Japanese Language and Literature
Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese
jll.pitt.edu | Vol. 59 | Number 1 | April 2025 | DOI: 10.5195/jll.2025.389
ISSN 1536-7827 (print) 2326-4586 (online)

Development of L2 Interactional Resource in Pragmatics Instruction: Use of Japanese Interactional Particle *ne* in Assessment Activity

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Abstract

The present study examined the development of interactional competence (IC) by JFL learners in an explicitly instructed setting, focusing on their use of a Japanese interactional particle *ne* in spontaneous conversation with NS classroom guests. More specifically, the study explores the impact of pragmatics instruction on the learners' change in participation in assessment activity (Goodwin 1986) using *ne* in conversation. The instruction, incorporating metapragmatic discussion of the interactional functions of *ne* and recurrent conversation opportunities with NS classroom guests, was implemented in a third semester beginning Japanese class for one semester. The study focuses on learners' appropriation of *ne* in ways that are consistent with the instructional content, and that potentially extend beyond it in terms of form, function, and activity-relevant participation. Qualitative analyses revealed greater evidence of interactional competence through the contingent use of *ne* in different sequential positions (follow-up and initial *ne*), while there was a difference in developmental trajectory between the contextual understandings and actual use of *ne* among individual learners. The findings suggest a critical role of explicit pragmatics instruction in learners' metapragmatic development and use of *ne* as an index of interactional competence for the creation of alignment and intersubjectivity between participants in interaction.

1. Introduction

Becoming a competent member of a given speech community presupposes the knowledge of, and the ability to use, a wide range of interactional resources to be received, understood, and responded to by all participants for establishing a shared understanding of the ongoing conversation, or intersubjectivity (Kärkkäinen 2006; Young 2019) during interaction. In more recent years, the development of interactional resources by L2 learners has received growing attention in understanding the construct of

pragmatic and interactional competence (Hall et al. 2011; Ishihara and Cohen 2022; Taguchi 2019) and various teaching contexts the learners can develop in L2 pragmatics (Jeon and Kaya 2006; Plonsky and Zhuang, 2019; Tateyama 2009) and in conversation analysis (CA) informed pedagogy (Barraja-Rohan 2011; Betz and Huth 2014; Kunitz and Yeh 2019). One such interactional resource occurs in assessment with the Japanese interactional particle *ne*, which refers to utterances that evaluate the content of one's own or another's talk as the relevancy of alignment (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992). While previous L2 studies have documented the development of assessments by L2 learners as an index of emerging interactional competence in study-abroad and classroom-based interaction settings (e.g., Dings 2014; M. Ishida 2009; Ohta 2001; Shively 2016), the role of instructional interventions in the learners' ability to develop L2 resources for participating in assessment activity with the particle *ne* has remained largely unexplored. The present study examines how the implementation of pragmatics instruction contributes to Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) learners' metapragmatic development and interactional competence of a Japanese interactional particle *ne* as a resource to create alignment and intersubjectivity in assessment activity during the conversation with native speaker (NS) classroom guests.

2. Background

2.1 Development of L2 assessment activity across different contexts

Interactional competence constitutes the knowledge and deployment of interactional resources jointly constructed by participants in a discursive practice (Young 2011). Young (2019) later proposed a set of resources that participants bring to create intersubjectivity in interactive practices: 1) participation framework, 2) linguistic resources, and 3) interactional resources. Interactional resources, which allow participants to co-construct stance and meaning with others, is the most relevant to the present study. In a similar vein, Hall and Pekarek Doehler (2011) conceptualize interaction as a context-specific activity that draws on a range of participants' interactional resources for the co-construction of meaning-making.

The present study employed Young's (2019) proposal of participation framework (assessment activity) and interactional resources (*ne*) as its main analytical focus. The particle *ne* invokes a context-specific practice in the form of assessment activity, in which interactants express their evaluation and stances towards what is being referred in the ongoing talk

(Goodwin 1986; Goodwin and Goodwin 1992). A growing body of research on the development of L2 assessments has considered alignment and intersubjectivity as evidenced through the deployment of interactional resources by L2 learners in a study-abroad context (Dings 2014; Shively 2016; Taguchi 2014). Dings (2014) documented the development of assessments by an L2 Spanish learner in conversation with a native Spanish speaker during a year abroad. In her study, the learner demonstrated shifts in participation from minimal agreement tokens such as *sí* (yeah) to more syntactically complex, elaborate assessments including *es triste* (it's sad). Shively's (2016) report on L2 learners of Spanish during a semester abroad showed how the learners' implicit and explicit socialization with host families and age peers enabled them to develop listener and speaker assessments using a wider range of lexical items to show alignment and empathy towards their interlocutors.

Some expressions of alignment may be universal across languages, but others are linguistically specific in their contributions to interaction. Japanese is particularly unique in this respect, and one way to do it is realized by the particle *ne*. Although the early acquisition of interactional particles such as *ne* may be unproblematic for Japanese-speaking children (Clancy, 1985), the difficulty of acquiring the particles by individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (Kato et al. 2022) as well as by adult L2 learners of Japanese has been addressed in the literature (Saigo 2011; Yoshimi 1999). One reason underlies in the nature of the interactional particles as being non-referential indexes (Cook, 1992; Silverstein, 1976). Furthermore, the acquisition of such indexes is challenging for those learners whose resources are not available in their L1. Another reason stems from the fact that the general description of these particles in L2 textbooks is often presented in a simplistic fashion; *ne* marks a speaker's request for 'confirmation or agreement' from the hearer (see Banno et al. 2020; Tohsaku 2005), and such simplistic descriptions hardly capture the complexity of the meanings that are only made available through social interaction.

Previous studies have yielded empirical evidence that the development of *ne* as an alignment marker is enabled through a result of sufficient exposures to classroom and study-abroad interactions. Ohta (2001) showed how classroom learners began to use *ne* as an affective assessment in a follow-up turn. Ishida (2009) and Masuda (2011) reported on the development of alignment expressions through *ne* by JFL learners in different assessment positions during study abroad. However, research

documenting the impact of formal instruction as the unit of analysis is extremely limited except for Kakegawa (2009), who examined the effects of instruction on students' development of particles *ne*, *yo*, *no*, and *yone* in email correspondence with native speakers. Considering the scarcity of research that informs instructed learners' pragmatic potential to appropriate these particles in spoken discourse, the present study considered the implementation of pragmatics instruction as a pedagogical framework that helps learners to develop a metapragmatic understanding and interactive use of the particle *ne*. This study focuses on the instructional effectiveness for 1) JFL learners' metapragmatic understanding of interactional functions of the particle *ne*, and 2) learners' appropriation of *ne* as an interactional resource to co-construct alignment and intersubjectivity as they engage in spontaneous conversation with NS classroom guests.

2.2 *Ne*-marked assessment in Japanese

To identify a learner's development of L2 interactional resources as evidenced using *ne*, the present study employs the notions of activity and participation for analyzing language use situated in interaction and ways in which its deployment constitutes social action (Hayashi 2014). Our focus here is assessment activity in Japanese, which invokes a participation framework in which participants deploy *ne* as an interactional resource to invite the co-participant's next interactional moves such as alignment and/or (dis)affiliative responses (Hayano 2011; Morita 2005, 2012; Tanaka 2000); and to signal the speaker's stance of inviting the partner's involvement in an 'incorporative' manner (Lee 2007; Ogi 2017). Let us turn to the following segment of the excerpt from Ohta (2001), in which the *ne*-marked assessment produced by a beginning learner of Japanese emerged as her explicit display of understanding of what her peer partner said in the previous turn.

Excerpt 1. [Ohta, 2001, p. 217–218, modified]

01 H: *Sara-san wa?*
'How about you, Sara?'

02 Sr: *Eeehh (.) Konshu wa:: mm:: isogashikatta desu (.)*
°isogashikatta desu.° (2) Takusan arubaito o shimashita. (4)
H-san wa?
'U::m this week was m:: busy °it was busy°

I worked a lot. How about you, H-san?'

03 H: *Shiken to:: repooto ga takusan arimashita kara (.) isogashikatta desu.*
'I had lots of exams and papers so it was busy.'

04 Sr: *Taihen desu* ***ne****:. (.)* ((laugh)) ← follow-up turn *ne*
'That's tough.'

This segment illustrates a peer-peer interaction in which the students are reflecting on their schedule from the previous week and one of the learners, Sara, uses *taihen* (tough) as her assessment and marks it with the particle *ne* to display her affective stance towards the utterance produced by her partner in the preceding turn (line 04). Sara's display of alignment *ne* in the follow-up assessment *taihen desu ne* (that's tough) was facilitated by her intersubjective understanding of the content of her partner's previous turn, thereby emerging as a result of joint assessment activity in which Sara expressed empathy in response to her partner's mentions of busy days at school.

The following excerpt illustrates how a speaker provides a *ne*-marked assessment in the initial turn in such ways that make relevant the recipient's display of agreement to the *ne*-marked assessment. Here a pottery instructor (T) is commenting on a teapot that her student (S) made.

