

***Aizuchi* responses in JFL classrooms: Teacher input and learner use**

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Introduction

Japanese speakers use a variety of verbal expressions to express listenership in conversations (Mizutani, 1985; Ohta, 1995; Yoshimi, 1999). Among these, backchannel responses are one of the most extensively studied features, and previous research reports cross-cultural differences where backchannel responses are more prevalent in Japanese than in languages such as English (Horiguchi, 1988; Maynard, 1987, 1993). In addition, second language (L2) learners are found to transfer their native language strategies when speaking in Japanese (Kubota, 2001; Maynard, 1986). Most of these studies have been conducted outside of language classrooms, and we have yet to understand how learners acquire these strategies in formal instructional settings. For this reason, this study investigates how classroom learners learn these strategies in foreign language learning settings. In particular, it focuses on the types of input that L2 learners receive and the output they produce in and outside of the classroom. As background to this study, this paper first reviews studies that have attempted to characterize Japanese *aizuchi*. Secondly, studies that investigate L2 learners' acquisition of *aizuchi* will be discussed. These studies reveal a lack of classroom-based research but also provide the basis for the design of the current study. Subsequently, the details of the study will be presented. The findings of this study show critical issues in teaching and learning *aizuchi* in Japanese as a foreign language classrooms.

Review of literature

Characteristics of aizuchi

In natural conversations, a listener can take turns by asking and responding to questions, elaborating on or confirming the speaker's statements, or causing a topic shift. Alternately, he/she may support the continuation of the speaker's talk. This can be achieved by nonverbal means such as eye and head movement, or even silence, or short phrases such as *mmhm*, *uh-huh*, and *yeah* (White, 1986). These supportive behaviors are called *aizuchi* (Mizutani, 1988), backchannel responses (Yngve, 1970), or continuer and assessment (Schegloff, 1982). Although these terms overlap in meaning, their meaning and function vary. In this paper, the term *aizuchi* is used as it best describes Japanese supportive responses.

Scholars generally agree that *aizuchi* signal the current speaker to continue his/her talk and do not require him/her to respond. Native Japanese speakers use *aizuchi* extensively. For example, Maynard (1993) compared the frequency of backchannels in English and Japanese *aizuchi* and found the Japanese use twice as many *aizuchi* as the Americans do, and a similar tendency is also reported in comparison with Chinese and Korean (Ogoshi, 1988; Mizuno, 1988; Yang, 2001). Mizutani (1988) demonstrated that native Japanese speakers use *aizuchi* about 15 to 20 times per minute on average. Komiya (1986) found that *aizuchi* occur every 9.6 seconds on a TV interview program, and every 6.1 seconds during phone conversations.

The noticeably high frequency has lead many researchers to study *aizuchi* for over twenty years (Horiguchi, 1988; Kita & Ide, 2007; Kogure, 2007; Maynard, 1986, 1987, 1993; Miyata & Nisisawa, 2007; Mizutani, 1985, 1988; Nagata, 2004; Ohama, 2006; Ohama, Yamazaki, & Nagata, 1998; Oso, 1988; Saft, 2007; Sugito, 1989; Sugitou 1993). In order to characterize them, researchers have studied *aizuchi* in terms of frequency, form, function, and timing at which they appear. These studies have shown that the frequency of *aizuchi* vary depending on formality, mode of conversation, the relationship between interlocutors, the listener's gender, and age (Komiya, 1986; Kurosaki, 1987; Miyazaki, 2002; Sugito, 1987).

In terms of formal characteristics, there seems to be no agreement regarding the operational definition of *aizuchi* among researchers. One of the complications in classifying *aizuchi* is that one or more features may occur simultaneously (Maynard, 1986). For example, non-verbal expressions like vertical head movement can occur with verbal forms of *aizuchi* (Kita & Ide, 2007). Thus some scholars limit *aizuchi* to linguistic behavior (Iwasaki, 1997; Mizutani, 1988), while others include non-verbal behaviors such as head nodding, smiling, and eye movement (Kogure, 2007; Szawtrowski, 2001). Verbal *aizuchi* are also distinguished according to form. For example, Iwasaki (1997) formally classifies *aizuchi* into the following three types: non-lexical, phrasal, and substantive. Non-lexical *aizuchi* are a closed set of short sounds with little or no referential meaning such as *ee*, *soo*, *aa*. Phrasal *aizuchi* are expressions with meaning, such as *naruhodo* and *uso*. Substantive *aizuchi* are an open class of expressions with full referential content. Horiguchi (1997) classifies *aizuchi* into three types: 1) a fixed set of short expressions called *aizuchi-shi*, such as *hai*, *ee*, *hoo*, *fuun*, *hee*, *soo desu ne*, *naruhodo*, and *honto*; 2) a repetition; and 3) a short reformulation of a part or all of the immediately preceding speaker's utterance. In addition, Maynard (1993) proposes laughter and Yang (2001) includes an anticipatory expression in which the listener anticipates and expresses a word or phrase that s/he anticipates the speaker will say. differ whether Except for *aizuchi-shi*, scholars differ on whether to include these various forms as *aizuchi* (Horiguchi, 1997; Ohama, 2006; Szatrowski, 1993; Yang, 2001).

