

The Function of Aizuchi by Native Japanese Speakers on the Miku Real Japanese YouTube Channel

Syahrul Ramadhan
Universitas Dian Nuswantoro
Syahroel.ramadhan2002@gmail.com

Bayu Aryanto
Universitas Dian Nuswantoro Semarang
Pintokita2000@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kecakapan berupa penggunaan pada beberapa fungsi *aizuchi* sebagai sesama perempuan dengan bahasa ibu yaitu bahasa Jepang. *Aizuchi* merupakan respons singkat yang digunakan dalam percakapan bahasa Jepang untuk menunjukkan pemahaman, persetujuan, atau keterlibatan. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis deskriptif kualitatif, dengan data yang diperoleh dari transkripsi percakapan dalam video. Sumber data penelitian ini berasal dari salah satu video pada channel youtube Miku Real Japanese dengan judul “【8 mins Japanese conversation】 about LOVE / Relationship” yang di publikasikan pada tanggal 03 Januari 2023 antara Miku sebagai pemilik channel dan Sayuri sebagai bintang tamu. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya *aizuchi* dalam komunikasi berbahasa Jepang. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan adanya tujuh fungsi *aizuchi*, yaitu (*Kiite iru to iu shingou*) tanda mendengar berjumlah 32 tuturan, (*Rikaishiteiru to iu shingou*) tanda memahami ada 14 tuturan, (*Doi no Shingou*) tanda sependapat berjumlah 11 tuturan, (*Hitei no Shingou*) tanda menyangkal ada 1 tuturan, (*Kanjou no Shingou*) tanda ungkapan perasaan berjumlah 9 tuturan, (*Ma wo motaseru Shingou*) tanda penyambung jeda ada 2 tuturan, dan (*Jyouhou wo tsuika, teisei, youkyuu no shingou*) tanda menambahkan, mengoreksi dan meminta informasi berjumlah 4 tuturan. Dengan adanya jumlah 73 tuturan, tergolong sebagai kemunculan *aizuchi* sangat tinggi dalam komunikasi 2 arah hanya dalam waktu 8 menit percakapan. Harapan untuk penelitian selanjutnya lebih dalam meneliti *aizuchi* dengan fokus latar belakang kemampuan berbahasa Jepang maupun mengenai rentang usia.

Kata Kunci: *Aizuchi*; Fungsi *Aizuchi*; Mitra Tutur; Penutur; Tuturan.

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the proficiency, specifically the usage patterns, of *aizuchi* functions among native Japanese-speaking women. *Aizuchi*, defined as the brief conversational responses signalling understanding, agreement, or engagement in Japanese dialogue, forms the core of this investigation. Utilizing qualitative descriptive analysis, the research examined transcribed conversation data sourced from a specific YouTube video titled “Japanese Conversation about LOVE / Relationship” on the 'Miku Real Japanese' channel, published January 3, 2023, featuring a dialogue between channel owner Miku and guest Sayuri. The study underscores the critical importance of *aizuchi* in Japanese communication. Analysis revealed seven distinct functional categories: the sign of listening (*Kiite iru to iu shingou*) was most frequent with 32 utterances, followed by the sign of understanding (*Rikaishiteiru to iu shingou*) with 14 utterances, the sign of agreement (*Doi no Shingou*) with 11 utterances, the sign of emotional expression (*Kanjou no Shingou*) with 9 utterances, the sign of adding/correcting/requesting

information (*Jyohou wo tsuika, teisei, youkyuu no shingou*) with 4 utterances, the sign of filling pauses (*Ma wo motaseru Shingou*) with 2 utterances, and the sign of denial (*Hitei no Shingou*) appearing just once. Remarkably, with a total of 73 *aizuchi* utterances occurring within just 8 minutes of bidirectional conversation, the video demonstrates an exceptionally high frequency of these conversational cues. Consequently, the study suggests future research should delve deeper into *aizuchi*, potentially focusing on speakers' Japanese language proficiency backgrounds or examining conversations across specific age ranges, such as between children and adolescents, adolescents and adults, or adults and the elderly.

Keywords: *Aizuchi; Functions of Aizuchi; Interlocutor; Speaker; Utterance*

1. Introduction

Within speech culture, Japan possesses its own distinct characteristics. This stands in contrast to speech culture in Indonesia. One unique feature of Japan is that when Japanese people communicate, they have a custom where listeners respond while the speaker is still talking. This is called *aizuchi*. *Aizuchi* refers to short utterances (including nonverbal actions) sent by the listener as a response after the speaker yields a turn in the middle of a conversation or at the end of a turn to claim the right to speak (Maynard, 1995).

