Hedging Functions of a Japanese Sentence
Particle in Interviews*

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Sentence particles in Japanese can function as a question marker, an excla-
mation marker, or a marker for forbidding an action depending upon the
variety. One such sentence particle is *ne* (or *nee* as emphasis) and it can be
regarded as a "hedge" or a "verbal filler". This pragmatic expression commonly
occurs in conversations[1], especially in informal situations to attract the lis-
tener's attention or to seek his/her agreement much like *you know* or a tag
question in English[2]. It is reported that in actual conversations such particles
as *ga* 'but' or *ne* are frequently added to the auxiliary verbs *desu* or *masu*
where otherwise in written form those auxiliary verbs are expected to come
at the end of a sentence (Mizutani, 1985, p. 62, data quoted from research
done by Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyuujo).

This paper mainly discusses the various contextual meanings of this par-
ticle, *ne* as observed in interviews, categorizing it on the basis of its functions.
I also examine the frequencies of its appearance in individual categories and
pair categories in the interviews, searching for any notable fixed conversa-
tional roles and/or interactions.

The corpus I used for my analysis is taken from the interviews in a na-
tional senior high school baseball competition (Chiben Wakayama Senior High
School v. Narutoo Senior High School) held in August, 1989. Although there
are altogether eight participants involved in the interviews, four people are
chiefly responsible for the conversations throughout the game. Following is
a list of those eight participants, with the four chief participants listed first.
Participants are all males and their ages are on the basis of my estimation:

1. Announcer (henceforth ANC, early 40's)
2. Commentator (Shin'ya Isono, henceforth S. I., approx. 50)
3. Guest commentator from Chiben Wakayama Sr. High. side (Mamoru
   Hayashi, henceforth M. H., late 30's)
4. Guest commentator from Narutoo Sr. High. side (Masamori Tsuchiya,
   henceforth M. T., in his 40's)
5. Reporter 1 (henceforth R1, early 30's)
6. Reporter 2 (henceforth R2, late 20's)
7. After-game interviewer (henceforth AGI, 40's)

8. Manager of Narutoo Sr. High (henceforth M of N, 50's)

I videotaped almost the entire game through the bottom of the 12 th inning and the interview of the manager of the winning team televised on NHK, lasting two hours and 37 minutes. I transcribed all the interviews word for word and categorized each sentence ending in the particle, *ne* according to my own scheme. Few of those sentences ending in *ne* were difficult to classify into a single category.

Categories of *ne* based on the contextual meanings

The particle *ne* carries a variety of meanings when used in various contexts in actual discourse. On the basis of my analysis of the corpus of the interviews mentioned above, the following six categories were observed. Examples of each category for this section are adopted from my corpus with the exceptions of sentences (12), (13) and (14).

1. Seeking agreement

(1) Pitchaa no Oshio-kun wa   ochitsuitemasu *ne*.
    pitcher of   Mr. TOPIC calm

    'Pitcher Oshio looks very calm, doesn't he?'

(2) Ima no battingu nado mo nakanaka chikara ga   komottemasu *nee*.
    now of batting   rather   power   NOM filled

    'His swing was really powerful, wasn't it?'

This type of *ne* is most common when used by an interviewer to confirm his/her comment with an interviewee. But his/her confirmation can be just a formality when the comment is obviously true. For example, *Ii tenki desu nee* 'It's a fine day, isn't it?' is quite obvious when uttered on a fair weather. The speaker is not really asking for an opinion, but rather using it as an icebreaker to strike up a conversation. The typical intonation of *ne* in this category is falling.

2. Seeking information (casual style)

(3) Shinozaki desu keredomo, ima doo shimashita ka *ne*.
                 but   now how did   QM

    'Speaking of Shinozaki, what's the matter with him?'

(4) Ima kono miokuri to yuuno wa   doo yuu koto deshoo ka *ne*.
    now this let go   TOPIC what   thing   QM

    How come the batter let the pitch go by?'