Researchers have also attempted categorize the functions of *aizuchi*. Horiguchi (1988) identifies five functional categories: 1) display of listening; 2) display of understanding; 3) display of agreement; 4) display of disagreement; and 5) expression of emotion. Maynard (1993) proposes the following six categories, many of which overlap with Horiguchi's categories: 1) continuer; 2) display of understanding of content; 3) support and empathy toward the speaker; 4) agreement; 5) strong emotional response; and 6) minor additions, corrections, or requests for information.

The first five categories are similar to Horiguchi's but the last category is not. Continuer is a signal of attention and understanding though the listener who uses a display of understanding of content does not necessarily understand the content. Support and sympathy is used when the speaker evaluates something, and the listener considers that support and sympathy is needed. On the other hand, when the speaker asks a question or makes a question-like statement to the listener, agreement is often used. Strong emotional response can express more than a continuer, a display of understanding, or a display of support can. The minor addition and clarification and request for confirmation is a new category and can be considered as part of a negotiation move. Other researchers propose even more categories such as filling the void (Matsuda, 1988) and focusing on oneself (Szatrowski, 2002).

In addition to forms and functions, previous research has focused on the timing at which *aizuchi* occurs. Mizutani (1986, 1988, 1993, 2001) describes where to use them from the speaker's point of view and states that the listener's use is controlled by the speaker with pausing,¹ because pausing signals the speaker's invitation for the listener to participate. Sugitou (1993) states the falling intonation in the speaker's speech also marks the appropriate timing for *aizuchi*. Furthermore, Horiguchi (1997) suggests that the speaker's weakening of vocal quality, falling intonation, pausing, nodding, and interjectional particle signal the timing. Maynard (1987) states grammatical completion signaled by major clause junctures such as *kedo* (but), *dakara* (so), and *-ba* (if), as well as sentence-final particles such as *ne* and *sa* serve as important signals.

Although *aizuchi* generally do not trigger a shift in turn, recent research shows that some *aizuchi* expressions may function to enable the speaker to relinquish the turn. Nagata (2004) demonstrates that *aizuchi* can be used with or without a pause, and some *aizuchi* can initiate the turn-shift. In his study, repetitive *aizuchi-shi* (e.g., *sososo*, *haihai*, etc.) are frequently used when *aizuchi* is not preceded by a pause, which triggers the shifting of the turn from the speaker to the listener who has just uttered an *aizuchi*. This is not the case with conceptual *aizuchi* (e.g., *aa*, *soodesu ne* (oh, I see), *aa*, *hontoni* (oh, really?), etc.). Also, Kwak (2003) examines conversational data between two people and finds that turn-relinquishing *aizuchi* constitute 20% of the total *aizuchi*. These turn-relinquishing *aizuchi* occur mostly at the beginning of the sentence, especially when the speaker is not willing to continue talking and the listener does not know what to say. According to Kwak, Japanese attempt to fill the interval with the turn-relinquishing *aizuchi* until either the speaker or listener starts talking in order to show the intention of continuing to speak. Kwak claims that turn-relinquishing *aizuchi* can be a part of *aizuchi* because they indicate a "display of understanding" from the functional point of view.

In summary, previous studies of Japanese reveal that *aizuchi* appear in a variety of forms and serve multiple functions. Moreover, the way *aizuchi* is used is affected by a number of social factors. Although native speakers (NSs) of Japanese seem to use this highly complex pragmatic feature with ease, there is a great deal of individual variation, which results in a varied impression of individuals as good or poor listeners (Ohama, 2006). This naturally leads to the question of how well L2 learners acquire and use *aizuchi* in Japanese conversation. The next section reviews the studies that investigate this very issue of L2 acquisition of *aizuchi*.