Aizuchi is not the only form of listener response; another term commonly used worldwide is "backchannel." According to Yamashita (2017), listeners employ various responses such as verbal responses (e.g., hmm, mm-hmm, huh, uh-huh) and nonverbal responses (e.g., head nodding, eye gaze, and expressions like smiling, sadness, happiness, surprise, fear, etc.). The presence of backchannel itself is necessary for the conversation to flow and proceed smoothly.

The use of *aizuchi* in Japanese society also typically involves its own distinctiveness, for instance, in terms of acquisition of the native language, or mother tongue, which is Japanese. Generally, individuals whose mother tongue is Japanese tend to be more dominant in interactions, especially in language use, whether verbal, nonverbal, or a combination of both (Kennett & Nagata, 2017).

Similarly, *aizuchi*, frequently used by native Japanese speakers, tends to occur with greater dominance in frequency compared to non-native Japanese speakers. However, it is not impossible for non-native Japanese speakers to use *aizuchi* more frequently under certain conditions; this theory is based on experiments conducted by (Hanzawa, 2012). This phenomenon occurs because the acquisition of their mother tongue, Japanese, is ingrained from birth until they reach an age proficient enough to communicate with native Japanese speakers. The use of *aizuchi* among native Japanese speakers is distinctive—particularly because of their early language acquisition of Japanese as their mother tongue. Generally, individuals who acquire their native language become more dominant in interaction, employing both verbal and non-verbal methods (or a combination of both). As a result, *aizuchi* expressed by native speakers occurs more frequently than when used by non-native speakers. This dynamic stems from the natural acquisition process, where Japanese is ingrained in native speakers from birth through to maturity, enabling sophisticated communication with foreign speakers.

Another notable characteristic in the use of *aizuchi* is the influence of the speaker's gender. Both native and non-native female Japanese speakers tend to utilize *aizuchi* more often compared to their male counterparts (Imelda, 2014). A study by Imelda (2014) involving second- and third-level Japanese language students at Hasanudin University in Makassar found that female Japanese speakers produced a greater volume of *aizuchi* than males. Nonetheless, differences also exist among females; specifically, native Japanese female speakers use more *aizuchi* than non-native female speakers (Imelda, 2014). *Aizuchi* is not confined to verbal

utterances in spoken or written forms. It is also expressed non-verbally through signals such as gestures, facial expressions, and other non-linguistic elements. Each type of non-verbal expression carries its own meaning, reflecting a response from the conversation partner. For instance, facial expressions which characterized by changes such as smiling, surprise, fear, confusion, or frowning, play a significant role, while eye contact varies in intensity or avoidance, thereby signaling different responses.

According to Kaito and Kazuhiro (2023), head movements serve various communicative functions, such as emphasizing key points and confirming responses to utterances. These movements also indicate that the listener is actively engaged with what the speaker is saying. However, because head movements can coincide with other gestures, their interpretation can sometimes be ambiguous. Furthermore, within the context of Japanese communication culture, listeners are expected to provide brief responses (*aizuchi*) as feedback to the speaker's message. If a listener fails to respond or remains silent, the speaker might assume that their message is ignored or uninteresting—an act considered impolite. *Aizuchi* has thus become a hallmark of everyday interactions in Japan, often reflecting the concept of *amae* (a nurturing or dependent attitude). Research on *aizuchi* has increasingly focused on its usage across various data sources and contexts, including its application in anime, television series, and even by non-native Japanese speakers in Indonesia.

A study by Aryandi and Andarwati (2023) examined *aizuchi* in the Japanese anime *Yuru Camp*. This anime tells the story of a group of high school girls who enjoy camping in Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan. What sets this research apart from other anime-based studies is its focus on the research object and the application of Kubota's (2001) theory on *aizuchi*. Kubota divides the functions of *aizuchi* into seven categories, and although 63 data samples were collected, only 14 samples were displayed in the study. Another investigation focusing on *aizuchi* in the Japanese TV series *Inaka ni Tomarou!* was conducted by Dityandari and Aryanto (2020). They analyzed 428 data samples using the theory of *aizuchi* forms and functions. From two videos of the series, only 23 samples were selected from the 428 available, revealing that 16 *aizuchi* utterances occur per minute—indicating a very high frequency of *aizuchi* use among native Japanese speakers.

A further study by Giri and Wedayanti (2015) focused on Japanese literature students at Udayana University. Using questionnaires administered to 47 fourth-semester students—with each questionnaire featuring four types of conversations—the study found that conversations incorporating two to three types of *aizuchi* were associated with higher comprehension levels. Conversely, conversations with more than three types of *aizuchi* were less well understood.

