

【原著】

# Japanese L2 English Learners' Use of Hedges and Emoji in One-to-one LINE Discussion Forums

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日本人英語学習者の1対1のLINEディスカッション  
フォーラムにおける垣根表現と絵文字の使用

Stachus Peter Tu

## 1. Introduction

This study reports on one-to-one LINE discussion forums involving three pairs of intermediate level learners of English. The focus is on the relationship between two dependent variables: hedges and nonverbal markers, and two independent variables: non-agreement and teaching, in the context of these one-to-one conversations.

The study is structured as follows. It begins with a review of previous research, considering how non-agreement and teaching influence hedge and emoji use. Next, it describes the study: research questions, participants, the one-to-one discussion forum, procedures, and data analysis. The study then goes on to consider findings relating to the research questions of this study. The study finishes with a discussion of the findings and a summary of the conclusions.

## 2. Literature

### 2.1. *Non-agreement, instruction, and hedge use*

Research on interactants' disagreements in conversation, when speaking in ones' nonnative language (Takahashi & Beebe, 1993) and when speaking in ones' native language (Edstrom, 2004), found that interactants will mitigate their disagreements. These studies confirmed Leech's Maxim of Agreement in his Politeness Principle (1983), which states that interactants have a tendency to choose agreement over disagreement, and mitigate disagreements when expressing them. This may be explained by preference structure, which describes the tendency for speakers to prefer certain types of actions in a conversation (Pomerantz, 1984). Researchers who expanded upon Leech's Politeness Principle (Angouri & Locher, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2000), specify that this mitigation is required due to the face-threatening quality of disagreement. A disagreement is face-threatening because it effectively tells the other person that they are wrong, perhaps as a result of insufficient thought, study, or intelligence. Spencer-Oatey (2000), mentions that the face threatening acts within disagreement need to be treated appropriately in order to create or maintain relationships. All of this suggests that mitigating politeness strategies will occur less often in agreement than in non-agreement.

Regarding instruction, Bou-France and Garces-Conejos (2003, p. 19) point out that politeness

strategies may be taught using Brown and Levinson's model of politeness in order to "help non-native speakers to become aware of potential areas for negative pragmatic transfer and avoid pragmatic failure." Several studies that noticed EFL learners' inability to use politeness strategies in a similar way to native speakers of English (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015; Eelen, 2001; Linde, 2009; Suh, 1999) emphasize the need for the teaching of politeness strategies. Commenting on the teaching of EFL learners, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015, p. 9) proposes that "These L2 learners need, as a first step, to have their pragmatic awareness raised through consciousness-raising activities, which can help them become aware of the different politeness norms that might prevail in the target language environment." Several studies that included the teaching of politeness strategies to EFL learners (Carrell & Konneker, 1981; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; LoCastro, 1997; Schepers, 2014; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2012) note the positive effects of instruction on learners' ability to use politeness strategies and therefore increase their pragmatic competence. Schepers (2014, p. 28) concludes that "The teaching of pragmatics has proven to be effective in the context of the classroom, especially in an EFL one."

## *2.2. Non-agreement, instruction, and emoji use*

Preference structure describes the tendency for speakers to perform certain types of actions more often than others a conversation (Pomerantz, 1984). One feature of this phenomenon is that speakers will express agreement faster and more directly than disagreement because agreement is the preferred action. When expressing a dispreferred action, mitigation may occur. It has been argued that emoji often clarify and strengthen the intended meaning of a statement (Butterworth, Giuliano, White, Cantu, & Fraser, 2019; Lin, 2019). Since mitigation strategies would be preferred over strengtheners in non-agreement, because non-agreement is dispreferred compared to agreement, it was speculated that emoji would occur less in non-agreement.

While there are virtually no studies that have specifically investigated the effects of instruction on nonverbal marker use, some studies have investigated the positive effect of instruction on face-to-face nonverbal communication (Schwebel & Schwebel, 2002; Surkamp, 2014). Surkamp (2014, p. 15) emphasizes the importance of teaching face-to-face nonverbal communication, particularly for communicative competence, by pointing out that "One of the main teaching objectives in the foreign language classroom is the development of communicative competence. As an essential part of communication is non-verbal, communicative competence cannot consist solely of the correct use of verbal language."

# 3. Method

## *3.1. Research questions*

Previous research suggests that the two variables of non-agreement and the effect of teaching influence two variables: hedge use and emoji use. The current research is designed to evaluate this in a LINE online discussion forum via the following inquiry:

*Research question 1:* How does non-agreement and teaching affect hedge and emoji use in one-to-one conversations?

It was noticed in a previous study on group discussion forums (Tu, 2020), that participants largely replied to topic statements posted by the teacher and that participants usually did not talk back-and-forth with each other about the same topic. Since the one-to-one conversations in this study allow us to observe participants' behavior more closely, the study also investigated the following:

*Research question 2:* Is there back-and-forth conversations about the same topics in one-to-one conversations? What are the qualities of these conversations?