L2 studies of aizuchi

NSs of Japanese are found to transfer the pragmatic features of their Japanese listener behaviors into English, and these are interpreted as frequent interruptions of the speakers' speech rather than supportive behaviors (Maynard, 1993). Conversely, L2 learners of Japanese are found to transfer their first language (L1) listener strategies into Japanese (Nagata, 2004; Watanabe, 1994; Yang, 2001). Although learners tend to become more target-like as they become more proficient, L1 transfer seem to persist even at advanced levels regardless of learners' native languages (Watanabe, 1994). For example, English verbal backchannels do not have much variety and tend to occur only after a point of grammatical completion (Maynard, 1986; White, 1986). As a result, English speakers tend to use fewer verbal *aizuchi* in Japanese (Maynard, 1993). Instead, English speaking learners of Japanese tend to resort to head-nodding in Japanese, which also occurs in English conversation frequently (Kubota, 2001; Maynard, 1993; Szawtrowski, 2001).

Another notable difference between L2 learners and NSs is that learners tend to misinterpret the functions of *aizuchi* and use them in a restricted manner. For example, Ishida (2005) found that Australian learners of Japanese often misinterpreted the function of the *aizuchi-shi*, *ee*, when it indicated agreement, politeness, or formality. However, they were successful when *ee* indicated understanding, or continuation. Similarly, Yang (2002) reported that Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) learners thought that the primary function of *aizuchi* was to express politeness. In terms of use, Mukai (1999) and Yang (2001) found that their non-native subjects did not use *aizuchi* to express emotion as much as NSs did.

Turn-taking patterns have also been an issue of investigation, concerning differences in patterns among NSs and non-native speakers (NNSs) (Murata, 2000). Komuro (1995) compared NSs and learners of Japanese turn-taking patterns and concluded that L2 learners' patterns were different from those evident in conversations between NSs. Moreover, NSs and teachers tend to use more turn-taking backchannel responses in talking with NNSs/learners (Kwak, 2003), and learners who have resided in Japan for a long time are found to use more turn-taking backchannel responses than those who have not (Yoshimoto, 2001).

The previous studies of L2 *aizuchi* use demonstrate that learners acquire *aizuchi* rather slowly and may not achieve a native like competence in the use of this feature. While these studies reveal a number of problems in acquiring *aizuchi*, most of them focus on the pattern of acquisition and do not deal with the cause of problems encountered in the course of acquisition other than L1. This may be due to the fact that the majority of the studies are conducted in Japan and outside of the classroom. Needless to say, learners in Japan are exposed to natural use of *aizuchi* on a daily basis, which would affect their acquisition of features. However, foreign language learners have a very limited opportunity to interact with native Japanese speakers or hear *aizuchi* outside of the classroom. This means that foreign language (FL) learners' acquisition may be affected not only by the learners' L1 but also by input they receive in the FL classroom. Yet, there has not been any study which has examined *aizuchi* use in FL classrooms. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap. More specifically, the present study

examines the use of *aizuchi-shi* and nodding by instructors and intermediate/advanced learners of Japanese in and outside of JFL classrooms. Other verbal forms of *aizuchi* are not included because they are not universally recognized as *aizuchi*. Also, repetitions and reformulations occur very frequently in the classroom for a variety of purposes such as classroom drill practice, corrective feedback, and confirmation, so it is difficult to distinguish *aizuchi* from other types of repetitions and reformulations. Nodding is included because NSs of English, the subjects of this study, are known to use nodding frequently (Maynard, 1986). The two forms of *aizuchi* are analyzed in terms of frequency and functions. Furthermore, the instructors' use is compared with the learners' use in order to investigate how the teachers' input does or does not correlate with the learners' productions.

Data

The data consist of video-recorded classroom sessions in intermediate (the fifth semester) and advanced (the seventh semester) Japanese courses, and office hour conversations between students in these courses and their teachers in a large mid-western university. All of the students in these courses were NSs of English, and only one student in the advanced course was a heritage student. For classroom data, two 50-minute sessions of each course, a total of 200 minutes of classroom sessions were videotaped. All of the sessions focused on conversational activities. For out-of-classroom data, four students, two from each course, and two teachers in these courses participated in the study. A twenty-minute conversation between each of the students and his/her teacher during one of the teacher's office hours was videotaped. The first five minutes were discarded from each of the conversations because the initial part of conversation was somewhat awkward because of the presence of the video-recorder. The remaining fifteen minutes, a total of 100 minutes of face-to-face conversation data was submitted for the analysis. Two doctoral students in applied linguistics transcribed all of the data. They cross-examined one quarter of the data to assure consistency. The remaining data was transcribed independently and the researcher examined all of the data for consistency.

