Interactional functions of verbalizing troubles:  
Self-addressed questions in Japanese conversation  
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When a speaker in conversation encounters a trouble producing an utterance, one of the common solutions across languages is self-addressed questions (SAQs). Tian et al. (2016) showed that Japanese speakers produce nante yu no ‘how to call it,’ nan daroo ‘what would it be’ and nan dakke ‘what was it,’ and concluded that, comparing the usages with English and Mandarin counterparts, SAQs in Japanese more frequently address problems of phrasing than problems with memory retrieval. It should be pointed out, however, that having a trouble in formulation is one thing and verbalizing such a trouble is another. In other words, it is not yet clear what outcome such meta-comments on the speaker’s troubles have in the ongoing interaction.

Adopting the methodology of Interactional Linguistics (Thompson et al. 2015), this paper aims to reveal the functions of verbalizing troubles in interaction. The data for this study are taken from CallHome and CallFriend Japanese (McWhinney 2007) and some additional video recordings from our own collection.

Through the qualitative analyses, we found that while the speaker’s trouble when using nante yu no can be a lack of appropriate expression in the language they speak (ex.1), the speaker often has an interactional issue in that she or he is implementing an action that requires delivery with caution due to the delicate nature of the action (cf. Lerner 2013), such as giving advise to the recipient (ex.2) or making a negative evaluation about people (ex.3). Using nante yu no ‘how to call,’ the speaker alerts the recipient about the delicate nature of the talk that is going to be delivered. Moreover, the tokens of nante yu no are often articulated in a faster tempo than the surrounding talk, which indicates that the speaker is not buying time but is indicating her stance towards the content.

We also compared nante yu no with the other SAQs in Japanese, which makes our findings more robust. Firstly, nan daroo ‘what would it be’ is often produced after a question, when the speaker is trying to come up with an answer. With nan daroo, the speaker keeps the floor, making the recipient wait until a satisfactory answer is produced. By contrast, the tokens of nan dakke ‘what was it’ are often used when the speaker is telling a story. Although the story belongs only to the speaker, she or he orients to the shared knowledge with the recipient using nan dakke, so that the recipient can offer the candidate answer. Thus, the three types of SAQs differ in their sequential environments as well as their interactional functions.
Examples

(1) [The speaker is talking about his experience in shopping.]

*e warito ano: nante yu no hora yasuri* (0.3) hai- a: ha ryohanten mitaina toko aru ndakedo
INJ fairly well how.to.say hey discount.shop INJ INJ volume.retailor like place exist but
“We well, fairly, you know, there are places, **how to say it**, like discount shops (0.3) ret- um
volume retailers.”

(2) [The speaker is commenting on a letter that the recipient wrote in English.]

01  *iroiro ano >nante yu no kana< machigae de wa nai ndakerededomo:::,*
various INJ how.to.say mistake COP TOP NEG but

02  *motto koo iu hoo ga ii tte iu noto::,*
more this say way NOM good QT say and
“There are various, **how to say it**, … though they are not mistakes,
but there are better ways to say those things.”

(3) [The speaker is asked whether she has made friends in the new environment.]

01  *tteiuka::, .hh ano:, zenzen koo:, >nante yu no kana< chigau ndesu yo ano,
DM INJ at.all INJ how.to.say different COP FP INJ

02  *(0.2) kyootsuuno ten ga nai ndesu zenzen.*
common point NOM not.exist COP at.all
“It’s rather, well, totally, well, they are, **how to say it**, different.
(0.2) We have nothing in common at all.”

Transcription symbols

> words <    words articulated in a faster tempo
(0.3) length of pause or silence
     prolongation
-     cut-off

References

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