Towards Dialogue Authenticity of Examinations via Discourse Markers

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Abstract

This paper examines how the use of discourse markers (DMs) has evolved in conversational problems in university entrance examinations over the past forty years. The result of the analysis reveals that although considerable progress has been made, there is much room left for improvement. This report concludes that considering the potential washback effect, it is essential to raise the quality of problems in examinations in order for young Japanese to acquire English competency and that appropriate inclusion of DMs in dialogues can enhance the proximity of the discourse toward authentic conversation. The author lastly provides an example of how to insert DMs into a typically rigid existing examination problem in order to generate an air of actual conversation.
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1. Introduction

It has been the wish of many students of English language worldwide to learn colloquial, communicative English (Timmis, 2002) and the Japanese are no exception. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT) has long recognized the unsatisfactory state of English language education especially in terms of improving students’ communicative abilities. MEXT has hence been launching various projects and action plans including “An Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities” announced in 2003 and “The English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization” in 2014. In addition to these, when the Course of Study is revised approximately every ten years, MEXT introduces new English subjects for the purpose of boosting students’ communicative skills. Examples of new subjects at the high school level are “Oral Communication” in 1989 and “English Communication” in 2009.

In spite of all these efforts by MEXT and above all by students themselves, dramatic improvements in students’ communicative skills have yet to be seen. The most commonly cited culprit responsible for poor communicative English skills of the Japanese is said to be in entrance examinations. The competition to get into prestigious universities is so severe that high school students as well as teachers have no choice but to concentrate on the kind of English that appears in entrance examinations (Sturman, 1989; Brown, 1993, 1995; Vanderford, 1997; Shimamura, 2009). Therefore, it is essential that the use of English in entrance examinations, especially dialogue questions, bear more resemblance to communicative, colloquial
English, in order to equip students with “the ability to fluently communicate with English speaking person” as advocated by MEXT in its English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization.

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether or not Japanese university entrance examinations have shown any progress in conversational problems by analyzing the use of Discourse Markers (DMs). Since DMs are known as, among other things, features of unprepared, spontaneous talk (Erman, 1987; Watts, 1989; Channell, 1994; Carter and McCarth, 1997; McCarthy, 1998; Fox Tree, 1999; Fox Tree and Schrock, 2002), examining the use of DMs will hopefully reveal, even partially, the degree of progress in conversational problems. Because of their potential washback effect, the quality of problems in entrance examinations should be one very important aspect of changes in English education in Japan. In the end, the author would like to demonstrate how adequate addition of DMs will bring dialogues in closer proximity to natural spoken English.

2. Background and literature review

2.1 Historical aspects of English language education in Japan

Japan had been secluded from the rest of the world for more than 200 years and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the country fully realized the economic and technological superiority of the Western world. There was obviously a strong desire to catch up, and understanding English was imperative to Japan’s progress (Weiner, 1994). During this time, it was even proposed that Japanese be abandoned and English adopted as the national language (Miller, 1982). Therefore, it is not surprising that English was regar-
ded as the tool to gain, not to give, information. In much the same way as they had used Chinese as a source for knowledge, it was mostly the ability to read English and then to translate it into Japanese that was required for this purpose.

Until Japan became economically successful in the 1970’s, English was regarded as the way to transfer information one way. Japan then recognized the need for interactive communication for spoken as well as written language. This period, 1970s, coincided with the emergence of communicative teaching in Western countries (Shohamy, 1990; Clapham, 2000), but the Japanese educational system resisted these outside influences. Thus, though Japan had ample opportunities to reform its English language education, these chances were never taken. Both English classes at school and English in entrance examinations have long been based on grammar translation method.

2.2 The Course of Study

In Japan, MEXT promulgates the Course of Study or curriculum guidelines approximately every ten years. It provides the goals, guidelines, and general principles for teaching each subject. Its purpose is to ensure that students are provided with the same quality of education throughout Japan.

