closing Stage

   In the argument stage, we have seen that Sam and Yoko have been arguing over their definitions of a Japanese verb. They counter each other's claims by responding promptly, sometimes even interrupting and using louder volume. In the closing stage, we will see that the argument gradually becomes more contained both in terms of the turn actions and their delivery.

Segment 4

```
50  S:  >so: so: so:< demo nanika no naka ni: kara wakemasu
```

   "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you *wakeru* from inside of something."

```
51      (0.6)
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```
52      hutatsu aru:
```

   "There are two."

```
53      (0.5)
```

```
54      wakeru: wa: hen ja [nai?]
```

   "Isn't it strange to *wakeru*?"

```
55  Y:                    [oben]to:, obento: wa hukuro ni:,
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```
56      hitotsu no hukuro ni: hutatsu haitteitara, obento:
```

```
57      wakeru desho?
```

   "*Obento*, if there are two *obento* in a bag, in one bag, you *wakeru* them, right?"

```
58      (1.1)
```

```
59  S:  tabun so: kedo: yoku ie [masu ka? yoku ]
```

   "Maybe so, but can you often say that? Often,"

```
60  Y:                          [tabun so:     ]
```

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　"Maybe so,"

```
61  S:   ie [masu ka?]
```

　　　　　"Can you say that?"

```
62  Y:      [ha:i,   ] iemasu
```

　　　　　"Yes, we can say that."

　　　In lines 50 to 62, Sam and Yoko continue to argue about the definition. In lines 55 to 57, Yoko again reiterates her understanding of the verb, using a hypothetical example to further explain its usage. Her turn in line 57 finishes with a tag question (*desho?*) which makes acknowledgement, and by implication agreement, a preferred recipient response in the next turn. However, Sam, who has been opposing this idea, does not respond to her claim immediately, allowing a 1.1-second gap of silence to transpire (line 58) before finally producing a weak agreement in line 60. Weak agreement can be an indication of a compromise and thus is often seen as the beginning of an argument closing (Kotthoff, 1993; Mori, 1999a). This is the first overtly affiliative move in this interaction since the argument started, indicating that the argument may be heading towards some sort of settlement, i.e., the opening sequence of the argument closure (c.f. Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). But note that Sam is far from equivocal in his agreement at this point, following it with a turn increment that again attempts to place some limitations on the value of Yoko's position, using a question to imply that while what she says may be true, it may not be a frequent usage. In this way his agreement is partial and immediately negated by a downgraded retry of his point—one that accepts the possibility of Yoko's view, but characterizes it as trivial.

　　　　　Further indications that the discussion is moving toward the argument closure can be observed in the following sequence.

Segment 5

```
61  S:   ie [masu ka?]
```

　　　　　"Can you say that?"

```
62  Y:      [ha:i,   ] iemasu
```

　　　　　"Yes, we can say that."

```
63       (1.9)

64  S:   so: watashi wa hutatsu, be- obento: ga hutatsu aru (.)

65       tabemasho: (.) wakeru koto iu:(.) wanai to omou
```

　　　　　"So, I have two *bento*. Let's eat them. I don't think I would use *wakeru*."

```
66       (0.7)

67 S:    honto ni?
```

"Do you really? "

68   (0.6)

69 Y: hai (0.3) dakara gokai shimashita (0.6) h.[h.]

    "Yes, that's why I misunderstood you."

70 S: [ki-]

71   watashi wa gokai sasemashi[ta?]

    "Did I make you misunderstand?"

72 Y: [hai.]

                                    "Yes."

73   (0.4)

In line 62, Yoko insists that her way of using the verb is common. Sam has been displaying strong opposition to all of Yoko's claims via prompt responses throughout the argument stage. However, here he does not immediately contest Yoko's opinion, as evidenced by the 1.9-second gap in line 63. Although he delivers one more attempt at disagreement in lines 64 and 65, prosodic features of his delivery (voice quality, tone, and volume) here are weaker compared with earlier turns in which he was opposing Yoko. This turn is followed with a gap of silence before Sam initiates a further confirmation check, indicating that he is no longer as adamant about his position.