In addition to the conversation data, the lesson plans and class materials up to the data collection are examined to assess how *aizuchi* was instructed and practiced in these courses.

Analysis

First, the class materials and lesson plans were analyzed qualitatively in terms of overall syllabus type, skills emphasized in the course, types of materials and activities used, and the amount of instruction of *aizuchi-shi*. Secondly the transcribed classroom data was analyzed in terms of activity types, because some activities were so highly controlled that they did not provide much opportunities to engage in spontaneous conversation while others were completely free.

In addition, *aizuchi* which appeared in classroom and office hour conversations are classified according to the following categories:

1. Speaker
 - 1 Teacher
 - 2 Student
2. Listener (*aizuchi* user)
 - 1 Teacher
 - 2 Student
3. Turn
 - 1 Turn-taking *aizuchi*
 - 2 Turn-continuing *aizuchi*
4. Types of Turn-continuing *aizuchi*
 - 1 *Aizuchi-shi*
 - 2 Head nodding
 - 3 Both
5. Context in which turn-continuing *aizuchi* occurs
 - 1 Appropriate timing (pause, weakening of voice, lowering and rising intonation, etc.)
 - a Grammatical completion
 - b Others
 - 2 Inappropriate timing
6. Frequency
7. Functions of turn-continuing *aizuchi* (Horiguchi's (1988) categories were adopted for the most part, except that Strong Emotional Response in Maynard's (1993) classification was added.)
 - 1 Listening
 - 2 Understanding
 - 3 Agreement
 - 4 Disagreement
 - 5 Minor additions, corrections, or requests for information
 - 6 Strong emotional response

Results

Course characteristics and instruction of aizuchi

As mentioned earlier, participants in this study come from two levels of Japanese courses, third year Japanese and fourth year Japanese courses. The course characteristics are very different between them, so these characteristics are examined first. The third year Japanese course is a conversation course with two sections taught by two different instructors. Each section meets three times a week for fifteen weeks. The syllabus is organized in terms of function. Most of the materials are teacher-made except that the dialogues in the main text are used as conversation models and listening materials. The predominant activities are scenario plays and role plays with some class discussions which are usually conducted before a scenario or role play. *Aizuchi-shi* are taught explicitly at the beginning of the course for about two hours, but nodding was not

explicitly taught. After the formal instruction, *aizuchi-shi* are inserted throughout dialogues, script models, and handouts, so students are constantly exposed to *aizuchi-shi* primarily on paper.

The fourth year Japanese course is a thematically organized multi-skill course. This is the most advanced course offered at this institution, and only five students were enrolled during the study. Like the intermediate course, the class meets three times a week for fifteen weeks. There is no textbook in this course, so the instructor chooses material from authentic sources such as newspaper clips, web pages, short stories, films and TV programs, and recorded unscripted conversation among NSs, in addition to providing supplementary handouts created solely for the course. The primary activities are discussions of some readings, although most of the readings are done at home as homework. Again, *aizuchi-shi* are explicitly taught at the beginning of the semester for one and a half hours, and students are constantly reminded to use them during discussions throughout the semester.

Table 1. Course characteristics of the intermediate and advanced courses

Courses	3rd year	4th year
Size	2 sections, 2 instructors, 20 students	1 section, 1 instructor, 5 students
Instructional hours	3 times a week for 15 weeks	3 times a week for 15 weeks
Syllabus	Functional	Thematic
Skills	Conversation	Four skills
Materials	Textbook, teacher made, authentic	Authentic
Major activities	Scenario play, role play discussions	Discussions, reading
<i>Aizuchi</i> instructions	2 hours, scripts, model dialogues, handouts	1.5 hours, handouts, discussions

Turn-taking and turn-continuing aizuchi

Table 2 shows the number of turn-taking and turn-continuing *aizuchi* used by the instructor and students, respectively, in class and during the office hour. In general, turn-taking *aizuchi* were predominantly used by the instructors regardless of conversational situation. Advanced students were capable of using turn-taking *aizuchi* outside of the classroom but not in class. These results coincide with the findings of Kwak (2003) and Yoshimoto (2001) in that more proficient speakers tend to use turn-taking *aizuchi*. In addition, the instructors provide a large number of *aizuchi* during office hours but not as many in the classroom. This is probably due to the fact that face-to-face conversation occurs less frequently in the classroom.

