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An analysis of なんか in Japanese conversation

Angela A-Jeoung KIM

1.　Introduction

As a part of cross-linguistic contrastive analysis, the current study examines the functions and meanings of the Japanese marker なんか in conversation. As will be noted shortly, なんか has a few meanings and usages ascribed to it in the dictionaries and grammar books. Unlike its most frequent definition being an informal form of both など, 'or, etc., such as' and なにか, 'something, anything', なんか does not always carry such a meaning in a real conversation.　This paper examines the function of なんか in conversation data.　Although なんか has also been described as a filler (Maynard 1990: 259), and as a hedge (Lauwereyns 2002), Tagliamonte points out that when used in conversation, fillers, hesitation markers, or hedges are "not haphazard, random or indiscriminate.　Instead, their patterns of use are quite circumscribed and linguistically defined" (Tagliamonte 2005: 1896).　This implies that such markers serve a specific function in conversation discourse (see Schiffrin 1987; Clark and Fox Tree 2002; Tagliamonte 2005; Schourup 1985; Östman 1981).　In this paper, I will demonstrate that なんか in Japanese also exhibits the specific environments where it is used.　By identifying the particular environment where なんか is likely to occur, as well as its collocation with other markers and expressions, the current study attempts to shed light on the discourse function of なんか as having a function beyond that of mere filler or hedge and a meaning that deviates significantly from that given in dictionaries.

The data used for this study consists of approximately 30 minutes of audio-taped face-to-face conversation by native speakers.[1] The conversations were between friends, both male and female, and were recorded in a casual setting. All the participants in the recording were in their twenties at the time of recording, and had either completed an undergraduate degree, or were still studying at undergraduate or postgraduate level. The participants were born and raised in Japan, and had received formal education in Japan at least up until the age of seventeen. The data was collected in Canberra through a network of friends.[2] The 30 minutes of data contained a total number of 93 cases of なんか.

2. Background and previous studies

According to Japanese-Japanese dictionaries, なんか is found under two separate entries（三省堂国語辞典 1982: 814; 国語大辞典 1980: 1858; 広辞林 1991: 1493）or under one entry with two different usages（岩波国語辞典 1982: 828; 国語大辞典言泉 1989: 1745; 新明解国語辞典 2007: 1118）. One is as an informal spoken form of など, 'and so forth, and (or) the like, *et cetera*', which is an adverbial particle, used to present an example among a group of things. The other is as an informal spoken form of なにか, 'some, any, something, anything', which is a compound word of an interrogative なに, 'what' and か, a question marker. (1) and (2) below are examples of the two entries of なんか. Unless otherwise stated, all the examples are in Japanese. The translations were added by this author.

(1) 卵<u>なんか</u>お好きですか。 （国語大辞典言泉 1989: 1745）

'Do you like something like eggs?'

(2) なんか食べる？ 　　　　　　　　　　（国語大辞典 1980: 1858）

　　'(Do you want to) eat something?'

In addition to the above, detailed meanings, functions and usage of なんか found in dictionaries and grammar books include its function as a topic marker （益岡・田窪 1998: 50; メイナード 2005: 329）especially used for belittling （Martin 1987: 161; 国語大辞典 1980: 1858; 国語大辞典言泉 1989: 1745; 日本語大辞典 1989: 1458; 庵 2001: 367; Kaiser et al. 2001: 264） or emphasizing (Maynard 1990:30; Kaiser et al. 2001: 264). Closely related to this meaning of なんか is a meaning of humbling oneself when used about the speaker（友村 2007: 281; Kaiser et al. 2001: 264）. (3) and (4) represent the use of なんか as a topic marker, used in a belittling sense, and showing the speaker's modesty, respectively.

(3) こんなくだらない本なんか読むな。 　　　　　　（仁田 1982: 408）

　　'Don't read such a trashy book'

(4) わたしなんか何もお手伝いできなくて。すみません。（友村 2007: 281）

　　'Sorry. Someone like me cannot do anything to help'

Further, なんか has been described as carrying the meaning of なんとなく, 'somehow'（砂川 1998: 413; Kaiser et al. 2001: 264），or なぜかわからない が, 'without knowing why'（砂川 1998: 413）when "modifying a predicate" (Kaiser et al. 2001: 265) or expressing a state of affairs（砂川 1998: 413）. It has also been claimed as functioning as "a filler in conversation" (Maynard 1990: 129), meaning 'uhh…' (Maynard 1990: 259). Examples (5) and (6) show the use of なんか to mean 'somehow' and 'uh'.