In another study, Pradnyani and Andriyani (2023) observed on the Hajimesyacho YouTube channel a conversation between a native Japanese male and a foreign male speaker. The forms of *aizuchi* identified included *aizuchishi*, *kurikaeshi*, *iikae*, and *sonota*. Among these, *aizuchishi* (the expressive form) was the most frequent, with common functions including signaling that the listener is listening (*kiiteiru to iu shingou*), understanding (*rikaishiteiru to iu shingou*), agreement (*doui no shingou*), disagreement (*hitei no shingou*), and emotional expression (*kansei no hyoushutsu*), with the listening signal being the most predominant.

Furthermore, Perdana and Nurohmah (2022) examined the use of *aizuchi* in a podcast on the YouTube channel *Yuyu no Sekai Nihongo*. In this video, Yuyu, a native Japanese speaker, invited a foreigner from Myanmar to discuss his country's situation. The study found that although the foreign speaker was proficient in Japanese, his fluency was still markedly lower compared to that of Yuyu. Another study by Maghfiroh and Siti (2021) focused on analyzing the use of non-verbal *aizuchi*—specifically facial expressions—and their functions as observed on the YouTube channel *The Ogasawara Family*, managed by Vika. Vika frequently

collaborates with foreign female speakers. The findings of this study are expected to facilitate Japanese language learners in mastering the use of *aizuchi* in both spoken communication and daily interactions. Based on the discussions above, the present study distinguishes itself by focusing on dialogue interactions among native Japanese speakers, specifically among females, to explore whether native Japanese female speakers tend to use *aizuchi* more frequently.

This study adopts Kubota's (2001) theory on the functions of *aizuchi*, which categorizes them into seven functions:

1. 聞いているという信号 (*Kiiteiru to iu Shingou*) or Signal of Listening a form of *aizuchi* which indicates that the conversation partner is listening and typically expressed with terms such as “*hai*,” “*un*,” “*souka*,” and “*soudesune*.”
2. 理解しているという信号 (*Rikaishiteiru to iu Shingou*) or Signals of Understanding form of *aizuchi* that implies the listener is attentively processing and trying to comprehend the conveyed information, commonly expressed with words like “*souka*,” “*soudesune*,” “*sou*,” and “*wakarimashita*”.
3. 同意の信号 (*Doui no Shingou*) or Signals of Agreement : an *aizuchi* that conveys the listener agrees with the speaker's content, often using phrases such as “*soune*,” “*hai*,” “*sousou*,” and similar expressions.
4. 否定の信号 (*Hitei no shingou*) Signals of Disagreement : A form of *aizuchi* that indicates the listener's disagreement with the speaker's statement, typically marked by expressions like “*iie*,” “*uun*,” and “*iya*.”
5. 感情の信号 (*Kansei no Hyoushutsu*) or Signals of Emotion: A form of *aizuchi* that Reflects the listener's emotional response—such as sadness, happiness, surprise, or anger—often expressed with words like “*hee*,” “*maji*,” or “*sugoi*ne,”
6. 間をもたせる信号 (*Ma wo Motaseru Shingou*) or Signals for Pausing): An *aizuchi* that functions as a filler or bridge between the listener's and the speaker's turns, expressed through interjections such as “*e*,” “*n*,” or “*nani*.”
7. 情報を追加、訂正、要求の信号 (*Jyohou wo Tsuika, Teisei, Youkyuu no Shingou*) or Signals for Adding, Correcting, or Requesting Information: *Aizuchi* that indicates the listener wishes to add to, correct, or request further information related to what has been said.

Based on the explanations from the previous journals mentioned above, what differentiates prior research from the present study is the research focus. Among these existing studies, no research has been found concerning two-way conversations between fellow native Japanese speakers where *both* the speakers and interlocutors are of the same gender which in study limited in female native Japanese speakers. This present study aims to investigate more deeply whether female native Japanese speakers produce more *aizuchi* than their male counterparts, even within a conversation timeframe of approximately 8 minutes.

2. Method

The research method employed in this study is observational, utilizing the observation with note-taking technique. The author first watched the video titled "Japanese conversation about LOVE / Relationship". Subsequently, while listening to the utterances made by both speakers, the author noted down dialogues containing elements of *aizuchi* functions (Mirhosseini, 2020). The primary data for this study was sourced from an 8-minute YouTube video titled "Japanese Conversation about LOVE / Relationship", published January 3, 2023 on the 'Miku Real Japanese' Channel, featuring an organic dialogue between two female native

Japanese speakers.