Excerpt 2. [Hayano, 2011, p. 64, modified]

01 T: *de- (0.2) atsui* ***ne*** ← initial-turn *ne*
'And- it's thick.

02 S: *Atsui desu* [***ne****:* ← agreement
'It's thick.'

03 T: [*Un:*
'Yeah:

While critiquing her student's teapot, the instructor says it's 'thick' by marking the first assessment with *ne*. This *ne*-marked comment was directed at the student, proposing that the recipient's joint assessment be relevant next. In line 02, the comment was then picked up by the student, who also responded with *ne* to show full agreement. The reciprocal marking of *ne* in an adjacent pair of turns is common in Japanese and the

same evaluation is treated as an unproblematic agreement (Hayano 2011). The development of *ne* in the initial-turn assessment beyond the follow-up turn was also evidenced in L2 learners' alignment expressions in study-abroad contexts (Ishida 2009; Masuda 2011). In contrast to these previous findings, however, Kizu et al. (2019) concluded that the amount of naturalistic exposure in an immersion context is not necessarily a decisive factor in the development of interactional particles. As Kasper and Rose (2002, 230) put it, "For developing pragmatic ability, spending time in the target community is no panacea, length of residence is not a reliable predictor, and L2 classrooms can be a productive social context."

Kasper and Rose's claim above addresses how classroom instruction can serve as a productive social context for the development of pragmatic and interactional competence. The present study follows this line of pedagogical inquiry by investigating the impact of pragmatics instruction on the learners' metapragmatic development and use of *ne* as an index of interactional competence. More specifically, this study focuses on the changes in the learners' understanding of the pragmatic target *ne* that transcends the rule-based, textbook knowledge (e.g., speaker's request for agreement or confirmation) and their ability to deploy the particle as an interactional resource for creating alignment and intersubjectivity in the context of spontaneous conversations in L2 Japanese.

3. The Study

The present study adopted explicit pragmatics instruction (Taguchi 2015) in a third-semester Japanese class at a U. S. university. The framework of the instruction is grounded in L2 instructional pragmatics (Ishihara and Cohen 2022) and interactional competence (IC)-based language teaching (see Salaberry and Kunitz 2019). These pedagogical frameworks emerged as a reaction to the gap between textbook representation of language and its actual use; model dialogues presented in textbooks are typically purposed to teach key grammar and vocabulary as the target of each unit and do not represent how participants in conversation interact with each other; and some pragmatic features are present in model dialogues, but no explanations are provided as to contextual meanings and use in L2 textbooks (Hoshi 2021; K. Ishida 2009).

Such observations have compelled researchers to develop and implement instructional models to teach pragmatic and interactional competence through pragmatics-focused or CA-informed approaches (Bardovi-Harlig et al. 2015; Barraja-Rohan 2011; Betz and Huth 2014;

González-Lloret 2019; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006; K. Ishida 2009; Iwai 2013; Kunitz and Yah 2019). These studies employed CA or discourse-analytic findings to develop instructional materials that incorporate natural language samples (i.e., naturally occurring conversation) or other research-based resources. For example, Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) demonstrated that explicit instruction using CA-based authentic materials had a positive effect on learners' ability to anticipate, interpret and produce socio-pragmatically relevant conduct, i.e., common sequence structures for telephone openings in German. More recent research by Kunitz and Yah (2019) examined the outcomes of IC-based instruction for the development of interactional skills by beginning learners of Chinese, with a specific focus on topic management and active listenership achieved by two focal students. After the two semesters of instruction, the students were able to demonstrate more refined active listenership through relevant response tokens, and topic management using confirmation and elaboration questions. Their study also highlighted the benefits of collaboration between conversation analysts and practitioners in creating research-inspired materials for IC teaching units.

While the existing studies have contributed pedagogical models that demonstrate the relevance of CA to the teaching of IC in the development of a distinct course of action (e.g., speech acts, conversational opening and closing, repair, topic management, etc.), research that focuses on the use of a specific linguistic form for next action contexts has been less common (Pekarek Doehler 2019). K. Ishida's (2009) is one of the few interventional studies that addressed the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic-focused instruction on the indexical meanings of style shifting between the two sets of forms, the *desu/masu* and plain forms in Japanese. Drawing from the previous studies that evidenced the switch of these two forms in a single interaction among L1 speakers of Japanese (e.g., Cook 2008; Okamoto 1999), Ishida demonstrated that the explicit pragmatics instruction benefited the learners' understanding and dynamic use of the *desu/masu* and plain forms in the construction of highly situated indexical meanings in social interaction. Another study by Iwai (2013) reported on the effect of pragmatics-focused instruction on the JFL learners' developing use of a pragmatic resource *–n desu* to engage in small talk as a social activity to co-construct sociability, rapport, and identity in interaction with a native speaker of Japanese.

The present study explored the integration of L2 instructional pragmatics and IC-based pedagogy in the development of interactional

competence of a specific linguistic form *ne* for participating in the assessment activity in the context of spontaneous conversation of Japanese. From this perspective, this study examined 1) how L2 learners of Japanese can be instructed to develop their understanding of pragmatic use of the particle *ne* in a context-specific activity, namely, assessment activity in interaction; 2) how the learners can be instructed to develop a specific linguistic resource (*ne*) as an index of interactional competence for in the construction of alignment and intersubjectivity with other interlocutors in open-ended conversational practices.

The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. How does the pragmatics instruction impact the learners' metapragmatic development of the particle *ne*?
2. How does the pragmatics instruction affect the development of interactional competence as evidenced by the ability to use the particle *ne* in the communicative practices?
3. What evidence is there that the learners are using *ne* in ways that extend beyond the instructional content, reflecting the enhanced ability to appropriate *ne* as an interactional resource to create alignment and intersubjectivity in conversation?

4. Methodology

4.1 Collected data and participants

The study was conducted over one semester (sixteen weeks) for a third-semester Japanese class (focus group) that met four days a week for fifty minutes. The class received pragmatics instruction on interactional particles *ne*, *yo*, and *yone*, along with the institutionally mandated syllabus. The instructor of the class was a native speaker of Japanese with more than eight years of teaching college-level Japanese at the time of data collection. The participants in this study consisted of fourteen students (eight males, six females) from the focus group, and five native speakers of Japanese attending the university as international students with no previous Japanese teaching/tutoring background.

The study reported on in this article focuses on the interactional competence of *ne* by the instructed learners who received the pragmatics instruction on the particle in question. The data collected for this study include 1) students' background information, 2) pre- and post-tests to elicit students' understanding of the pragmatic functions of the particle *ne*, and 3) audio- and video-recordings of NS-learner interactions between the pre- and target-instruction periods. Recorded interactions were later

transcribed for data analysis, following Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions (Appendix A). Student background information (length of Japanese studies, use of Japanese outside class, and exposure to Japanese media) was collected at the onset of the study (Appendix B).

4.2 Study design

During the pre-instruction period (Weeks 1-7), students in the focus group learned core grammatical structures and vocabulary and practiced them in a variety of dialogs that included turns where *ne* and *yo* are used, but no explicit instruction of the particles was given to this group during this period. Over the target-instruction period (Week 8-16), approximately twenty minutes out of six 50-minute class sessions was allocated for awareness-raising activity that aims to enhance student's understanding of pragmatic functions of the particle *ne*. There was a total of four conversation sessions to which five Japanese NS guests were invited to the classroom respectively during the semester. Each student was assigned to interact with the same NS partner for thirteen to fourteen minutes and interacted with their peers when they were not paired with the NS partner. Assigning the same NS-learner pairs throughout the study assumes that the interactional particles are more likely to occur as interpersonal relationships among participants develop during conversation. Session 1 and 2 took place during the pre-instruction period when no explicit instruction of *ne* was provided to the focus group, and Session 3 and 4 were held during the interventional period when the students were involved in the metapragmatic discussions regarding the pragmatic functions of *ne* and a series of oral practices as a component of the target instruction.

The pre- and post-tests were administered respectively at the beginning and the end of the study, to identify any shifts in the learner understanding of the functions of the particle *ne*. In these tests, students were asked to provide written descriptions of the pragmatic functions of *ne* and other particles used in each described situation.