(5) あの人の言ってること，<u>なんか</u>変だと思いませんか。(砂川 1998: 413)

'Don't you think what he is saying is somehow strange?'

(6) いいねえ，<u>なんか</u>，キャンディーとか出るんでしょ？

(Maynard 1990: 421)

'That's good, uh, candies or something are served, right?'

Summarizing the above, it can be said that なんか is a spoken form that is used as a topic marker that expresses a belittling or humbling, as in 'such (a person, thing etc.) as', and other meaning such as 'and so forth, and (or) the like, *et cetera*', 'somehow', 'something, anything', 'without knowing why', and 'uhh⋯'.

In addition to the aforementioned studies, Maynard (2000) has described the functions of *nan*(*i*) extensively, as "an 'anti-sign' referring to unspeakable moments of language" (Maynard 2000: 1209) with various functions in discourse. Also treating なに as a whole, メイナード (2009: 10) posits that なに may be used by the speaker to express dissatisfaction or disagreement with the interlocutor, but also to express dependency or an interpersonal closeness. Elsewhere, メイナード (2001: 302) has hinted at the possible use of なんか as a discourse strategy for a softened or indirect expression. However, these studies do not discuss the functions of なんか per se.

An intriguing fact is that there are markers in other languages that seem to share a number of similarities with なんか in Japanese. In terms of location, as well as with regard to some of the functions, なんか is similar to markers in English such as *just*, *like*, and *you know*, as well as *mak* (막) in Korean. Among these I found such striking similarities especially between the functions of English *like* claimed by Schourup (1985) and なんか. My analysis in the current paper owes much to Schourup (1985). Schourup mentions that *like*

has cases which cannot be adequately characterised with dictionary meanings provided for the marker. Schourup has found cases of *like* preceding an exact numeral expression as well as *like* preceding obviously inexact formulations. He points out that the function of *like* for the former is "to constitute a kind of hedge, attenuating the overexactness of the speaker's chosen formulation" (Schourup 1985: 42). While suggesting 'approximately' as a plausible reading of *like* for the latter, Schourup (1985: 42) notes that it is to indicate that "the speaker is aware that what follows is an imprecise rendering of what s/he has in mind". According to Schourup (1985: 48) the approximative meaning of *like* is also applicable when *like* is used after questions. Schourup (1985) goes on to show the instances of *like* which are used to introduce direct discourse and point out that such function of *like* is the speaker's expression of "what I am about to report is *like* what I or someone else has in mind" (Schourup 1985: 44). In addition to the use of *like* as a hedge, mentioned above, most relevant to the current study is Schourup's (1985) examination of the cases where *like* means 'for example' and where *like* is used as an interjection. Schourup (1985: 49) comments that the 'for example' reading is "strongly reinforced by context" and presents examples which contain expressions such as 'oh', 'for instance', and 'or other—uh things like that' in addition to *like*. He continues that the 'for example' reading suggests "an accurate but selective representation", arguing that this reading "should be possible in any case where selectivity of report is conceivably the nature of the discrepancy" (Schourup 1985: 50). Finding cases where 'for example' meaning are inadequate, Schourup isolates the use of *like* in specific distributional environments and calls those forms as pausal interjection. He points out that *like* as a pausal interjection occurs before problematic descriptive terms, restart, filled and unfilled pauses, and also at the beginning of a clause after some prefatory material. Schourup

believes that where *like* is a pausal interjection a substantial contribution is made to the utterance as it suggest "the material about to follow is difficult to formulate appropriately or precisely" (Schourup 1985: 56), while at the same time indicating "an attempt at expression rather than a failure of communication" (Schourup 1985: 63). All in all, the meaning and function of *like* according to Schourup (1985) serve to indicate a "possible discrepancy between what the speaker has in mind and what is overtly said" (Schourup 1985: 62). The frequency of the occurrence of *like* with these functions, he argues, can be explained by the spontaneous nature of the conversation where speakers "frequently find themselves in the position of having to formulate what they have to say without time for the considered eloquence" (Schourup 1985: 61). The function of なんか seems similar to some extent to the function of *like* mentioned above, as will be presented below.