This video was strategically selected to address critical research gaps in pragmatics while ensuring methodological rigor through three key criteria: First, participant homogeneity, both speakers share identical gender and native proficiency profiles to control variables per Kubota's (2001) and Imelda's (2014) frameworks on demographic influences in aizuchi usage. Second, contextual relevance, the romance topic inherently demands high interlocutor engagement (*amae*) and emotional reciprocity, maximizing natural *aizuchi* occurrence as established in Maynard's (1995) studies on Japanese conversational dynamics.

Third, platform novelty, unlike prior research focused on scripted media (Aryandi & Andarwati's 2023), this unedited YouTube dialogue captures contemporary informal speech patterns. To validate comprehensiveness, three bilingual linguists independently confirmed ≥ 5 distinct *aizuchi* types during pilot screening of a 2-minute segment, with theoretical saturation achieved when all seven Kubota (2001) functions emerged organically in the full transcript.

3. Result

This study analysed that in the instance of 8 minutes 32 seconds video there are 73 instances of *aizuchi* used by both speakers and shown in the table 1. The *aizuchi* used by both speakers shown that the Kubota's (2001) categorization of *aizuchi* is found and used extensively during the conversation by Miku and Sayuri in a casual conversational settings in the YouTube video.

Table 1. Findings on the Function of Aizuchi Based on Kubota's Theory (2001)

No	<i>Aizuchi Function</i>	Total
1.	間をもたせる信号(<i>Kiiteiru to iu Shingou</i>) Signals of Listening	32
2.	理解しているという信号 (<i>Rikaishiteiru to iu Shingou</i>) Signals of Understanding	14
3.	同意の信号 (<i>Doui no Shingou</i>) (Signals of Agreement)	11
4.	否定の信号 (<i>Hitei no Shingou</i>) (Signals of Disagreement)	1
5.	感情の信号 (<i>Kansei no Hyoushutsu</i>) (Signals of Emotions)	9
6.	間をもたせる信号 (<i>Ma wo Motaseru Shingou</i>) Signal for Pausing	2
7.	情報を追加、訂正、要求の信号 (<i>Jyohou wo Tsuika, Teisei, Youkyuu no Shingou</i>) Signal for Adding, Correcting, or Requesting Information	4

4. Discussion

1) Aizuchi as Signal of Listening

Data 1 (02:29)

- サユリ : たぶん、4歳とか、5歳のときに..
Sayuri : “...tabun, 4sai toka, 5sai toki ni...”
: “...maybe, 4 years old or 5 years old...”
ミク : うん、うん、うん。
Miku : “un, un, un.”
: “uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.”

In the utterance containing the aizuchi "u-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh," this expression functions as a listening response, signaling that the listener is attentively following the speaker's talk. This utterance originates from Sayuri as the interlocutor, who was discussing her own experience of "*hatsukoi*" or first love. She explained that around the age of 4 or 5, she considered herself worthy and consequently pursued a boy in her class. Sayuri's utterance was responded to by Miku (the speaker) with the phrase "uh-huh,uh-huh, uh-huh," accompanied by head nodding. This indicates that the speaker was carefully listening to the interlocutor's explanation.

Data 2 (05:42)

- サユリ : 例えば「今度、なんとか食べたい」とか。。。
Sayuri : “*tatoeba* [*kondo, nantoka tabetai*] *toka...*”
: “Like [next time want to eat something] ...”
ミク : うん
Miku : “*un*”
: “uh-huh”

In the utterance containing the *aizuchi* "uh-huh," this expression serves as a listening response, signaling that the listener is paying attention to the speaker's talk. This utterance originates from Sayuri as the interlocutor, who was discussing strategies to make someone confess their love to her, using her characteristic methods such as hinting with phrases like "want to eat something" or "want to go out together." The interlocutor's utterance was then responded to by Miku (the speaker) with "uh-huh." This demonstrates that the speaker was attentively listening to the interlocutor's speech while nodding her head mid-utterance.

In Data 1, the utterance of “uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh,” coupled with head-nodding, functions as a prosodic and visual continuer precisely at moments when Sayuri elaborates on her first-love recollection which aligns with Maynard’s (1995) finding that continuers serve to hand the floor back to the speaker at key junctures of narrative unfolding. Moreover, Miyata & Nisisawa note that Japanese backchannel tokens like “un” routinely perform two intertwined roles: they both confirm comprehension and indirectly grant the speaker the right to keep talking (Dityandari & Aryanto, 2020). Data 2’s solitary “uh-huh” exemplifies this: as Sayuri describes her strategic conversational hints towards Miku’s brief continuer reinforces the affiliative bond and encourages further elaboration. This listener behavior is emblematic of Japanese conversational norms, in which minimal responses are finely tuned in timing and prosody to manage turn-taking and sustain interactional flow (Dityandari & Aryanto, 2020) . By deploying these continuers, Miku effectively co-constructs the conversation, signalling that she listens on two dimensions, cognitive and social which embodying the very essence of *aizuchi* as “small words that are pronounced to someone else’s story” (Dityandari & Aryanto, 2020).