When the Course of Study in 1979 and 1989 are compared, several differences can be observed as well as numerous similarities (Law, 1995). One of the most significant improvements from 1979 to 1989 is the introduction of aural/oral communication, with one disappointing aspect: none of these courses are compulsory. It was widely
observed, therefore, that many high schools did not actually follow these guidelines for fear of losing precious class hours to solve questions for entrance examinations.

The Course of Study in 1998 placed more emphasis on aural/oral communication and some qualitative improvements were made as well. In this 1998 Course of Study, *gengo katsudo* or language activity, is described as “to respond” or “to transmit information” instead of the more physical action of “to speak”. This change shows a better understanding by MEXT of what actually constitutes communicative ability, which is not merely a jumble of separate skills but the integration of each skill along with the development of paralinguistic and sociocultural competence, paragmalinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence (Hymes, 1972; Widdowson, 1978; Canale and Swain 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell 1995).

The 2009 Course of Study focuses on developing academic proficiency, such as expressing oneself in presentations, debate, and discussions (Underwood, 2012). In reality, however, because of the intense pressure caused by competitive entrance examinations, these reforms can potentially end up having only a cosmetic effect without a concrete proposal for reforming examinations.

### 2.3 Washback effect

Washback effect is the term used when describing the effect testing has on teaching and learning (Hughes, 2003; Brindley, 2001; Chapelle & Brindley, 2002) and it can be either positive or negative. A high stakes test such as university entrance examination in particu-
lar can dominate the whole process of learning and teaching. In the case of foreign language education, both students and teachers tend only to focus on what is likely to be tested, irrespective of its effectiveness on the development of language ability (Leonard, 1998). Consequently, washback effect can be beneficial when the contents of the examinations reflect the aim of a particular form of education, but it can be harmful when there is a wide discrepancy between the two.

It is widely believed that Japanese university entrance examinations have had a negative washback effect on English language education (Brown, 1993, 1995; Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Ryan, 1995; Leonard, 1998; Sturman, 1989; Vanderford, 1997). Researchers have shown that despite the students’ wish to develop their communicative ability, most English exams lack communicative content. Tanabe (2003) also reports on the poor quality of spoken English among Japanese students, despite the long hours spent on English education.

The influence of the washback effect is reflected in three different Japanese expressions meaning English: eigo, juken eigo, and eikaiwa. Eigo is a general term meaning English. When someone specifies English you learn at school for examinations, it is often referred to as juken eigo, whereas English for actual communication is called eikaiwa. This trend demonstrates there is a conventional division in the minds of many Japanese that there are two different languages within English (Hones & Law, 1989).

2.4 Authentic versus edited dialogues

There have been lengthy debates on the pros and cons of authen-
tic materials over the past several decades. Although some researchers once advocated the motivating effect of authentic materials (Bacon and Finnemann, 1990; Kuo, 1993; Little et al., 1994), the majority now agree on the use of adapted materials as most appropriate. Authentic dialogues with no editing have so many overlaps, unfinished sentences, ellipses, spoken grammars, and so on that they simply confuse students and can be a hindrance to learning especially for beginners (Widdowson, 1984, 1990, 1994, 2000; Morrow, 1977; Robinson, 1980; Hutchinson & Waters, 1984; Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984; Day and Bamford, 1998). One way to create suitable materials for learning is to start with the authentic dialogue and eliminate inappropriate usages. Another is to fill in missing features of natural discourse in concocted dialogues (McCarthy & Carter, 1994). As Widdowson (1998) advocates, “The appropriate language for learning is language that can be appropriated for learning” (p.715) and this principle also holds true when composing dialogues for entrance examinations.

2.5 Discourse Markers

2.5.1 What constitute discourse markers

Although most researchers fundamentally agree that Discourse Markers (hereafter DMs) signal a sequential discourse relationship, there is no consensus on what expressions are discourse markers and what are not.

