

# ***Manzai*-like humor sequences: Exploring a particular form of highly collaborative conversational humor in Japanese interactions**

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*This article examines a particular form of highly collaborative conversational humor that is commonly encountered in Japan. It consists of ritualized humor sequences co-constructed by the participants in interaction who adopt complementary stereotypical character roles, closely resembling the boke ('the fool') and the tsukkomi ('the straight man'), the two characters in contemporary Japanese duo stand-up comedy manzai. Using recordings of naturally occurring conversational interactions between two close friends who habitually make use of this form of humor, the study illustrates the patterns that the participants follow when engaging in the construction of humor sequences, indicates the regularities in their timing and sequential positions, and considers the functions that they seem to fulfill. It also draws attention to the importance of intertextuality and repetition in the successful achievement of this form of humor and discusses the relational implications and consequences of its use.*

**Keywords:** *conversational humor; collaborative humor; humor sequences; play frame; Japanese conversational humor; Japanese humor; manzai*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**C**onversational humor – understood here as any instance of humor that is spontaneously produced and negotiated in the course of an interaction primarily through verbal resources – is an extremely complex and varied phenomenon, whose study requires a linguistically and interactionally informed close analysis as well as taking into consideration factors such as the socio-cultural context, the participants' social relations, age, gender, and the goals that the use of humor allows them to achieve at any given point during interaction (see, e.g., Norrick 1993; Norrick and Chiaro 2009; Tsakona and Chovanec 2018). It takes multifarious forms and serves a wide range of social, affective, and discourse-pragmatic purposes. It may be formally accomplished through units as small as

words situated in an appropriate context (as is the case with punning and other forms of wordplay), but it may also take up long stretches of talk and multiturn sequences jointly constructed by different participants (as is the case with, for example, anecdotes or banter). Besides providing entertainment, conversational humor may also be used to facilitate smooth interaction, defuse tension, lighten up the mood, and save one's own as well as the co-participant's face. It may also be employed for socialization purposes, to assert and subvert power structures, and to test out and negotiate shared norms, values, and attitudes. Interactional achievement of humor may further enable the participants to manifest and concurrently construct, negotiate, and develop their relationships, mutual positioning, identities, solidarity, rapport, and a sense of closeness, belonging, and cohesiveness among the members of a group (see, e.g., Straehle 1993; Norrick 1994; Kotthoff 1996; Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Hay 2000; Everts 2003; Holmes 2006; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006; Coates 2007; Oropeza-Escobar 2011).

Despite the burgeoning scholarly interest in conversational humor over the past two decades or so, Japanese conversational humor remains markedly underexplored. Relatedly, some students of Japanese humor who write for international audiences still appear to feel compelled to explicitly refute the stereotypical belief – held especially in the West – that the Japanese lack a sense of humor and explain why some might think so. For example, Ōshima (2013), who attempts to describe the 'style of Japanese humor' by analyzing the most popular stories submitted to the website of Japan's Funniest Story Project, argues that the Japanese use humor within their inner circles and – as members of a high context society – achieve humor in ways that may be too subtle for the westerners to appreciate. Similarly, Takekuro (2006), having conducted a contrastive analysis of 'conversational jokes' in several Japanese and American movies, concludes that foreigners might not encounter much humor in their interactions with the Japanese, because "Japanese jokes are limited to situations in which participants know each other well and the degree of formality is low" (Takekuro 2006, 90). It would be wrong, however, to assume that all forms of humor attested in Japanese interactions rely on barely noticeable incongruities or that formal settings completely inhibit humor from occurring. Geyer (2008, 97–122), for example, explored the practice of teasing in faculty meetings in Japanese secondary schools and found that young male teachers who commit conversational transgressions against tacit institutional norms are teased by those in positions of power, while the rest of the group subsequently joins in laughing and making fun of the 'transgressor.' Murata (2014) reports congruent findings in her study on the use of humor in business meetings at a Japanese company. She demonstrates that humor is employed during these meetings, but only the people who are in charge appear to have the right to make the initial humorous remarks, while others respond to them and build on them, depending on their relative positions within the group.

Few studies have so far focused on humor in Japanese everyday conversational interactions. Suzuki (2001), for example, draws on multiple sources of data, including taped

conversations, in order to explicate what she calls ‘self-mockery’ in Japanese, describing it as an act during which “the speaker makes a statement and then denies, invalidates, or expresses his/her nonserious attitude toward the content of the utterance by adding a certain phrase,” such as *nanchatte*, *nante*, *toka itte*, or *tte* (Suzuki 2001, 163). Yoshida (2001) presents fieldwork-based observations on the functions of joking among female workers at a Japanese inn. Matsumoto (2009) examined Japanese elderly women’s use of humor when engaging in painful self-disclosures during casual conversations. Takanashi (2011) discusses speech style shifts as one of the linguistic strategies employed by the Japanese to signal play framing in conversations among friends. Otake and Cutler (2013) offer an analysis of a corpus of spontaneously produced puns by a single speaker over a period of two years. Finally, using recordings of conversational interactions of four groups of friends, Mizushima and Stapleton (2006) explored “a particular subset of seemingly offensive utterances” (Mizushima and Stapleton 2006, 2106) that bear close resemblance to one of the patterns of realization of the humor sequences discussed in this paper. The authors refer to these utterances as ‘meta-oriented critical comments’ and describe them as a specific form of teasing that is elicited by the person who ends up being teased, and hence, as constituting part of a sequence that consists of “the teasee’s invitation of a meta-oriented critical comment, and the teaser’s critical response to those invitations” (Mizushima and Stapleton 2006, 2109).

## 2 THIS STUDY

The present study focuses on a particular form of conversational humor which I have frequently encountered in the naturalistic data that my Japanese informants and I have collected over the course of my long-term research on various aspects of everyday conversational interactions of Japanese young people (in practice, people in their twenties up to mid-thirties). Particularly, as far as my data are concerned, I found it being used most commonly in conversational interactions between young men in close personal relationships that they themselves characterized as friendships.<sup>1</sup> Since the humor sequences that this paper explores strongly resemble dialogs typical of the contemporary Japanese duo stand-up comedy *manzai*, I refer to them as *manzai*-like humor sequences. Contemporary *manzai* is typically “characterized by the antagonistic yet friendly, fast-paced dialogue” (Stocker 2002, 299) performed by two men, one of them playing the role of the *boke* (‘the fool’) and the other one playing the role of the *tsukkomi* (‘the straight man’). The two characters may represent various opposing qualities, such as chaos and order, absurdity and normality, or *honno* (a private self and its feelings and opinions) and *tatema* (a socially acceptable public persona), respectively (Inoue 1981). Overall, “[t]he *boke*’s role is

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1 Unfortunately, I have not studied interactions between people that belong to different age groups sufficiently enough to be able to comment on their use of this form of conversational humor.

to make stupid or out-of-context statements and to engage in cognitive misunderstandings,” whereas the *tsukkomi*'s “role involves making statements to correct or to put down the *boke*” (Ōshima 2006, 105), often in a harsh and even physically violent way. *Manzai*-like exchanges constitute a popular and ubiquitous source of entertainment in contemporary Japanese television and radio shows (Stocker 2006). Their occurrence in ordinary conversation for the purpose of achieving humor has also been noticed (e.g., Mizushima and Stapleton 2006, 2106; Ōshima 2006, 106); however, to my knowledge, they have not yet received close scholarly attention and are yet to be described as a specific form of conversational humor that can commonly be encountered in Japan.