### 3.2. Participants

Three pairs of second-year students were selected, for whom the study assigned the aliases: "Nina", "Haruka", "Shinichi", "Ryutaro", "Yoko", and "Mami". All of the participants were second-year students enrolled in the Department of English at their university and were taught by the main researcher. The first pair consisted of Nina and Haruka, who were both female students, and rated the relationship closeness towards each other as 1 (the highest rating of closeness). The second pair consisted of Shinichi and Ryutaro, who were both male students, and rated the relationship closeness towards each other as 1. The third pair consisted of Yoko and Mami, who were both female students. Mami rated her relationship closeness with Yoko as 2, while Yoko rated her relationship closeness with Mami as 3. Nina and Haruka had TOEIC scores of 845 and 740 respectively. Shinichi and Ryutaro had TOEIC scores of 575 and 590 respectively. Yoko and Mami had TOEIC scores of 570 and 555 respectively.

### 3.3. One-to-one discussion forums

Participants created discussion-friendly topic statements such as "Smoking should be allowed

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*Message #7 (response to the topic statement: "Parents should never hit their children.")*

**Yoko:** I think parents should never hit their children. 😞 I have 2 reasons.

First, from my memory, I have seen my father hitting my brother. It was very shocking.

😞 Hitting children is pitiful. 😞

Second, on the Internet, children who were hit by parents tend to turn to crime in the future. 😞

If children don't feel "I am loved by parents.", they would go wrong. 😞

Therefore, I believe that parents should not hit their children 😞 .

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*Message #8 (agreement)*

**Mami:** I think parents should NEVER hit their children!! 😞

Because children can't forget the memory their parents hit them even they grow up.

And it sometimes ruin relationships between the children and their children. 😞 😞 😞

It's not a few parents who was abused in their childhood and do it their children..

Abuse from parents to children cause negative chains.

So I think parents should never hit their their children.

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**Figure 1.** Yoko's expression of agreement towards a topic statement not written by either members of the discussion forum, and Mami's expression of agreement towards Yoko's opinion

on campus.” and these are posted in a student’s name by the teacher onto the discussion forum. In this study, each pair of participants are in their own separate discussion forum, with no other classmates present. If participants expressed an opinion towards a topic statement that was not created by either of them, this was not counted as agreement or non-agreement because the creator of the topic statement is not present. An example of this from Yoko and Mami’s discussion forum is shown in Figure 1.

Yoko’s expression of agreement towards the topic statement, “Parents should never hit their children.”, was not counted as agreement because the topic statement was not written by Yoko or Mami, therefore there was no one to agree with. However, Mami’s response was not only towards the topic statement, but also towards Yoko’s opinion, and therefore was counted as agreement.

### *3.4. Procedures*

The study formed three one-to-one discussion forums that made up of two participants each, and the teacher as non-participating observer. The topic statements were those of controversial nature that participants and their classmates created prior to the discussion forum. The teacher posted an equal number of these topic statements in the discussion forums each week. Participants received instruction related to hedge use and emoji use at the beginning of class during the first and fourth week respectively. Participants reviewed what they had learned at the beginning of the following week’s class.

### *3.5. Data analysis*

The study analyzed the three pairs’ one-to-one LINE discussion forums that were conducted for eleven weeks during the 2019 fall semester. There was a total of 60 messages, which contain a total of 4,770 words.

The identification of hedges followed a three step process: 1) Reading the entire response. 2) Identifying the opinions that the response is attempting to convey. 3) Determining which words or phrases, if altered or removed, would leave the opinions more direct or imposing. These words and phrases were identified as hedges in the study.

When the data was analyzed, the rate of hedge and emoji use for each pair of participants was plotted chronologically message-by-message. Additionally, the study marks whether agreement or non-agreement is expressed in each message. These are participants’ expressions of agreement and non-agreement towards each other’s opinions or topic statements, and not answers to topic statements that were not created by them.

### *3.6. Informed consent*

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from an ethics committee at the university. After receiving this permission, the study was explained to the students before they were given the option to participate. Students who provided consent were given the option to withdraw their consent, discontinue their participation in the discussion forum at any time, and remove all data collected from them.

## 4. Results

This section begins with findings relating to each pair of participants: effect of non-agreement and instruction on hedge use, effect of non-agreement and instruction on emoji use, and back-and-forth conversation. In the tables and graphs, “A” represents the expression of agreement towards the other person, while “N” represents the expression of non-agreement towards the other person. Blanks represent messages that expressed opinions towards topic statements that were not created by either member of the discussion forum.

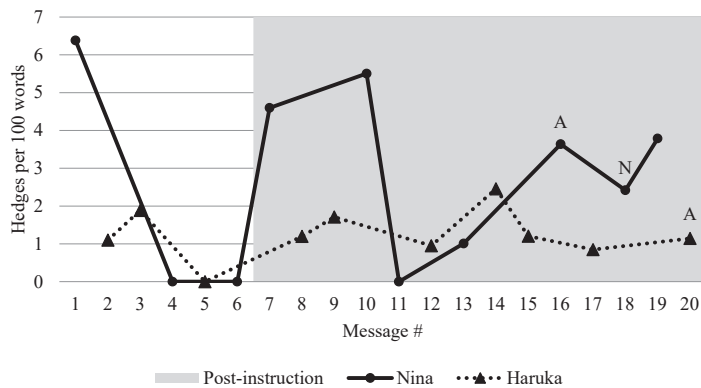
### 4.1. Nina and Haruka

#### *Effect of non-agreement and instruction on hedge use*

The data in Table 1 and Figure 2 show the rate of hedge use for each message sent between Nina and Haruka. The presence of agreement or non-agreement is also indicated. In Figure 2, gray sections of the graph denote messages that were sent after receiving instruction on hedge use.