2) Aizuchi as Signal of Understanding

Data 3 (06:09)

- サユリ : 告白したことありますか
Sayuri : ““*kokuhaku shita koto arimasu ka?*”
: “has confessed?”
ミク : ありますね。そう。。。
Miku : “*arimasune. sou...*”
: “there is, right...”
サユリ : うん。

Sayuri : “un”
: “uh-huh”

In the utterance, the *aizuchi* found in the form of the utterance “うん (*un*)” functions as a signal of understanding. This utterance serves as an indicator that the listener is actively paying attention and attempting to comprehend or process the information conveyed by the speaker. This utterance originates from Miku, the interlocutor, responding to a question posed by Sayuri, the speaker, regarding “whether she had ever admitted it.” Miku answered, “Well, Yes...”). Subsequently, the utterance “*un*.” produced by the speaker (Sayuri) indicates that she understands and acknowledges that the interlocutor (Miku) had indeed experienced the moment of admitting it. This is further reinforced by the following discussion about Miku's face instantly changing when she stated it. The distinction between the “*un*” functioning as a signal of understanding and the “*un*” functioning merely as a signal of hearing lies in the context of the utterance and the timing of its delivery.

Data 4 (09:26)

ミク : そういう人、好きになりやすいですね。
Miku : “*souiu hito, suki ni nari yasuidesu ne.*”
: “someone like that, is likeable.”
サユリ : うん、あー、それはわかります。
Sayuri : “*un, a~, sore ha wakarimasu.*”
: “uh-huh~, got it.”

In the utterance, the *aizuchi* found in the expression “*un, a~, sore ha wakarimasu*” functions as a sign of understanding. This *aizuchi* serves to signal that the listener is actively listening and striving to comprehend or process the information conveyed by the speaker. This utterance originates from Miku as the interlocutor, who is discussing her ideal type of man that she likes, such as a man who enjoys adventures, especially one with a youthful spirit. Subsequently, the interlocutor's utterance is responded to by the speaker using the expression “*un, a~, sore ha wakarimasu*”. This response demonstrates that the speaker has understood what the interlocutor (Miku) was discussing regarding her criteria for an ideal man.

3) Aizuchi as Signal of Agreement

Data 5 (01:25)

ミク : 。。。女性同士で、恋愛について話すことですね。
Miku : “*...josei doushi de, ren 'ai nit suite hanasu kotodesu ne.*”
: “...the girl's talk about love live”
サユリ : そうですね
Sayuri : “*soudesune*”
: “that's right.”

In this utterance, the *aizuchi* “that's right.” is used to indicate that the listener shares the same opinion as the speaker. The utterance originates from Miku, who initiates a conversation on the topic “Girl's Talks About Love Lives” Sayuri, as the respondent, replies with a signal that she agrees with Miku's viewpoint.

Data 6 (04:30)

ミク : 日本って、告白文化がるじゃないですか。
Miku : “*nihon tte, kokuhaku bunka garu janai desu ka.*”
: “In Japan, there's a love confession culture, right?”
サユリ : うん、うん。

Sayuri : “un, un.”
: “uh-huh, uh-huh”

This utterance originated from Miku (the interlocutor) while discussing Japanese culture, specifically the culture of expressing affection among Japanese people. This culture is unique in that individuals directly express their liking to the other person and invite them out. Subsequently, this utterance from the interlocutor, Miku, was answered by Sayuri (the speaker) with "uh-huh, uh-huh". This shows that the speaker believes the opinion expressed by the interlocutor aligns with her own thoughts, especially since both women share the same background as native Japanese citizens who have experienced and felt that very Japanese culture since childhood. In both Data 3 (06:09) and Data 4 (09:26), the *aizuchi* tokens delivered by Sayuri do more than simply show that she's hearing Miku, they actively index her comprehension and guide the unfolding of the interaction. Horiguchi (in Dityandari and Aryanto, 2020) argues that such signals allow the speaker to “make an informed decision to either proceed or terminate the discourse” by confirming that “their audience comprehends their discourse” this backchannel verifies that Sayuri has correctly parsed the information and simultaneously reassures Miku that she can continue elaborating on the nonverbal level through the facial expression shown.

4) *Aizuchi* as Signals of Disagreement

Data 7 (03:48)

ミク : 私の名前、みくなんですけど、意地悪な男の子に「肉、肉」っていわれて(い)ました。

Miku : “*watashi no namae, miku nandesukedo, ijiwaruna otokonoko ni* 「*niku, niku*」
tte iwarete (i)mashita.”