*Manzai*-like humor sequences represent a highly collaborative form of conversational humor that involves the performance of ritualized exchanges during which the participants assume complementary character roles of the *boke* and the *tsukkomi*. The *manzai*-like humor sequences that I found in my data can be broadly classified into two types based on their organization. One of them (hereinafter referred to as Type A) takes the form of an adjacency pair with possible (and relatively common) post-expansion. The other (hereinafter referred to as Type B) is considerably more complex in structure and involves multiple turns peppered with self- and allo-repetition. This paper aims to explore and illuminate this form of conversational humor, drawing on the methods and findings from Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics. To that end, I first describe the two patterns of realization of *manzai*-like humor sequences and exemplify them using excerpts from the conversational interactions of two Japanese young men who self-identify as close friends. Subsequently, I discuss various issues related to the form and function of the *manzai*-like humor sequences, compare them with other commonly distinguished forms of conversational humor, and consider the relational implications and consequences of their use. In this way, I hope to contribute to the body of work on conversational humor and deepen our understanding of the verbal humor employed by the Japanese people in their everyday conversational interactions.

I call the two friends, whose conversations I use here, Takuya and Shōta. They come from the northwestern part of the Kantō region and have self-identified as close friends since high school. Takuya went to work after completing his secondary education, whereas Shōta studied for two more years at a junior college. At the time of data collection, they were 26–27 years old and worked for a car manufacturer and a bicycle store, respectively. I analyzed three spontaneous face-to-face conversational interactions between the two friends with a total length of 112 minutes, which they audio-recorded themselves when hanging out in a leisurely public setting of cheap restaurants on three occasions in 2012, separated from each other by a period of about three months. In addition, I analyzed their semi-public interactions on a social networking site that took place during that year. To complement the recordings, I further had access to a set of recordings that capture about eight hours of Takuya's conversations with people other than Shōta (including his girlfriend, co-workers, casual friends, and new acquaintances) in various informal com-

municative situations. The analysis of the data allowed me to conclude that (1) in the studied recordings, Takuya does not employ this form of conversational humor in his interactions with people other than Shōta and (2) *manzai*-like humor sequences constitute a habitual part of Takuya and Shōta's interactions; they are used consistently throughout and across their individual interactions and represent a key part of their specific 'group humor style,' through which they manifest and interactionally construct their friendship bonds and relational continuity (cf. Zawiszová 2018a).

### 3 DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This section offers an account of the two patterns of organization of *manzai*-like humor sequences that I was able to distinguish and a close analysis of five examples extracted from the recordings of Takuya and Shōta's spontaneous conversational interactions.<sup>2</sup> In the first subsection, I focus on the Type A pattern of realization of the humor sequences and examine four examples. In the second subsection, I concentrate on the Type B pattern of realization of the humor sequences and provide a close analysis of one longer example. Significantly, at the point when the recordings were made, in the interactional history of the two friends, the distribution of the character roles between them was fixed: Takuya consistently took on the role of the *boke*, while Shōta consistently assumed the role of the *tsukkomi*. As I explained previously (Zawiszová 2018a), this distribution was not random, but rather appeared to be consonant with the overall conversational styles that the two friends adopted when interacting together at the time. The transcription conventions are provided at the end of the article. The participants' names in the transcripts are abbreviated thus: 'T' is used to mark the turns produced by Takuya and 'S' marks those produced by Shōta. The arrows in Excerpts (1)–(4) indicate the lines that form a part of the humor sequences. The arrows in Excerpt (5) mark the initial lines of different segments into which the humor sequence can be analytically divided.

#### 3.1 Type A

The *manzai*-like humor sequences that represent the Type A pattern of realization take the form of an adjacency pair with a possible post-expansion. The sequences minimally consist of the participant that assumes the role of the *boke* producing a turn (that constitutes the first pair part) in which they transparently provoke their co-participant into taking on the role of the *tsukkomi* and the other participant accepting the invitation by producing a turn (that forms the second pair part) in which they criticize and/or correct the participant in the role of the *boke* or their conversational contribution. More specifically,

2 The excerpts that are included and discussed in this paper have previously been used in my book on the practices for manifestation and construction of friendship in and through conversational interactions (Zawiszová 2018a).

the participant in the role of the *boke* provokes the other participant to criticize and/or correct them in the next turn by making a short illogical, unreasonable, ludicrous, or otherwise errant and locally problematic conversational contribution, whereas the other participant aligns themselves with the proposed course of action and assumes the role of the *tsukkomi* by voicing a critical comment and/or correcting the *boke* or their conversational contribution, often in a harsh or mock-aggressive manner, in the next turn. The base sequence, as described above, can be further expanded either with a sequence closing third (that is, a single turn produced after the second pair part) or with a non-minimal post-expansion that consists of another adjacency pair, which can also be followed by a post-expansion. Post-expansion constitutes a part of the humor sequence, as the participants sustain the play frame by staying in their respective character roles. In what follows, we will consider four excerpts that exemplify *manzai*-like humor sequences following the Type A pattern.

During one of the recorded conversations, Shōta notices that he had a missed call and returns the call without telling Takuya whom he is calling. Lines 2–4 in Excerpt (1) represent the final part of the call. While on the phone, Shōta uses a polite speech style, but talks in a relaxed rather than formal manner. He uses the phrase *otsukaresama desu*, which constitutes a common form of (de)greeting between co-workers. He laughs and demonstrates knowledge of the interlocutor's personal life, but mainly reports who he called and what the sales were like that day. It is thus obvious that he is talking to someone from work whom he has known for some time and with whom he is on friendly terms, but who probably has a higher position in the company and/or is older than him. Consequently, it is in light of all these clues that Takuya's contribution in lines 5–6 can be interpreted as intended to be regarded as non-serious and treated as an invitation to engage in a *manzai*-like humor sequence.