3. Analysis

If なんか is a filler and used frequently in a spoken discourse, it may be assumed that なんか is used as a delay signal. Assuming that なんか is a delay signal, it is reasonable to consider that the use of the marker indicates some kind of problem on the part of the speaker, one specific to spontaneous language. Assuming that なんか indicates the speaker's difficulty in formulating utterance, I examined the position of なんか with respect to pause or other signs that indicate delay. Interestingly but unsurprisingly, the data showed that 59% (55 occurrences out of 93 in total) of なんか were directly related to delays. As (a) and (b) in Table (1) show なんか was found to be immediately preceded by or immediately followed by either a filled and/or unfilled pause. Unfilled pauses here include markers such as あの and まあ(あ) which are known as fillers in Japanese (Backhouse 1993; *ano*: Cook 1993). There were

also cases where なんか was both preceded, and followed by filled and/or unfilled pauses as in (c). As can be seen in (d), なんか were also found with fillers that are 'multi-word items' (Backhouse 1993: 180) and expressions that explicitly indicate the speaker's problematic state in choosing a word/phrase. According to Clark and Fox Tree (2002: 82), prolonging syllables by the speaker can be understood as a sign of delay. なんか was also found to be preceded by the lengthening of the last syllable of a word (which are not interjections) and a restart. As will be shown with examples, these instances of なんか were found in contexts where the speaker appeared to be facing difficulty in formulating utterances in an appropriate way. However, one major difference between なんか in the current data and *like* in Schourup's (1985) data is that it was rare for *like* to be preceded by a pause, whereas for なんか it appeared to be preceded by a pause as often as it was followed by one.

Table 1 　なんか co-occurring with delays

Position of なんか	Details	Number of Occurrences
(a) なんか＋ filled/unfilled pauses	(a)-1 なんか . . .	19
	(a)-2 なんか あの	5
(b) Filled/unfilled pauses ＋なんか	(b)-1 . . . なんか	13
	(b)-2 まあ（あ）なんか	2
(c) Filled/unfilled pauses ＋なんか＋filled/unfilled pauses	(c)-1 . . . なんか . . .	1
	(c)-2 まあ なんか あの	1
	(c)-3 . . . や なんか まああ	1
(d) なんか with expressions that explicitly indicate the speaker's problematic state in choosing word/phrase	(d)-1 （. . .）explicit expressions of problem in formulation/multi-word filler＋なんか	2
	(d)-2 なんか＋explicit problematic expressions	2
(e) Lengthened word/restart＋なんか	(e) Lengthening of last syllable of a word (which are not interjections)/restart＋なんか	8

Note that (c) was extracted for avoiding double counting for categories (a) and (b). Since the instances in (c) are both preceded and followed by a pause, they could, in fact, have been categorized into either (a) or (b), had there been only one existing category. In addition to the above, there are cases of なんか which are not immediately associated with a pause. It seems that these cases of なんか may be used to say 'for example' and to hedge as summarized in Table (2). Table (2) also includes the occurrences of なんか with its contextual meaning as described in dictionaries.

Table 2   Instances where なんか is not immediately preceded or followed by a pause.

Use of なんか	Details	Number of Occurrences
(f) 'For example' use	Reinforced by the context, often used with other expressions to reinforce the interpretation	12
(g) Hedge	Softening the exactness of a word/ phrase	16
(h) Dictionary meaning	(h)-1 など	2
	(h)-2 なに＋か	4
	(h)-3 ～（と）か なんか	5

In the examples below, where more than one なんか occurs in one example, the target instance of なんか is underlined in both the transcript and the translation.

(a)-1   なんか ...