: My name's, Miku, but there is a bad guy called me 「meat, meat.」

サユリ : おー!めっちゃひどい

Sayuri : “*o~! mecha hidoi.*”

: “What! that's so rude.”

ミク : そうそう。いや、私も全然。。。なんか幼稚園の頃、めっちゃ強かった
ので、全然、気にして(い)なかったんですけど。

Miku : “*sousou. iya, watashi mo zenzen... nanka youchien no koro, meccha tsuyokattanode, zenzen ki ni shite (i) nakattandesukedo.*”

: “Yes yes. No, I don't really... when I am still a child, I am really strong and doesn't think about it that much,”

This utterance was spoken by Miku as she recounted a childhood experience of being teased by a male peer with the nickname "meat", a pun on her name. Immediately, the conversation was interrupted by Sayuri (the interlocutor) with a brief utterance adding, in an agreeing tone, that "that was mean." However, towards the end of her utterance, Miku expressed that she had been strong enough to handle such teasing as a child. Therefore, the statement "Yes yes. No, I don't really.." within Miku's utterance serves to contradict the brief statement made by Sayuri, the interlocutor. The *aizuchi* functions as a disagreement marker, signifying the speaker's lack of agreement or contradiction of the interlocutor's statement.

In Kubota's taxonomy of *aizuchi*, *aizuchi* that serves as signal of disagreement (否定の信号; *Hitei no Shingou*) covers those *aizuchi* that explicitly reject or contradict the prior turn, typically realized as いえ (*ie*; no) or simple “yes” (いや; *iya*), when used with corrective intent understood as token of speakership incipency, signals that the listener is poised to take or redefine the floor in order to correct or reframe the previous utterance. Nishfullayli and

Santiar (2023) further observes that such disagreement *aizuchi* often occur in mid-utterance, enabling a cooperative negotiation of meaning without a full turn-shift or sometimes this signify a self-repair sequence as shown in the given utterance in data 8 that strengthen the findings of Dityandari and Aryanto (2020) description of corrective *aizuchi* as collaborative repairs, which refine speaker meaning while preserving conversational harmony.

5) *Aizuchi* as Signals of Emotion

Data 8 (03:25)

- サユリ : 昔、けっこう太って(いて、めっちゃ丸かったんですよ。
Sayuri : “*mukashi, kekkou futotte (i)te, meccha marukatta ndesu yo*”
: “A long time ago, I’m so pluffy”
ミク : えー!
Miku : “*e~!*”
: “What!”

The *aizuchi* in the stated utterance at minute 03:25 of the video 'What!' functions as an emotional expression marker. This type of *aizuchi* signifies the listener's manifestation of feelings, such as surprise, joy, sadness, or any other emotions in response to the speaker's statement. This specific utterance was produced by Sayuri (the listener) while discussing her past when she was very overweight and round. This revelation immediately surprised Miku (the speaker), who had been unaware that Sayuri had previously been heavy. Miku's utterance exemplifies an emotional expression marker. This classification is evident because, during the utterance, Miku slightly raised her pitch and displayed a surprised expression on her face.

Data 9 (06:32)

- ミク : すぐ顔が赤くなったり、。。。。
Miku : “*tsugu kao ga akaku nattari*”
: “My face turned red”
サユリ : えっ、本当に?。。。。
Sayuri : “*ee, hontou ni?*”
: “Really?”

In the utterance above the *aizuchi* found in "Really?" that serves as a marker of emotional expression. It indicates the partner's feelings, such as surprise, happiness, sadness, anger, and others, in response to what the speaker has said. In the utterance “Really?”, the identified *aizuchi* functions as an emotional expression marker. This *aizuchi* signifies the interlocutor's manifestation of feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, anger, etc. in response to the speaker's statement. This utterance was produced by Miku, while discussing how her face would flush because she was attempting to talk to someone she liked. This statement prompted an immediate reaction of surprise from Sayuri, the speaker, who exclaimed, ‘eh, for real?’. Sayuri's surprise stemmed from her disbelief that someone could actually blush when meeting a person they liked, perceiving such a reaction as something that only happens in animations or fairy tales.