Levinson (1983) is one of the first to shed light on DMs, though he did not use the actual term DMs but instead referred to them as phrases that “indicate the relationship between an utterance and the
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prior discourse” (pp.87-88). Some of the examples Levinson researched are but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, and after all. Schourup (1985) who employs the term “discourse particles” is mainly interested in like, well and y’know.

Schiffrin’s (1987) work on “discourse markers” has laid the foundation for later research. Her analysis includes and, because, but, I mean, now, oh, or, so, then, well, and y’know as they occur in unstructured interviews. She sees the functions of DMs as indicating or displaying the relationship between sentences.

Blackmore (1987) uses yet another terminology “discourse connectives” and discusses phrases such as and, after all, you see, but, moreover, furthermore, and so. She works within the relevance theory framework and proposes that these terms “impose constraints on relevance in virtue of the inferential connections they express” (p. 141).

Taking all these studies into account, Fraser (1990) basically agrees with other researchers in that “a discourse marker signals the speaker’s view of how the message following relates to the preceding” (p.391) but excludes some of the expressions that his predecessors consider to be DMs. For example, he refuses to include interjections (ah, oh, etc.), vocatives (Mr. President, darling etc.) and other expressions such as because, y’know and I mean, as they have functions other than signaling a sequential relationship. He later (1999) modifies some of his arguments, and includes conjunctions such as because, since, and although. All these endless efforts by different researchers confirm the potential difficulty of defining DMs.

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2.5.2 Basic characteristics of DMs

As addressed in the earlier section, there has been no single agreement among researchers as to what constitutes DMs. There are, however, some basic elements that are most commonly attributed to DMs and these would include connectivity, optionality, non-truth conditionality, weak-clause association, initiality, orality, and multi-categoriality (Schourup, 1999). In other words, DMs are optional items which relate utterances but do not affect the truth conditions of the core meaning of a sentence and not usually inside the syntactic structure. DM positions are often, though not always, at the beginning of a sentence.

The following examples from Fraser (1990) illustrate how caution is required when identifying DMs (pp.388–389). In these very similar two sentences, the identical word can either function as DM (*italicized*) or as something else (not italicized).

(1) (i) A: John left. *Now*, Mary was really frightened.
(1) (ii) A: John left. Now, Mary was really frightened.

(2) (i) A: I want another candy. B: *Well*, there are six left.
(2) (ii) A: I want another candy. B: There are...well... six left.

*Now* in (1–i) functions as a focusing device, while in (1–ii) it serves as a time adverbial. Similarly, well in (2–i) functions as a discourse marker signaling some forthcoming dissonance, while in (2–ii), it is a pause marker, a very different signaling device.
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The aim of this presentation is not charging bravely into the world of never-ending discussion as to the qualification of DMs but examining the transition of Japanese university entrance examinations in terms of DMs, and making constructive suggestions in composing dialogues in the test. Therefore, in this article, the selection of DMs will be narrowed down to the frequently used DMs that have gained approval by most researchers.

2.5.3 Functions of discourse markers in spontaneous talk

Although DMs can be found in both written and oral interactions, some DMs are more likely to be found in spoken discourse (Carter, 1987; Stenstorm, 1990; Schourup, 1999) where they serve to function to mark interpersonal and social relationships. By tactfully using DMs, speakers are conveying their reactions to what others have said and signaling their stances, attitudes and feelings to the listeners. DMs, therefore, have higher tendency to appear in spontaneous talk. Appropriate use of DMs in written dialogues, therefore, could help them assume the natural air of spoken dialogues.