Ne of this type is used for asking a genuine question in a casual or familiar way, assuming the questioner is not sure about what is going on and asks

for the help of his/her listener. The examples above show a falling intonation because the sentences carry a (w) h-word, but information-seeking questions ending in *ne* frequently have a rising intonation. Very often this type of *ne* is preceded by an interrogative marker such as the particle, *ka* and/or a (w) h-word. This does not mean, however, that the appearance of *ka* ensures that the sentence belongs to this category. Rather, the speaker's intention can be determined by contextual evidence such as his previous comments and manner of speech.

3.   Attracting attention or keeping speaking turn

(5) Sorekara, kaabu   no kontorooru desu ga *ne,...*
     then   curve ball of control   but
     'And about the pitching control of his curve balls...'

(6) Soo desu *nee...*
     so
     'Let me see...'

The most noteworthy characteristic of this type of *ne* is that it is not necessarily preceded by a sentence or the S+V structure. Rather, it is very frequently inserted after words or short phrases to get the listener's attention or keeping speaking turn. Therefore, sentence (5) above can be paraphrased as follows without jeopardizing the meaning of the sentence: *Sorekara ne, kaabu no ne, kontorooru desu ga ne,...* Since the speaker generally does not complete his statement when using *ne* of this type, typically he holds his intonation level whether the particle ends in a short or a long vowel.

4.   Showing the speaker's emotions, most commonly surprise, admiration or sympathy

(7) Soo desu *nee.*
     so
     'I agree with you.'

(8) Naruhodo *nee.*
     'It certainly is./You're absolutely right.'

This type of *ne* is frequently used in interviews as a response to utterances in my category 1. Since this is not a request or a question but simply an expression of his/her feelings, the speaker cannot expect to trigger any re-action unlike categories 1 and 2. Examples (6) and (7) happen to be identical, but intonation patterns are different, the former one level, the latter one ending in a falling pattern showing the speaker's strong confirmation.

5. Intensifying the speaker's opinion or assertion

(9) Oshio ga   hunbatte nagete hoshii tokoro desu *ne*.
        NOM hang on throw   want

    'I hope pitcher Oshio sticks it out.'

(10) Sukoshi booru ga   takai ki ga shimasu *nee*.
   little   ball   NOM high feel

    'I think his throw is a little too high.'

This is another case where the speaker merely expresses him/herself rather than asking for any reaction. This type of *ne* also has a falling intonation contour. Unlike statements in category 4, which are frequently used to express agreement with a speaker, statements with category 5 are not used as often in answer to a question. Since *ne* here is used as an intensifier, it is practically possible to have as many sentences ending in this type of *ne* in a row as the speaker wishes. In my corpus one of the commentators records five in a row. If the statement is even more strongly asserted the particle, *yo* is a preferred choice.

6. Friendly requesting (for a favor)

(11) Sono nebarizuyosa o   motto   apiiru shite oite kudasai *nee*.
    that tenacity   ACC more   emphasize   give us

    'Please emphasize the students' tenacity for us.'

(12) Kare ni yoroshiku *ne*.
   he   to say hello

    'Say hello to him for me.'

There occurred only a single example of *ne* of this category in my corpus (i. e., sentence (11)). The sentence particle, *ne* here sounds rather 'light and casual' commonly accompanied by a smile, eye-gazing, nodding or a combination of these. Sentences ending in this type of *ne* show either a rising or falling intonation contour, but the former one sounds friendlier. The particle usually follows a polite imperative form (e. g., *--shite kudasai* 'Please do--') or a variation of this and functions to soften the tone of the command further. Therefore, this particle dose not normally occur in the most blunt imperative form in such a sentence as *Sore kotchi e motte koi ne* 'Bring it over here' (cf. *Yo*, instead perfectly matches the rest of the sentence to intensify the speaker's feeling). Sentence (12) has an imperative form in deep structure but is considered ellipted in represented form. In order to judge the correct category one must rely not only on the utterance itself but on the speaker's manner when it was pronounced (e. g., prosodic features, facial expressions).