Since this argument revolves around an interpretation of a Japanese lexical item, the identity category of "native speaker" has become subtly mobilized and is being made relevant in the details of the conversation and therefore making their relative levels of Japanese expertise procedurally consequential for the ongoing talk (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). Despite the fact that Sam's interpretation of *wakeru* is correct (in one sense), he appears to have been unaware of the other usage, which is equally valid. Although he at first holds his ground, he is unable to maintain it in the face of repeated reassertions from Yoko, a fluent speaker of Japanese.

In line 69 Yoko produces another account, this time locating Sam's use of *wakeru* as the reason why she misunderstood him during the earlier telephone conversation. Given the sequential context of this turn, it is hearable also as a complaint, perhaps reattributing blame for their current predicament back at the husband. Having established the additional meaning of *wakeru*, Yoko is in a position to be able to connect the topic back to her original in lines 14 and 15. Note that, both this TCU and the one in line 69 begin with the turn-initial connective *dakara*, which Mori (1999b) identifies as a canonical way of doing "agreement-plus-elaboration" in Japanese. Here Yoko's turn is not so much agreement as confirmation, but the effect is the same: "As recipients extend their response with the use of *dakara*, they offer their own experience as an example or consequence of the circumstance described by the prior speaker" (Mori, 1999, p. 71).

In line 72, Sam finally seems to recognize his part in the misunderstanding, returning to his normal tone of voice to initiate a confirmation check that acts as an admission, albeit one that is designed as an interrogative, which still makes an implicit claim of different knowledge bases. All of these displays indicate that Sam may be

attempting to gradually back out of this argument. The following sequence illustrates how Sam eventually terminates the argument.

Segment 5

```
84  S:   =goka(h)i suru kado:ka onaka ga mada suita
```

"Misunderstanding or not, I'm still hungry."

```
85  Y:   nani shiyo:
```

"What shall we do?"

```
86  S:   daijo:bu nani mo irimasen =jo:dan =chotto jo:dan

87       /na\tto ga aru desho?
```

"It's OK. I don't need anything. Joke. Little joke. We have *natto*, right?"

```
88  Y:   =n(h)ai ((laugh))
```

"We don't have any."

```
89  S:   (.) A, chocolate (.) sausage mada aru
```

"Oh, chocolate. We still have sausage."

One method of terminating an argument is by changing the topic of a conversation (Vuchinich, 1990). In line 84, Sam does a telling, claiming that he is still hungry, which is hearable as a mild complaint. This links topically back to the beginning of the extract where Yoko asked Sam if he had had enough food (line 2). By going back to the original conversation topic, he is making a bid to terminate the argument sequence. This is also noticeable through the way he prefaces his turn in line 84 with a 'be-that-as-it-may'-like conditional that dismisses the relevance of the intervening argument sequence and proposes to return the conversation to the topic of the dinner, and therefore projects a different thread of talk, one which will focus on possible solutions to the problem rather that addressing the reason why there is insufficient food.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Sam fully agrees with Yoko. Notice, that he has never overtly displayed his acceptance of Yoko's definition or admitted that he was not right about his version of the definition. Family members retain contrary views even when closing an argument (Vuchinich, 1990). Careful examination of the talk that follows Segment 5 (see Appendix 1) reveals that an apology or some other display of recognition is not forthcoming from Sam. He instead repeats his claim that he is not convinced, in effect negating the partial agreement from line 59. Yoko makes public she is aware of the missing admission via her appeal for sympathy in lines 81 and 83.

The talk in this segment consists of jokes and suggestions. Drew (2005) notes that with every move speakers make, they are making publicly available their understanding of whatever has just occurred, and the result of such real-time analysis "can be found in the construction of their fitted, responsive turn" (p.75). CA uses these immediate displays of intersubjectivity in what it calls the *next turn proof procedure*