**Table 1.** *Hedges per 100 words in each message sent between Nina and Haruka*

Message #	Agreement or Non-agreement	Nina	Haruka
1	-	6.383	-
2	-	-	1.099
3	-	-	1.887
4	-	0	-
5	-	-	0
6	-	0	-
7	-	4.598	-
8	-	-	1.198
9	-	-	1.709
10	-	5.505	-
11	-	0	-
12	-	-	0.952
13	-	1.010	-
14	-	-	2.459
15	-	-	1.205
16	A	3.636	-
17	-	-	0.847
18	N	2.419	-
19	-	3.788	-
20	A	-	1.143



**Figure 2.** *Hedges per 100 words in each message sent between Nina and Haruka*

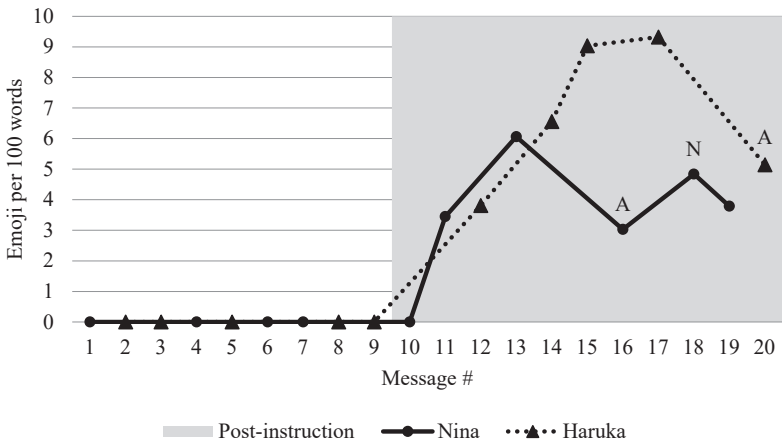
There were so few incidents of actual agreement or non-agreement that the study could not analyze its effect on hedge use. Nina and Haruka employ varying rates of hedges even when they are not responding to each other. From this message-to-message analysis, the effect of instruction could not be seen. The use of hedges varies considerably message-to-message.

*Effect of non-agreement and instruction on emoji use*

The data in Table 2 and Figure 3 show the rate of emoji use for each message sent between Nina and Haruka. The presence of agreement or non-agreement is also indicated. In Figure 3, gray sections of the graph denote messages that were sent after receiving instruction on emoji use.

**Table 2.** *Emoji per 100 words in each message sent between Nina and Haruka*

Message #	Agreement or Non-agreement	Nina	Haruka
1	-	0	-
2	-	-	0
3	-	-	0
4	-	0	-
5	-	-	0
6	-	0	-
7	-	0	-
8	-	-	0
9	-	-	0
10	-	0	-
11	-	3.448	-
12	-	-	3.810
13	-	6.061	-
14	-	-	6.557
15	-	-	9.036
16	A	3.030	-
17	-	-	9.322
18	N	4.839	-
19	-	3.788	-
20	A	-	5.143



**Figure 3.** *Emoji per 100 words in each message sent between Nina and Haruka*

Nina and Haruka began to employ emoji after they received instruction. As the discussion forum neared the end, both participants began to employ a lower rate of emoji. Actual discussion, in terms of expressing agreement or non-agreement towards the other person's opinion, does not occur until the end of the discussion forum. Due to the small number of messages that expressed agreement and non-agreement towards the other person, it was not possible to determine the relationship between non-agreement and emoji use.

### *Back-and-forth conversation*

Message 18 was the first incidence of non-agreement. Until message 18, participants would not reply to the same topic statements and kept switching topics. An example of this is shown in Figure 4. Both participants had already received hedge instruction when these messages were sent. Hedges are highlighted in gray.

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*Message #7 (response to the topic statement: "Students should be required to study English in elementary school.")*

**Nina:** In my opinion, students should be required to study English in elementary school. I think English is the most used language in the world. As I see it, English is like a window to the world because by English you can learn so many stuffs about the world. Also, maybe elementary school age is a great time to learn new things because children in that age have good brains that can absorb lots of new information. Therefore, students should be required to study English in elementary school.

*Message #8 (response to the topic statement: "We should stop eating whale meat.")*

**Haruka:** In my opinion I agree with the topic "we should stop eating whale meat". I have two reasons for it. Firstly, whales are about to extinct. The number of whales are decreasing in the world. I checked internet to find the reason why they are going to extinct. One researcher said whales are hurting by the unused oil from industries. Also, the ocean face a big problem due to global warming year by year. That means all of the species in the ocean are influenced by it. The place called ocean is going to be not appropriate for those species such as whales. Secondly, whales are getting polluted. Whales live height up in the food chain. They accumulate higher levels of pollution than many other marine species. I looked it up on internet and a researcher said whales are polluted because of human. They are polluted by heavy industries and industrialized agriculture in urban areas. From those reasons, I don't think we should keep eating whale meat.

