



## Being a Non-expert in L2 English: Constructing Egalitarianism in Group Preparation Work

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**ABSTRACT:** Analyses are presented of interactional excerpts containing three methods through which Japanese university students preparing for a group presentation in a required English class take an epistemic stance of uncertainty towards their own displayed knowledge of their second language (L2) English. These three methods consist of 1) producing a candidate item as uncertain, 2) casting doubt on something just said by self, and 3) overtly claiming lack of knowledge. Epistemic stance can be understood as consisting of different dimensions, with a stance of uncertainty related specifically to the dimension of epistemic access. Analyses are also presented of how other students respond or do not respond to such a stance. Through this kind of stance-taking and responses and non-responses, the students do being non-experts in their L2 without making relevant possible asymmetries in expertise. That is, by doing being non-experts among non-experts, the students construct an epistemically symmetrical, egalitarian relationship within their group.

**Keywords:** classroom discourse; conversation analysis; epistemic access; epistemic stance; peer-group interaction

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In interaction, participants can orient to the relative certainty or uncertainty of their knowledge, with such an orientation being one aspect of epistemic stance (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, 2011). A participant's display of (un)certainly with respect to his or her own knowledge can be procedurally consequential (Schegloff, 1991) for the interaction, bring about changes in the participation structure, and make relevant social identities and particular features, such as features related to relationships or morality, associated with these social identities (Goodwin, 1987; Mondada, 2011). This may include making relevant the relative (non-)expertise of different participants in relation to the knowledge towards which an epistemic stance of (un)certainly has been taken (Sidnell, 2005). In this paper, I investigate these issues by looking at some of the ways that English as a foreign language students working together to prepare a group presentation take a stance of uncertainty towards their own displayed knowledge of their second language (L2), English, and thus construct themselves as non-experts in their L2. Inasmuch as they do not orient to themselves or others as L2 experts, they also construct a within-group egalitarian relationship.

### 2. EPISTEMIC STANCE, UNCERTAINTY, AND RELATIVE EXPERTISE

Through the ways that participants construct their talk and other actions in interaction, and through the ways that they respond to others, they also contribute to the construction of their own and others' affective and epistemic stance towards what they say (Kärkkäinen, 2006; Jaffe, 2009) and towards what others say (Gardner, 2001). There are different dimensions of participants' epistemic stance, namely epistemic primacy (e.g., who has primary rights to certain knowledge), epistemic responsibility (e.g., who can be held accountable for the accuracy of this knowledge), and epistemic access (e.g., relative certainty of knowledge) (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, 2011). While affective and epistemic stance, as well as the different dimensions of epistemic stance, are likely to be interrelated, in this paper, I focus on only one dimension of epistemic stance, namely, epistemic access, and in particular the taking of a stance of uncertainty. In addition, I take the view that (un)certainly is a public phenomenon, that it is something that participants do in interaction (Beach

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and Metzger, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 2005; Goodwin, 1987<sup>1</sup>; Sidnell, 2005). As with other conversation analytic and ethnomethodological work on cognitive phenomena, I follow the “praxiological rule” articulated by Coulter (1991), according to which cognitive properties of participants are treated “as embedded within, and thereby available from, their situated communicative and other forms of activities” (p. 189).

Looking at uncertainty as a public and interactional phenomenon, Sidnell (2005) shows how displays of uncertainty can be procedurally consequential for interaction, in that such a display makes relevant epistemic asymmetries among participants and can thus serve as a warrant for the giving of advice. Similarly, Goodwin (1987) shows how a display of uncertainty can position the recipient as a knowing recipient and can thus bring about a change in that recipient’s participation in the interaction. A particular type of uncertainty display, an explicit claim of insufficient knowledge through the use of an expression such as *I don’t know*, can be used, for example, to avoid disagreement (Beach and Metzger, 1997; Tsui, 1991; Weatherall, 2011) or to preface a possibly problematic action (Helmer, Reineke, and Deppermann, 2016; Tsui, 1991; Weatherall, 2011). Such a claim of insufficient knowledge can have consequences for how, and even whether, an individual participates in an activity (Helmer, Reineke, and Deppermann, 2016; Mondada, 2011; Pekarek Doehler, 2016).<sup>2</sup> Moving to classroom interaction, Sert and Walsh (2013) show how, in teacher-fronted interaction, a claim of insufficient knowledge can bring about a change in participation by projecting the teacher’s allocation of a turn to a different student. Also in relation to classroom interaction, Sert and Jacknick (2015) analyze one way—smiling—that students may manage interactional troubles brought about by issues of epistemic access. A display of uncertainty, the actions that it warrants, and the changes in participation structure that it brings about can also make relevant (aspects of) social identities, such as being an expert in a particular domain of knowledge (Sidnell, 2005), being a spouse who is likely to share certain experiences with the uncertain speaker (Goodwin, 1987), or being a student who is recognized as relatively more knowledgeable (Jakonen and Morton, 2015).