Table 1. Timeline for the pragmatics instruction of particle *ne* for the focus group

Week	Period	Content of instruction
1 - 2	Pre-instruction 1	Pre-test
3		Conversation session 1 (Pre-1)
4 - 7	Pre-instruction 2	Pre-instruction
7		Conversation session 2 (Pre-2)
8 - 11	Target-	Pragmatics instruction (awareness-raising activity;

	instruction 1	oral practices)
11		Conversation session 3 (Target-1)
12 - 15	Target-instruction 2	Pragmatics instruction (awareness-raising activity; oral practices)
15		Conversation session 4 (Target-2)
16		Post-test

4.3 Instructional treatment

The pragmatics instruction on *ne* consisted of two different components: awareness-raising activity and recurrent conversation practices with NS classroom guests. The awareness-raising activity entailed 1) presentation of how *ne* occurs in different assessment turns, 2) metapragmatic discussions of *ne*'s functions and contextual use, and 3) oral practices using *ne* and other particles in short or extended dialogues that closely resemble naturally occurring talk that characterizes turn taking, affiliation, response tokens, sequential organization, and paralinguistic features (Barraja-Rohan 2011). To understand contextual situations where *ne* and other particles can occur in a given interaction, students watched a few video clips of conversations between native speakers using *ne*, *yo*, and *yone* to develop familiar topics such as past trips and upcoming exams, etc. Students were then asked to discuss with peers and instructor 1) how *ne* is deployed variably in the sequential development of talk, 2) how *ne* might be responded to by the other person as a relevant interactional move, and 3) the co-occurrence of gestural and prosodic moves with *ne* (Appendix C). Building on CA-informed findings of the pragmatic functions of *ne*, the instruction also introduced dialogue examples of *ne*-marked assessment turns, as shown in Excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 3. Assessment activity with *ne*

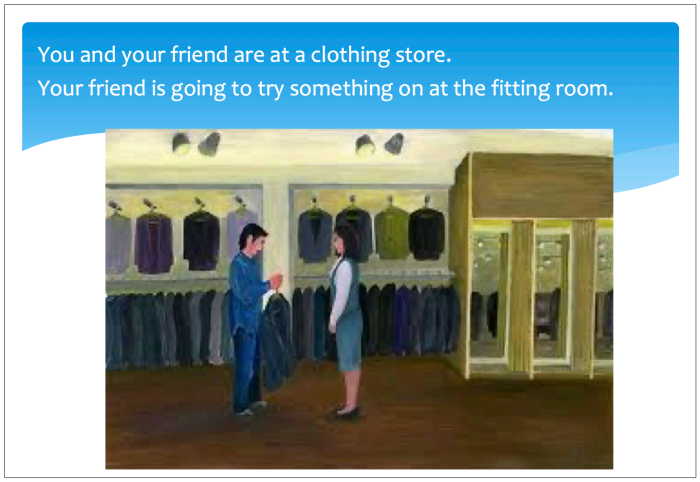
a. Follow-up assessment *ne* marks alignment motivated by the content of the previous turn
   A: *shuumatsu nanika yotei aru?* Any plans this weekend?
   B: *shukudai to baito ga atte...* I have homework and a part-time job...
   A: *ee, taihen da **ne**.* Oh, that sucks.

b. Initial assessment *ne* marks the recipient's display of alignment (agreement or disagreement) as relevant next
   A: *sore, pittari da **ne**.* It really suits you.
   B: *sou kana...* Does it really?

In assessment sequences, *ne* is deployed in both follow-up and initial turns. The follow-up *ne* occurs in a recipient's position where he/she provides an assessment in response to the content of the speaker's preceding utterance (Masuda 2011; Morita 2005). The initial *ne* occurs in a speaker's assessment turn that invites the recipient's responses (such as agreement or disagreement) as relevant next (Tanaka 2000). In developing the instruction, I examined the general descriptions of *ne* in some major Japanese textbooks used in North American universities (e.g., *Genki*, *Situational Functional Japanese, Yookoso!*). To bridge the gap between the rule-based textbook descriptions of *ne* (e.g., to ask for agreement or confirmation) and its pragmatic functions evidenced in CA studies, I created and incorporated the learner-friendly visual resources that describe the use of *ne* in different contextual situations (Figures 1 and 2) in the instruction to guide students' awareness raising and as a scaffold for their production in the conversation sessions.

Figure 1: Visual resources of *ne* in contextual situation

Figure 2: Visual resources of *ne* in contextual situation



The communicative component was incorporated as the recurrent conversation sessions in which students engaged in spontaneous conversation with NS partners without receiving feedback on their *ne* use. In order to obtain as naturalistic an interaction as possible, topic nomination in these conversations was left entirely in the participants' control. The goal of this practice was to engage students in 'open-skill environments' (Segalowitz and Trofimovich 2012) in which they need to monitor changes and adapt their language resources as they occur in real time. Specifically, it focused on how linguistic affordances that potentially become available through interaction with NS peers might enable the learners' appropriation of *ne* as an interactional resource to co-construct alignment and, in turn, to achieve intersubjectivity between participants.

4.4 Procedure for analysis

The analytical focus will determine the degree of instructional effectiveness as evidenced from the pre- and post-test results and the conversation data collected from Sessions 2, 3 and 4 (pre-instruction 2, target-instruction 1, and target-instruction 2). Data from Session 1 (pre-instruction 1) is excluded from the current analysis because most of the conversations consist of initial information exchanges between two speakers introducing themselves to each other or conversing for the first time in which interactional moves with the target particle *ne* would be less likely than a conversational situation where the participants' relationship has already been established.

To address the first question regarding the impact of pragmatics instruction on students' metapragmatic development of *ne*, analysis draws on the results of pre- and post-tests to evaluate qualitative shifts in their understanding of the pragmatic functions of *ne* between the pre-instructional and target-instructional periods. To address the second question regarding their application of metapragmatic knowledge to communicative practices, analysis focuses on evidence in which the learners produce *ne* in ways that are consistent with what was taught in the classroom in terms of form, functions, and activity-relevant participation. To address the third research question concerning evidence for learners' extended use of *ne* beyond the instructional treatment, we examine how they were increasingly able to appropriate *ne* as a resource for creating alignment and intersubjectivity with others in conversation.

Analysis of the conversational data considers paralinguistic features (e.g., prosody, gesture), frequency, appropriateness of *ne*'s use that is consistent with the instructional content, and potential erroneous occurrence of *ne*. This study is based on the perspectives that stylistic variation can also be found even among individual L1 speakers of Japanese, in relation to the addressee's knowledge and stance, situational contexts, or local identity they want to construct with others (e.g., Eckert and Rickford 2001). Therefore, the goal of this study is not to identify the extent to which the students have mastered some native-like use of *ne*, but to examine how they can demonstrate qualitative changes in their metapragmatic understanding of *ne*'s functions, and the appropriation of the pragmatic target in ways that are mutually acceptable and recognizable to the speakers of the target language.

5. Findings

5.1 Metapragmatic development

In order to determine whether the pragmatics instruction triggers the learners' metapragmatic development regarding the target pragmatic form *ne*, the pre- and post-tests were administered to evaluate any qualitative changes in the understanding of various functions and stances indexed by *ne* in contextual situations prior to and following the instructional intervention. The pre- and post-tests respectively asked students to provide written descriptions of the pragmatic functions of *ne* and other particles used in each constructed dialogue.

For the interest of space, the present analysis will focus on one of the questions presented in the pre- and post-tests (Speaker A: *Kinoo no nihongo no tesuto, doo datta?* How was the Japanese test yesterday?) for three possible answers from Speaker B: a) *Muzukashi katta ne!* b) *Muzukashi katta yo!*; and c) *Muzukashi katta yone!* (It was difficult!), which differed only with respect to the sentence ending. To make distinctions in explaining the meaning of *ne* and other particles in an assessment turn, students would need to understand the differences in the expression of stance taking toward the achievement of intersubjectivity between speakers in interaction. For example, the response *muzukashi katta ne!* indicates that B gives an assessment of the test that A can easily align to, since A and B both took the test, or because A, who is not in B's class, has known that B took the test the day before. If A says *muzukashi katta yone!*, it indexes that A and B orient to mutual evaluations of the test they took the day before and/or negotiate their congruent (or incongruent) epistemic views about the referent (Hayano 2017; Nazikian 2019). In this way, the different uses of particles are one way that speakers of Japanese can display their stance and seek shared stance with the interlocutor towards what they are assessing or conveying in the talk.

In the pre-test, the majority of students in the focus group commented that particle *ne* in B's response *muzukashi katta ne* (It was difficult) is equivalent to the English tag questions such as 'isn't it?' and is used "*to ask for confirmation and agreement*," a common function often introduced in the textbooks. Other responses include instances in which *ne* marks intimacy, "*Sounds friendly*," which was consistent with what a few students mentioned when I first asked the class what they have understood about *ne* at the pre-instructional stage. This suggests that although the students demonstrated some textbook-derived knowledge of particle *ne*, they did not appear to have an awareness of why and how *ne* is marked as

a resource for negotiating alignment between the speaker and the addressee.

In the post-test, however, eight out of fourteen students in the focus group showed increased awareness of *ne* to be used for seeking shared knowledge/stance about the referent (the test) between participants. Some of the responses include "Both persons took it, so they expect each other to feel the same way" (Emily); "showing sympathy, sympathizing with the person who took the test that yes, it was hard for me" (Trey); "B is seeking agreement from A that the test was hard" (Julie); "the listener is agreeing with what has already been shared and known" (Tara); "A also took the test, so A may agree with B about the difficulty of the test" (Kyle). One student responded, "B may have already known that the test was obviously hard for both of them" (Ann). Ann's definition is particularly relevant to the use of *ne* in a response position where the hint of the *ne*-utterance is already sufficient for the recipient to align in his/her next turn (Shibahara 2002).

An examination of students' written responses in the pre- and post-tests shows that there is a qualitative difference in their prior and current understanding of *ne*-marked talk. In other words, the students' pre-test knowledge of *ne* did not transcend the rule-based description of 'confirmation and agreement.' However, their post-test knowledge of *ne* reflects a greater shift in understanding from a single speaker's expression of alignment through *ne* to an intersubjective use of *ne* for negotiating alignment (e.g., agreement) about what is being assessed between speakers.