    Mizutani (1985, p. 209) claims that *ne* can be used only when the speaker

and the listener share the common knowledge for the conversation or world knowledgd. She illustrates this point with some examples including the following sentence:

(13) * Watashi wa   kinoo   Tanaka-san   ni aimashita *ne.*
     I   TOPIC   yesterday   Mr./Ms. to met

     'I met Mr./Ms. Tanaka yesterday, didn't I ?'

The many sentences in category 1 of my analysis seem to support Mizutani's claim since both ANC and commentators are watching the same game together. Categories 2 through 6, however, do not necessarily satisfy this requirement. In category 3, for instance, the listener may not have the slightest idea of what is being expressed at the midpoint of the unfinished statement and similarly, in category 5 the speaker can insist on his/her own opinions while the listener may not agree with him/her. As Mizutani indicates, her example (13) is ungrammatical but if it is changed to (14) without jeopardizing the propositional content, it is perfectly grammatical and can be classified in either category 3 or 5:

(14) Watashi wa   kinoo   Tanaka-san   ni aimashite *ne.*
    I   TOPIC   yesterday   Mr./Ms. to met

    'I met Mr./Ms. Tanaka yesterday, you know.'

In the same vein, example (15) from my corpus also proves that the speaker does not have to have 'shared knowledge' with the listener.

(15) ...itsunomanika   ichirui   -gawa no Arupusu ippaini narimashite *ne.*
     without notice first base side of Alps   fully   became

     'The "Alps" stand on the first base side filled up with people without our realizing it.

Frequencies of each category of *ne*

The following list displays the total frequencies and percentages of each category of the particle in the interviews. The figure in parenthesis shows the number of particles that could be categorized in the column as an alternative choice.

The total number of appearances of this particle is 559: the announcer (ANC) accounts for 190 of them (34.0%) and the three commentators (M.H., S.I. and M.T.) follow him with 119 (21.3%), 94 (16.8%) and 81 (14.5%) respectively. Out of 599 examples category 1 is the most common with 173 (30.9%) examples of which 150 (86.7%) belong to ANC. Category 4 is almost as often used as category 1 totaling 164 (29.3%) with a total of 135 (82.3%) belonging to the three commentators. Categories 3 & 5 follow with 114 (20.4%) and 101 (18.4%) respectively, but categories 2 and 6 have only six examples (1.1%) and

Frequencies ot the particle, *ne*

Category \ Speaker	ANC	S. I.	M. H.	M. T.	R1	R2	AGI	M of N	total	%
1	150(3)	8	5(2)	0	3	3	3	1	173(5)	30.9
2	5(1)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6(1)	1.1
3	15	40	18(1)	6	8	25	2	0	114(1)	20.4
4	18(1)	16	54	65	4	3	0	4	164(1)	29.3
5	2	30	42	10	4	7	0	6	101	18.1
6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.2
total	190(5)	94	119(3)	81	19	40	5	11	559	100.0
%	34.0	16.8	21.3	14.5	3.4	7.2	0.9	2.0	100.1	

a single example (0.2%) respectively.

There are many possible interpretations of this data including the most distinctive ones as follows. The ANC's use of the particle is mostly seeking agreement (category 1, 150/190=78.9%) rather than offering his opinions (category 5, 2/190=1.1%) In many cases he is double checking rather obvious facts or feelings with his commentators:

(16) Ima kaabu   o   misemashita *ne*.
now curve ball ACC showed

'He's thrown a curve ball now, hasn't he ?'

(17) Ii   atari datta n desu ga *nee*.
good hit   was   but

'He almost managed to get a hit, didn't he ?'

In a sense what he says is oftentimes redundant or boring to the audience too, but his job requires him to say something to fill in the gap of silence. Contrary to my expectation the announcer (or interviewer) does not ask many information-seeking questions with *ne* (category 2, 5/190=2.6%). Probably a rising intonation or the question marker, *ka* is clearer and more common as this type of question.