Table 2. Number of turn-continuing *aizuchi* vs. turn-taking *aizuchi*

		Turn-continuing		Turn-taking	
		teacher	student	teacher	students
4th year	class	38	42	24	1
	office	108	60	10	8
3rd year	class	12	19	32	0
	office	90	18	24	1

In addition, the students' *aizuchi* were directed primarily to the teacher in the advanced class, but in the intermediate class, the *aizuchi* were directed towards peers, as shown in Table 3. Since many of the activities in the third year involved scenario and role plays where model conversations were provided, students seemed to emulate *aizuchi* in peer conversation. However, when the activities were not controlled by scripts and allowed spontaneous speech, students rarely used *aizuchi* either toward the peer students or the instructors.

Table 3. Interaction types in classroom (*Aizuchi* supplier > Speaker)

Level	Activities	Student > Teacher	Student > Student	Teacher -> Student	Total
4th year	All activities	36	6	38	80
3rd year	All activities	3	16	12	31
	Free activities (speech is not controlled)	2	1	8	11

Turn-continuing aizuchi

Table 4 shows the frequency and the timing of turn-continuing *aizuchi* in the classrooms. In the fourth year class, both students and instructors used *aizuchi* at equal frequency. According to Mizutani (1986) NSs of Japanese use *aizuchi* every twenty to thirty moras in conversing with another NS. Both the instructor and the students used *aizuchi* for an average of every twenty-five to twenty-six moras, showing a similar tendency with NS-NS conversations. Considering the fact that the class activities are mostly discussions in which language control was minimum, the similarity between conversations in this class and NS-NS conversations may not be surprising. However, the students used *aizuchi* with appropriate timing (i.e., when a signal such as a pause or weakening voice was given) 71.4% of the time, which is slightly lower than the instructors. Also, over one-third of the students' *aizuchi* were provided after a point of grammatical completion whereas over 80% of the instructor's *aizuchi* were provided in the middle of sentences. Therefore, the advanced students continue to rely on L1 strategies when timing their production of *aizuchi*.

In the intermediate classes, the students used more *aizuchi* than the instructors. In fact, 94.7% of their *aizuchi* were provided with appropriate timing but more than half of them were produced at a point of grammatical completion. Again, the instructors used *aizuchi* in locations other than at the end of a sentence over 90% of the time, showing an even more striking difference between native and non-native speakers. The reason that students frequently produced *aizuchi* was due to the fact that the language models that they practiced had *aizuchi* embedded in them and most of the *aizuchi* they produced were during the scenario and role play activities. When the conversation is not controlled, the students produced very few *aizuchi* at a longer interval of 39.7 moras. The instructors also provided a smaller number of *aizuchi*, though the interval was still very short. This suggests that neither the students nor the instructors used *aizuchi* in the same way between free and controlled conversational activities.

Table 4. Frequencies and context of *aizuchi* used in classrooms

Levels		<i>Aizuchi</i> supplied by	# of <i>aizuchi</i>	# of moras	Appropriate timing	Gramatical completion
4th year		Student	42	25.9	30 (71.4%)	16 (38.1%)
		Teacher	38	25.4	32 (84.2%)	6 (15.6%)
3rd year	All	Student	19	26.3	18 (94.7%)	10 (52.6%)
		Teacher	12	16.3	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)
	Free	Student	3	39.7	2 (66.7%)	0
		Teacher	8	13.3	8 (100%)	0

The data during the office hour conversations produced more *aizuchi* from both the instructors and the students (see Table 5). This is not surprising because they were engaged in face-to-face conversations, so their need for creating a collaborative dialogue was greater than in the classroom situations. Also, instructors used more *aizuchi* than the students, suggesting that they put themselves into the listener's role in order to encourage students to speak. In addition, the instructors in both courses used *aizuchi* with similar frequencies in and outside of classes but used them between phrases more often outside of the classroom than inside the classroom. This suggests that grammatical completion tends to trigger *aizuchi* more often in class than outside of class.