5.2 Relationship between metapragmatic development and oral performance with *ne*

This section investigates how the learners' metapragmatic development is associated with their performance with *ne* in the conversation sessions. Some previous L2 research evidenced a positive relationship between metapragmatic/conceptual knowledge and oral production skills in instructed settings (Serrano 2010; van Compernolle and Williams 2012). In the present study, however, a closer analysis of the learners' metapragmatic awareness of *ne* in the pre- and post-tests and the conversation data revealed that the students' *overall* metapragmatic development does not directly translate into the *individual* learners' ability to produce the target pragmatic feature *ne* in spontaneous conversational contexts.

As is discussed below, the conversation data evidenced the individual differences in the learner appropriation of metapragmatic knowledge to

produce more appropriate output. This finding suggests that the relationship between metapragmatic development and oral performance is attributed to such factors as individual variability, task types (more linguistically controlled vs. spontaneous contexts), and learnability of materials in relation to learners' proficiency. In their study on the impact of different task types (e.g., planned and unplanned production) on students' oral performance in L2 French, French and Beaulieu (2016) remark, "spontaneous speech production is cognitively demanding, possibly preventing learners from allocating their attentional resources to the appropriate stylistic encoding of their intended speech" (p.67). Seen from this perspective, the gap between metapragmatic development and oral performance gains in the individual learners in the present study is not an unexpected outcome, given that the task demands (spontaneous conversations) may have increased cognitive load to such an extent that it prevented some learners from successfully appropriating their previously learned information into appropriate production of the target form *ne* in the conversation.

Given the individual differences in students' language proficiency and Japanese backgrounds at the onset of this study, the focus of analysis is on the individual learners' developmental trajectory of interactional competence with the use of *ne* in the spontaneous conversation over time between the pre-instruction and target-instruction periods.

5.3 Learners' performance with ne in the pre-instruction period

Table 2 illustrates the use of *ne* by individual students in the focus group during the pre-instructional period (Session 2).

As Table 2 shows, *ne* occurred very infrequently in both the follow-up turn and initial turn at the pre-instruction stage. Some students were found to produce *ne* anomalously. For example, Ryan, who was the most user of *ne* in his talk, tended to overuse *ne* in the context where alignment from the recipient was not relevant, which resulted in some disruptions (e.g., a prolonged pause) to the sequence of talk. A closer analysis also revealed that some focus group students at this stage did not capitalize on the opportunities to use *ne* even when the appropriate environment arose and instead responded with minimal acknowledgment tokens (*aa* or English *oh*) or/and evaluative comments with an explicit absence of *ne* (e.g., *ii desu* instead of *ii desu ne*), making it difficult to create intersubjectivity between participants in the ongoing conversation.

Table 2. Use of *ne* by individual students in the pre-instructional period (Pre-2)

Focus group (N=14)	Initial-turn *ne*	Follow-up turn *ne*	Formulaic *ne*	Anomalous *ne*
Ryan	0	1	0	18
Julie	0	0	3	1
Kelly	0	1	0	3
Brian	0	0	1	4
Tara	1	0	1	1
Trey	0	0	0	0
Ann	0	0	0	0
Lucas	0	0	0	0
James	0	0	0	0
Beth	0	0	0	0
Fred	0	0	0	0
Emily	0	0	0	0
Kyle	0	0	0	0
Ethan	0	0	0	0
Total	1	2	5	27

When the particle *ne* did occur in the learners' speech, it was limitedly used in formulaic, textbook-like expressions such as agreement (*soo desu ne,* That's right) and a follow-up assessment (*ii desu ne,* Sounds nice) in response to the content of the previous utterance. This finding is not entirely surprising since, even before the instruction was received, some of the focus group students reported that they were already aware of their previous exposure to such formulaic *ne*-marked expressions by hearing or producing it in and outside the classroom.

5.4 Learners' performance with ne in the target instructional period

The analysis to be presented here focuses on the focus group learners' use of *ne* in different turns of an assessment activity including 1) a follow-up assessment *ne* as a reaction to the content of the utterance performed by the previous speaker, and 2) an initial assessment *ne* as a turn that can be responded to by the recipient. Formulaic *ne* (e.g., agreement *soo desu ne* and *ii desu ne*) is excluded from the table. Table 3 below illustrates the individual students' use of *ne* in the conversation sessions during the target instructional period (Session 3 and 4).

Table 3. Use of *ne* by individual students in the target instructional period (Target-1 and 2)

Focus group (N=14)	Session 3 (Target-1)			Session 4 (Target-2)		
	Initial *ne*	Follow-up *ne*	Anomalous *ne*	Initial *ne*	Follow-up *ne*	Anomalous *ne*
Ryan	1	2	11	1	3	7
Julie	0	7	1	1	6	0
Tara	0	5	1	1	5	0
Fred	0	2	1	1	2	0
James	0	1	1	0	1	0
Kyle	2	0	1	0	1	1
Trey	0	1	0	0	1	0
Beth	0	1	0	1	1	1
Brian	0	1	0	0	1	0
Emily	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ann	0	0	0	1	1	0
Ethan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kelly	-	-	-	1	1	0
Lucas	-	-	-	0	2	0
Total	2	20	16	7	26	9

Focusing on the learners' changes in participation with *ne* during the target instructional period, we can find that there is a steady increase in the use of *ne* in the follow-up assessment turn (from 20 tokens to 26 tokens) and in the initial assessment turn (2 tokens to 7 tokens), as the anomalous use decreased to approximately half the number of the tokens produced by the learners in the preceding session. It should also be noted that some students began to produce a variety of follow-up *ne* assessments other than the formulaic *ii desu ne*. Furthermore, more students, including those who produced no particles in their assessment turns at the pre-instruction stage, demonstrated their emerging ability to produce *ne* in an assessment activity. In the section that follows, we will examine the individual learners' emerging use of *ne* in the follow-up assessment turn.

5.4.1. Follow-up assessment *ne*

Analysis of the target-instruction conversation data revealed that individual learners in the focus group started from different points at the onset of the study with respect to their development of *ne*: a few learners (Kelly, Julie, Ryan, and Tara) had already used *ne* in follow-up assessment turns at the pre-instruction stage, whereas the rest of the learners produced no particles even when there were appropriate contexts for such use (see Table 2). The following learner, Brian, was also one of the learners whose

ne use only appeared in the formulaic agreement *soo desu ne* (that's right) in the pre-instructional period. Brian's target-instruction data revealed that other uses of *ne* besides the agreement expression began to appear in Session 3 and that by the end of Session 4, he demonstrated more competent performance through his use of *ne* in a follow-up assessment in response to the co-participant's talk.

Excerpt 4. Brian: Learner Hana: NS
Conversation Session 4 (Target-2), Focus group

01 Brian: *ee, saikin, doo?*
um recently how
'uhm how is everything these days?'

02 Hana: *saikin ne, chotto isoga*[*shii.*
recently IP a little busy
'I've been a bit busy recently.'

03 Brian: [oh, *chotto ishogashii* hah
oh a little busy
Oh, you are a little busy'

04 Hana: *un.*
yeah
'Yeah.'

05 Brian: *eeto, uhm (.) nani o (.) shimashi(.)ta?*
well uhm what O do-PAST
Well. uhm what did you do?'

06 Hana: *purezenteeshon ga futatsu atte,* [*peepaa¿ hitotsu atte,=*
presentation SUB two have-TW and paper one have-TE
'I have two presentations and one paper, and

07 Brian: [*oo* *oo*
oh oh
'oh' 'oh'

08 Hana: =*chotto isogashii desu.*
a little busy COP
I'm a little busy.'

09 Brian: *oo*
oh
'oh'

10 *soo desu ka. hee (.) taihen da* ***ne****::.*
so COP Q wow hard COP IP
'I see. Gee that's tough.'

11 Hana: *taihen da yo::* hah [hah
hard COP IP
'It is tough.'
12 Brian: [hah hah

Brian has been studying Japanese for four years since high school but he has no daily exposure to hear or use Japanese outside the classroom. While his use of *ne* was limited to the formulaic agreement expression (*soo desu ne*) during the pre-instruction period, this excerpt exemplifies his changes in participation through not only the multi-productions of precision-timed, back-channeling *aizuchi oo* (uh huh) prior to the provision of an aligning assessment marked with *ne* in line 08. Note that the placements of his *aizuchi* are not of a random occurrence but appear at locations in Hana's production of her talk that indicates likely continuation of Hana's turn. Brian's third *aizuchi* in line 07 appears before the ending of Hana's previous turn, immediately followed by his acknowledgment *soo desu ka* (Is that so?) and *hee* (oh), an assessment of the preceding talk as newsworthy (Mori 2006). Brian produces his *ne*-marked assessment, *taihen da ne::* (that's tough). In this assessment turn, Brian, as a college student himself, displays his strong empathy for Hana's heavy school work through a prolonged production of *ne::* (Burdelski 2013). The learner's emerging interactional competence is demonstrated through his enhanced listenership with *aizuchi* as well as the use of *ne* with an appropriate contextualization cue (prolonged *ne::*) as resources to display alignment and shared affect with his NS partner towards the accomplishment of intersubjectivity.

Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) noted in their work on assessment that the use of contrastive tense (i.e., past tense for indexing the speaker's direct experience and present tense for general opinion) marks two distinct stances toward the referent being assessed. The following excerpt illustrates the learner's (Ryan) deployment of *ne* in the follow-up assessment containing an adjective in the past form *yokatta* (was great),

which is hardly heard in learners' speech at this level. Ryan has six years of studying Japanese (including high school), but he has no daily exposure to Japanese outside the classroom. At the pre-instruction stage, he already used *ne* in assessment expressions such as *ii desu ne* (that's nice) and *taihen desu ne* (that's hard) but also produced the largest number of anomalous uses of *ne* (18 tokens) out of all students in the focus group. However, his conversation data evidenced the decrease of anomalous *ne* and more controlled capacity of deploying *ne* in non-formulaic assessment constructions.

Excerpt 5. Ryan: Learner Hana: NS
Conversation Session 4 (Target-2), Focus group

01 Ryan: *sankusugibingu wa:: nani o shita?*
Thanksgiving TOP what O do-PST
'What did you do for Thanksgiving?'

02 Hana: *tomodachi dooshi de atsumatte,* [*tomodachi ga atsumatte* =
friends each other with gather-TE friends SUB gather-TE
'My friends and I got together and'

03 Ryan: [ohhh
oh
'Oh'

04 Hana: = *sankusugi*[*bingu shita.*
Thanksgiving do-PST
'we had our Thanksgiving.'

05 Ryan: [*yokatta* ***ne***[*::!*
good-PST IP
'Must have been great.'

06 Hana: [*soo, tanoshikatta.*
yes fun-PST
'Yeah I had a fun time.'

07 Ryan: *boku wa:: hawaikai no kazoku to::- ni kaerimashita.*
I TOP Hawaii Kai LK family with LOC return-PST
'I went back to Hawaii Kai where my family is.'

The segment begins with Ryan's initiating a question of what his NS

partner (Hana) did for Thanksgiving. While Hana is describing how she spent her first Thanksgiving, Ryan produces an acknowledgment token *ohhh* and an affective assessment using an adjective *ii* (good) in the past form, *yokatta ne::!* (must have been great), with the vowel elongation as an expression of heightened affect. Note that Ryan produced his affective assessment *yokatta ne::* before Hana completes her turn (line 05). Such overlapping responses constitutes an index of interactional competence, i.e., learner's competent use of linguistic resources for precision-timed uptake of the interlocutors' talk as participation in joint stance-indexing of alignment in the assessment activity. An assessment using an adjective in the present form *ii ne* (sounds good) could also have been appropriate to index a more generalized stance (Heritage 2002) toward Hana's relating of her Thanksgiving, but by changing aspect from *ii ne* to *yokatta ne*, Ryan is displaying greater affective involvement in his evaluation of Hana's Thanksgiving experience as if he was relating to it as his own. His successful use of *ne* prompts the participants' mutual engagement in a sequence of assessment practices in the turns that follow: Hana's agreement *soo* (yes) is produced in overlap with Ryan's *ne*-assessment and she continues with her own assessment *tanoshikatta* (It was fun) with no particle marking, which indicates the closure of the current assessment activity. In the next section, we will examine learners' use of *ne* in the initial assessment turn, another instructional component of the present study.

5.4.2. Initial assessment *ne*

During the target instruction period, the initial-turn *ne* increased to a steady degree among some of the focus group students, while still underdeveloped compared to the follow-up *ne*. This evidence also suggests that the development of initial *ne* occurs only after that of follow-up *ne* for the learners of this study. The following two excerpts illustrate such instances where initial-turn *ne* emerges in the speech of the learners who used follow-up *ne* in the previous sessions. One of the predominant topics in the conversation sessions is schoolwork. In assessment sequences on this topic, participants often have equivalent access to the assessable since it is mutually sharable, and the opportunity for alignment is relevant through the use of initial-turn *ne*.

Excerpt 6. Ryan: Learner Hana: NS
Conversation Session 3 (Target-1), Focus group

01	Ryan:	*nnn, soo desu. takusan shuku*[*dai ga arimasu::::	
		uhm so COP a lot homework SUB have	
		'uhm it is. We have a lot of homework.'	
02	Hana:	[*hee, riidingu?*	
		oh reading	
		Oh, reading?'	
03	Ryan:	*aa, ano:: suugaku.*	
		uhm well math	
		'uhm well, we have math.'	
04	Hana:	*toku?*	
		solve	
		'Solving math problems?'	
05	Ryan:	*hai.*	
		yes	
		'Yes.'	
06	Hana:	*nnn* ((frowning face))	
		ah	
		'Ah'	
07	Ryan:	((tongue click)) ((sighing)) *iya da* ***ne****!* [hah	
		terrible COP IP	
		'It sucks!'	
08	Hana:	[*iya da ne, iya da ne,*	
		terrible COP IP	
		'It does, it does,	
09		*taihensoo, sore wa.*	
		hard-AUX that TOP	
		'it does sound hard.'	

Prior to this interaction, Hana commented that Ryan must be busy as a science major. In line 01, he responded that he has a lot of homework, which receives an interest marker *hee* from Hana, followed immediately by her nomination for Ryan's type of homework, *riidingu?* (reading?). Hana's nomination triggers a repair activity as Ryan corrects it to *suugaku*, meaning math problems. In line 07, following a tongue click and a sigh, Ryan initiates his first assessment with *ne*, using a more strongly marked affect index, *iya da* (It sucks). By proffering his initial-turn assessment

with *ne*, Ryan is inviting Hana's response or alignment to his *ne*-talk to share their experience as being college students loaded with a lot of schoolwork. Ryan's use of *ne* in this turn explicitly marks that assessment interactionally relevant for the co-participant's joint assessment activity—Hana displays her strong alignment with the emphatic attitude expressed by the repetition of Ryan's initial assessment, *iya da ne*, *iya da ne* (Strauss and Kawanishi 1996).

The following excerpt illustrates an instance in which the learner's (Julie) strategic use of *ne* emerged in the initial-turn assessment in a transition relevance place where she self-selects herself as the next speaker when faced with a complete cessation of topical talk and turn taking.

Excerpt 7. Julie: Learner Nao: NS
Conversation Session 4 (Target-2), Focus group

01	Nao:	*mainichi hataraku?* every day work 'Do you work every day?'
02	Julie:	((shaking head))
03	Nao:	*kinyoobi to* [*nichiyoobi?* Friday and Sunday 'You work on Friday and Sunday?'
04	Julie:	[*n* *hai.* yeah yes 'yeah' 'yes'
05	Nao:	*okke, okke, ok*[*ke.* ok ok ok 'ok, ok, ok.'
06	Julie:	[*n.* yeah 'Yeah.'
07		(1.5)
08	Julie:	((pointing to Nao's cell phone case)) *kore wa kawaii* ***ne****!* this TOP cute IP 'This is cute!'
09	Nao:	*ne,* IP

ariga[*too!*
thank you
'It is, thanks!'

10 Julie: [*n, doko de kaimasu- kaimashi*[*ta ka.*
ya where LOC HES buy-PST Q
'Where did you buy it?'

11 Nao: [*onrain de kaimashita.*
online with buy-PST
'I bought it online.'

Julie has studied Japanese for one year since college and has a daily exposure to Japanese at work for three hours per week. In the beginning of this interaction, while Nao is trying to develop the current talk by asking questions regarding the days of the week Julie works at the shop, Julie provides increasingly minimal, almost non-committal responses. Finding that Julie works on Friday and Sunday, Nao responds with an explicit display of acknowledgement *okke, okke, okke* (ok, ok, ok), marking the closure of the current topic (line 06). Then, following a lengthy pause at line 07, which indicates that neither of the interlocutors holds the floor, Julie then nominates herself as the next speaker, initiating her first *ne*-marked assessment *kawaii ne!* (This is cute!) while pointing to Nao's cellphone cover, which marks the start of a new topic (line 08). Nao immediately picks up her cellphone and overlaps with the stand-alone *ne* as a resource to co-construct affective alignment with Julie in the ongoing assessment activity. Julie's deployment of initial-turn *ne* here serves as a resource to make a topic transition in a way that can be participated in by her NS peer for joint alignment activity (line 09), as well as to develop topic in turns that follow (lines 10 to 11).

Analysis of the learners' use of the particle *ne* during the target instructional period reveals that the students who received the instruction have demonstrated their ability to use the particle *ne* for participating in a variety of assessment activities beyond listener responses in the follow-up turn. For example, as shown in Excerpt 7, Julie's effective deployment of the particle *ne* in the initial assessment position indicates that the learner has demonstrated emerging interactional competence to recipient-design her *ne*-marked turn in a way for it to invite her NS partner's joint assessment of the topic-in-progress in the ongoing conversation (Pekarek

Doehler and Berger 2016). Evidence of the learners' deployment of *ne* in the initial- and follow-up assessment positions as observed in three learners (Brian, Ryan, and Julie) of the preceding excerpts supports the effectiveness of instructional interventions for the learners' emerging competence through their use of *ne*, and other interactional resources such as overlapped utterances and precision-timing of uptake and responses from the recipients, which contribute to the creation of intersubjectivity and topic development with their conversation partners.