As should be clear from the above, one thing that is likely to result from a display of uncertainty is the relevance of the relative (non-)expertise of different participants. One kind of expertise that may become relevant, particularly when one or more participants is using an L2, is language expertise. Like other kinds of expertise, language expertise is inherently relative (Rampton, 1990), in that a participant who is (who acts as, who is treated as) a language expert in one situation may be (may act as, may be treated as) a non-expert in another. There is now a fair amount of conversation analytic work on how language expertise may become relevant, with the result that participants take on complementary identities as relative language expert and non-expert. This may involve orienting to a first language (L1) user as the language expert, as shown by Hosoda (2006) and Kotani (2017) for mundane conversation, by Kurhila (2004) for institutional interaction, and by Kasper (2004) for conversations-for-learning. However, participants can also orient to the relative expertise in the L2 of one L2 user. Melander (2012), for example, shows how students in a Swedish primary school orient to the L2 expertise of one student teaching others how to count to twenty in Japanese, which is not her first language, as well as how others can challenge this expertise. Similarly, Reichert and Liebscher (2012) show how university students learning German may position themselves as relative L2 experts, at least with regard to certain vocabulary items, during group preparation work, and how such positioning can be contested. A common finding of Hosoda (2006), Kotani (2017), Kurhila (2004), Kasper (2004), Melander (2012), and Reichert and Liebscher (2012) is that orientation to one participant’s language expertise tends to be very brief as participants orient to other aspects of their identity as relevant, even though status as language experts and non-experts, at least when there are both L1 and L2 using participants, may be omnirelevant (Kasper, 2004). Language expertise is thus not only relative, but also transient and situated within the interaction. In addition, among students working together in their L2 or on something related to their

L2, there may be good reasons to avoid being an L2 expert, as students may be held accountable for what they (claim to) know (Kunitz and Marian, 2017) and as, within student peer groups, there may be negative consequences of appearing to know too much (Jakonen and Morton, 2015).

A common feature of work on relative language expertise and of work on displays of uncertainty, as well as work on epistemic stance more generally, is the idea of asymmetry. One participant's positioning as a relative expert positions others as relative non-experts; one participant's display of uncertainty positions the recipient as a knowing recipient; one participant's claims to possess primary epistemic rights positions others as possessing fewer epistemic rights. In contrast, in this paper, I will be focusing on symmetry. One thing that I will try to show is how a display of uncertainty does not necessarily make relevant the greater knowledge or expertise of other participants. Rather, I will try to show how taking a stance of uncertainty towards one's own displayed L2 knowledge, along with how it is responded to or not responded to by others, can, at least within the activity of preparing for an L2 group presentation, be used to construct a symmetrical, even egalitarian, relationship among the participants. Everyone is a non-expert, and therefore equal. In addition, one criticism of work in epistemics, a criticism that I think is at least sometimes valid, is that it often gives the impression that issues of knowledge—who knows what, who has the right to know what, who has the obligation to know what—are always relevant (Lindwall, Lymer, and Ivarsson, 2016<sup>3</sup>). I would therefore like to emphasize that taking a stance of uncertainty towards one's own displayed L2 knowledge—and through this, doing being a non-expert in the L2—is something that participants sometimes do, but it is not something which they are constantly preoccupied with.

In what follows, after briefly introducing the data, I look at three specific methods through which students take an epistemic stance of uncertainty towards their own displayed knowledge of L2 English. These three methods are 1) producing a candidate L2 item as uncertain, 2) casting doubt on something just said by self, and 3) overtly claiming a lack of knowledge. While this third method is most similar to the claims of insufficient knowledge studied in much of the work reviewed above, it seems to be relatively infrequent in relation to the first two methods. Next, I analyze how other students commonly respond or do not respond to such a stance. I then analyze one extended episode in which such stance-taking is done in order to show how students can move from asymmetrical to symmetrical epistemic stances. Finally, I argue that through such stance-taking and how it is or is not responded to, the students construct a symmetrical, egalitarian relationship as being non-experts within a group of fellow non-experts.