(1) *A new recruit*

- 1 S: ((talks on the phone))
- 2 arigatō gozaimasu.  
*Thank you very much.*
- 3 hai otsukaresama desu.  
*Goodbye.*
- 4 shitsurei shimasu.  
*[a polite phrase used before hanging up]*
- 5 T: → dare,  
*Who [was it]?*

- 6 → shinnyū shain?  
*A new recruit?*
- 7 S: → hhhh <<laughing> iya> <<:-)> senpai senpai.>  
*hhhh <<laughing> No,> <<:-)> [my] older co-worker, [my] older co-worker.>*
- 8 (1.5)
- 9 S: → hh <<laughing> nande shinnyū shain ni sonna kashikomatte  
shaben[nakya,>  
*hh <<laughing> Why would [I] be speaking to a new recruit in such a respectful way?>*
- 10 T: → [hehehe  
*hehehe*
- 11 S: → hhh <<laughing> wake wakannē yo.> hh  
*hhh <<laughing> [It] doesn't make any sense.> hh*
- 12 T: → <<:-)> shakaijin da [kara kana-> ]  
*<<:-)> [I thought] maybe because of being a responsible member of the society...>*
- 13 S: → [*<<laughing> shakaijin] to shite->*  
*<<laughing> As a responsible member of the society->*
- 14 → <<:-)> chigau yo.>  
*<<:-)> [You're] wrong.>*
- 15 T: → hh  
*hh*
- 16 ((pause))

The moment Shōta ends the call, Takuya restarts their conversation by asking whom he talked to, but does not wait for Shōta to answer and immediately appends a candidate answer, *shinnyū shain* ('a new recruit'), thereby creating a confirmation-seeking question through which he claims that he thinks that he knows the answer and is just 'checking it out' (Pomerantz 1988, 370) and, at the same time, makes Shōta's confirmation or disconfirmation in the next turn conditionally relevant (lines 5–6). In formulating his guess, Takuya correctly locates it in the work domain, but blatantly disregards all other clues offered by Shōta's contributions during the telephone conversation, including the Japanese

norms regarding the use of speech styles and registers that can be regarded as part of the Japanese ‘communal common ground’ (Clark 1996). By voicing this transparently erroneous and illogical guess with a high level of certainty, Takuya leaves it to Shōta to recognize that he has assumed the role of the *boke* and invites him to align with the proposed course of action and co-construct the *manzai*-like humor sequence with him by assuming the role of the *tsukkomi* in the next turn. In the next turn (line 7), Shōta displays his amusement (by producing a burst of laughter in the turn-initial position and delivering the rest of his response with interspersed laughter and in a smile voice), unequivocally disconfirms Takuya’s wrong assumption, and – using repetition – corrects it emphatically, thereby concluding the base sequence.

However, the humor sequence represented in Excerpt (1) continues beyond the base sequence, as it involves a non-minimal post-expansion. Following a short pause, Shōta produces two pulses of laughter and expands the base sequence by laughingly pointing out the unreasonableness of Takuya’s assumption (lines 9–11). Takuya laughs in overlap with Shōta’s speech at the point when Shōta finishes an embedded question in which he expresses what, in his assumption, he finds fault with (line 10), but then returns to his role as the *boke* and tries to explain his way of reasoning in a way that is itself fallacious and illogical, as it is not grounded in the actual norms that would be observed in Japanese society (line 12). In response, Shōta again first shows his amusement by laughing while repeating the key part of Takuya’s explanation, but then tells Takuya assertively, albeit in a smile voice, that he is wrong (lines 13–14). This move effectively terminates the humor sequence, and Takuya acknowledges that, as he goes on to produce only two quiet pulses of laughter (line 15) and a pause ensues. The fact that this humor sequence was initiated after a break in conversation that was caused by the phone call rather than as a ‘side sequence’ (Jefferson 1972) inserted in the course of an ongoing sequence is significant, as it appears that Type A *manzai*-like humor sequences that are produced as side sequences do not normally permit post-expansion.

About nine seconds later, as shown in lines 2–3 in Excerpt (2), Shōta appears to initiate a storytelling or an informing sequence. At the end of both intonation phrases that comprise his turn, he uses the interactional particle *sa*, delivered with an elongated vowel and a slightly rising intonation contour, to signal that he wishes to maintain speakership and not be interrupted at that point (Morita 2005). He is, however, interrupted, because Takuya identifies Shōta’s turn as a trouble source and checks whether he understands it correctly, using the format of an ‘insertable element’ (Hayashi and Hayano 2013) to proffer a candidate understanding of an element that Shōta left unexpressed in his turn, that is, the topic (line 4).<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, the omission of the topic in the given sequential environment makes Shōta’s statement potentially ambiguous, because it is arguably not com-

3 A ‘topic’ is a special constituent of the Japanese sentence structure that may be left unexpressed as long as it is inferable from the context and there is no other pragmatic necessity to overtly express it.



Even though understanding might have been an issue at that point of the interaction, as Shōta's close friend, Takuya certainly knew that Shōta is not talking about himself. His candidate solution to the problem is, therefore, obviously intended to come across as non-serious and perfectly ludicrous and, in effect, as an invitation for Shōta to assume the role of the *tsukkomi* and engage in the co-construction of a *manzai*-like humor sequence. As can be observed in lines 5–6, Shōta recognizes and takes up Takuya's invitation and designs his response in a manner similar to what he did in the exchange represented in Excerpt (1). First, he displays his amusement with short pulses of laughter and continues to laugh and smile throughout his turn. Subsequently, he disconfirms Takuya's assumption and corrects it. Unlike in the preceding example, however, Shōta delivers his turn in a mock-aggressive manner. He slows down, uses a compressed pitch range, emphatically stresses the elements through which he carries out the negation and correction (see the capitalization in the transcript), uses the colloquial non-past negative form of the copula *ja nē* which is associated with a certain degree of roughness (rather than a more neutral sounding *ja nai*), punctuates both assertions with the interactional particle *yo*, which allows him to “enhance his[...] position as the deliverer of the utterance contents and feeling” (Lee 2007, 386), and pronounces the word *ore* (‘I’) with a trilled [r], whose use in Japanese is stereotypically associated with a coarse, aggressive style of speech. After completing the sequence, Shōta immediately resumes the activity that Takuya interrupted (see the latching between lines 6 and 7 in the transcript), which turns out to be a dramatic retelling of a humorous scene that he overheard while on the phone with his co-worker.

The following excerpt illustrates another situation in which Takuya interrupts Shōta to initiate a *manzai*-like humor sequence by using the format of other-initiation of self-repair. In lines 1–6, we can observe Shōta eagerly trying to explain the procedure that he will now have to follow to take a day off work, but his explanation is long, messy, and rather confusing, which is arguably the reason why, when Shōta reaches a point of completion of an intonation phrase but projects more talk to come in line 6, Takuya, who has so far offered no verbal or vocal signal of following or understanding what Shōta has been saying, interrupts his speech. Takuya produces a prosodically marked latched repair-initiating ‘astonished question’ (Selting 1996), formulated as a partial repeat or a feigned summary of Shōta's turn, but, in fact, featuring gross misinterpretation of its contents (line 7). By using the format of an astonished question to have Shōta repair his prior turn in his next turn, Takuya indicates that he is experiencing a problem of expectation (rather than hearing or understanding) with regard to Shōta's prior turn. In other words, he thereby implies that he has heard and understood Shōta say that which he ‘repeats,’ but finds it surprising or astonishing. It is, indeed, astonishing, as that which Takuya claims to have heard Shōta say is not only quite different from what he said but also incompatible with the common ground knowledge and general expectations regarding the practice of taking days off by employees in Japanese companies.