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**Figure 4.** Example of Haruka switching topics and avoiding non-agreement with Nina's opinion

The first incident of non-agreement that occurred from message 18 is shown in Figure 5. Both participants had already received hedge and nonverbal instruction when these messages were sent.

Figure 5 shows an example of Nina expressing an opinion about the same topic Haruka was talking about immediately after Haruka expressed her opinion. Haruka did not respond to this and instead waited for Nina to express an opinion on another topic. After Nina expressed an

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Message #17 (response to the topic statement: “School uniforms are unnecessary.”)

**Haruka:** I disagree with my topic “school uniforms are unnecessary “. **In my opinion**, students should wear school uniforms. There are two necessities of wearing school uniforms.

📖✂️ Firstly, uniforms create less discrimination in the classroom, enabling students to focus on learning and education. 📖✂️ School uniforms ensure that no child is superior or inferior to any other child. They also create unity between students and make them responsible individuals who respect all cultures and religions. 👥🌐 Another major necessity of wearing school uniforms is that these are economical. 💰✂️ School uniforms help parents. They don’t have to spend some money in buying the seasonal school dress for the kids. 🧑🧒🧑 In conclusion, students should wear school uniforms because these uniforms allow them to focus on their study rather than distracting them towards fashion and trends.

Message #18 (non-agreement)

**Nina:** I agree with the topic of school uniforms are unnecessary. 📖 I have two reasons to support **my opinion**. Firstly, uniforms cost a lot of money. 💰📖 According to one article, new school students spends about ¥30000-¥40000 just for uniforms. If those students didn’t have to wear uniforms, they could save those money and maybe spend them on other educational stuffs. ✂️📖 Secondly, it takes students sense of individuality away. Students won’t be able to express who they are. **I think** schools should be the place where students can learn about individuality that we are not the same. They should teach that each person is different and we are unique in different ways. But uniforms tell students that everyone should be the same. 👥 For those reasons **I think** uniforms are unnecessary.

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**Figure 5.** Non-agreement from Nina

opinion on another topic in message 19, Haruka expressed agreement towards that opinion in message 20. This is shown in Figure 6.

Haruka expresses agreement with Nina’s opinion. Both participants had already received hedge and nonverbal instruction when these messages were sent. These were the last two messages sent in their discussion forum.

#### 4.2. Shinichi and Ryutaro

##### *Effect of non-agreement and instruction on hedge use*

The data in Table 3 and Figure 7 show the rate of hedge use for each message sent between Shinichi and Ryutaro. The presence of agreement or non-agreement is also indicated. In Figure 7, gray sections of the graph denote messages that were sent after receiving instruction on hedge use.

Although instruction seemed to have a positive effect on Ryutaro’s rate of hedge use, it did not increase Shinichi’s rate of hedge use, as he employed a lower rate of hedge use by the end of the discussion forum. With only one incidence of non-agreement, its relationship with hedge use could not be discerned. Although agreement occurs sporadically throughout the discussion forum, a single incidence of non-agreement does not occur until the very end of the discussion forum. The rate of hedge use message-by-message varied significantly.



Message #19 (switching to responding to the topic statement: "Students should be required to study English in elementary school.")

**Nina:** I think students should be required to study English in elementary school. 🙄🙄 I have two reasons to support my opinion. First of all, English is the most used language in the world, it would probably be necessary for a lot of people in the future. 🌟 Secondly, elementary school age is a brilliant time to learn a second language because children have a good brain condition that can receive lots of new things. 🧠 I think starting to study English at the age of 6 which is the beginning of elementary school is the best. 📅 Because students will be able to study it at least 6 years until they graduate elementary school, and they can learn it step by step in each year. 📖 for those reasons I think students should be required to study English in elementary school.

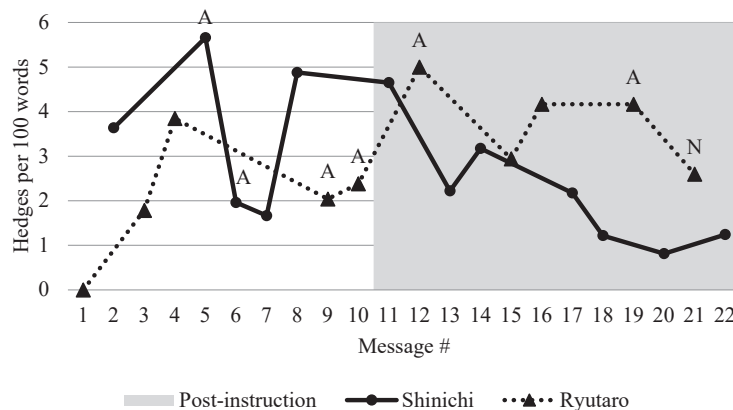
Message #20 (agreement)

**Haruka:** I agree with the topic of students should be required to study English in elementary school. There are some reasons that support my opinion. First of all, children who learn English at a very young age have native-like pronunciation. 🌟🙄🙄 It is said that many Japanese students lack self-confidence in speaking English. 🙄 However, children are often less self-conscious so they are willing to speak even if they make mistakes. It is important to let the students practice the same vocabulary and grammar again and again. 📖✍ The important thing is the lessons should be fun and interesting to get the children's attention to speak English as much as possible. 🧠🌟 Otherwise, they will quickly become bored. In class, culture is one of the essential parts of language learning. It is not possible to learn a foreign language without learning some of the culture. They can learn about its culture through the activities such as games and role-playing without getting bored. 🌀 In conclusion, studying English at a young age is necessary for us in the future. It could help us to master a second language more faster.