### 3. DATA

The data are drawn from over ten hours of video-recorded interaction among Japanese university students preparing for group presentations in required English classes. The students have had at least six years of English education prior to entering the university. However, this university, which specializes in engineering and applied science, while quite difficult to enter, is not known for requiring a high level of English. Although there is actually a great deal of variability in students' abilities in their L2 English, the general perception among both faculty and the students themselves is that students at this university are not particularly strong in English. In addition, students do not choose this university because they perceive themselves as strong in English.

While students occasionally use their L2 English, most of the interaction in the recorded data is in Japanese. For students to interact in their L1 when preparing for an L2 presentation is not unusual, as shown in Kunitz (2013, 2015), Kunitz and Marian (2017), and Reichert and Liebscher (2012). In the transcripts, the talk is presented using a three-tier system, with the original in the first line, based on standard conversation-analytic conventions (Jefferson, 2004), a







Frame 1



Frame 2

In lines 01-02, Nishi attempts to formulate a sentence in English, getting as far as the word “owner’s,” which he marks with the genitive morpheme. However, rather than continuing with an English word, he pauses for one second and then says, quietly and with rising intonation, the Japanese word “katte.” He then translates “owner’s katte” completely into Japanese as “oonaa no katte” (line 03), after which he laughs slightly. During the silence in line 04, Kita, who has been looking down, shifts his gaze slightly to the right before almost immediately gazing up. Neither of these gaze shifts is in the direction of Nishi, who is sitting to the left of a third student, visible next to Kita in the frames. Kita then holds his gaze position, visibly doing a thinking face. In line 05, he shifts his gaze back down as he provides a candidate translation, “up to owner.” This is produced with rising intonation, so that it can be heard as a less-than-certain candidate (Hosoda, 2006), and is followed by an “s” sound (possibly an English grammatical morpheme) and a brief laugh token at the end of line 05 (in overlap with which Nishi initiates repair). The laugh token can also be heard as indexing uncertainty.

#### 4.2 Casting Doubt on Something Just Said

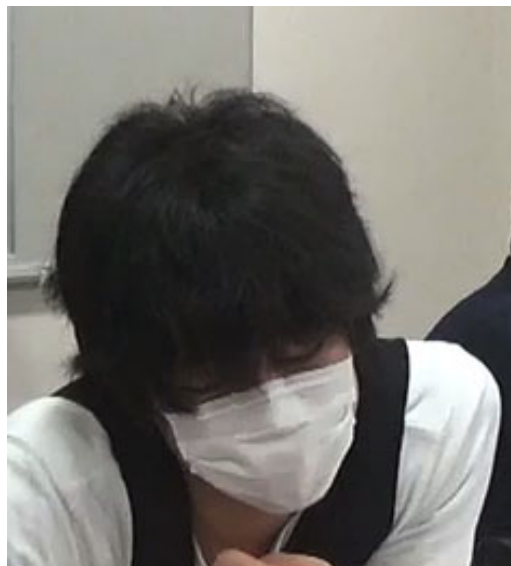
A second common method for taking a stance of uncertainty towards one’s own displayed L2 knowledge is to say something that casts doubt on what has just been said. As can be seen in excerpt 3, this also commonly involves embodied actions such as tilting the head.

Excerpt 3; Minami, Nishi

```
01 N: there are lot of pro *blem. hh
      *gaze to M
02      (0.2)
03 M: .hh problem_ *=
      N: *gaze down
04 N: = # *demo nai ka. #
      CP NG Q
      That isn't it.
      #Frame 1 #Frame 2
      *tilts head right----->
```



Frame 1



Frame 2

In line 01, Nishi produces a candidate L2 formulation of something they could include in the presentation. Similar to excerpt 2, this is immediately followed by a single laugh token. As Nishi comes to the end of this L2 formulation, he shifts his gaze to Minami, who then repeats the last word of what Nishi has said. Nishi then shifts his gaze back down and casts doubt on the candidate L2 formulation by saying, in Japanese, “demo nai ka” (*that isn't it*), while at the same time indexing his ambivalence by tilting his head to the right, as can be seen in frames 1 and 2.

Excerpt 4 continues immediately from excerpt 2 above.