2.5.4 Functions of discourse markers to be analyzed

As was discussed earlier, criteria of DMs are somewhat vague with different suggestions from individual researchers. Among the numerous DMs, eleven are selected based on Fox Tree (1999), as she concentrates on DMs “found frequently in spontaneous speech but not in prepared speech or written text” (p.390). Some of the DMs from Fox Tree are excluded from the analysis because of their potential ambiguities.
2.5.4.1 Oh

According to Schiffrin (1987), “oh occurs as speakers shift their orientation to information” (p.74). Jucker & Smith (1998) categorize oh as a reception marker, which gives feedback to speakers to show how listeners are integrating information. The status of oh as a reception marker is later endorsed by Fuller (2003). Ajimer (1987) enumerates seventeen functions for oh, and finds “oh occurred more than any other initiator with accompanying elements” (2002, p.100) with 42% of the use of oh occurring as in one of the following collocational patterns:

Expletives with oh  Oh God, Oh gad, Oh gosh, Oh golly, Oh goodness, Oh Christ, Oh Crikey, Oh crumbs, Oh bloody, Oh hell, Oh heavens, Oh dear, Oh God almighty
(These mostly function as a follow-up or back channel.)

Positive covert intensificational adjectives and adverbs with oh  Oh super, Oh good, Oh great, Oh fine, Oh lovely, Oh fantastic, Oh absolutely
(Affective connotation)

Agreement  Oh yes, Oh I know

Disagreement  Oh no

Acceptance  Oh I see, Oh of course, Oh well
Endorsement  *Oh that’s a point, Oh that’s right*

2.5.4.2 Well

*Well* is perhaps the most researched DMs. Schourup (2001) identifies more than a dozen studies that have attempted to determine *well*’s core function, with no consensus yet reached. *Well* can initiate turns (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974), preface answers that are insufficient (Lakeoff, 1973) and anticipate disagreements (Pomerantz, 1984).

Both Schiffrin (1987) and Fuller (2003) conclude that *well* is a reception or response marker and it appears when an utterance is at odds with a previous one. Schiffrin (1987) further discusses the use of *well* in response to a question. When respondents are unable to answer a question coherently, *well* can act as a signal for diversion. According to the data collected by Schiffrin, answers to WH-questions are more often preceded by *well* because deliberation is needed in order to deliver a considered response. In the case of a yes-no answer, respondents will tend to preface their answers with *well* when not answering yes or no. Overall, Schiffrin concludes, “*well* is used when respondents do not match questioners’ assumptions as to what constitutes the ideational content of an answer” (pp. 107–108).

The following dialogue from Schourup (2001) is intriguing, as in it *well* is used as a “quasi-linguistic vocal gesture used to portray the speaker’s mental state” (p.1058).

A: There’s something I need to ask you.  [long pause]
B: Well?

(This will be followed by the promised question.)

Reading this dialogue, the author pictures an image of a person shrugging shoulders and cupping hands, as if to say “Come on. I’m all ears.” The function of well here is almost equivalent to the physical gesture, making the dialogue lively.

2.5.4.3 You know and I mean

Because of their apparent similarities, the functions of you know and I mean have often been compared with each other. Some of the earlier researchers argue that they are interchangeable but later disproved by Fox Tree and Schrock (2002). General agreement is that their functions are semantic: you know “marks interactive transitions in shared knowledge” and thus invites inferences on the part of addressees, whereas I mean “marks speaker orientation toward the meanings of own talk” and forewarns upcoming adjustments (Schiffrin, 1987, p.309). Consequently, there is the danger that you know forces addressees to make more inferences on the speaker’s meanings than they want, while I mean might make the addressee appear self-focused and self-centered (Schiffrin, 1987; Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002). As is the case with any other DMs, moderate use of these DMs is desirable.

2.5.4.4 Sort of and kind of and like

Sort of and kind of and like are not seemingly DMs but they can functions as DMs when not inside the syntactic structure or when the
deletion of it from the sentence does not affect the syntactic structure of a sentence as in the following examples. Americans are prone to use kind of much more than the British (Crystal and Davy, 1975) and sort of and kind of are interchangeable.

(1) (i) I was sort of (kind of) okay at first but began to shiver later.
(ii) I have no idea what sort of (kind of) a man he is.
(2) (i) ...may be you can like delete this part because this would get us in trouble.
(ii) I like skiing but I’m not fond of snowboarding.