(Schegloff, 1992; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) to understand speaker intentions according to the participant there-and-then claims. In line 85, Yoko treats Sam's bid to change the topic (line 84) as an indirect request for more food, by initiating a new sequence that addresses the problem of what to eat. In line 86, Sam dismisses his prior turn as simply a joke ("*chotto jodan*"), providing Yoko with a retrospective characterization of how to interpret his intentions. Although they continue to address the issue of what to eat next by tabling a number of suggestions, Yoko's next turn (line 88) is interspersed with laughter, indicating that she has aligned to Sam's depiction of line 84 as humorous. In this way the *wakeru* misunderstanding is solved and the argument is successfully diffused as the talk moves on to other topics.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has shown the process of how a routine dinner conversation turns into an argument. We have seen three stages in the argument sequence. In the opening stage, the conversation started out when the wife acknowledged the possibility that there was not enough food by asking her husband if he had enough to eat. Although Sam was at one point challenging Yoko, the conversation remained an ordinary friendly one. However, once they realized that they had had a misunderstanding due to the differences in their definitions of a key lexical item, they started to defend their own explanations by showing opposition to each other's claim (the argument stage). In this stage, we witnessed consecutive turns that enacted disagreement, in which the participants responded to each other quickly, often by overlapping their talk at points in the current-speaker's turn where speaker transition was not relevant (i.e., interruption). We also observed many instances where they were agitated, using louder volume and a stronger tone of voice in this stage. In the closing stage, the argument was gradually terminated with such methods as displaying weak agreement, displaying laughter displays, and ostensibly admitting fault instead of opposing the other party. The argument sequence came to an end as one of the participants initiated a change of topic.

By analyzing a single instance of the temporal unfolding of an argument, this paper has shown how a variety of interactional practices are used to construct a particular sequence of talk as argumentative. The aim of this paper has been to account for the process of argument through a fine-grained description of talk in terms of micro-social actions. The analysis called on broader findings from previous CA studies of the organization of talk-in-interaction, noting how they can be brought to bear on this particular instance. No attempt has been made to generalize the findings from this one argument to all arguments, and neither is one warranted.

Neither have I made any claims up until this point about the participant's macrosocial identities, including such relationally-paired membership categories as husband/wife, male/female, Japanese/non-Japanese and native/non-native. The CA aesthetic suspends analyst understandings of such categories in favor of evidence of the participants' locally-achieved understandings as they display them by and through the talk. As Schegloff (1987a) notes, "(w)hatever concerns for macrosocial issues we entertain, our ways of dealing with them will in the end have to be compatible with a capacity to address the details of single episodes of action through talking in interaction" (1987a, p. 102).

The argument in this study occurred when the participants discussed one matter in which they held different views, each participant attempting to insist on his or her own views being correct. In five hours of intercultural couple talk, I did not find any cases where the source of the argument was specifically due to the couple's cultural

differences. In terms of content, we have seen, however, that language differences, in particular misunderstandings that that are borne from lack of L2 knowledge by the non-native may become one source of contention between intercultural couples. It is not my role as analyst to assign blame in the case we have looked at here. If anything, both Yoko and Sam's interpretation of the word *wakeru* are valid, especially with regard to *obento*, which can be both divided and shared. Through a careful examination of the data, however, we can be fairly certain that at this point Sam was unaware of the second usage of *wakeru*, the one that Yoko had taken him to be using during the earlier phone conversation. This would seem to make Sam's status as a 'non-native' one of the identity categories that is being indexed throughout the conversation, and in the end this is probably is the reason why he finally accepts Yoko's alternate definition. Here Sam is the novice and Yoko is the expert, at least with regard to Japanese. However, the fact that Sam is able to enter into dispute about the interpretation of a lexical item from Yoko's first language must also make relevant their relationship as 'intimates': they are "doing being" husband and wife by the very fact that the novice is able to question the expert in this instance. This may be another way in which bilingual couples interactionally achieve "doing couplehood" (Piller, 2002, p. 222).

All talk is ultimately co-constructed and each party has a hand in prolonging the argument. At no point does Yoko acknowledge Sam's interpretation of *wakeru*. Such a partial agreement does not serve her local purposes of avoiding responsibility for the predicament. The participants are undoubtedly performing aspects of their identities, but they are also mobilizing them in the greater goal of winning the argument.

This paper has neither intended nor attempted to provide advice for intercultural couples on how to have (or win) and argument. That was never the aim of the exercise. However, it is likely that many readers will recognize elements of their own home conversations in the details of this analysis. One point that can and should be applied to other instances of conflict in intercultural talk, however, is the careful turn-by-turn consideration of action and the way it can lead to argument.