(3) *A month off*

- 1 S: shifuto kumen kara:,  
*[I] will be able to schedule [my own] shifts, so,*
- 2 shigatsu no (.) tatoeba sono tsuki no (.) kongetsu dattara,  
*April, (.) for instance, that month, (.) if [it] were this month,*
- 3 jūroku kara (.) jūroku kara tsugi no gogatsu no jū:go made,  
*from the 16th, (.) from the 16th until the next, May 15th,*
- 4 (.)
- 5 o shifuto kumu.=  
*[that's the time frame I] 'd schedule [my] shifts for:*
- 6 =de daitai sono shigatsu no tsuitachi gurai ni: ,=  
*And so, roughly around that, April 1st,*
- 7 T: → =shigatsu jūgo kara gogatsu jūroku made yasumen no?  
*[You] can take days off from April 15th until May 16th?*
- 8 S: → (.) hh <<:-)> ikkagetsu mo yasumenē yo [BAka.]>=  
*(.) hh <<:-)> [Of course I] can't take a whole month off, [you] idiot!>*
- 9 T: → [hhh ]  
*hhh*
- 10 S: =sorede shifuto ga kokonoka ireru kara,  
*And so, [I] 'll be sending in the shift [schedule] on the 9th, so,*
- 11 sorede yutte kurereba,  
*so, if you let me know...*
- 12 (2.8)
- 13 T: ikkagetsu mae gurai ni ieba ii n?  
*[So I] should tell [you when I'm free] about a month ahead?*
- 14 S: un.  
*Yeah.*

15            dekiireba.  
              *If possible.*

As evidenced by the brief pause that precedes his response (line 8), Shōta was apparently caught off guard by Takuya's move. However, his subsequent response clearly demonstrates that he interprets Takuya's turn as 'performed by the *boke*' and inviting Shōta to assume the role of the *tsukkomi* and engage in the *manzai*-like humor sequence. Instead of addressing the 'trouble' in his prior turn that was pointed out by Takuya, he first displays his appreciation of the entertainment value of Takuya's move by issuing two pulses of laughter (and producing the remainder of his turn in a smile voice) and then goes on to draw attention to the ridiculousness of that which Takuya claims to have understood him say, doing so in a mock-aggressive manner, using both prosodic and verbal resources, including an intellectual insult *baka* ('an idiot') directed at Takuya. Takuya's laughter in overlap with the insult produced by Shōta turn-finally (line 9) arguably indicates that he enjoys the exchange and has received Shōta's coarseness as part of his performance in the role of the *tsukkomi*, and hence, as a behavior that is not intended to be treated as hurtful or hostile. Just as we could observe in Extract (2), having produced the second pair part of the humor sequence, Shōta immediately resumes the activity that Takuya interrupted (line 10), making no perceptible pause after his critical comment, only using the conjunctive expression *sorede* ('and', 'so') to mark the shift of focus.

Excerpt (4) comes from a conversation that took place about three months after the conversation from which the previous extract was taken, but it can be interpreted more accurately by referring to the fragment that we have just considered. Having talked about a recent trip that they took together with their two other friends, Takuya and Shōta move on to discuss the possibility of going on another trip as a group. Unlike the others, Shōta is not free on the weekends, but – as he explained in the fragment represented in Excerpt (3) – he can take a day off relatively easily, provided he asks for it well in advance. The exchange shown in lines 1–3 below concludes their conversation about the topic and a long pause ensues (line 4). Finally, as shown in line 5, Takuya breaks the silence by smilingly making a suggestion that is obviously not intended to be treated seriously, but rather, as a *manzai*-like-humor-sequence initiating turn, in which Takuya positions himself as the *boke* and invites Shōta to assume the role of the *tsukkomi* and criticize him in the next turn.

(4) *The day after tomorrow*

1 S:        ja hizuke dake kimete kuretara sa:-  
              *So, if [you guys] just picked a date[, you know]...*

2 T:        yasumi toreru no?  
              *[You] 'll be able to take a day off?*

- 3 S: yasumi (.) onegai suru kara.  
*[I]’ll (.) ask for a day off.*
- 4 (7.6)
- 5 T: → sore ja: <<:-)> asatte yaru ne.>  
*Well then, <<:-)> [we]’ll do [it] the day after tomorrow.>*
- 6 S: → <<:-)> <<f> BAKA ka> [omae ga.>  
 <<:-)> *Are [you] nuts, you [idiot]?!>*
- 7 T: → [hhhh  
*hhhh*
- 8 (1.2)
- 9 S: → <<laughing> IKKAgetsu> <<:-)> mae gurrai ja BOke.>  
 <<laughing> *[You must tell me] about a month> <<:-)> ahead, [you] stupid!>*
- 10 T: → hahahaha  
*hahahaha*
- 11 ((pause))

Takuya’s suggestion to meet in two days’ time complies with Shōta’s request to be informed in advance, but it is fundamentally impractical because it goes against their previously established shared understanding that – as shown in Excerpt (3) – Shōta needs to be given about a month’s notice. Takuya’s use of the interactional particle *ne* with falling intonation contour in the turn-final position makes his suggestion even more provocative. Here, the particle serves as a resource that invites a speaker change and allows Takuya to display his (feigned) confident expectation that Shōta will take up the suggestion in the next turn while he, in fact, expects Shōta to do quite the opposite, as is evidenced by his behavior throughout the remainder of the sequence (lines 7 and 10). Showing no hesitation as to how he should interpret what Takuya is trying to accomplish by his move, Shōta aligns with the proposed course of action by criticizing Takuya in a quite harsh and aggressive manner, while simultaneously displaying his amusement through smiling and laughter (lines 6 and 9).