In these examples, eliminating sort of (kind of) and like from (i) is not detrimental to the core meaning of the sentences, except that sentences without those DMs lose the downtoning effect (Crystal and Davy, 1975). These DMs are regarded as “softeners” by many researchers and those DMs “make spoken interaction easier, more pleasant and more efficient” (Aijmer, 1994, p.127).

2.5.4.5 Actually

As a DM, actually does not literally appeal to the actuality of an assertion but instead it allows the speaker to change the perspective to something that has just occurred in the speaker’s mind (Aijmer, 2002) as in the following example:

A: I’ve heard Ann is getting married.
B: Well, actually, she is my favorite actress.
2.5.4.6 *Incidentally and by the way*

These DMs, in the description of Hirschberg and Litman (1993), “indicate the beginning of a digression” (p.501).

2.5.4.7 *Anyway and as I was saying*

These DMs indicate a return from a digression or signal that the topic is coming towards its end (Hirshberg & Litman, 1993; Carter, Hughes & McCarthy, 2000). Note that sentence final *anyway* means “in any case” and is normally used adverbially (Carter & McCarthy, 1997).

3. Method

Zenkoku Daigaku Nyushimondai Seikai (hereafter DNS) is the most sold book that list examination problems of major universities throughout Japan. Depending on public demand, the publisher, Obunsha, decides on which university to list and there are some, not many, changes of universities every year. Because some universities have different English problems for different faculties, the number of English problems is inevitably larger than the number of universities listed. On average, out of five different questions for one faculty, one is dialogue-based question if a university decides to include a dialogue question at all.

In this report, the number of the appearances of the eleven DMs used dominantly in spoken dialogues, has been manually counted in the dialogues of private university entrance examinations in DNS: *oh, well, you know, I mean, sort of (kind of), like, actually, incidentally, by the way, anyway, as I was saying.*
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For the purpose of analyzing the historical transition of Japanese university entrance examinations, problems in 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2012 from DNS are studied.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The number of dialogues in examinations in 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2012

Sheer comparison of the number of questions set around dialogues discloses the transition toward communicative English of Japanese university entrance examinations. Remarkable increase is observed in the rate of dialogues in examination questions with the percentage increasing around six fold between 1982 and 2012. The fact that only one in ten examinations included dialogues in 1982 reveals the nature of English education in Japan at that time. English lessons were conducted by the grammar translation method for reading and writing, not for communicating interactively (see section 2.1).

A quick glance through the 1982 edition of DNS is enough to see that questions then were centered around reading long passages,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: The number of universities, examinations and dialogues listed in DNS in 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of univ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of dialogues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of dialogues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
translating English into Japanese and vice versa. High school students those days would spend the entire English lesson reading a passage and translating it word by word into Japanese. Little or no instruction in English conversation was given at school. Data in 2002, in contrast, show that 62.8% of the questions contain some sort of dialogues. This is a significant leap from those of 1982, which is merely 10%. This remarkable increase in the number of dialogues reflects the universities’ efforts to respond to the public’s need for communicative English.

There is a slight decline in the percentage of dialogues from 2002 to 2012, from 62.8% to 58.8%. Further observation is required to see whether this trend will continue or it is only a temporary phenomenon due to a different selection of universities by Obunsha. Another possible reason could be the increasing inclusion of a listening test in the entrance examination. Casual conversation in English is one of the popular materials for listening test and this may satisfy a university’s need to test candidates’ understanding of communicative English. It is not easy to predict in which direction this trend will move because drastic revision of university entrance examination is expected in 2020, including total abolition of National Center Test for University Admissions.

4.2 The number and kind of DMs in dialogues in 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2012

Table 2 shows that in 1982 examinations, dialogues contain only 0.01% of DMs. In 1992, it rises to 1.2% with a 120% increase. With such small data, the percentage of increase does not often reflect the
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Table 2: Occurrence of 11 selected DMs in each year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of words in dialogues</td>
<td>3,020</td>
<td>7,099</td>
<td>20,748</td>
<td>16,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of DMs</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of DMs</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

true nature of the event. Yet the conscious effort can be observed by the test compilers to make dialogues look more natural.