Excerpt 4; Kita

07 (1.1)

08 K: # \*iya # \*↑chotto#(0.3) oonaa ni  
no little owner PP

#Frame 1 #Frame 2 # Frame 3

\*lateral head shake----->

\*gaze up

09 makaseru tte kanji suru.

entrust QT feeling do

*No, that feels like saying leave it up to the owner.*



Frame 1



Frame 2



Frame 3

At the start of line 08, Kita rejects his L2 translation (excerpt 2, line 05) of Nishi's talk by saying "iya chotto" (a negator followed by a mitigating expression) while producing a lateral head shake. This head movement is similar to the head tilting in excerpts 1 and 3, except that in the latter, the top of the head moves a greater distance relative to the bottom of the head, while in Kita's head shake, the bottom of the head moves a greater distance. Rather than indexing ambivalence, this head shake appears to work as a non-verbal negator, reinforcing the verbal negator in Kita's talk. As he completes the head shake, he shifts his gaze up, rather than to either one of the other students in his group. He then back-translates (Kunitz 2013, 2015) "up to owner" (excerpt 2, line 05) as "oonaa ni makaseru" (lines 08-09) followed by the quotative "tte." This is then finished off with "kanji suru" (*feels like*). Kita thus casts doubt on his candidate L2 translation by rejecting it and then producing a back-translation as an account for the rejection. This doubt is also indexed through the head movement.

### 4.3 Overtly Claiming Lack of Knowledge

A third, though apparently less common, method for taking a stance of uncertainty towards one's own displayed L2 knowledge is to overtly claim a lack of knowledge (Sert and Walsh, 2013). One example is shown in excerpt 5 and a second is shown in lines 37-38 of excerpt 9d below.

Excerpt 5; Goto, Hamada, Jimbo

- 01 (2.1)  
 G: ((writing))  
 02 G: \**high school* +*collapse*.  
       \*stops writing  
       J: +gaze to G  
 03 J: *hai* +*secon:d*.  
       yes  
       +gaze to H  
 04 (0.4)  
 05 H: *ichi* [kookoo ga ( )].  
       one high-school SB  
       *First, high school is ...*  
 06 G: [.h \**I can't understand spells*].=  
       \*gaze to J, smiling  
       J: +gaze to G  
 07 H: = [etto:  
       uh  
 08 J: = [heh [.h h  
 09 G: [ \*hh .h \* +*collapse*.  
       \*gaze off J \*gaze to paper  
       J: +gaze off G

During the silence in line 01, Goto is writing something. At the start of line 02, he stops writing and lifts his pencil slightly off the paper and then says "high school collapse." Having just stopped writing, and with his gaze on his paper, this is hearable as related to what he has just written, that is, it is hearable as a reading (of part) of what he has just written, what he plans to write as a continuation of what he has just written, or what he has just written plus what he plans to write next. One other student, Jimbo, takes what Goto does in lines 01-02 as an indication that the first reason that they will give in their presentation has been written down and that, therefore, work on this reason is complete. In line 03, he orients to moving on to the second reason by saying "hai (*yes*) second." In







J: +gaze to H  
 10 H: eto\*e::to \*are >are are:< (.) toku ni: osake  
       uh      uh      that      that      that                  special PP alcohol  
           \*gaze up      \*stops writing  
 11 wa: ↓ ano: (0.9) ano ↑ kanzoo toka ↓ kinoo ga  
       TP      uh                  uh      liver      and-such      function SB  
 12 mada: (.) juuhassai dattara:,  
       yet          18-year-old      CP-AS-CN  
       *Uh, you know, especially for alcohol, the functioning of the liver  
       and such is not complete if you're an eighteen year old.*

As mentioned above, Jimbo proposes to go on to the next reason in line 03 and gazes at Hamada, who is writing. Hamada continues writing as he, apparently, formulates the first reason in Japanese. From line 07 to line 10, he then stops writing, resumes writing, gazes up (while continuing to write), and then stops writing again. As he does this, he appears to be thinking of the second reason that the group will use in their presentation, following the agenda set by Jimbo's talk in line 03. He produces three different "eto" tokens, a Japanese version of *uh*, and three "are" tokens, a prospective indexical (Hayashi, 2003), before formulating a candidate second reason in Japanese (lines 10-12). While Jimbo briefly aligns with Goto through gaze shift and laughter, as shown above, Hamada seems simply to ignore Goto's claim of lack of knowledge as he pursues the agenda set by Jimbo in line 03.

These two ways of (not) responding to a stance of uncertainty are general throughout the recorded data. In addition to not responding to a stance of uncertainty by disagreeing, then, the students also do not respond in ways that may make their own L2 expertise relevant. That is, the initial stance of uncertainty does not make relevant asymmetries of epistemic access.