Shōta’s immediate response (in line 6) features a non-predicate-final utterance structure, which represents a popular resource for the co-construction of affective stance dis-

play in Japanese conversational interactions (e.g., Ono 2006; Zawiszová 2018b). Even though Japanese is traditionally considered a predicate-final language, various forms of turn-constructional unit extension are common (Couper-Kuhlen and Ono 2007), including non-predicate-final utterances whose post-predicate elements are prosodically integrated with the prior unit, as we can observe here. Shōta first exclaims the predicate part of the utterance, *baka ka* ('Are [you] stupid?'), which is a grammatically complete sentence structure in Japanese. He then proceeds to supply the grammatical subject of the predicate, *omae ga* ('you + nominative/subject-marking particle'), under the same intonation contour as the predicate part, which suggests that the post-predicate part of the utterance was planned as part of the utterance from the start and was not simply added to it as an afterthought or a correction. The post-predicate element is referentially superfluous, which is also evident from the fact that Takuya starts laughing in appreciation of Shōta's contribution in overlap with it (line 7), but the overt expression of the second-person subject makes Shōta's criticism of Takuya come across as more direct and effectively more hostile (cf. Lee and Yonezawa 2008). At the same time, it allows Shōta to design his turn as a non-predicate-final utterance, whereby he is able to convey a heightened affective stance, foreground expressivity, and utter the criticism, which was invited by Takuya in the prior turn and which is verbally delivered especially via the predicate part of the utterance, at the sequentially earliest point possible (cf. Zawiszová 2018b).

Since the sequence was initiated by Takuya following a moment of silence, rather than as an interruption of an ongoing activity that could be resumed, a pause follows. It is, however, quickly broken by Shōta, bursting into laughter and mock-aggressively reminding Takuya of the fact that he needs to be given a warning about a month ahead (line 9). To construct his remark as an extension of the *manzai*-like humor sequence, Shōta uses a number of resources to make it sound harsh and hostile, in spite of his laughter and smiling throughout the turn. He uses different phonetic-prosodic features, such as stress, loudness, or the trilled [r], the dialectal variant of the copula *ja*, and the emphatically delivered intellectual insult *boke* ('stupid', 'fool') directed at Takuya. In response, Takuya again displays his understanding of Shōta's turn as being a part of the *manzai*-like humor sequence and shows his appreciation of its amusement value by orienting to Shōta's turn with wholehearted laughter (line 10), which then forms the final contribution to the sequence and is followed by a pause. Note that the manner of realization of the post-expansion of the base sequence represented in this excerpt bears a strong resemblance to that shown in Excerpt (1). Having no conversational activity to return to, Shōta produces one more turn as the *tsukkomi*, which effectively enables the two friends to sustain the play frame for a bit longer.

### 3.2 Type B

Compared to the Type A pattern of realization of *manzai*-like humor sequences, the Type B pattern of realization is considerably more complex. It involves multiple turns featuring much self- and allo-repetition, rapid talk, the participant in the role of the *boke* repeatedly provoking the criticism of the participant in the role of the *tsukkomi* by means of such actions as blabbering, deliberately misinterpreting, blatantly lying, drawing illogical conclusions, trivializing serious matters, and making incoherent, ambiguous, facetious, self-important or excessively assertive statements, and the participant in the role of the *tsukkomi* aligning with some of the contributions made by the participant in the role of the *boke* by using minimal response tokens and repeats, marking other contributions as problematic, uttering critical comments, pointing out that the participant in the role of the *boke* is not making any sense, correcting them, drawing attention to the falsity of their claims and the unfeasibility of their suggestions, displaying mock-aggressive behavior, attempting to bring the conversation back to order, and eventually succeeding in it. While the formal structure or the organization of Type A and Type B patterns of realization of *manzai*-like humor sequences are fairly distinct, what connects them are the character roles of the *boke* and the *tsukkomi* in which the participants assume and interactionally position each other.

The *manzai*-like humor sequences of the Type B pattern of realization that I found in the conversational interactions between Takuya and Shōta are substantially longer than those of the Type A pattern discussed above. Therefore, because of space constraints, this subsection considers only one example of this pattern. The fragment of talk represented in Excerpt (5) was preceded by a short exchange of opinions between the two friends regarding the route that they should take to go to Shōta's place after they finish their dinner. Takuya was unhappy about Shōta's suggestion to take the expressway and suggested taking local roads to avoid paying the toll, but Shōta strongly opposed the idea and reminded Takuya that last time he had listened to him and tried to return home after visiting him without taking the expressway, he had a traffic accident and ruined his new car. The mood becomes rather gloomy and serious and they sit in silence for a few seconds until Takuya reopens the conversation in a smile voice and with the connective expression *demo* ('but') to signal a shift in focus away from the negative aspect of their previous encounter onto a positive one, which he thereby also marks as more important (line 2). The *manzai*-like humor sequence that ensues can be analytically divided into five segments, each centered around a different phrase, which further gives this sequence a poetic quality of sorts. The phrases that the segments revolve around are: *yokatta* ('[it] was good'), *ore/omae no okage de* ('thanks to me/you'), *ii* ('[it]'s good'), *daijōbu da* ('[it]'s okay'), and *umaku itteru* ('[it]'s going great').

(5) *It was good*

1 (7.3)

2 T: → <<:-)> demo yokattaro?  
<<:-)> *But [it] was good, right?*

3 kite.>  
*[That you] came.>*

4 S: (.) nani ga?  
(.) *What [was good]?*

5 T: <<:-)> kite yokattaro?>  
<<:-)> *[That you] came was good, right?>*

6 S: hehhh <<laughing> nande sō,>  
hehhh <<laughing> *Why [are you] like>*

7 <<:-)> purasu ni mottekō to suru ka ne: kimi wa honto ni.  
<<:-)> *trying to [have us] focus on the bright side [of the whole thing], you, seriously.*

8 sugu motteku kara ne.>=  
*[You just] focus on [the bright side] right away[, don't you].>*

9 =demo yokatta yo.  
*But [it] was good.*

10 T: yokattaro?  
*[It] was good, right?*

11 S: yokatta yo.  
*[It] was good.*

12 T: → ore no okage de.  
*Thanks to me.*

13 S: un.  
*Mm.*

- 14 omae no okage de.  
*Thanks to you.*
- 15 <<:-)> imi yoku wakaranai na.>  
<<:-)> [I] don't really get what [you] mean.>
- 16 T: un.  
*Mm.*
- 17 (3.9)
- 18 S: → un.  
*Mm.*
- 19 ii no kai,  
*Is [it] good or*
- 20 warui no kai kore wa.  
*is [it] bad [that] it [is so, I wonder].*
- 21 T: un.  
*Mm.*
- 22 ii to omou.  
*[I] think [it]'s good.*
- 23 S: <<laughing> ii to omou tte.> hh  
<<laughing> “[I] think [it]'s good” [he] says.> hh
- 24 (2.7)
- 25 T: → daijōbu da.  
*[It]'s okay.*
- 26 S: <<laughing> imi wakannai.>  
<<laughing> [I] don't get what [you] mean.>
- 27 T: daijōbu.  
*[It]'s okay.*