Figure 6. Nina expressing an opinion about a different topic after Haruka did not reply

Table 3. Hedges per 100 words in each message sent between Shinichi and Ryutaro

Message #	Agreement or Non-agreement	Shinichi	Ryutaro
1	-	-	0
2	-	3.636	-
3	-	-	1.786
4	-	-	3.846
5	A	5.660	-
6	A	1.961	-
7	-	1.667	-
8	-	4.878	-
9	A	-	2.041
10	A	-	2.381
11	-	4.651	-
12	A	-	5
13	-	2.222	-
14	-	3.175	-
15	-	-	2.941
16	-	-	4.167
17	-	2.174	-
18	-	1.220	-
19	A	-	4.167
20	-	0.813	-
21	N	-	2.597
22	-	1.242	-



**Figure 7.** Hedges per 100 words in each message sent between Shinichi and Ryutaro

#### *Effect of non-agreement and instruction on emoji use*

The data in Table 4 and Figure 8 show the rate of emoji use for each message sent between Shinichi and Ryutaro. The presence of agreement or non-agreement is also indicated. In Figure 8, gray sections of the graph denote messages that were sent after receiving instruction on emoji use.

**Table 4.** Emoji per 100 words in each message sent between Shinichi and Ryutaro

Message #	Agreement or Non-agreement	Shinichi	Ryutaro
1	-	-	0
2	-	0	-
3	-	-	0
4	-	-	0
5	A	0	-
6	A	0	-
7	-	0	-
8	-	0	-
9	A	-	0
10	A	-	0
11	-	0	-
12	A	-	0
13	-	0	-
14	-	4.762	-
15	-	-	4.412
16	-	-	6.25
17	-	0	-
18	-	1.220	-
19	A	-	6.25
20	-	1.626	-
21	N	-	5.195
22	-	1.242	-

Shinichi and Ryutaro began to employ emoji after receiving instruction, with Ryutaro's rate of emoji use being higher. No conclusions regarding any relationship between non-agreement and emoji use could be drawn.

#### *Back and forth conversations*

When looking at the conversations closely, it was noted that Shinichi and Ryutaro would also

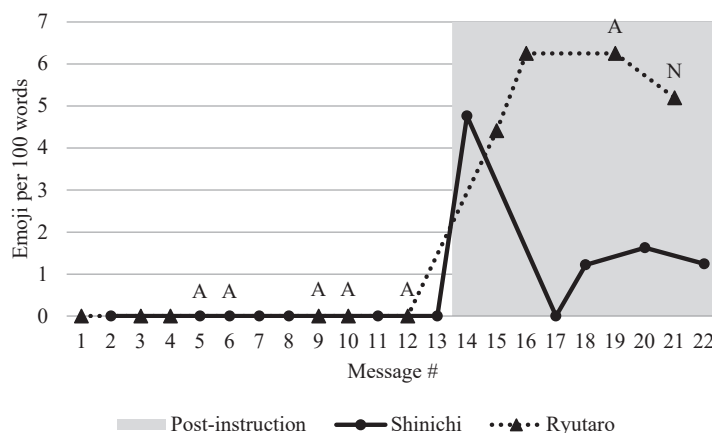


Figure 8. *Emoji per 100 words in each message sent between Shinichi and Ryutaro*

Message #11 (response to the topic statement: “English is easy to learn.”)

**Shinichi:** In my opinion, I disagree with this opinion. In daily life, the opportunity of contacting with English is too little. That is, we Japanese have to struggle to study English. For this simple reason, I think it is not easy to learn English.

Message #12 (agreement)

**Ryutaro:** In my opinion, I disagree with this opinion. I think that many Japanese have few opportunities to touch English. And Many people have declared that there is no opportunity to use in the future. Therefore I disagree with this opinion.

Figure 9. *Example of Ryutaro expressing agreement towards Shinichi’s opinion*

generally avoid expressing opinions towards the same topic statements. This is what Nina and Haruka would do in their conversations. When Shinichi and Ryutaro would occasionally express opinions towards the same topic statements, they would always agree with each other’s opinions. This is shown in Figure 9.

It is important to note that when participants are saying “I disagree”, this is disagreement towards the topic statement, not each other. Since both participants expressed disagreement towards the same topic statement, they were agreeing with each other. Shinichi and Ryutaro would rotate between avoiding talking about the same topic and agreeing with each other until very late in the discussion. At message 21, Ryutaro finally expressed non-agreement towards Shinichi’s opinion in message 20. Shinichi responds by switching to a different topic in message 22. This is shown in Figure 10.