## 6. AN EXTENDED CASE

In order to gain a better understanding of how students take an epistemic stance of uncertainty towards their own L2 knowledge, what prompts such a stance within the interaction, and some of the different ways that students respond to such stance taking, this section presents an analysis of a single extended case. This case is shown as excerpt 9 and contains within it the interaction that was shown as excerpt 1 above. Because it is a long excerpt, it is broken into several shorter segments. For each segment, I first provide a description of the participants' actions and then discuss how these actions are related to epistemic stance.

Excerpt 9a; Abe, Baba, Chiba

01 ((A saying something to C))  
 02 B: <paper bookus ca::n> +(2.6) &paper  
   +writing----->  
 A: ((looks at B's paper during silence))  
   &gaze down  
 03 boo&kuhsuh (2.0) ca::n \*  
   ----->  
 A: &writing----->  
 C: \*gaze to B's paper  
 04 C: ° (nan da) (.) s-° +(1.1)  
           (what CP)  
 A: ----->  
 B: -----> +gaze to A's dictionary

- 05 B: + &nan da kke + ↑ len::' \_ + &(0.2)  
 what CP Q  
*What was it?*  
 +gaze off dictionary +gaze to paper +writing---->  
 A: &pencil off paper &gaze to dictionary
- 06 A: *lend &and &borrow?*  
 &gaze off dictionary  
 &writing---->
- B: ----->
- 07 (3.7)  
 A: ----->  
 B: ----->
- 08 C: (eɪ demo sore tte\_) (0.9) ↑ ukemi ni  
 (hm but that QT) passive PP  
 A: ----->  
 B: ----->
- 09 shinai to dame nan ja n[ai?  
 do-NG CN no-good CP CP NG  
*Don't we have to put it into the passive?*
- 10 A: [m:. &soo da +ne.  
 right CP IP  
*That's right.*  
 &gaze to B's paper  
 B: -----> +pencil off paper
- 11 B: mhh hh +.h  
 +makes mark on paper

During this excerpt, both Abe and Baba are writing, with Baba engaged in writing aloud (Mortensen, 2013). As Baba is sitting between Abe and Chiba, what she has written can be viewed by both these other two students. In line 02, Baba first says what she is going to write, and then begins writing during the long silence. As Baba starts writing, Abe looks at this, but then shifts her attention back to her own paper and begins writing. Following the silence, Baba engages in writing aloud and continues writing into line 04. Meanwhile, at the end of line 03, Chiba brings her gaze to Baba's paper. During the silence in line 04, Baba looks at Abe's open electronic dictionary, which prior to this excerpt was used to find a translation of the Japanese "kashikari," with this translation being "lend and borrow." Presumably, this is still visible on the dictionary screen. Though she takes her gaze off the dictionary at the start of line 05, through her talk in this line she makes it clear why she has looked at the dictionary. She also says the first word of the expression "lend and borrow." Baba resumes writing as Abe brings her attention to the dictionary and says the entire expression (line 06). As she completes the expression, she resumes writing and both Abe and Baba continue writing through the silence in line 07 and Chiba's talk in line 08. Chiba's talk at the start of line 08 is unclear, but following the silence, she initiates a correction of what Baba has written (lines 08-09). In overlap with the end of this initiation of correction, Abe agrees and then shifts her attention to Baba's paper. Baba then stops writing, laughs (line 11), and quickly makes a mark on her paper (line 11).

In lines 08-10, neither Chiba nor Abe orient to their knowledge of what sort of grammatical form that Baba should use as uncertain. Through her laughter in line 11, and by not questioning what she has been told, Baba accepts the need to correct what she has written. Though it is not clear in the video exactly what sort of mark Baba makes on her paper in line 11, one possibility is that she is marking where something needs to be written in order to correct what she has written. The three students thus construct asymmetrical epistemic stances, with Chiba and Abe taking stances of being

more knowledgeable than Baba regarding the grammatical form that Baba should use, and Baba taking a stance of being less knowledgeable by accepting what she has been told.

As the interaction continues, the three students collaborate on how Baba should correct what she has written.