- 28 S: un.  
*Mm.*
- 29       daijōbu.  
*[It]'s okay.*
- 30 T: → shōta no jinsei umaku itteru yo.  
*Your life's going great [I tell you].*
- 31       (2.8)
- 32 S: <<laughing> nan no konkyo de sō itten no omae wa,> hhhhhh  
<<laughing> *What grounds do you have for saying that?> hhhhhh*
- 33 T: <<:-)> iya: ore kara mite ne,>  
<<:-)> *Well, from what I can see[, you know].>*
- 34 S: umaku ittenē yo.  
*[It]'s not going great [I tell you].*
- 35       (11.5)
- 36 S: nanka nomu?  
*[Do you want] something to drink?*
- 37 T: daijōbu da.  
*[I]'m okay.*

During the first segment (lines 2–11), Takuya stubbornly insists on having Shōta confirm that despite the unfortunate ending of their previous encounter, he is glad that they met, repeating the same question with only slight variation three times. Shōta at first refuses to align with Takuya's confirmation-seeking question, displays annoyance and irritation, emphasizes his heightened affective stance by using the non-predicate-final constituent order, conveys a sense of distance between Takuya and himself by using the second person deictic expression *kimi* (cf. Onishi 1994, 365) rather than *omae*, which he normally uses, to refer to Takuya, and laughingly criticizes Takuya for his behavior and attitude. Having done that, however, he gives in and – using a form of repetitional response – confirms that Takuya is right, whereby he both aligns and affiliates with Takuya (cf. Stivers 2008) and brings the conversation to temporary calm and order.

Having achieved Shōta's confirmation, Takuya moves on and initiates another seg-

ment (lines 12–16) by making an odd self-praising assertion. Shōta responds to it with a minimal response token *un* (‘mm’) and using a repetitional response, which is a format that is often used in Japanese to indicate agreement, but here it seems to be more of an automatic response made without giving it much thought, as Shōta goes on to admit that he does not fully understand what Takuya means. Shōta’s complaint that he does not understand can be viewed as a form of other-repair initiation that locates Takuya’s preceding turn as a trouble source and calls for the resolution of the trouble in the next turn. The response that Takuya provides – that is, a minimal response token *un* (‘mm’), which seems to function here as a sequence-closing acknowledgement token – is, therefore, in contrast with what would normally follow and so, because of its situational inappropriateness, it elicits a sense of strangeness or absurdity.

In the next segment (lines 18–23), the desired *manzai*-like effect is created by the juxtaposition of Shōta’s implicit criticism of Takuya and Takuya’s performance of *boke*-like ignorance of the criticism and unwavering insistence on his simplistic positive outlook. Referring to Takuya’s previous assertion, Shōta expresses his doubts regarding the valence of its implications, criticizing his friend implicitly. Performing the *boke*, Takuya completely ignores the implied criticism and responds to Shōta’s rhetorical question by confidently voicing his opinion that it is a positive thing. This move makes Shōta laugh throughout his next turn, in which he closes this segment by using the format of a verbatim quotation of Takuya’s previous statement framed with the utterance-final quotative marker *tte* in order to convey a sense of detachment from the quoted material and draw attention to it as a source of his laughter and a target of his mocking attitude (cf. Suzuki 2007).

The next segment (lines 25–29) ensues after a short pause and revolves around the semantically vague but stylistically assertive evaluative statement *daijōbu da* (‘[it]’s okay’), which Takuya introduces into the exchange. In his response, Shōta again claims that he does not understand what Takuya means, but laughs throughout his turn, indicating that while he might not be able to interpret the referential meaning of Takuya’s utterance, he understands what Takuya is doing by means of the utterance in terms of the ongoing activity. Takuya responds to Shōta’s repair initiation by repeating the assessment instead of providing a repair solution, as would arguably be normally done by a participant in a serious exchange. Shōta, however, does not insist on having the problem resolved, as he chooses not to engage in often pointless (from the point of view of information exchange and conversation development) back and forth with Takuya and expresses his agreement with him, using the minimal response token *un* (‘mm’) and a repetition of Takuya’s assessment, to affiliate with Takuya and bring the segment to a close.

In his next turn, Takuya appears to provide a – now redundant and out-of-place – answer as to what he meant when he said *daijōbu (da)* (‘[it]’s okay’). Assuming an inappropriately confident and knowing position, he proffers an assessment of Shōta’s life, whereby he initiates another segment (lines 30–34). He marks the assessment with the

utterance-final interactional particle *yo* delivered with a falling intonation to claim ‘an epistemic stance of authority’ (Morita 2002, 227) with respect to knowledge about the quality of Shōta’s life. Shōta responds with a delay, but laughs throughout his turn to show his amusement. In his response, he draws attention to the inappropriateness of Takuya’s assessment and effectively criticizes him. In order to display his heightened affective stance and “maximise [his] feeling or emotion associated with the utterance” (Lee and Yonezawa 2008, 741), he deploys the non-predicate-final utterance structure with the second person deictic expression postpositionally marked as the topic, *omae wa* (‘you + topic-marking particle’), produced in the post-predicate position. In response, Takuya admits in a smile voice that his epistemic access is, in fact, rather limited, which might be regarded as a response that indicates that Takuya is slowly letting go of his character role of the *boke*. However, it is Shōta’s turn, in which he emphatically negates Takuya’s assessment and uses a *yo*-marked statement to claim ‘epistemic primacy’ (Hayano 2011, 60) and to establish the correct distribution of epistemic rights between the two of them regarding the matter at hand, that definitively terminates the play frame and restores the serious mode of their conversation.

Overall, the exchange shown in Excerpt (5) represents an example of a relatively non-aggressive *manzai*-like humor sequence, in which Takuya and Shōta take on complementary character roles and show patterns of behavior that are remarkably consistent with those that can be observed in the exchanges of the *boke* and the *tsukkomi* in contemporary *manzai*. For example, as Stocker (2006, 61) points out, in *manzai*, “[t]he *boke*’s ideas seem to run freely with the perspectives of his own unique, absurd world, while the *tsukkomi* tries to apply a line of reasoning or common sense to the dialogue. The *boke* constructs what appears to be foolish or absurd interpretations of ‘reality’,” twisting it “into an entirely different logic, often wandering off into what appears to be a completely different matter.” The *tsukkomi* criticizes, corrects, and points out “the illogic or stupidity of the *boke*’s crazy, silly, off-the-wall, or ignorant remarks,” but “nods and says filler words [...] in response to the *boke*’s relatively normal-sounding statements” (ibid.), regardless of whether they make any sense to him or not. The *tsukkomi* acts as “the commonsense voice of social order in the face of the trickster-like *boke*’s chaotic utterances and behavior which upset that order” (ibid.).

## 4 DISCUSSION

This section discusses a number of issues concerning the form, function, and use of *manzai*-like humor sequences, both in general and in Takuya and Shōta’s conversational interactions in particular.