However, the students' use of *aizuchi* outside of the classroom was different from their use in the classroom setting. The advanced students used *aizuchi* in a more target-like manner in terms of timing, but they overused *aizuchi*, which may be interpreted as excessive or too interruptive even by Japanese. Also, the intermediate students used *aizuchi* more frequently. However only two thirds of their *aizuchi* were provided with appropriate timing, and one third of them occurred at a point of grammatical completion. In other words, the intermediate students are producing *aizuchi* more but they struggle to use them with appropriate timing in free conversation.

Table 5. Frequencies and context of *aizuchi* used during office hours

Levels	<i>Aizuchi</i> supplied by	# of <i>aizuchi</i>	# of moras	With signals	Complete sentences
4th year	Student	60	16.0	48 (80%)	6 (10.0%)
	Teacher	108	25.1	108 (100%)	6 (0.6%)
3rd year	Student	18	24.7	12 (66.6%)	6 (33.3%)
	Teacher	90	17.2	84 (93.3%)	6 (6.7%)

In terms of functions, instructors in both courses used *aizuchi* for a variety of functions in the classroom (see Table 6). The most common function was agreement, which was followed by the functions of listening and understanding. As classroom activities are controlled by the instructors and the flow of the interaction may be more predictable to the instructors, they may not have to use *aizuchi* for an expression of understanding or listening. Instead they need to provide positive feedback, which may have resulted in an increase in the agreement function in classroom activities. Also, the instructors rarely used *aizuchi* to show disagreement or emotional response, although these functions are commonly seen in natural conversations among NSs. This may be because language instructors are naturally drawn to the features of student language use rather than the content of the conversation during class.

Contrary to the functions associated with the instructors' use of *aizuchi*, advanced students used *aizuchi* for a very limited set of functions. They predominantly used *aizuchi* to express understanding, and occasionally used them as an expression of listening and disagreement. The frequent expression of understanding by the students may have occurred because of the nature of this class. As mentioned earlier, all the class materials are authentic and somewhat difficult for students. Thus, it may have been necessary for the students to demonstrate their understanding to allow the instructor to decide how to best conduct class activities.

Third year students used *aizuchi* with more variety although most of them expressed either listening or emotional response. The varied pattern was observed only in controlled conversation practice. In free conversations, they used *aizuchi* as a sign of listening and expression of emotional response only. In other words, students did not display multiple functions unless students were working with a model conversation.

Table 6. Functions of *aizuchi* used in classrooms

Levels		<i>Aizuchi</i> supplied by	Listening	Understanding	Agreement	Disagreement	Addition, correction, or request for information	Emotional response
4th year		Student	6	34	0	2	0	0
		Teacher	10	8	16	2	2	0
3rd year	All	Student	9	2	1	0	0	7
		Teacher	3	3	5	0	1	0
	Free	Student	1	0	0	0	0	2
		Teacher	2	2	4	0	1	0

Table 7 shows the functions of *aizuchi* that appeared in the office hour conversations. In this setting, the instructors in both courses continued to show varied functions. However, they used *aizuchi* to indicate understanding more than twice as many times as they did to express listening or displaying agreement, which was not observed in classroom data. Interestingly, clarification requests and minor corrections, which appeared in the classroom were not used by the instructors at all during the office hours. The instructors may have felt that they needed to show signs of understanding and refrain from making a negotiation move in order to encourage students to talk. Because the students' proficiency is limited, the demonstration of understanding and a lack of challenge would assure students of their comprehensibility and encourage further conversation. Instead of corrections, the instructors used *aizuchi* to express their disagreement and surprise as in the case of NS-NS interactions.

The students showed an increased variety of *aizuchi* during office hours. Although understanding was expressed frequently, unlike the classroom data, it was not the predominant function observed. Instead, learners used *aizuchi* to express their interest by using *aizuchi* to show signs of listening, agreeing, and disagreeing. However, they were unable to express emotion or make a negotiation move through *aizuchi*. This finding was similar to the findings of Mukai (1999) and Yang (2001) and provides further support for the finding that learners at this level are unable to express their feelings through *aizuchi*.