On the other hand, three commentators are not mainly in the position of asking questions (no examples found) or seeking agreement (category 1, 13/294=4.4%), but of giving comments or expressing feelings (categories 4 & 5) reflected in the fact that 217 cases out of 294 examples (i.e., 73.8%) are in the latter category. Among their replies of agreement to the interviewer typically, *soo desu ne* (e) or 'That's right/I agree with you' account for 45.9% (135/294) of the utterances.

Category 3 is used mainly for attracting the listener's attention or keeping the speaking turn. This type in terms of frequency demonstrates the largest

individual variety. Commentator S. I. accounts for 42.6% of the utterances in this category out of his total utterances of *ne* (40/94). On the other hand, other commentators do not show such high frequencies: 18 of the 119 examples (15.1%) for M. H. and 6 of the 81 (7.4%) for M. T. This imbalance of percentages is probably not attributable to their roles in the interviews, but it is more logical to assume that it depends on a personal characteristic or habit of the speakers. ANC does not use many occasions of the *ne* of this category (15/190=7.9%). Since this type of *ne* momentarily blocks the flow of speech, it is counterproductive for an announcer, who is expected to keep up an even flow of speech, to use this form.

It is interesting to note the speech of the two reporters who are with a big crowd led by cheerleaders in the bleachers. Their speech show a relatively high rate of occurrence of this type of *ne*: 42.1% for R1 (8/19) and 62.5% for R2 (25/41) although the total in the data is rather small (33). It is, however, very possibly a result of their physical situation. They have to use short, loud utterances (at least they may think so) in the noisy stands to communicate through a microphone with the commentators in the booths, in much the same manner as one tends to talk on the telephone when surrounded by noise. In such stands it may oftentimes be necessary for the reporter to make sure if he is really communicating. For this purpose, using *ne* is one of the most efficient ways in Japanese conversations, each time the speaker expecting the listener's nod or a short response (e. g., *hai/ee* 'yes'). R2's talk may consciously or unconsciously be aiming at this effect:

(18) Narutoo wa desu *nee*,... gakusee mo desu *ne*, shiji   ni shitagatte
          TOPIC   students   direction to obedient
     ugoiteiru n desu yo. Ippan   no ooen...wa   makasero to yu katachi
     moving   general of cheer TOPIC depend   form
     de desu *ne*...

     'In the Narutoo cheering section students obey the adults who take the leadership.'

The low frequency of occurrences of *ne* in category 6, friendly requesting, is as expected. Public sports interviews by their nature do not contain many such speech functions. A free, casual conversation may have more examples of this type. The only sentence in category 6 in my corpus is (11) uttered by R2. Actually he is not asking seriously, but he tries to soften the atmosphere by introducing a naive request and inducing laughter.

As indicated in parentheses eight expressions may be classified into two categories and in all cases except one, category 1 is involved. For example, the following utterance has ambiguous readings (i. e., category 1 or 2) as the translation suggests.

(19-1) Ima kyatchaa ga... chuuchoshita n deshoo ka *nee*.
  now catcher NOM hesitated   QM

  'The catcher hesitated (to make a move) now, didn't he.'

  (The tag may be read with either falling or rising intonation)

  According to the first reading the speaker is relatively sure that the catcher hesitated (the falling intonation in the translation) and in the second reading the speaker gives a genuine question about the hesitation in question (the rising intonation in the translation). I prefer the first reading because the next utterance (19-2) by the same speaker immediately follows sentence (19-1) with the falling intonation.

(19-2) Te ni tsukanakatta yoona kanji ga arimashita *nee*.
  hand to did not stick like feeling NOM was

  'It seems he couldn't make up his mind, could he?'

  The speaker seems relatively confident of his understanding about the catcher's motion. The possibilities for the second reading, however, should not be totally excluded, either, since sentence (19-1) has a question marker, *ka* and therefore, the sentence conveys the sense of some doubt, too.