#### 4.1 Co-construction of humor and mock-aggressiveness

*Manzai*-like humor sequences represent a form of maximally collaborative conversational humor that the participants jointly construct across their turns. In order to successfully achieve humor in this way, it is essential that the participants in interaction share a clear understanding of the activity and their roles in its constitution, and – based on this understanding – make concerted efforts to jointly construct the sequences by producing such contributions as their respective roles in the activity require. Resembling those of the *boke* and the *tsukkomi*, the two characters in the contemporary Japanese duo stand-up comedy *manzai*, the two roles position the participants as mutually dependent, complementary, and effectively inseparable. As we observed in the extracts presented above, the participant acting as the *boke* introduces chaos and illogic into the exchanges; however, for the contributions of this participant to have this desired effect, it is necessary that the other participant points it out by taking on the role of the *tsukkomi*, who represents common sense and focuses on logic and order, which again can only be fully recognized by virtue of the juxtaposition of their contributions with those produced by the other participant.

The contributions made by the participant who assumes the character role of the *boke* may be viewed as interactionally aggressive. For example, in the extracts that we have considered, Takuya blatantly violates a variety of the Gricean maxims, jeopardizes the progress of an ongoing activity by being intrusive and disruptive, exploits the practices of other-initiation of repair to make Shōta address imagined or greatly exaggerated problems that he claims to have with his prior turns, and designs his turns to display confident expectation of Shōta's confirmation or agreement in the next turn while actually making sure that he provokes the opposite reaction. In contrast, the contributions made by the participant who assumes and is positioned in the role of the *tsukkomi* are frequently interpersonally aggressive. In his contributions to the *manzai*-like humor sequences, Shōta, for example, makes use of a range of resources to display heightened affective stance, aggression, annoyance, or irritation, regularly mocks and denigrates Takuya's intellectual abilities, beliefs, and behavior, harshly demands that he 'shut up', insults him, puts him down, and inconsiderately corrects and criticizes him. Significantly, as exemplified by Takuya's behavior in the studied extracts, the participant in the role of the *boke*, just as the *boke* in *manzai*, seems to be required to be resilient to the verbal abuse and hostility of their counterpart and accept the attacks without retaliating.

*Manzai*-like humor sequences share certain aspects with various 'aggressive forms' of conversational humor that are reported to often be used by (especially male) close friends, such as those referred to as teasing, mocking, banter, goading, jocular mockery, or jocular abuse, but differ from them in several important respects. Since the roles that the participants adopt during their joint construction of *manzai*-like humor sequences are fixed and the process requires that they skillfully follow certain established patterns rather than

show their wit and originality, the participants do not seem to use *manzai*-like humor sequences to negotiate their power or positions within their relationship, there does not seem to be any vying for dominance, and there is no reciprocity in the interpersonally aggressive behavior. In addition, the aggression, criticism, and harsh treatment are transparently provoked by their target, accepted without any resistance, and clearly appreciated and enjoyed. The sequences also do not exemplify self-deprecating or self-denigrating humor, as the participant who becomes the target of humor only adopts the position of a potential target and invites their co-participant to deliver the line that would effectively make them the target.

#### 4.2 *Framing, repetition, and intertextuality*

The interactional construction of *manzai*-like humor sequences requires that the participants jointly establish and sustain a ‘play frame’ (Bateson 1972), that is, “a particular communicative mode” (Dynel 2011, 217), within which they – acting as “partners in concerted activities” (Linell 1998, 74) – perform their routinized exchanges and interpret each other’s contributions as non-serious and intended to primarily serve entertainment purposes. What enables Takuya and Shōta to do that is their knowledge and experience and, especially, their extensive ‘personal common ground’ (Clark 1996) that has developed over the course of their long shared interactional history. Concurrently, each time they perform a *manzai*-like humor sequence, they not only index their prior interactions, but also update and further expand their shared database of ‘prior texts’ (cf. Becker 1994, 165), which they can access and refer to during their future interactions. Consequently, it is this intertextuality and repetition that give the activity its relational significance and make the generation of the various meanings and effects possible.

As demonstrated in the excerpts, it is always Takuya who initiates the *manzai*-like humor sequences and sets up the play frame. Shōta’s task is then to recognize that the play frame has been invoked and respond accordingly so as to sustain it and contribute to the construction of the particular type of humor sequence that Takuya’s move has initiated. Takuya’s sequence-initiating moves are abrupt and generally take the form of a single intonation phrase. There is no pre-sequence that would allow Takuya to ascertain Shōta’s willingness to partake in the activity; thus, by initiating the humor sequence Takuya effectively demands Shōta’s instant cooperation. Sometimes Takuya frames his sequence-initiating as well as subsequent utterances as non-serious by delivering them with a smile, but he often employs no overt ‘contextualization cues’ (e.g., Gumperz 1992) that would guide Shōta’s interpretation of his intent. Therefore, in order to recognize Takuya’s utterances as non-serious, Shōta primarily needs to rely on his prior experience of interacting with Takuya, his understanding of *manzai*-like humor sequences and their role in his and Takuya’s interactions, and his ability to notice that Takuya’s propositions are incongruous with what he knows (or believes to know) that Takuya knows, thinks, understands, be-

lieves, etc.

Because of his role in the activity, Shōta regularly makes use of a wide range of resources (such as non-predicate-final constituent order, style shifting, interjections, swearing, name calling, modulation of voice quality, pitch, intonation, tempo, and loudness) to display a heightened affective stance, irritation, and aggression. To sustain the play frame, Takuya is then required to orient to all Shōta's contributions as non-hostile, which Shōta makes easier for him by frequently bursting into laughter and producing speech-laughes and speech-smiles that may be interpreted as indicating his amusement and enjoyment of the exchange, and, consequently, as framing his harsh-sounding utterances as non-serious. Whereas Takuya plays the role of the sequence initiator, Shōta is tasked with terminating the play frame and reverting the conversation to the non-humorous mode. Just as Shōta is expected to play along when Takuya utters a sequence-initiating turn, Takuya is expected to recognize Shōta's intention to terminate the play frame and respect it by refraining from making further contributions. Overall, the realization of the humor sequences thus allows the two friends to both manifest and further their close bonds.

### 4.3 *Sequential positions, timing, and local functions*

There are two ways in which *manzai*-like humor sequences are typically embedded in the ongoing conversation. They can either be preceded and followed by a pause, or they can form what Jefferson (1972, 294) called a 'side sequence within an ongoing sequence.' The first category is exemplified by Excerpts (4) and (5), but also (1), as the phone call that preceded also constitutes a break in the conversational exchange of the two friends. Analyzing the examples that fall into this category, we notice that since there is no specific activity to which they could return, Shōta tends to extend the base sequence of the Type A pattern of realization, and both Takuya and Shōta initiate new segments within the humor sequences that follow the Type B pattern of realization with a view to sustaining the play frame for a bit longer. Excerpts (2) and (3) illustrate the second category and allow us to observe that the disruption which the *manzai*-like humor sequences cause to the progressivity of the ongoing sequences is minimal. Shōta terminates the play frame and immediately resumes the activity that was temporarily interrupted, often using no continuation devices, and making no perceptible pause between the final utterance of the humor sequence and the utterance through which he resumes the activity that Takuya interrupted, thereby creating an effect of the humor sequence being 'sequentially deleted' (cf. Jefferson 1978).