#### 4.3. Yoko and Mami

##### *Effect of non-agreement and instruction on hedge use*

The data in Table 5 and Figure 11 show the rate of hedge use for each message sent between Yoko and Mami. The presence of agreement or non-agreement is also indicated. In Figure 11, gray

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*Message #20 (response to the topic statement: “School uniforms are unnecessary.”)*

**Shinichi:** I think it is not necessary for students to wear school uniform. Students should wear clothing they’d like to wear because it leads to grow their individuality 😊 Students who have infinite possibilities shouldn’t be blocked their way. But all is freedom is not very good!! The rule of wear in United States is just right. According to the internet, most school in the United States do not require uniforms, but instead enforce a standardized dress code of what types of clothing are appropriate for students to wear to school. It is moderate for them to express themselves in school 👍 There are both method and freedom. If Japan’s system of school uniform changes, the number of people who are flexible and have ability of creation may increase!!!

*Message #21 (non-agreement)*

**Ryutaro:** I disagree with this opinion 😞 I have three reasons. First, students will perform properly by wearing school uniforms. They realize that they are students by wearing school uniforms. Second, wearing school uniforms can enhance companion consciousness. I think they get along with each other better 😊 Third, wearing school uniforms will be anti-poverty measures. The importance of school uniforms is that somebody isn’t conspicuous, such as who is rich or who is poor 😞 For these reasons, I think school uniforms are necessary 😊

*Message #22 (switching to responding to the topic statement: “Students should be required to study English in elementary school.”)*

**Shinichi:** I agree with this topic. They should study English from elementary school. I think Japanese education system of English should reform. There are two reasons. First, the average Japanese TOEFL score is the lowest of all Asian countries. When I found this data, I felt very shocked 😞 Japanese ability of English is not good is obvious, but I didn’t think it was so low. So we Japanese should have sense of crisis. Second, according to the article in the internet, “Around 10 years of age is the best time for language learning. After that age, it becomes difficult to acquire a language.” It is very interesting content for young age 😊 Maybe the duration calls “Golden Age”. This is the best time to learn something. For example, supports, studies, anything else. So whatever thing you learn, that duration is the most appropriate to do. That is, elementary school is very good!!! For these reasons, I think students should be required to study English in elementary school.

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**Figure 10.** Ryutaro expressing non-agreement towards Shinichi’s opinion and Shinichi switching topics as a response. These were the last messages of this discussion forum

sections of the graph denote messages that were sent after receiving instruction on hedge use.

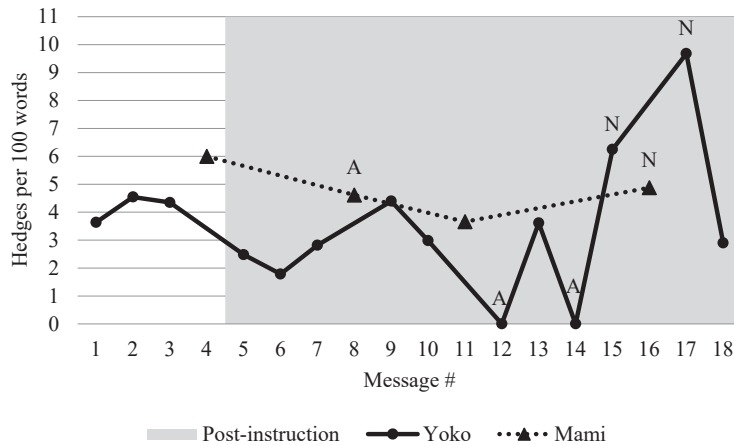
Due to the sporadic nature of the data, the effect of instruction could not be discerned. A higher rate of hedges seemed to be employed in messages that expressed non-agreement. This was the most visible in Yoko’s use of hedges, where she visibly employed a higher rate of hedges when expressing non-agreement. Mami sent much fewer messages than Yoko. Although still a small number, Yoko and Mami expressed non-agreement more than the other pairs of participants.

#### *Effect of non-agreement and instruction on emoji use*

The data in Table 6 and Figure 12 show the rate of emoji use for each message sent between

**Table 5.** Hedges per 100 words in each message sent between Yoko and Mami

Message #	Agreement or Non-agreement	Yoko	Mami
1	-	3.636	-
2	-	4.545	-
3	-	4.348	-
4	-	-	6
5	-	2.479	-
6	-	1.786	-
7	-	2.817	-
8	A	-	4.615
9	-	4.396	-
10	-	2.985	-
11	-	-	3.659
12	A	0	-
13	-	3.614	-
14	A	0	-
15	N	6.25	-
16	N	-	4.878
17	N	9.677	-
18	-	2.899	-

**Figure 11.** Hedges per 100 words in each message sent between Yoko and Mami

Yoko and Mami. The presence of agreement or non-agreement is also indicated. In Figure 12, gray sections of the graph denote messages that were sent after receiving instruction on emoji use.