Finally, by focusing on an argument between an intercultural couple, I have in no way intended to imply that such conflict is necessarily more frequent, problematic or even noteworthy between such people. On the contrary, since the interpretation of meaning is an interactionally-achieved matter for couples who share the same first language, just as it is for intercultural couples, it is conceivable that language misunderstandings as a source of argument could be found in instances of argument between Japanese couples as well. In that sense, the focus of this study is a common one and perhaps nothing unique to intercultural couples.

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Appendix 1: Complete Transcript of the Argument

```
01      (4.0)

02  Y:  Sam tariru?

        "Sam, do you have enough?"

03  S:  ((laugh))

04  Y:  no?

05  S:  no. demo daijoobu =honto ni

        "No, but I'm OK really."

06      (.)

07  S:  kimi yoku kikanai to ikemasen.((laugh)) demo-=

        "You must listen carefully.  ((Laugh.)) But,"

08  Y:  =ki:ta yo.

        "I did listen."

09  S:  =demo chigau chigau jugyo: no mae ni toka ni chotto

        "But no, no. Before the class or whatever, a little bit…"
```

```
10  Y:   yoku ki:ta.
```

"I listened carefully."

```
11  S:   nani kikimashita ka
```

"What did you hear?"

```
12       (0.5)
```

```
13  S:   [obento: ]
```

"*Bento* box?"

```
14  Y:   [dakara::] dakara: (0.6) sore o wa/ke\te to itta
15       =daka: hu/ta\tsu  aru to omotta
```

"Because, because you said to *wakeru* them, I thought there were two."

```
16  S:   N↑:=
```

"Oh!"

```
17  Y:   =hitotsu /zu\tsu
```

"One for each."

```
18  S:   >kanga'ete, wa'ketta, moshi hu'tatsu aru,< na'nimo
19       wakema'sen
```

"Think about it. We *wakeru*-ed. If there are two, we don't *wakeru* anything."

```
20  Y:   hu/ta\tsu aru kara hitotsu /zu\tsu wa [ke-]
```

"Because there are two, we *wakeru* one each…"

```
21  S:                                        [A: ] CHI'GA:U
```

"Oh, that's not right."

```
22       (0.4)
```

```
23  S:   /SO\RE wa wa'keru:: koto: tsukaimasen.
```

" You don't use *wakeru* for that."

```
24  Y:   <tsu/ka\u yo>
```

"We do use it."

```
25  S:   chiga:u =honto?
```

"No. Really?"

```
26      ((1.0 second of eating sound))

27  Y:  <°tsu/ka\u yo°>
```

"We do use it."

```
28      ((2.1 seconds of eating sound))

29  S:  (d(.h)- e(.h)- ) i(h):e

30      (1.4)

31  S:  nattoku dekimasen
```

"No, I cannot be convinced."

```
32      (1.7)

33  Y:  do:shite hutatsu   attara =a:, wakemasho:.
```

"Why, if there are two, oh, let's *wakeru* it."

```
34      (2.2)

35  S:  do:shite: [sono ]
```

Why, that…"

```
36  S:            [h.:: ]

37      ((drinking something))

38  Y:  sono atama ga aru kara:, watashi ni so: itta kara:,

39      watashi wa gokai shimashita
```

"Because you think that way and because you told me that, I misunderstood you."

```
40  S:  chigau wakeru wa: (1.0) s- nanika naka ni:, ano::

41      candy (.) wakemasu. hito:tsu, hito:tsu=
```

"That's not right. *Wakeru* is, inside of something, umm, candy, you share one and