Both Data 8 and Data 9 are clear examples of emotional *aizuchi*, brief listener tokens that convey surprise or other affective stances toward what the speaker has just said. Unlike continuers or agreement tokens, these emotionally laden responses do more than keep the floor—they highlight the listener's immediate emotional engagement with the narrative. In Data 8, Miku's raised-pitch expresses genuine surprise upon learning that Sayuri was once very overweight; similarly, Sayuri's in Data 9 signals astonishment at Miku's tendency to blush when speaking to someone she likes. Emotional *aizuchi* perform an important relational

function in Japanese conversation: by signaling affective alignment, they help build rapport and shared understanding between interlocutors. Todd (2019) describe this form of *aizuchi* as providing emotional support for turn-takers, showing empathy and solidarity without taking the speaker's turn.

6) *Aizuchi* as Signal for Pausing

Data 10 (06:40)

- ミク : 。。。じゃ、次の質問はですね。
Miku : “...*jaa, tsugi no shitsumon ha desu ne*”
: “...the next question is”
サユリ : はい。
Sayuri : “*hai*”
: “Yes”

The *aizuchi* "Yes" serves as a pause-filling device, bridging conversational gaps between interlocutor and speaker. Originating from Miku (the interlocutor) during a discussion about her blushing when speaking to the opposite sex, she was abruptly interrupted and prompted for the next question. Sayuri (the speaker) then responded with "Yes", functioning as a transitional cue between utterances.

According to Kubota (2001), such tokens “bridge conversational gaps” by filling silences or preparing for a turn transition. These signals are crucial for maintaining discourse continuity. On another instance, this finding also aligns with the finding of Dityandari and Aryanto (2020) which shows simple interjections like “a...” function as soft gap-fillers that prevent conversational breakdown and preserve the speaker's momentum which shown in this research with Sayuri's “Yes” not only acknowledges Miku's preview of the next question but also cues her readiness to resume speaking, effectively smoothing the interruption and upholding the cooperative flow of information.

7) *Aizuchi* as Signal for Adding, Correcting, or Requesting Information

Data 11 (08:41)

- サユリ : あと、ちょっと、英語で言ったら Weird なんですけど、たぶん、日本語だったら変かな。うん、ちょっと面白い人。
Sayuri : ““*ato, chotto, eigo de ittara Weirдна ndesukedo, tabun, nihongodattara hen ka na. Un, chotto omoshiroi hito*”
: “Yes, it's “weird” in English and it sounds kinda off in Japanese. Yes, he's an interesting guy.”
ミク : 個性的な人とか、
Miku : “*kousei tekina hito toka*”
: “Excentric person?”
サユリ : そうそう!個性的な人かな。
Sayuri : “*sousou! Kousei tekina hito kana*”
: “Yes!, an excentric person”

The *aizuchi* identified in the utterance 'kousei tekina hito toka' serves a corrective function. Its purpose is to signal a change, amendment, or correction to the speaker's preceding statement. This instance originated when Sayuri, acting as the interlocutor, described the type of man she likes using the phrase “Yes, a somewhat interesting person”. Miku, as the speaker, immediately interjected with “eccentric person” to perform this corrective function. Subsequently, Sayuri (as interlocutor) adopted this correction, repeating with “Yes! an eccentric

person” that indicates she accepts the correction made by Miku.

This finding corresponds to Kubota’s (2001) seventh function, which encompasses backchannel repairs and collaborative completions. Such corrective *aizuchi* like Miku’s utterance, serve to narrow semantic scope or suggest a more precise term, then license the speaker to integrate that refinement of Sayuri previous remarks. Miyata and Nisisawa (in Dityandari & Aryanto, 2020) characterize these as collaborative finishes, where the listener’s timely addition both demonstrates comprehension and fine-tunes the referential content without overtaking the turn. As such, when this form of *aizuchi* is deployed, they significantly enhance mutual intelligibility and co-construct the conversational meaning and furthermore, this underscore the listener’s active role in shaping discourse and in ensuring that the speaker’s intended nuance is faithfully conveyed.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the author analysed seven (7) functions of *aizuchi* found in an 8-minute and 32-second YouTube video from the channel "Miku Real Japanese," featuring a conversation between Sayuri and Miku, both native Japanese female speakers. A total of 73 *aizuchi* instances were obtained from the video analysis. This number can be considered to meet the criteria for a very high frequency of *aizuchi* occurrence in two-way communication between native Japanese speakers of the same gender (female).

The results are as follows: 32 instances were classified as the listening signal function (*kiite iru to iu shingou*), making it the most frequently used *aizuchi* function. This high frequency is because this listening signal is easy to utter. Next, 14 instances were classified as the understanding signal function (*rikaishiteiru to iu shingou*). Following this, 11 instances represented the agreement signal function (*doi no shingou*). Subsequently, a rarely occurring function was the denial signal function (*hitei no shingou*), with only 1 instance found. This scarcity is attributed to the conversation's theme of romance, a topic in which women are often quite adept, resulting in minimal use of denial utterances during the video.