Excerpt 9b

- 12 (1.4)
- 13 B: *ca:n* (1.4) +(1.0)  
+makes mark on paper
- 14 C: *be*
- 15 B: *be* +:: & (0.6) +(0.6)  
+writes-----> +pencil off paper  
A: &writes----->
- 16 A: *be* &: (1.3)  
--> &pencil off paper  
(gaze and hands to dictionary))
- 17 C: *len* [*de\*duh?*]  
\*tilts head left
- 18 A: [*dakara lend\_*]  
CP-because  
*So, lend ...*
- 19 B: +*lended* (0.2) [ +*doh:*]  
+pencil to paper +writes
- 20 A: [m? (0.2) + \**lento?*]  
B: +pencil off paper  
C: \*RH on dictionary
- 21 (.) [*ja nai?*]  
CP NG  
*It's "lent", isn't it?*
- 22 C: [ \**e? nantonaku- e\_*]  
somehow  
*That seems ...*  
\*moves dictionary towards self
- 23 B: [ +*lento* ka. ]  
Q  
*Is it "lent"?*  
+RH picks up eraser
- 24 C: \* +*lento* kana.  
Q-IP  
*Maybe it's "lent".*  
\*opens dictionary  
B: +erases----->
- 25 (0.2)
- 26 A: +*lento* da na.  
CP IP  
*It's "lent".*  
B: +drops eraser

Following the long silence in line 12, Baba continues to take an asymmetrical epistemic stance as less knowledgeable and in need of guidance. In line 13, she reads “can” from her paper, which is

followed by a long silence. During this silence, she makes a mark on her paper, which from the video appears to consist of two strokes and to be a mark to show where something should be inserted. (As mentioned above, the mark she makes in line 11 may also show where something should be inserted.) Baba thus displays knowledge of where in the emerging written sentence something should be added, but through her silence and lack of writing, not of what should be added. In line 14, Chiba, who has continued to gaze at Baba's paper, suggests what should be added, the word "be," which Baba repeats as she starts to write in line 15. (In line 16, as Abe suspends her own writing, she also says "be," but it is unclear whether this is writing aloud or confirming what Baba should write.) Chiba and Baba thus continue to take asymmetrical epistemic stances towards what Baba should write, with Chiba taking a stance as more knowledgeable.

As shown also in excerpt 1, in line 17, Chiba suggests the next word that Baba should write, "lended," while simultaneously taking a stance of epistemic uncertainty towards this suggestion. Having from line 08 of excerpt 9a taken a stance as more knowledgeable than Baba about what the latter should write, with Baba aligning with the asymmetry in their knowledge, and with these asymmetrical stances being maintained through line 15 of excerpt 9b, Chiba lessens the asymmetry as she moves to the next thing that Baba should write by taking a stance of uncertainty. She thus moves out of a position of being able to tell Baba what she should write. Baba, on the other hand, continues to orient towards Chiba as more knowledgeable, as she repeats "lended" in line 19, emphasizing the suffixed grammatical morpheme by releasing the "d" sound after a brief pause, and, apparently, writing this.

As for Abe, she reorients towards her open electronic dictionary just after she suspends writing in line 16. She is consulting her dictionary in line 18, as she suggests the word "lend." However, the flat intonation on "lend" indicates that her suggestion is not complete and she continues to orient to and use her dictionary. In line 20, she casts doubt on "lended" by saying "m" with rising intonation (an open-class repair initiator) and then, after a brief pause, suggesting a different form, "lent." Abe thus aligns with Chiba's epistemic stance of uncertainty towards her own L2 knowledge, as she also orients to the form that Chiba has produced, "lended," as problematic. She also, though, takes a stance of uncertainty herself through rising intonation and then, in line 21, adding the Japanese expression, "ja nai" (*isn't it*). Importantly, her continued use of the dictionary suggests that she is able to produce this form with the assistance of her dictionary, rather than based on her own knowledge. As with Chiba, then, Abe also moves from a stance of being more knowledgeable than Baba about what the latter should write to a less asymmetrical stance about what she should write next, as she displays a reliance on her dictionary in suggesting an alternate grammatical form to the one agreed on by Chiba and Baba.

In response to Abe's suggestion of "lent," Chiba agrees that it may be correct in lines 22 and 24, while also moving to consult her own electronic dictionary. Baba accepts the suggested form, as she repeats it in line 23, adding the Japanese question marker "ka," and erasing something that she has written (presumably "lended" or the last three letters of "lended") in line 24. Finally, in line 26, Abe confirms that "lent" is the correct form, with her gaze indicating that she is reading this from her dictionary. Her use of "da na" (a form of the copula followed by an interactional particle), along with the falling intonation, indicate her certainty with "lent," while her continued orientation to her dictionary indicates that it is the dictionary which is the source of this certainty.