5.5 Uninstructed uses of *ne*

Analysis of the conversation data also revealed that some of the focus group learners were identified to use *ne* in ways that extend beyond what was taught in the instruction, especially that reflect their appropriation of *ne* as an interactional resource to meet the demands of spontaneous conversation. One of many diverse functions of *ne* is also to be used for the speaker's explicit display of understanding of what was newly informed in the preceding turns of talk. Subsequently, such a move with *ne* indicates that confirmation or an aligning response from the recipient becomes the expected next action (Morita 2012). First, we will look at this particular use of *ne* by one of the NS participants in the conversation session. Then, we will turn to the learner's use of *ne* when he was interacting with his NS partner.

Excerpt 8. Trey: Learner Sumi: NS
Conversation Session 2 (Pre-2), Focus group

01 Sumi: *aaa, 'Hotaru no haka'?*
ah, firefly LK grave
'Ah, you mean the movie "Hotaru no haka"?'

02 Trey: ((unintelligible))

03 Sumi: *are nakeru yone. atashi are mite, itsumo* [*ippai naite* =
that cry IP I that watch-TE always a lot cry-TE
'That movie makes my cry. I always cry watching it'

04 Trey: [*n::*
yeah
'yeah'

05 Sumi: = *kanashiku naru.*

sad become
'It makes me sad'

06 Trey: *tottemo kanash*[*ii.*
very sad
'It makes me very sad'

07 Sumi: [*u:::n.*
yeah
'yeah'

08 Trey: *a, soshite "ichi rittoru no na*[*mida" de ka-kanashikatta.*
um and one liter LK tear with sad-COP-PAST
'um, and the movie "ich rittoru no namida" made me sad.'

09 Sumi: [*n, n, n*
yeah yeah yeah
'Yeah, yeah, yeah'

10 *aa*[*aa*
ah
'ah'

11 Trey: [*chotto namida.*
a little tear
'It brings me a little tear.'

12 Sumi: *wakaru:::. sugoi ippai miteru n da* ***ne****.*
understand very a lot watch NOM COP IP
'I totally understand. You sure do watch a lot of movies.'

13 Trey: [*n, n*
yeah yeah
'yeah, yeah'

14 Sumi: [*korette, miru toki wa*
this-QT watch when TOP
'When you watch them,

15 *nihongo de miteru no?*
Japanese in watch NOM
'do you watch these movies in Japanese?'

Prior to this segment of interaction, Trey and Sumi were talking about Japanese animation films by Hayao Miyazaki. In response to Trey's assessment that one of his films *Hotaru no haka* (*Grave of the Fireflies*) is very sad, Sumi mentions that the movie always makes her feel sad and cry. Trey then brings up another Japanese film, adding that it also made him cry a little (line 11). After showing her highly affiliative response *wakaru:::* (I totally understand), Sumi concludes that Trey has watched many Japanese films and dramas, using *ne* (line 12). Note that her comment includes *n da* (the plain form of *n desu*), a discourse marker that can help the speaker maintain a conversational tone in his/her talk (Yoshimi 2001). That is, Sumi's use of *n da* indicates that she, as an interested conversational partner, displays her explicit understanding of what she and Trey have shared in their talk thus far. By adding *ne* to this component of the turn, the speaker displays explicitly her aligned stance to the other's informing, and subsequently, confirmation or alignment becomes the next relevant action. Demonstrably, Trey's alignment to Sumi's comment with *ne* is achieved through his positive response, *n, n* (yeah, yeah), produced in precision-timed turn-final overlap, prompting Sumi to further ask whether the learner watches Japanese movies in Japanese. Sumi's use of *ne* is consistent with what the learners were taught in the instruction in that *ne* is used to indicate that the recipient's alignment to the *ne*-marked assessment is relevant in the next turn; however, the learners did not receive explicit instruction on the use of *ne* to elicit the recipient's alignment to the speaker's understanding of what was newly informed in the preceding turns of talk, as we have observed in Sumi's use of *ne* in the excerpt above.

Now, let us turn to the learner's extended use of *ne* in a similar context. Our focus here is on an uninstructed use of *ne* by Brian, one of the students who limitedly produced a formulaic agreement with *ne* (*soo desu ne*) at the onset of the study and later began to use *ne* (*taihen da ne,* that's tough) in the follow-up assessment as shown in Excerpt 4. The following excerpt illustrates Brian's extended assessment with *ne* for explicit display of understanding what is newly informed in the preceding turns of talk.

Excerpt 9. Brian: Learner Hana: NS
Conversation Session 4 (Target-2), Focus group

01 Hana: *nisen. Two thousand¿*
two thousand
'Two thousand. Two thousand¿'

02 Brian: *o::::!* [hah hah
wow
'wow!'

03 Hana: [*sono kurai.*
that about
'About two thousand.'

04 Brian: *o:::, hontoo?*
wow really
'Wow, really?'

05 Hana: *moo, shogakkoo ichi nensei kara zu:::::tto(0.5)*[*renshuu* =
already elementary first grade from all the way practice
'We have been practicing kanji since the first grade in elementary school'

06 Brian: [*o:::*
oh
'oh'

07 Hana: = *shiteta kara,* [hah
do-PROG-PAST CP
'We have been practicing so'

08 Brian: [hah hah *o:::,* hah *a, takusan kanji ga* =
wow um a lot kanji SUB

=*arimasu(0.5)**ne***[*:::*
have IP
'Wow, there are many kanji characters to learn'

09 Hana: [*un,*
Yeah
'Yeah'

10 *takusan.*
a lot
'A lot'

Prior to this interaction, Brian asked Hana how many *kanji* characters she knows. In line 01, Hana replies that she now knows about 2000 characters because she has practiced *kanji* since her first grade. His receipt

tokens such as, *o:::!* (wow!) and *hontoo?* (really?) in the succeeding turns indicate that Hana's informing of *kanji* learning for native speakers is particularly new to Brian. Then at line 08, he provides a *ne*-marked assessment *takusan kanji ga arimasu ne* (here are many *kanji* characters [to learn]) as his explicit display of new understanding.[2] Here, Brian's comment with *ne* is qualitatively different from the follow-up *ne* that responds to the immediately preceding utterance: a slight .5 pause before adding *ne* in his turn indicates that he is processing the details of the previously co-constructed talk before he can explicitly mark his concluding remark as making confirmation or alignment relevant next by his recipient. Hana immediately shows agreement by using the same assessment initiated by Brian *un, takusan* (yeah, many), which demonstrably overlaps his *ne* before he completes the turn.

What this excerpt shows us is that although this particular function of *ne* was not explicitly taught in the instruction, the learner's emerging interactional competence involves more than the deployment of *ne* in this particular context; his active listenership demonstrated towards the ongoing talk contributes to the sequential appropriateness of marking explicit appreciation of the partner's newly informing talk through *ne*, which subsequently enables the interlocutor to respond in a more aligned manner and achieve intersubjectivity between the participants.

5.6 Anomalous *ne*

Notably, the learner changes in participation with *ne* demonstrate an overall increase in appropriate use as well as a decrease in anomalous use in the conversation sessions over the target-instruction periods. However, certain anomalous usage of *ne* persisted through time in the following positions: 1) overproduction of *ne* for unshared information between interlocutors; and 2) misuse of *ne* in place of *yone* as negotiating the interlocutors' mutual epistemic access to the referent. Shibahara (2002) has shown that even the advanced JFL learners studying abroad in Japan were often found to overuse *ne* in sharing information that is unlikely to secure the recipient's alignment, which makes their utterances sound unnatural to speakers of Japanese. Excerpt 10 exemplifies such a case.

Excerpt 10. Ryan: Learner Hana: NS
Conversation Session 3 (Target-1), Focus group

01 Ryan: *doyoobi ni arubaito ga arimasu* ***ne***:[::. ((anomalous))
Saturday on part-time job SUB have IP
'I have my part-time job on Saturday.'

02 Hana: [*un.*
yeah
'yeah.'

03 Ryan: *demo, a:: kinyoobi ni, um,*=
but ah Friday on uhm

= *uchi ni(.) kaerimashita* ***ne***. ((anomalous))
home LOC return-PAST IP
'But on Friday uhm I went home.'

04 (1.0)

05 Hana: *u:::::n, uchi ni kaetta, uchi-*
uhm home LOC return-PST home
'uhm you went home, home'

06 Ryan: *kazoku no uchi de*
family LK home LOC
'at my family home'

Prior to this interaction, Hana asked Ryan about his typical weekend plans. He replied that he has a part-time job on Saturdays, using *ne* (line 01). His response with *ne* would have been appropriate to a question like *shuumatsu wa arubaito?* (You have a part-time job on the weekend?), whose adjacent pair constitutes a shared topic for the co-participant's alignment to occur. However, since his *ne*-marked reply contains new information to Hana, it is not clear what Hana's uptake should be, resulting in her minimal response *un* (yeah) in the succeeding turn.