  So far I have analyzed the expression in question on the sentential level, but it is also meaningful to examine it on the discourse level to determine if there are any popular pair categories in the conversational interactions. There are so many occurrences of agreement-seeking questions (173) especially by ANC, but what is the most common response to them? The following list shows the breakdown of the replies.

Responses to agreement seekings ending in *ne*

[A] Expressions ending in *ne*:

Category 1	0	
Category 2	0	
Category 3	6	
Category 4	110	(incl. 93 caser of *soo ((nan)) desu ne*)
Category 5	6	
Category 6	0	
Total	122	

[B] Others:

Agreement (e. g., *hai/ee*)	28
Thinking/hesitation (e. g., *mmm*)	5
Explaining opinions	1
No response	9
Speaker's not giving enough pause	

for listener to reply   8

Total 51

It is most striking that in general agreement-seeking ending with *ne* are successfully responded to with agreement (i. e., [A] category 3 & [B] agreement); 138 out of 173 (79. 8%) including 110 examples ending in *ne* (63. 6%). Ninety three examples are *soo desu ne* 'That's right' or its variations, 53. 8% of the total of [A] and [B]. It is also noteworthy that responses with *ne* show a high ratio to the totals (122/173=70. 5%). To summarize, the most typical discourse pattern related to *ne* in my corpus is

      ⌈ANC: (Agreement seeking)+*ne*.
      ⌊Commentator:(Agreement, particularly *soo desu*)+*ne*.

This pattern forms the rhythm of the conversational interaction as much as a tag question accompanied by a reply with the same tag does in English:e. g., 'It's a nice day, isn't it ? —— 'Yes, isn't it ?'. This rhythm seems to contribute a good deal to the speakers' feeling of closeness to each other.

Another notable figure in the list is 9 cases of 'no response'. Conversations are usually interrupted if there is no response to an agreement-seeker. Conversationalists constantly try to fill the gaps of silence verbally or non-verbally. Therefore, these 11 cases are particularly intriguing. Two of these turn out to be cases where ANC did not seem to direct agreement seekings to any particular person. In other words, he was talking with a guest, but his commentary about the game directed to the listening public and his periods of silence apparently blocked the natural conversational flow with his guest. To avoid such silence ANC should have called the interviewee's name again to clarify whom he was talking to.

Three other cases of 'no response' occur when ANC again does not specify the interviewee, but in these cases he intentionally does this. All of these cases of agreement-seekings are uttered as a part of his commentary about the game and preparation for the after-game interview. Therefore, ANC sounds like he is talking with some imaginary partner.

Another 'no response' case is found in the interaction between the manager of Narutoo Sr. High. and the after-game interviewer as follows:

(20) M of N: ...kata   ga   karukatta n desu ka *nee*.
              shoulder NOM light   QM
            '(His) throw was not hard enough, was it ?'

  AGI: (silence)... sono ato   migotoni   tachinaorimashita *ne*.
              that after   remarkably   improved
            '(He) improved remarkably afterwards, didn't he ?'

M of N is seeking agreement from AGI, but the latter is not in the position

to give a comment. Instead, the interviewer himself directs an agreement-seeking remark of a positive nature to M of N.

The remaining three cases are the ones where the listeners seemingly ignore the agreement seekings. Chances are those listeners might have hesitated to comment because of one reason or another, or missed the speaker's words, or thought about something else. There are no clues found in the corpus.

Some discourse interactions evidence certain characteristics of word play or 'gameness'. As was shown above, the format, 'agreement seeking+*ne*' followed by 'agreement+*ne*' is a typical one. Another example of this is the case in which before the interviewer completes his statement the interviewee either fills in the missing words or expresses his judgment about the idea. An illustration follows. ANC was reporting that Chiba Narutoo had experienced many close wins for the local pennant. Then he commented as follows.