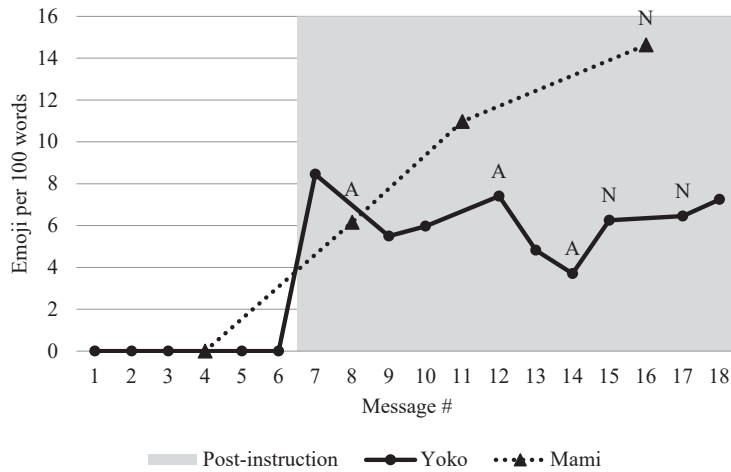
Yoko and Mami began to employ emoji after they received instruction. Although Mami's rate of emoji use was the highest in the final message, where she expressed non-agreement, this was data from a single message. Yoko, who expressed non-agreement twice, did not seem to change her rate of emoji use when expressing non-agreement.

#### *Back-and-forth conversation*

The first expression of non-agreement was done by Yoko in message 15. This expression of non-agreement was towards Mami's opinion from message four at the beginning of the discussion

**Table 6.** *Emoji per 100 words in each message sent between Yoko and Mami*

Message #	Agreement or Non-agreement	Yoko	Mami
1	-	0	-
2	-	0	-
3	-	0	-
4	-	-	0
5	-	0	-
6	-	0	-
7	-	8.451	-
8	A	-	6.154
9	-	5.495	-
10	-	5.970	-
11	-	-	10.976
12	A	7.407	-
13	-	4.819	-
14	A	3.704	-
15	N	6.25	-
16	N	-	14.634
17	N	6.452	-
18	-	7.246	-

**Figure 12.** *Emoji per 100 words in each message sent between Yoko and Mami*

forum. Although rarely occurring, participants could respond to opinions from very early on in the discussion forum because they were able to view the entire message history. This is shown in Figure 13.

Instead of responding to this non-agreement, Mami expressed non-agreement in message 16 towards a different opinion expressed by Yoko from message 13. Yoko responded to this in message 17 by also expressing non-agreement towards this non-agreement. This was the only time, among all the messages analyzed in this study, where non-agreement was expressed towards the other person's expression of non-agreement. This is shown in Figure 14.

*Message #4 (response to the topic statement: "Japanese teenagers should go to vote.")*

**Mami:** I think Japanese teenagers should go to vote. Japan is ageing society with fewer children. So Japanese government tend to raise policies for senior citizens. If Japanese teenagers go to vote more, Japanese government will pay attentions for young people's voice. So I think young people should go to vote.

*Message #15 (non-agreement)*

**Yoko:** Umm 🤔, My opinion is different from yours. Japanese teenagers do understand about politics? It is too early to judge which one is voted. 🤔 So, I don't think Japanese teenagers should go to vote.

**Figure 13.** Yoko expressing non-agreement towards Mami's opinion from message four

*Message #13 (response to the topic statement: "School uniforms are unnecessary.")*

**Yoko:** In my opinion, school uniforms are necessary. There are 3 reasons for it. First, students don't need to care about what to wear at school 🏫. I am a university student 🎓, so I have to decide clothes everyday. That is sometimes troublesome. Second, when I wear uniform, I get very motivated. 😊 school uniforms will brace you up. Third, school uniforms prove your identity. Everyone will know you are high school students, and which schools you go. Therefore, I believe that school uniforms are necessary 😊.

*Message #16 (non-agreement)*

**Mami:** I think school uniforms are unnecessary... 🤔 School uniform has good points and bad points. If we had school uniforms, we wouldn't waste our time to choose clothes. 😊🕒 And wearing school uniforms contribute to schools. These are good points. Then I want to take notice of bad points. School uniforms are expensive. It must cut costs. 💰🔪🔪🔪 And it's difficult to adjust in a change of season. In addition, I think it kills student's individuality and originality. 🙅🙅🙅🙅 So I think school uniforms are unnecessary or it must be more selectable and freely. 😊

*Message #17 (non-agreement towards non-agreement in message 16)*

**Yoko:** I understand your opinion! School uniforms kill individuality..... 🤔 I think so. However, in my view, school uniforms are necessary until high school. They are emotionally immature, so they have to obey adults 🙅

**Figure 14.** Mami expressing non-agreement in message 16 towards a Yoko's opinion in message 13 and Yoko responding by expressing non-agreement in message 17 towards this non-agreement

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Effect of non-agreement and instruction on hedge and emoji use

There were few instances of non-agreement in any of the three discussion forums. The case

studies are already limited in the amount of data they are able to collect and drawn conclusions from and the situation was further aggravated by the fact that many participants simply did not interact with each other consistently. Due to participants in all discussion forums primarily only responding to topic statements posted by the teacher, and not proceeding to actually exchange opinions, there was very few incidents of agreement and non-agreement. As a result, conclusions about the effect of non-agreement on hedge and emoji use were unable to be drawn.