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence of 11 DMs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oh</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyway</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of/Sort of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actually</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I was saying</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidentally</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By the way</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What can be construed from this Table 3 is that *oh* and *well* are two popular DMs throughout. In regard to other DMs, there have not been major increases in the number of their use, despite the sharp
increase in the number of total words in dialogues, perhaps except *actually*, which shows a slight increase in use.

4.3 Discussion on selected DMs

4.3.1 Oh

*Oh* collocates with other words more often than any other DM. In Aijmer’s data (2002), 42% of *oh* collocates with one of the words listed in section 2.5.4.1. In the dialogues of 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2012 combined, the rate for those collocations is 26%.

Oh, no (12 instances)
Oh, yes (7 instances)
Oh, I see (6 instances)
Oh, well (6 instances)
Oh, of course (5 instances)
Oh, goodness (5 instances)
Oh, dear (1 instance)

*Oh no* is the most frequent collocation, whereas in Aijmer’s study (2002), *oh yes* occurs about three times as often as *oh no*, and his claim is more or less consistent with the results of online corpora. In the British National Corpus, there are 1951 instances of *oh no* and 3147 instances of *oh yes* in the spoken data as of January in 2015. Similarly, on the same day, 277 *oh no* and 354 *oh yes* are identified in the spoken data from Corpus of Contemporary American English. This uniquely higher frequency of *oh no* in the Japanese examinations can be the result of abundant use of *oh no* in daily life in Japan.
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When both oh no and oh yes are searched using Japanese *katakana character* in YAHOO! JAPAN, oh no yields 185,000 search results compared with 28,200 of oh yes. It means oh no is more popular or used in Japanese society. There is even a Japanese joke involving oh no: “Ono wo otoshite oh no!” meaning “someone dropped an ax or ono (which sounds like oh no) and said oh no!” It is probable that oh no lingers in the subconscious mind of many Japanese, and that test writers cannot help using the expression more often than they realize. Employing oh in collocations is a good tactic, when caution is exercised not to overuse oh no.

### 4.3.2 kind of / sort of and like

*Kind of* and *sort of* as DMs only appear twice in total and only one example is found for *like* as a DM illustrated in section 2.5.4.4. Even though DM *like* is the sixth most frequent DM in spoken data from the Australian and New Zealand ICE corpora, blind introduction of *like* in the examination can be very confusing to examinees. The following sentence is the extract from British National Corpus and the one discussed in section 2.5.4.4:

(1) ...history of the war in the picture, and it had *like* all these photos of ....

(2) (i) ...may be you can *like* delete this part because this would get us in trouble.

There is a great chance that some students confuse DM *like* with verb like. Therefore, scarce use of this softener is “kind of” understand-
able. One thing English teachers can do is to explain to students in the classroom how DM *like* is used as a hedge in conversation. One successful example of the introduction DM *like* is observed in 2002 examination: “What! You mean *like* green tea?” This short simple sentence effectively introduces DM *like*, without confusing examinees. Muller’s (2005) research shows that non-native speakers use DM *like* only a fraction of the time of native speakers of English. Learners should be exposed different expressions, including *like*, in order to acquire high level of language competency.

Some effective usage of *kind of* and *sort of* are found in examinations. The following (1) is the extract from 1992 dialogue that includes DM *kind of*:

(1) A: Will you drop in for a cup of coffee?
   B: I’d like to, but I don’t think I’d better. It’s *kind of* late.

Compare this with this dialogue from 2002:

(2a) A: Here, have some of these chocolates. They are delicious.
   B: No, thanks. I’m trying to stick to the diet I’m on.