Over time, *manzai*-like humor sequences have developed into a habitual part of Takuya and Shōta's interactions, which is evident, for example, from the frequency and smoothness with which the two friends engage in their construction and the fact that they do not produce any sense of markedness while doing so. The sequential positions in which the humor sequences occur show remarkable regularity and can thus be viewed as

reflective of certain norms and values that the two friends observe in their interactions. When the conversation becomes relatively serious or personal, Takuya initiates a *manzai*-like humor sequence in order to supply comic relief, change the topic, and make the exchange more light-hearted. After a longer pause and when the conversation becomes slow or monotonous, Takuya initiates a *manzai*-like humor sequence to re-establish the conversation as fast-paced and geared toward fun. In addition, Takuya also initiates a *manzai*-like humor sequence to playfully annoy Shōta during an ongoing lengthier conversational activity, such as an informing or storytelling sequence, featuring Shōta as the primary teller, especially when Shōta might be viewed as overdoing something (e.g., complaining, bragging, criticizing, or showing eagerness or excitement). Such conversational transgressions have, in fact, repeatedly been reported as commonly triggering various forms of conversational humor, such as teasing or goading (e.g., Drew 1987; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Mitchell 2015). The major difference between these forms of humor and the humor sequences discussed here is that the latter are not confrontational, as it is the one who notices the overstepping on the co-participant's part who becomes the target of humor, not the one who is caught overdoing something.

#### 4.4 *Relational implications and consequences*

Joint construction of *manzai*-like humor sequences not only provides the participants with mutual entertainment and helps them deal with certain interactional concerns, but also both indexes and further enhances solidarity, rapport, and a sense of cohesiveness and belonging between them as a group. Since “jointly constructed humor typically develops where people are familiar with each other and with each other's interactive style” (Holmes 2006, 33), it contributes to the manifestation and interactional constitution of the participants' closeness and relational continuity. Similarly, ‘aggressive forms’ of conversational humor tend to be used to achieve mutual entertainment (or at least they tend to be used with no intention of genuinely hurting or threatening the target) by people in certain types of close personal relationships, as they require that the participants trust each other and share an orientation to the activity as non-hostile and relationship-supportive. Consequently, by habitually making use of ‘aggressive forms’ of humor in their conversational interactions, the participants display and strengthen their bonds and continually contribute to the definition of their relationship (cf., e.g., Straehle 1993; Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Everts 2003; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006; Oropeza-Escobar 2011; Haugh and Bousfield 2012).

The binding function that *manzai*-like humor sequences fulfill in Takuya and Shōta's conversational interactions is further enhanced and emphasized by their formulaicity and frequent recurrence, as repetition of this kind “affirms interlocutors' shared history, mutual access to a set of prior texts, and membership to the same group” (Gordon 2009, 10; cf. Tannen 2007, 61). Being repeatedly employed by Takuya and Shōta as a resource to

achieve certain goals, *manzai*-like humor sequences have gradually developed into a practice that now forms a part of the shared repertoire of practices that are constitutive of their friendship group (cf. Wenger 1998). In addition, the participants may be said to have developed a form of ‘customary joking relationship.’ In anthropology, the term traditionally used to be applied to refer to proscribed social relations, such as “a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence” (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 90). In humor research, the term came to be used more broadly and is usually applied to refer to spontaneously developed voluntary joking relationships, that is, relationships between people whose interactions are routinely filled with humor-oriented actions and activities, especially those of aggressive or competitive types (e.g., Norrick 1993).

## 5 CONCLUSION

Although investigating conversational humor can provide invaluable insights into the worlds of individual groups, cultures, and societies, studies exploring humor in Japanese social interaction remain scarce. In this article, I focused on a particular form of maximally collaborative conversational humor realized as humor sequences that are jointly constructed by the participants who assume two complementary stereotypical character roles that closely resemble those of the *boke* and the *tsukkomi*, the two characters in the contemporary Japanese duo stand-up comedy *manzai*. While the sequences that the participants thereby produce might be viewed as representing a form of ‘aggressive humor’, they are not confrontational and do not serve to assert dominance, as the harsh remarks and aggressiveness are transparently provoked and evidently enjoyed by their target. I illustrated the ways in which the sequences may be realized and used by referring to the findings from a close analysis of their occurrence in the conversational interactions between two close friends. In addition to examining their form, timing, sequential position, and the functions that they seem to fulfill, I also pointed out the significance of intertextuality and repetition in the successful achievement of this form of humor and drew attention to the relational implications and consequences of its use. In the process, I argued that such properties as their heavy reliance on the co-participants’ shared understanding, highly ritualized nature, and the particular combination of the characteristics pertaining to jointly constructed forms of humor and ‘aggressive’ forms of humor make *manzai*-like humor sequences an exceptionally powerful resource for the participants to both manifest and co-construct their close bonds, relational continuity, a sense of belonging, rapport, and solidarity. Whether they represent a form of conversational humor that is typically Japanese or a form of conversational humor that also has its place in other cultures remains an open question.

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

The modified Hepburn system of romanization of Japanese is employed. Standard orthography is used when regular phonological processes apply, but colloquial and non-standard pronunciation is noted. The use of a trill consonant [r] instead of the standard tap [ɾ] is marked as ‘rr.’ Vowel elongation is indicated by a colon, with each symbol corresponding to the approximate length of a mora in the given environment. Laughter is represented by ‘h,’ ‘he,’ and ‘ha’ as approximations of audible laugh tokens. Double parentheses are used to provide the transcriber’s comments. No capital letters are used in the transcripts, while punctuation and other markings that appear in the excerpts provided in this article are adapted from GAT 2 (Selting et al. 2009) and are employed as indicated below.

### *Aspects of speech delivery*

.	a falling intonation contour
,	a slightly rising intonation contour
?	a high rising intonation contour
-	a level pitch contour, a cut-off, or a self-interruption
CAP	an especially loud part of a word
<<f> talk>	a stretch of talk that is delivered in a markedly louder ( <i>forte</i> ) voice than the surrounding talk
<<:-)> talk>	a stretch of talk that is auditorily identified as being delivered in a smile voice (i.e., while smiling)
<<laughing> talk>	a stretch of talk that is delivered with interspersed laugh tokens (i.e., while laughing)

### *Temporal and sequential features*

[ ]	overlapping speech
=	a latching or contiguous talk
(.)	a micro-pause of up to approximately 0.8 second
(3.1)	a timed pause in seconds

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