Perhaps due to the fact that our data was based on a message-to-message analysis, the data was quite sporadic, particularly when analyzing the effect of instruction on hedge use. Although the study could not determine a consistent effect of instruction on hedge use, it was noted that participants began to employ emoji after receiving instruction. This use of emoji was most likely due to the fact that participants were ensured that emoji were appropriate to be used in the discussion forum after they underwent instruction.

### *5.2. Back-and-forth conversation*

The low rate of interaction in the discussion forums may have been due to participants avoiding non-agreement. Throughout the majority of every discussion forum, the participants would primarily give their opinions towards different topic statements, while usually not commenting on the other person's opinion. When they did comment on the other person's opinion, it was always an expression of agreement. This behavior would continue until the very end of the discussion forums until one person finally "breaks the peace" and actually expresses non-agreement towards the other person's opinion. Once this happened, none of the receivers of non-agreement would defend their opinion and initiate a discussion, but instead would continue to avoid non-agreement. In the case of Nina and Haruka, Haruka did not respond to Nina's expression of non-agreement and waited for Nina to send a message on a different topic. Once Nina sent a message that was about another topic, Haruka immediately agreed with Nina's "new" opinion. It is unwise to draw conclusions based on isolated instances, but Haruka seemed to not know how to respond to Nina's expression of non-agreement and instead, waited for her to change topics. Once Nina expressed an opinion about a new topic, Haruka sent a message that expressed agreement towards her opinion, which she may have been more comfortable doing. In the case of Shinichi and Ryutaro, Shinichi completely ignored Ryutaro's expression of non-agreement and switched to talking about a different topic. Shinichi seemed not to be interested in initiating discussion and decided to not even acknowledge Ryutaro's expression of non-agreement completely by switching topics. Whether these actions or non-actions were deliberate can only be a matter of conjecture. In the case of Yoko and Mami, Mami also failed to respond to Yoko's expression of non-agreement and switched topics. When Yoko, again, expressed non-agreement with Mami's opinion towards a new topic, Mami did not respond again, and the discussion forum ended. Even though Yoko seemed to actively try to initiate discussion, Mami's switching of topics and complete silence after the second incident of non-agreement may be interpreted as actions that deliberately stifled any possibility of discussion. The reasons for participants' avoidance of non-agreement towards each other's opinions may be due to its face-threatening quality, which could harm their relationships. Particularly in a one-to-one environment, where face-threat could only occur between two people, participants may feel increased vulnerability and heighten their efforts to avoid



non-agreement. The strategy of switching topics in order to avoid non-agreement may have been particularly favorable for participants because they may have felt more freedom to express opinions towards topic statements that were made by people who were not present in the discussion forum. Since these people were not present in the discussion forum, there was no possibility of face-threat.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate individual participants' use of hedges and emoji in their online discussions with one other classmate. Although our analysis of one-to-one discussion forums did not reveal much new data about hedge and emoji use, it revealed to us the tendency for participants to avoid non-agreement by switching topics or by not responding. This consistent avoidance stifled interaction throughout all of the discussion forums, resulting in very little actual discussion involving agreement or non-agreement towards the other person's opinions. Compared to those who participated in group discussions forums (Tu, 2020), participants in this study had much more freedom to "participate without interacting". This entailed the giving of opinions towards topic statements, but rarely ever commenting on the other person's opinions.

The greatest limitation in this study, was the fact that students were given topic statements to discuss that were not written by them. As a result, if one person responded to these topic statements, it did not count as expressing an opinion towards the other person in the discussion forum, because the other person did not write the topic statements. This was the main reason for the low rate of interaction, because it only allowed us to count participants' responses to the other person's opinion as agreement or non-agreement. Another limitation related to the topic statements, was the surplus of topic statements available for participants to discuss. The surplus of topics did not encourage participants to discuss the same topic and actually interact with each other, but instead allowed them to simply reply to multiple topics as if they were submitting homework without actually responding to the other person's messages. Furthermore, the surplus of topic statements allowed participants to avoid non-agreement in a way that does not exist typically in a conversation. Instead of having to employ hedges in order to mitigate the face-threat caused by non-agreement, participants were able to just simply switch topics or wait for the other person to talk about a different topic in order to avoid non-agreement. These methods of avoiding non-agreement, suddenly switch topics or going silent until the other person speaks again, are not typical of actual conversations. The combined effect of topic statements that were not written by the participants and having too many topic statements to discuss resulted in data that was not discussion-like. This problem could be mitigated by making participants discuss one topic that they created themselves. In this way, there would be no responses towards topics that are not created by the members of the discussion forums, nor would there be an option to just switch topics to avoid non-agreement.

The fact that many of participants' messages looked like "submissions to homework", makes us speculate that the participants perceived the discussion forum to be a form of homework rather than chatting on a familiar social media platform with a friend. The lack of interaction in particular, suggests that the discussion forum was not discussion-like. With such a low rate of discussion, it is also questionable whether the discussion forum allowed participants to practice and improve their ability to express their opinion. Furthermore, our attempts at promoting discussion as

possible by posting topic statements for students might have been seen as excessive involvement from the teacher. This may have caused participants to feel as if the discussion forums were just a required activity that was part of an English course, rather than an actual unsupervised discussion forum where they could practice expressing their opinion.

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