(21) ANC: ...sono gekisen no Chiba taikai o detekiteiru wake
      that hot contest of tournament ACC won   reason

      desukara, nantoka *ne*, koko wa--
      because by all means here TOPIC

      'Since your senior high school has had the guts to win their way
      in the prefectural matches, by all means... for this situation.

  M. T. : Soo desu *ne*.
       so

       'That's right.'

ANC did not finish his sentence intentionally but left a sort of pause after his last word because the content of the rest of the statement was contextually predictable. His partner was encouraged to fill in the suitable words in the gap or to agree/disagree with the idea in his ellipted statement. In this particular example, after ANC's *koko wa*, expressions such as *ganbatte hoshii* '(I want them to) take advantage of (this chance), or *tsuyosa o misete hoshii* '(I want them to) show their power' are acceptable choices as the ellipted forms. Actually in the corpus the interviewee played his role for this word game, saying *soo desu ne* 'That's right' to agree with predictable, ellipted phrases. There are two more similar cases found in my corpus indicating this example is not a chance occurrence.

Concluding remarks

This paper focused on the sentence particle, *ne* discussing its contextual meanings in discourse structures. I posited six categories for the particle in context on the basis of my interview analysis: 1) Seeking agreement 2) Seeking information (casual style) 3) Attracting attention or keeping speaking turn 4)

Showing the speaker's emotions, most commonly surprise, admiration or sym-
pathy 5) Intensifying the speaker's opinion or assertion 6) Friendly requesting
(for a favor).

I then discussed the frequencies of each category found in my corpus.
Categorizing each example of *ne* oftentimes can not be done in isolation, but
it requires total observance of the speaker includig his utterance itself, pro-
sodic features and facial expressions.

Among many findings were the roles of the participants and some charac-
teristics of each category. Also I examined some pair categories in inter-
views, discovering that there are consistencies in agreement-seekings and
responses, and a play of words in several instances.

For further research, it may be meaningful to check the similarities and
discrepancies between the Japanese *ne* and *you know* and tag questions in Eng-
lish. Also of interest is how and how often *ne* is used in various settings:
e. g., same-sex v. mixed-sex interactions, formal v. informal conversations,
older v. younger groups.

Notes

1. As is shown later the particle, *ne* is also frequently utilized in a sports interview.
   This usage is well contratsed with the announcer's commentary about the game, where
   no (or a small number of) occurrences of the word are observed as shown below.

   > ...saa, itten o ou Chiba Narutoo no 6-kai no omote no koogeki ga hajimari-
   > masu. Dotoo no yoona ooen ga tashikani 3 rui gawa kara okotteimasu. 5 ban
   > kyatchaa Hakkaku. Shooto. Hamada kara Horiguchi, wan-nauto desu. 6 ban
   > no saado Oono. Kyoo wa sekando goro to sentaa mae no hitto ga ippon. Na-
   > rutoo no hitto wa kokomade 2 hon desu.

   > 'Now we are on the top of the 6th. The batters of Chiba Narutoo Sr. High.
   > are coming up. They are trailing one run. The roaring cheers are coming
   > from the third base-side stand. Hakkaku. the catcher of the number five
   > spot, is at bat. It's a ground ball to the shortstop. Hamada throws the ball
   > to the first baseman, Horiguchi. One out. The sixth batter, the third base-
   > man Ohno is coming up next. He was grounded out and had a single to the
   > center today. Narutoo's had a couple of hits so far.'

2. According to a survey, among the Japanese words that are used more than 20 times
   in a conversation *ne* is placed 125th out of 607 in a formal situation, while it is placed
   34th out of 245 in an informal situation (Mizutani, 1985, p. 62, data quoted from re-
   search done by Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyuujo).

   Holmes (1986, p. 12) also reports that '*You know* also occurs predominantly in infor-
   mal conversations. ...there were only 12 occurrences of *you know* in 20,000 words
   of formal interaction, while *you know* occurs 195 times in 30,000 words of informal
   conversation.'

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