The significant epistemic gap in the *ne*-marked talk initiated by Ryan further reflects the challenges for Hana, who has no basis for alignment: Ryan mentions that he went home on Friday using *ne* (line 03), which invokes a 1.0 second pause (line 04) and non-aligning responses *u:::n* (uhm) in the subsequent turns where Hana signals confusion and disfluency. Analysis of the target-instruction data found that Ryan's

overproduced *ne* began to decrease by the end of the Target-2 stage, supporting the instructional effectiveness for his increased awareness of the pragmatic function of *ne* for sharing information that is only alignment-relevant between participants. This evidence also suggests that mere exposure to L2 talk outside the classroom (or during study abroad) may be insufficient for learners' understanding of pragmatic functions and competent use of *ne* in Japanese conversation.

Another evidence of anomalous *ne* in the present data is the misuse of *ne* in place of *yone* in an assessment turn. The target-instruction data found that Kyle, who did not produce any particles in the pre-instruction period, began to use *ne* in follow-up assessment turns. Excerpt 11 represents a typical instance in which the learner used *ne* anomalously to establish congruent epistemic views on the topic under discussion, which expects the use of *yone* (Kizu et al. 2013; Nazikian 2019)

Excerpt 11. Kyle: Learner Sumi: NS
Conversation Session 3 (Target-1), Focus group

01 Kyle: *aa, biichi doko desu ka.*
ah beach where COP Q
'Where is the beach (you went to)?'

02 Sumi: *ara moana biichi* [*paaku¿*
Ala Moana beach park
'Ala Moana Beach Park¿'

03 Kyle: [((nod))

04 Sumi: *waimanaro¿*
Waimanalo
'Waimanalo¿'

05 Kyle: ((pointing to the direction))((unintelligible))

06 Sumi: *un,* near the Makapu.
yeah
'Yeah, near Makapu.'

07 Kyle: Sandy Beach?

08 Sumi: *ato::: a::: wasurechatta!* [hah
and ah forget-RES-PAST
'and uhm I forgot!'

09 Kyle: [*aaa! a::: ara moana biichi:::*
ah uhm Ala Moana beach

10 *kirei desu* ***ne***. ((anomalous))
beautiful COP IP
'Ah! uhm Ala Moana Beach is pretty.'

11 Sumi: *nnn, kirei datta.*
yeah beautiful COP-PST
'Yeah, it was pretty.'

This interaction starts with Kyle's question about what beaches Sumi visited for the winter break. Sumi names a few, including Ala Moana Beach, one of Oahu's major beaches. After helping Sumi to recall the names of the beaches she went to, Kyle makes a *ne*-marked assessment about Ala Moana Beach (*kirei desu ne,* it's pretty) in line 10. This expression *kirei desu ne* would be acceptable in an assessment whose objective is to present the speaker's immediate reaction (e.g., when seeing someone wearing a pretty dress, when stepping onto a beautiful sand beach for the first time, etc.). However, since Kyle, as a local person, knows as much as, or more than Sumi about the beach, his response with particle *yone* (*kirei desu yone,* Isn't it beautiful?) would have been more appropriate. Furthermore, the need for *yone* here supports the learner's move to resume the topic (Ala Moana Beach Park) that first appeared in line 02 and evaluate it with Sumi, who has now been to the beach. Yet, although *yone* is an expected form in this type of assessment marking, the learner's use of *ne* here evidenced growing interactional competence as marking the recipient's interactional move as relevant next. Demonstrably, his *ne* turn was promptly responded to by Sumi, who exhibited strong display of agreement *nnn* (yeaaah) and a proffer of her assessment using the same segment *kirei*, marking their shared epistemic stance about the referent.

These two excerpts exemplify the impact of the learners' development of interactional resources on the subsequent sequences of talk, by demonstrating how their deployment of *ne*, though anomalous to varying degrees, was received and oriented to by their NS partners to navigate through their talk towards the achievement of intersubjectivity. It should

also be pointed out that the learner's underdeveloped *ne* could result in the speaker's inability to secure recipiency, i.e., non-alignment from the part of the recipient (as observed in Excerpt 10). Again, these findings suggest a critical role of instructional interventions in learners' understanding of how one's use of one form over another may be received and understood by the recipient for shaping the subsequent construction of interaction, as an index of interactional competence.

6. Discussion

The present study examined the development of interactional competence by JFL classroom learners in an explicitly instructed setting, focusing on their ability to use Japanese interactional particle *ne* in spontaneous conversation with NS classroom guests. More specifically, the study aimed to explore the role of explicit pragmatics instruction in the learners' metapragmatic and interactional development of a specific linguistic form (*ne*), as a resource for participating in an assessment activity. The instruction, inclusive of awareness-raising and conversational activities, considered how linguistic affordances potentially made available through these activities enable changes in the learners' understanding and the ability to use *ne* as an index of interactional competence in the context of spontaneous conversation in L2.

To summarize the evidence of the pragmatic target use by the focus group learners during the pre-instruction period, most students did not produce *ne* in the appropriate contexts and instead participated in conversation using minimal response tokens (*aa* or English *oh*) and/or evaluative comments without *ne*. When *ne* occurred in learners' speech, *ne* was predominantly used in agreement and formulaic expressions, such as *soo desu ne* 'That's right' and *ii desu ne* 'Sounds nice'. However, the target-instruction conversation data revealed the developmental patterns of *ne* among some learners: from no particle production to follow-up *ne* (e.g., Brian and Kyle); and from follow-up *ne* to initial-turn *ne* (e.g., Julie and Ryan).

Over the course of one semester (sixteen weeks), the students in the focus group progressed from acknowledging to agreeing with *ne* (*soo desu ne*) and *ne*-marked assessment in different sequential positions. This finding confirmed the claim of Kasper and Rose (2002) that the classroom instruction can provide a productive context of developing pragmatic abilities and make the progress faster than other learning contexts, such as Ohta's (2001) one-year classroom interaction and Masuda's (2011) 6-week

study abroad. Furthermore, the students in the present study exhibited the developmental sequence in assessment from formulaic *ne* (*ii desu ne*) to follow-up *ne*, and to initial-turn *ne* over time. The mastery of the initial *ne* appears to occur only after that of the follow-up *ne*, a listener's stance that is more accessible to express alignment toward an epistemically shared referent between participants at the time of the receipt. This result runs counter to the claim made by Dings (2014) and Shively (2016) in the developmental trajectory of assessment types in L2 Spanish: listener assessments lag behind speaker assessments due to their greater burden on listeners, who must pay attention to the details of what was previously said and provide an appropriate assessment accordingly. In Japanese, however, a competent use of *ne* in speaker assessments requires one's higher control in developing their talk as to whether the referent can be mutually assessable for negotiating alignment with others in the immediate interactional contexts.

The findings above provide some implications for teaching and development of interactional competence. The incorporation of a conversational component into the instruction provided learners with rich access to linguistic affordances that enabled them to go beyond the instructional content and transform knowledge of *ne* into actual use to manage the communicative demands of spontaneous conversation. Additionally, the evidence of the learners' anomalous use of *ne* contributes to advancing our understanding the non-linearity of individual learners' development trajectory of interactional competence and informing areas for instructional revisions. A close observation of the learners' resulting interactional competences helps to identify aspects of instructional resources that are less accessible to development under given interventional conditions. Taking these findings into consideration, I will present a set of revised resources for teaching *ne*'s functions in different assessment positions below (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Revised teaching resource of initial-turn *ne*

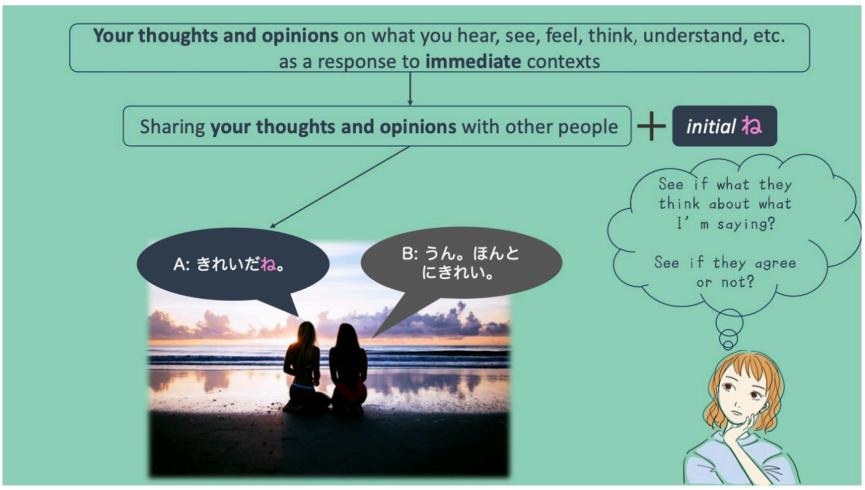
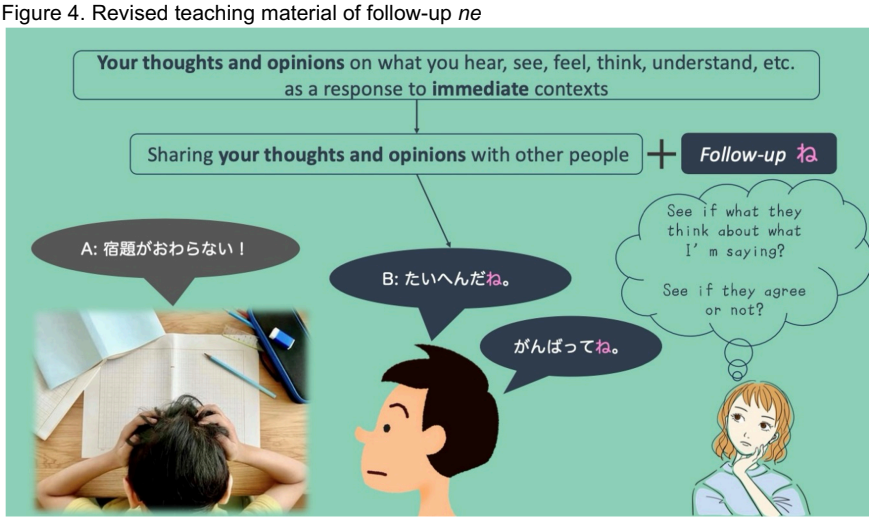