They are two similar interactions of offering and declining but the rebuttal in (1) sound softener and more polite, with the DM *kind of* functioning as lubricant for human relations. There are other thoughtful expressions in this sentence. First of all, instead of saying “No, thanks”, it skillfully employs a form of acceptance, “I’d like to” followed by “but” which turns overt acceptance into covert
declining, thus saving the face of speaker A. “I don’t think” is another good expression with more softening tone than the straight “I’d better not.” Lastly, the DM “kind of” is used as a hedge, making the meaning of the word somewhat ambiguous or avoiding fully committing to the utterance. Thus, the whole utterance of (1)B is less-threatening. In contrast, B’s replay in (2a) sounds rather straightforward with no softeners. When examinees are advanced students, it can be rewritten as follows in the examination:

(2b) A: Here, have some of these chocolates. They’re delicious.
B: Oh, I’d love to, but better not. I’m kind of watching what I eat, you know.

“No thanks” is a typical phrase for declining an offer and is taught at Japanese schools extensively. However, this expression could give a wrong impression. Starting with a positive remark of “I’d love to” followed by “but”, is a safe way to decline an offer. By intentionally transforming the precise word “diet” into “watch what I eat”, and further hedging it by using “kind of”, the tension will be reduced even further. Lastly, by adding “you know”, speaker B invites understanding on the part of the listener.

There are many other ways to rewrite dialogues and the variation just presented is merely one example. Additionally, there may be a time when a speaker truly wants to sound abrupt with no hedges. In many cases, however, it is preferable to sound non-threatening for the sake of establishing a relationship with others, and one way to do it is through a tactful use of DMs. It is the job of English teachers
and test makers to introduce different expressions to students and examinees. Learners will not acquire various attributes unless being exposed to them (Krashen, 1982, 1988) and because of the washback effect, dialogue in examinations could serve as the starting point to introduce “real English”.

4.3.3 Discussions on other discourse markers

Well is the most popular DM all the time and there is no further need to increase the frequency of its use. Most usage of well, though, is old-fashioned and monotonous, prefacing answers and so on. Creative usage of well, similar to the one discussed in the section 2.5.4.2 would be very interesting in the future examination.

The rest of DMs, you know, I mean, anyway, actually, as I was saying, incidentally, by the way are the frequently used DMs by native speakers but do not appear in the test very often. More use of these in the future could be beneficial for learners.

Low frequency of by the way is unexpected as it is one of the first expressions to be taught at junior high school, whereas phrases such as, as I was saying, incidentally are not found in high school textbooks. Anyway, actually, as I was saying, incidentally, by the way are categorized as transactional DMs, which help addressees make a coherent connection between two consecutive sentences. Because of their logical nature, they are mostly used in formal situations and may not be suitable for most of the casual interactions in test dialogues.

You know and I mean, on the other hand, are in the category of interactional DMs. These DMs have little propositional content, but
play important roles when people are trying to establish relationships with others (Trudgill, 1983). Although overuse or misuse of DMs can lead to adverse effect (Watts, 1989), appropriate use of interactional DMs can take away sharp edges from interactions and help addressees to avoid having to commit themselves to their utterances (Carter, 1998; Carter & McCarthy, 1997). Appropriate use of these DMs could be beneficial when the test makers want to invite more interactional atmosphere into dialogues.

4.4 Suggestions on dialogues

It is a welcoming trend that test questions after 1992 have shown steady progress toward including spoken elements of English in terms of the number of dialogues and the frequency of DMs. Still, the author believes that it is still insufficient and many dialogues can get rid of their rigidity by making minor alterations without losing their understandability. The following is one example by the author of how to insert some DMs and follow-ups into an actual examination dialogue in DNS.

Original dialogue

(Jim, an American, is talking to Manabu about America.)

Manabu: Jim, you’re from America, aren’t you?

Jim: Yes, Manabu. I’m from Dallas, Texas.

Manabu: What’s the population of Texas?

Jim: It’s very large. In fact, it’s the second largest state, after Alaska.
Manabu: What's the population of the U.S. now?

Jim: It's about 270 million.

Manabu: I know the capital of the U.S. is Washington, D.C. What does D.C. stand for?

Jim: The District of Colombia, which was named after Christopher Columbus.