As the interaction continues in excerpt 9c, all three participants continue to orient to the authority of dictionaries.



In excerpt 9d, Baba accounts for her inability to write a sentence in the passive voice without assistance.

Excerpt 9d

- 37 B: +>mo ↓ o, <+ &u ↑ kemi toka &unnun +kannun  
 already passive and-such ONM  
 +closes smartphone, LH lowers smartphone +writing--->  
 +RH picks up pencil  
 A: &gaze to dictionary &stops writing, RH to dictionary
- 38 B: zenzen wakannee. &hh+yabbe. .h+HHeh .h  
 at-all understand-NG dangerous  
*I can't understand the passive and stuff like that at all. This is bad.*  
 -----> +RH to eraser +starts erasing  
 A: &LH to dictionary
- 39 (1.1)  
 A: ((gaze to paper, erases, resumes writing))  
 B: ((puts down eraser and resumes writing))
- 40 C: ° *borrowed* \* (xxxxx) °  
 \*stops using dictionary, gaze to B's paper
- 41 +(3.6)  
 B: +pencil off paper
- 42 B: ° *borrowed* ° + & \*(1.4) e::&to:. ((after more  
 uh  
 +gaze to middle distance  
 A: &stops writing &gaze to B's paper  
 C: \*gaze to dictionary
- 43 silence, attempts at formulating English  
 44 sentence continue))

While in line 34 of excerpt 9c, Baba may have made an overt claim of lack of knowledge, such a claim is definitely made in lines 37-38 of excerpt 9d. As she makes this claim, she puts away her smartphone and resumes writing. It is important to note that, even though she has needed the help of other students and of dictionaries to formulate something in the passive voice, she has also displayed L2 knowledge related to the passive. Specifically, she has displayed knowledge, through both talk and writing behaviors, that something needs to be added after “can” and that the verb “borrow” needs to be modified in a way analogous to how “lend” was modified. At a somewhat more abstract level, she has displayed knowledge that English has both regular and irregular verbs and that, therefore, there is a possibility that “borrow” is an irregular verb. Through this overt claim of lack of knowledge, though, she takes a stance of epistemic uncertainty in relation to her knowledge of the passive and to various other unspecified L2 grammatical constructions.

This claim of lack of knowledge is not directly addressed to either of the other two participants and Baba makes it while engaged herself in writing. As a claim of lack of knowledge regarding the passive voice, it provides an account for why she initially failed to recognize the need to use the passive and why she needed help from the other students. In addition, it contains a self-deprecating extreme case formulation (Edwards, 2000; Pomertantz, 1986) and is brought to a close with laughter. However, neither of the other two students responds to it as an account. Nor do they respond to the self-deprecating extreme case formulation by, for example, downgrading it (Pomerantz, 1984). Nor do they join the laughter. Rather, the other two simply ignore Baba's claim of lack of knowledge. They instead focus on dictionary consultation, writing, and inspecting the results of writing. As the claim of lack of knowledge is not directly addressed to either Abe or Chiba, their lack of response



should not be interpreted as a conditionally relevant missing response. Nevertheless, by not responding, they avoid taking on the identity of relative grammar expert.

In this extended excerpt, then, knowledge asymmetries are initially made relevant as two students take on identities as relative L2 experts in relation to the third student. However, through producing a candidate word as uncertain, one student moves to lessen this asymmetry. A stronger sense of symmetry is established as the other initially more knowledgeable student aligns by also treating this candidate word as uncertain, while also showing that the authority for what she says rests with her dictionary, rather than her own knowledge. Finally, when the initially less knowledgeable student overtly claims lack of ability to use the English passive, the others ignore this and thus do not take on identities as L2 experts or reestablish the earlier epistemic asymmetry.

## **7. DISCUSSION: BEING A NON-EXPERT AMONG NON-EXPERTS**

As can be seen in excerpt 9, the students do not always take an epistemic stance of uncertainty toward their own displayed L2 knowledge. Nevertheless, this is something that they regularly do. Through taking such a stance, a student can do being a non-expert in their L2, English. By either ignoring such a stance or responding in a way that does not make relative expertise relevant, students can also avoid being positioned as an L2 expert. The students can thus claim to have no more expertise in L2 English than the other students. As mentioned above, this university is highly competitive. The students there are perceived to generally be strong at mathematics and science, but not at English. Sacks (1984) has shown how doing being ordinary is something that people have to work at. Similarly, doing being a non-expert in L2 English, and thus being what is perceived by some to be an ordinary student at this university, is something that the students work at.