Figure 4. Revised teaching material of follow-up *ne*



7. Pedagogical implications and future research

A proposal made by proponents of interactional development in instructional settings is that learners' awareness of the target features must be directed through explicit instruction, together with use of CA-informed resources and opportunities for the learners to deploy their language

resources in a communicative context (Barraja-Rohan 2011; Hall 1999; Taleghani-Nikazm 2019). A process by which learners develop their L2 in a way that ties these resources to changing conversational contexts constitutes a critical step for learners to advance their interactional competence. The present study confirmed that the learners' recurrent conversation opportunities enabled changes in participation in relation to their growing use of *ne* as an interactional resource for joint assessment activity with the interlocutors; the learners' developing interactional competence is evidenced through the increased ability to deploy *ne* for not only giving follow-up turns but also for eliciting the recipient's next interactional move, such as assessment, alignment, and intersubjectivity toward the topic-in-progress in interaction.

The evidence of learners' incomplete understanding of *ne* informs the need for instructional modifications, including the demonstration of negative evidence involving the use of *ne* and making language reflections between their L1 and Japanese, and exposure to different forms of social interaction through media such as film, television, and pod casts, etc. Furthermore, as evident in some interventional studies demonstrating that explicit instruction combined with a feedback component for learners' production facilitated the development of target L2 pragmatic features (Iwai 2013; Nguyen et al. 2015), one possibility for an instructional component is to incorporate corrective feedback by having learners review videos of their own performance to discuss their interpretations of particle uses by their NS partners and how their (anomalous) use of *ne* may have impacted the subsequent sequence of talk.

Possible future studies can be drawn from the findings of the present study. First, this study demonstrated that the pragmatics instruction facilitated interactional development of an interactional particle *ne* for JFL beginning learners. As it has been addressed that the acquisition of some *ne* functions such as "softener *ne*" for marking unshared information appears to be difficult for advanced learners in immersion contexts (Shibahara 2002), more research is needed to examine whether the instructional approach employed in the present study would be beneficial for advanced learners' development of interactional particles and other L2 pragmatic features that are often difficult to acquire through mere exposure to interactions of the target speech community.

Another area for future study concerns the relationship between learners' metapragmatic development and oral performance with the target form *ne*. This study demonstrated that there was individual variability in

the learner's appropriation of pragmatic knowledge to produce more concrete output in the conversation sessions. The instructional intervention did not equally result in the competent use of *ne* in different sequential positions among all students in the focus group; some students were found to use initial-turn *ne* more productively than others. This outcome could be attributed to contextual factors affecting the appropriation of the pragmatic target, such as individual students' learning processes, cognitive demands of task types, and their L2 proficiency. For some learners in this study, the task demands of engaging in spontaneous conversations may have increased the learners' cognitive load to such an extent that it prevented them from activating their pragmatic knowledge in support of more competent performance through *ne*. In this regard, future studies could examine how the use of CA-informed instructional material (e.g., natural language samples) supports the interaction between learners' metapragmatic knowledge and the target production of the pragmatic form as evidence of interactional competence.

Finally, this study is limited because the findings were drawn from a small sample size of a student focus group (fourteen students). More research is needed to investigate evidence of instructional effectiveness targeted at larger sample groups and a potential impact of other various factors on target performances (e.g., changes in the intervention, learners' exposure to authentic discourse outside classroom; incidental use of the target forms by the instructor during classroom instruction). Furthermore, as the present analysis only focused on the development of a single interactional particle *ne* in a semester-long investigation, future studies should explore whether learners' emergent interactional competence enables their sustained appropriation of L2 knowledge and target use in a delayed-post evaluation and performance.

NOTES

[1] Inter-rater reliability was checked by having another native speaker judge the appropriateness of particle use for 90% of the conversational data. The percentage of agreement was 95%. In the present study, particle use in learners' speech is considered accurate if their particular particle choice is appropriate in the sequential order of conversation; however, it is also judged appropriate if errors are found in the conjugation of the preceding predicate (e.g., *omoshiroi da ne*) and if there was a non-use of gender-neutral expression (e.g., *kirei ne* instead of *kirei da ne*) introduced in the target instruction.

[2] The concurrent use of a discourse marker *n desu* with *ne* (*kanji ga takusan aru*

n desu ne) would have been more common as a response, as *n desu* indexes shared understanding the topic at hand, creating intersubjectivity between interactants (Yoshimi 2001; Iwai 2013). For this study, *n desu ne* was not introduced in the target instruction.

APPENDIX A

Transcription conventions

bold	portion highlighted for reader attention
CAPITAL	increased volume
,	continuing intonation
.	falling intonation
?	question intonation
¿	rising intonation
!	animated tone
(.)	brief pause
(0.0)	elapsed time in seconds
:	extension of the preceding vowel
=	latched utterances
-	cut-off speech
[	overlapped utterances
‘ ’	quoted phrases
(( ))	comment by the transcriber
hah hah	laughter tokens
° °	relatively quieter than surrounding talk

Abbreviations used in word-by-word gloss

AUX	auxiliary
COP	various forms of copula verb *be*
CP	conjunctive particle
IP	interactional particle
LK	linking nominal
LOC	locative marker
NEG	negative morpheme
NOM	nominalizer
O	object marker
PST	past tense
Q	question marker
QT	quotative marker
SUB	subject marker
TOP	topic marker

APPENDIX B

Japanese-speaking participants

Name	Age	Academic standing	Japanese tutoring experience
Hiro	28	Graduate student	No
Fumiya	23	Junior	No
Hana	22	Sophomore	No
Sumi	21	Sophomore	No
Nao	20	Sophomore	No

Student background information: Focus group students

Focus group (N=14)	Length of Japanese language learning Including formal instruction		Language exposure outside of class (hours per day/week)
	High school (years)	College (years)	
Ryan	4	2	No
Julie	0	1.5	Yes, 3-4 hours/week
Kelly	3	2	No
Brian	3	2	No
Tara	2	8 months	Yes, a few hours/day
Trey	3	2	Yes, 1-3 hours/day
Ann	0	1	Yes, 3 hours/week
Lucas	4	3	No
James	2	2	Yes, 1 hours/week
Beth	4	1	Yes, 8 hours/week
Fred	2	1	Yes, 2-4 hours/week
Emily	2	1	No
Kyle	0	1	Yes, not sure
Ethan	3	2	Yes, one hour/week

APPENDIX C

Sample teaching materials

Discuss with your partner:

1. What are the basic functions of the particles we learned?
2. What is the speaker's stance using these particles?
3. How does the use of these particles affect the next speaker's responses?
4. What is the difference in the speaker's stance between ね and よ (e.g., きんちょうするね and きんちょうするよ) and between ね and よね (e.g., そうだったね and そうだったよね).

M: あ、Tono!

T: あ、Meguppe、ひさしぶり。

M: ひさしぶり。

T: 元気？

M: うん、元気、元気。

T: サンクスギビング、どっか行った？

M: あ、うん、マウイに行って来た(よ)。

T: え？いい_ね_！

M: うん、すごくよかった(よ)。

T: ああ、いいなー。

M: うん、え、Tonoは？

T: え？ぼく？ぼくはね、ずっとアルバイトだったんだ(よ)。

M: えー、そうなんだー。大変。

T: あ、そういえば、Native speaker sessionって、金曜日だ_よね_？

M: あ、そうだった_ね／よね_。わー、きんちょうする_ね／よ_。

T: え、だいじょうぶだ_よ_。

M: だいじょうぶかなー。

T: だいじょうぶ、だいじょうぶ。

M: あー、そうかなー。

M: Oh, Tono!

T: Oh, Meguppe. Long time no see.

M: Likewise.

T: How are you?

M: Yeah, I'm good.

T: Did you go anywhere for Thanksgiving?

M: Yeah, I went to Maui.

T: Oh, that's cool!

M: Yeah, I had a great time.

T: Oh, that's nice.

M: Yeah. How about you, Tono?

T: Oh, me? I had a part-time job.

M: Oh, yeah? That's hard.

T: Oh, by the way, is it on Friday that we have the native speaker session?

M: Yeah, it is. It's nerve-whacking.

T: It should be fine.

M: Is it going to be alright?

T: No worries!

M: Umm. I hope so.

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