Manabu: I hear Americans move a lot. Is that right?

Jim: Right. Most Americans change home many times.

Manabu: What states are most popular?

Jim: The Sunbelt states of California, Florida, and Texas.

Manabu: Why do you call them 'Sunbelt states'?

Jim: Because they are usually sunny.

The following is one possible way of rewriting this dialogue without unduly increasing the lexico-grammatical load. There are some DMs and follow-ups embedded. Follow-ups may increase a human touch to the dialogue, by showing the listener's interest and recognition to the speakers' utterance. All additions are underlined and DMs are italicized.

**Revised dialogue**

(Jim, an American, is talking to Manabu about America.)

Manabu: Jim, you're from America, aren't you?

Jim: Yes, Manabu. I'm from Dallas, Texas.

Manabu: *Oh, are you?* What's the population of Texas?

Jim: *Well, you know*, it's very large. In fact, it's the second
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largest state, after Alaska.

Manabu: *Well, then*, what’s the population of the U.S. now?

Jim: It’s about 270 million.

Manabu: *Oh, that is a lot, isn’t it?*  *By the way,* I know the capital of the U.S. is Washington, D.C. *but* what does D.C. stand for?

Jim: The District of Colombia. *It was actually* named after Christopher Columbus.

Manabu: *Was it?*  *Interesting.*  *Incidentally,* I hear Americans move a lot. Is that right?

Jim: Right. Most Americans change homes many times.

Manabu: *Then,* what states are most popular?

Jim: *Like* the Sunbelt states of California, Florida, and Texas.

Manabu: *I see* but why do you call them ‘Sunbelt states’?

Jim: Because they are usually sunny, *you know.*

Ideally, adding a few more follow-ups and not changing the topic one after another would bring this dialogue closer to a conversation, away from an interrogation style with a sequence of questions and answers. However, even a few makeshift DMs and follow-ups can make some differences. In Manabu’s second utterance, adding reception the marker “*Oh*” and “are you” shows that Manabu has received the information and is interested. In answering the question, Jim cannot come up with the precise number. Adding “*Well*” implies insufficient answers (Lakeoff, 1973) and “*you know*” invites inferences on the part of addressees. In this particular case, Jim
would like Manabu to understand that Jim does not know the exact population but knows that it is large. Manabu could say “Well then” to change the topic (then is not discussed in this paper but it is also DM) into something Jim may know to save face. In answering the question on Washington D.C., Jim could add actually to change the perspective from the city itself to a historical person to show the significance of the name. When answering the question about the most popular states, responses could be preceded by like, meaning for example, as this is a casual interaction between seemingly young boys.

The author would like to reiterate that there are many ways to refurbish a dialogue and this is only one suggestion. In this attempt, in order to show different possibilities, more DMs than needed may have been included.

5. Summary and Conclusion

This study has shown that dialogues in Japanese university entrance examinations have made steady progress in both quantity and quality over the past forty years in terms of authenticity created by the use of DMs. There is, however, still much room left for improvement. This paper has demonstrated that by adding appropriate DMs and follow-ups, dialogues will look substantially different with more natural tones.

Murphy writes in his 2001 paper that “it is the ignorance and fear of change and blame that keep university staff from openly talking about the exams, educating themselves, and risking changes” (p.3). In this short essay, no verification has been made how true this
remark still is in 2015. In regard to the use of DMs, however, dialogues in university entrance examinations have shown some, though not enough, improvement.

The author is a rare case among teachers of English, who has taught full time at junior high school, high school, cram school and college, as well as private English conversation school. The long experience of listening to the true wishes of learners of English and their parents at different stages has made me convinced that much as they like to be fluent in English, their first priority is to enter their first choice university. Considering the potential washback effect, therefore, test makers should continue their utmost effort to create better questions so that learners can learn “juken eigo” and “eikaiwa” at the same time. It is the responsibility of every educator to motivate students. Creating better questions for entrance examinations is one way to do it.

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## 専任教員研究業績一覧

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