Table 7. Functions of *aizuchi* used during office hours

Levels	<i>Aizuchi</i> supplied by	Listening	Understanding	Agreement	Disagreement	Addition, correction or request for information	Emotional response
4th year	Student	20	24	10	6	0	0
	Teacher	20	54	16	12	0	6
3rd year	Student	10	3	2	3	0	0
	Teacher	14	48	15	12	0	0

Discussion and conclusion

The present study provides further support for the findings of previous research. First, proficient listeners tend to use more turn-taking *aizuchi* than less proficient listeners. Also, L1 transfer was observed in selecting the timing of *aizuchi* in that English-speaking learners of Japanese used *aizuchi* at a point of grammatical completion more often than the NSs did. In addition, the functions expressed by the learners were more restricted than those of NSs.

At the same time, this study shows potentially interesting findings. First, it demonstrates that *aizuchi* input provided in classrooms is very different from that in face-to-face conversations. In the classroom, neither instructors nor students used *aizuchi* as much as they did in face-to-face conversations. When they were used in the classroom, *aizuchi* provided by the instructors and advanced students occurred with similar frequency and with similar timing. This means that the opportunity to provide *aizuchi* may be highly limited in the classroom. Also, the functions of *aizuchi* were somewhat restricted in the classroom compared to conversations during the office hours. More specifically, the instructors tended to express agreement and the advanced students predominantly expressed either understanding or listening. Moreover, neither students nor instructors used *aizuchi* to express feelings or attitudes unless they appeared in controlled conversational activities. This may have reflected the nature of the instructors' role in the classroom. The instructors control the classroom activities, encourage learners to speak, and check learners' language, so their attention may be focused more on language rather than conversation itself. A further study with a stimulated recall interview may provide insight into the teachers' decision making processes about their *aizuchi* use.

In addition, the analysis of the intermediate classroom data suggests that the scripted conversations may be effective as long as activities are closely related to it. However, whether they are effective in enabling the student to apply *aizuchi* use to free conversation is yet to be determined. This is because the use of *aizuchi* in the classroom showed a radically different distribution and frequency when compared with instructor use, while behaviors improved outside of the classroom.

Despite the instructors' efforts, the intermediate students showed a number of problems in using *aizuchi*. They were unable to use *aizuchi* during uncontrolled activities. Also, they relied on L1 strategies to decide on the timing of *aizuchi* even though the instructors' input rarely suggested grammatical completion as the appropriate timing. Moreover, the functions they expressed through *aizuchi* were highly restricted. These problems persisted even outside of the classroom though the quality of overall use improved in this setting.

On the other hand, advanced students used *aizuchi* much more appropriately. The students used *aizuchi* just as frequently, if not more frequently, than the instructors did and the timing tended to show more target like use, especially outside of the classroom. However, the functions expressed by these learners' use of *aizuchi* were still limited, in that the display of understanding was the most common function, and the tendency to express this function was even stronger in the classroom, perhaps because of the tasks required in class.

Although the present study provides a number of potentially interesting findings, the interpretation of the results requires caution for the following reasons: First the data size is extremely limited, so additional data must be incorporated into the analysis. The office hour conversation data involves only two students for each level, and therefore, the results may reflect more about individual differences rather than differences in proficiency levels. Also, the target form of *aizuchi* includes nodding and *aizuchi-shi* in this study, so it is not clear how other forms of verbal and non-verbal *aizuchi* were used by the participants. It is possible that students may have used more nonverbal *aizuchi* between phrases and used verbal *aizuchi* only at points of grammatical completion. If this were the case the degree of L1 reliance would be much greater than what is reported in this study. For this reason, a further analysis that distinguishes verbal and non-verbal *aizuchi* needs to be conducted. Moreover, the characteristics of the advanced students are very different from those of the intermediate students in that most of the advanced students had been to Japan for at least ten months, so they were exposed to *aizuchi* in natural settings. On the other hand, none of the intermediate students had ever lived in Japan for an extended period of time. Thus, any difference between the two levels may reflect this difference in exposure. Finally, the present study did not distinguish appropriate forms of *aizuchi* from inappropriate forms of *aizuchi* used by the learners. In order to depict learners' acquisition it is essential to examine the proportion of target-like usage as opposed to non-target like usage in future analyses.

Notes

1. Sugitou (1993) warns that there are two types of pause in the speaker's utterance. The first pause is at the end of a phrase, and the other one takes place when the speaker is thinking of what to say. At the end of phrase, the listener should insert *aizuchi*; however, in case of the latter, *aizuchi* is not necessary. Therefore, the listener needs to be able to differentiate between the two depending on the situation.

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