Further results include 9 instances classified as the emotional expression signal function (*kanjou no shingou*). Then, 2 instances were categorized as the pause-filling signal function (*ma wo motaseru shingou*), making it the second least frequent category, as the speakers tended to avoid leaving pauses in their speech. Finally, 4 instances were classified as the signal for adding, correcting, or requesting information function (*Jyohou wo tsuika, teisei, youkyuu no shingou*).

However, this study still has several limitations. The author hopes that future research will conduct more in-depth investigations into *aizuchi*, examining its functions, forms, and types. This could involve studying the basics of Japanese language, communication between native Japanese speakers of different age ranges, or investigating the use of *aizuchi* in both formal and informal situations.

6. Reference

- Andriyani, N. D. (2023). Penggunaan Aizuchi Oleh Penutur Asli Bahasa Jepang dalam Video Kanal Youtube Hajimesyacho. *Jurnal Listrendi : Jurnal Linguistik Sastra Dan Pendidikan*, 8(2), 269–275. <https://doi.org/10.51673/jurnalistrendi.v8i2.1750>
- Aryandi, A. D., & Andarwati, T. W. (2023). Fungsi Aizuchi Verbal dalam Dialog Anime Yuru Camp Episode 1-6 Karya Afro. *Ayumi Jurnal Budaya Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 10(2), 134–150. <https://doi.org/10.25139/ayumi.v10i2.6797>
- Dityandari, I. H., & Aryanto, B. (2020). Form and Function of Aizuchi Japanese Native

- Speaker in Inaka Ni Tomarou! TV Serial. *IZUMI*, 9(2), 186–199.
<https://doi.org/10.14710/izumi.9.2.186-199>
- Giri, N. L. K. Y., & Wedayanti, N. P. L. (2015). “Etika Komunikasi Orang Jepang (Studi Kasus Terhadap Mahasiswa Sastra Jepang Fakultas Sastra Dan Budaya Universitas Udayana). Bali: Universitas Udayana.
- Hanzawa, C. (2012). Listening behaviors in Japanese: Aizuchi and Head Nod Use by Native Speakers and Second Language Learners (Dissertation). University of Iowa.
- Iizuka, K., & Otsuka, K. (2023). Analyzing Synergetic Functions of Listener’s Head Movements and Aizuchi in Conversations. *Transactions of the Japanese Society for Artificial Intelligence*, 38(3), J-17. https://doi.org/10.1527/tjsai.38-3_j-m91
- Imelda. (2014). Penggunaan Aizuchi Ditinjau dari Jenis Kelamin pada Mahasiswa Bahasa Jepang Tingkat II dan III Program Studi Sastra Jepang Universitas Hasanuddin. *Kagami : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Jepang*, 5(1).
- Kubota, M. (2001). *Aizuchi wa Hito wo Ikasu*. Tokyo: Kouseidou.
- Maghfiroh, S., Supriatnaningsih, R., Prasetiani, D., & Nurjaleka, L. (2020). Bentuk dan Fungsi Aizuchi oleh Gaikokujin pada Channel Youtube The Ogasawara Family. *Jurnal Bahasa Jepang Taiyou*, 3(1).
- Maynard, S. K. (1990). *An Introduction to Japanese Grammar and Communication Strategies*. Tokyo: The Tokyo Times.
- Mirhosseini, S.-A. (2020). Collecting Data Through Observation. In *Doing Qualitative Research in Language Education* (pp. 61–84). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56492-6_4
- Nishfullayli, S., & Santiar, L. (2023). Aizuchi on Basic Japanese Language Textbook as Learning Material of Listening Behavior. *PAROLE: Journal of Linguistics and Education*, 13(1), 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.14710/parole.v13i1.13-31>
- Park, H. (2017). Chapter 8: Hulya’s Story. In-country Learning by Hulya Park. In B. Kennett & Y. Nagata (Eds.), *Learning Japanese: Voices of experience* (pp. 84–93). Candlin & Mynard.
- Perdana, S. P., & Nurohmah, H. (2022). Function of Aizuchi in The Podcast as One of Digital Communication Media. *Izumi*, 11(2), 173–182. <https://doi.org/10.14710/izumi.11.2.173-182>
- Todd, J. A. (2019). “It has the ability to make the other person feel comfortable”: L1 Japanese speakers’ folk descriptions of aizuchi. *Lingua*, 230, 102737. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2019.102737>
- Yamashita, Y. (2017). Response Behaviors in Conversational Speech among Japanese- and English-Speaking Parents and Their Toddlers. In F. D. M. Fernandes (Ed.), *Advances in Speech-language Pathology: Vol. IntechOpen*.