Through doing being a non-expert in L2 English, the students can accomplish different things. For instance, regularly taking a stance as more knowledgeable than other students would also involve acquiring greater obligations with regard to the quality of the product of the group's preparations. By doing being a non-expert, students avoid acquisition of these greater obligations.

As Jakonen and Morton (2015) point out, being too knowledgeable among peers can cause problems. In addition to taking on more responsibility for the quality of the presentation and other epistemic obligations, one such problem is that showing oneself as knowing too much, and thus making relevant asymmetries of knowledge, can lead to the emergence of a relatively hierarchical relationship among peers. Taking a stance of uncertainty towards displayed L2 knowledge can be a way of eliminating or minimizing asymmetries in epistemic stance. Similarly, when students respond to a stance of epistemic uncertainty by aligning with it, or when they simply do not respond and ignore the stance-taking, they avoid attributing to themselves greater epistemic access and epistemic obligations, of taking on an identity as an expert relative to their peers, and thus avoid the possible emergence of epistemic asymmetries and of a knowledge hierarchy. The students thus construct an egalitarian relationship among themselves as being non-experts among other non-experts. This may allow for the (possibly) morally sensitive issue of who knows more and who knows less not to arise, or when it does arise, to be handled in a way that downplays such asymmetries.

## **8. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I do not want to give the impression that giving planning time to students during class is without benefits. It is likely, it seems to me, to lead to higher quality products (e.g., group presentations) and to create opportunities for language learning. However, I would also like to emphasize that, when working with peers, there is more at stake for the students than producing a good presentation or learning something about the L2. How students work in peer groups contributes

to who they are and to the kind of relationship they have with others. A classroom is an institutional setting created for the purpose of education, but it is also a context composed of social actors and constructed through their actions. The concerns of these social actors are not limited to education, so there is always much more going on in the classroom than simply teaching and learning. I have tried to show in this paper what one of those other concerns may be.

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Yusuke Arano for his assistance with the transcription of Japanese. All errors remain my own.

## 10. NOTES

1. It is only fairly recently that terms such as *epistemic stance* have become widely used in conversation analysis. Some of the work that I cite in relation to an epistemic stance of (un)certainly, such as Goodwin (1987), predates the adoption of this terminology.
2. There is more work on expressions such as *I don't know*, such as the recent special issue in the *Journal of Pragmatics* on negative epistemics in different languages (see Lindström, Maschler, and Pekarek Doehler (2016) for the introduction of this special issue). A thorough review of this work is beyond the scope of this paper. One important thing to note is that the use of such an expression does not necessarily claim lack of knowledge and so is not necessarily related to epistemic stance (Helmer, Reineke, and Deppermann, 2016; Pekarek Doehler, 2016).
3. This criticism of epistemics is a relatively minor part of Lindwall, Lymer, and Ivarsson's (2016) argument, the primary thrust of which is that, contrary to the arguments of Heritage (2012), the concepts of epistemic status and stance are not necessary for the systematic analysis of action formation, which can be adequately done on the basis of sequential analysis.
4. This is possibly not a repetition. See analysis of excerpt 9b.
5. I have not been able to find any research on head tilting in Japanese interaction. However, I have been building a collection of these movements and one thing that the different instances in this collection seem to have in common is the indexing of ambivalence. In addition, Hosoda (2006) describes head tilting as one non-verbal resource that may be used by either L1 or L2 users of Japanese to self-initiate other repair as part of a word search.
6. One reviewer suggested that what I discuss as alignment could be better understood as affiliation. However, the data do not seem to me to provide the necessary basis for describing the other students' responses as affiliative. Rather, in excerpt 5, Jimbo's and Goto's actions are aligned as they engage in shared laughter. Similarly, in excerpts 6 and 7, the responses to a display of uncertainty take a similar stance towards the object of this display. It is in this sense that these actions can be understood as aligned.

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## 11. APPENDIX: SYMBOLS USED IN MORPHEME-BY-MORPHEME GLOSSES

From Nguyen and Kasper (2009):

CP	copula
IP	interactional particle
LK	linking particle
NG	negative morpheme
Q	question marker
QT	quotative
SB	subject marker
TP	topic marker

Not in Nguyen and Kasper (2009):

AS	aspect morpheme
CN	conditional
MD	modality morpheme
ONM	onomatopoeia
PP	postposition