one."

```
42  Y:  =dakara, ni [ko ijyo: aru desho]
```

"So, there are two or more, right?"

```
43  S:              [ima ima ima IMA   ] o- obento:
```

```
44          wakemashita desho?

            "Now, now, now, now, we wakeru-ed the bento, right?"

45   Y:     chokore:to wa nanko aru?

            "How many chocolates are there?"

46          (1.3)

47   S:     shiranai demo (te-) [rokko]

            "I don't know, six? "

48   Y:                         [ikko ] janai desho:

                                  "Not one, right?"

49          (1.2)

50   S:     >so: so: so:< demo nanika no naka ni: kara wakemasu

            "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you wakeru from inside of something."

51          (0.6)

52          hutatsu aru:

            "There are two."

53          (0.5)

54          wakeru: wa: hen ja [nai?]

            "Isn't it strange to wakeru?"

55   Y:                        [oben]to:, obento: wa hukuro ni:,

56          hitotsu no hukuro ni: hutatsu haitteitara, obento:

57          wakeru desho?

            "Obento, if there are two obento in a bag, in one bag, you wakeru them, right?"

58          (1.1)

59   S:     tabun so: kedo: yoku ie [masu ka? yoku ]

            "Maybe so, but can you often say that? Often,"

60   Y:                             [tabun so:     ]

                                      "Maybe so,"
```

61 S: ie [masu ka?]

         "Can you say that?"

62 Y: [ha:i,   ] iemasu

            "Yes, we can say that."

63   (1.9)

64 S: so: watashi wa hutatsu, be- obento: ga hutatsu aru (.)

65   tabemasho: (.)wakeru koto iu:(.) wanai to omou

         "So, I have two *bento*. Let's eat them. I don't think I would use *wakeru*."

66   (0.7)

67 S: honto ni?

         "Do you really? "

68   (0.6)

69 Y: hai (0.3) dakara gokai shimashita (0.6) h.[h.]

         "Yes, that's why I misunderstood you."

70 S: [ki-]

71   watashi wa gokai sasemashi[ta?]

         "Did I make you misunderstand?"

72 Y: [hai.]

                                      "Yes."

73   (0.4)

74   [hai so: desu]

         "Yes, you did."

75 S: [a: so: ka   ] a: so: ka

         "Oh, I see. Oh, I see."

76 Y: kono hayai henji

         "See how quick my response is."

77 S: s: [s(a):]

"Well…"

78 Y: [hai.]

"Yes."

79   (0.9)

80 S: nattoku dekimasen

"I cannot be convinced."

81 Y: ((laugh))(.) $˚kanashi:˚$=

"I'm sad."

82 S: =so:, $de(h)mo$

"Yeah, but,"

83 Y: kanashi:

"I'm sad."

84 S: =goka(h)i suru kado:ka onaka ga mada suita

"Misunderstanding or not, I'm still hungry."

85 Y: nani shiyo:

"What shall we do?"

86 S: daijo:bu nani mo irimasen =jo:dan =chotto jo:dan

87   /na\tto ga aru desho?

"It's OK. I don't need anything. Joke. Little joke. We have *natto*, right?"

88 Y: =n(h)ai ((laugh))

"We don't have any."

89 S: (.) A, *chocolate* (.) *sausage* mada aru

"Oh, chocolate. We still have sausage."

90   (.)

91 S: ja: sore wa dame

"Well then, that's not good."

Appendix 2: *Transcript Conventions*

Transcription conventions are adapted from the CA conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (as outlined in Lerner, 2004).

(.)	noticeable pause
(0.5) (2.3)	timed silence, in seconds
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
?	rising intonation
underline	emphasis
CAPITAL	much louder volume
° quiet°	quiet volume
<slow>	decreased speed
>fast<	increased speed
[	beginning of conversational overlap
]	ending of conversational overlap
=word	latching of utterance segments
.hh	in-breath
hh	out-breath
English	English-like pronounced word, English word
wo(h)rd	word with laughter bubbling
wor-	cut-off
wo:rd	elongated sound
(word)	unclear word
$word$	word produced with laughing voice

If Japanese was pronounced differently from the standard Tokyo accent, the following conventions were used:

w/ord high pitch accent in following syllable(s)
w\ord low pitch accent in following syllable(s)
w'ord   stressed accent in following syllable(s)

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[i] Talk-in-interaction not only indicates everyday conversation but also includes the wider range of "talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1988, p. 13) such as institutional talks (e.g., oral proficiency tests and doctor-patient talks).

[ii] *Obento* is a boxed deli meal prepared for one person to eat and normally contains one serving of cooked rice along with a main dish, e.g., meat or fish, and side dishes such as stir-fried vegetables and egg dishes.