(7)   (Talking about gaining weights while studying overseas, A was being asked whether other students around her were saying they had also gained weight)

A: あ＝<u>なんか ...</u>やっぱり いちキロぐらい増え いち にキロぐらいみ

ん な増えてるのかな

'Yeah. *Nanka* . . . one kilo, one or two, everyone has probably gained one or two kilos'

(8) (Talking about cheese and wine)

E: うん．だから<u>なんか...</u>その日によっ〜 その日に 自分で味わって
も違うんだろうけれども やっぱ，あの＝チーズによっ〜 を食べる
と こう 味が ちょっと 変わって 感じられる ことが ある［かも しれま
せん

'Yeah. And so *nanka*⋯depending on the〜, even if one tastes it on the same day, the taste (of wine) could be different, but well, cheese, depending on〜 if cheese is eaten together, maybe the wine could once again taste different'

(9) (After hearing that the interlocutor, who is attending a graduate school of linguistics, did history at an undergraduate level)

M: あ＝それ〜 でも <u>なんか...</u> なんで 言語学
'Oh＝, that〜 but *nanka*⋯why linguistics?'

(10) (After finding out that the interlocutor, who has been talking much about wine so far had attended a wine school in the past)

A: わ＝すごい <u>なんか...</u> ワインスクールって い どれぐらい 通うと そ
れぐらいの 知識が ((utterances omitted))

'Oh＝, great. *Nanka* . . . how how long do you have to attend a wine school (to gain) such knowledge?'

As seen from (7) to (10), these are the cases in which なんか is directly

followed by unfilled pauses. These examples all contain other signals which indicate formulating problems such as repetition, self-repair, and restarts, as well as abrupt cut-offs: (7)「いちキロぐらい増えいちにキロぐらいみんな増えてるのかな」; (8)「その日によっ～その日に」, and「あの＝チーズによっ～を食べると」; (9)「あ＝それ～でも」; and (10)「ワインスクールって いどれぐらい」.

(a)-2　なんか あの

(11)　(Interlocutor asked why M chose ANU to study)

　M:　ここ＝はですね＝その環境法の なんか あの いん～ センターみたいのが シドニー大学と あと エーエヌユーにあって,

　　　'(the reason for me to choose to come) here＝is that＝that environmental law, *nanka ano* gradu～ there is a center (for environmental law) at Sydney University and ANU . . .'

(12)　(Explaining about classes)

　M:　((utterances omitted)) それ以外は . . . この . . . こないだのセメスターも なんか あの＝なんでしたっけ. 働いてる人がたくさんいるんで ((utterances omitted))

　　　'Apart from that . . . this . . . (in the) previous semester as well *nanka ano*＝, what was it, (there are) many people who are working . . . '

(13)　(Being asked about whether M knows someone)

　M:　あ＝ええええええええ . . . こないだ なんか あの ええ . . . お会いしました.

　　　'Oh＝yes, yes, yes, yes . . . the other day *nanka ano* yes . . . I met him/her'

(11) to (13) are the cases in which なんか is directly followed by filled pauses, more specifically あの, and sometimes with the lengthened last vowel such as (12). (11) also contains a restart directly following the problem in formulation indicated by なんか あの:「なんか あの <u>いん〜センター</u>みたいのが」.

In (12) なんか あの with prolonged vowel (indicated by an equal sign ＝) is directly followed by なんでしたっけ, 'what was it', which literally is an expression of the speaker's searching for the appropriate word, or a filler（山根 2002: 50）as it is a question that is not directed at the interlocutor but at the speaker him/herself:「<u>なんか あの＝なんでしたっけ</u>」. (13) contains ええ with another pause, which follows なんか あの:「<u>なんか あの ええ . . .</u>」.

Although ええ is also recognized as a filler (Backhouse 1993: 180) it is unclear whether this is a filler or not in this context and position. What is important here, however, is how なんか is frequently associated with delays.

(b)-1   . . . なんか

(14)　(After hearing that the interlocutor is studying linguistics at the ANU)

　M:　. . . どう なんていうか . . . 何人か <u>. . . なんか</u> そ 日本語をこっちで やってる人いますよね なんか . . .

　　　'. . . how, how should I put it . . . a few people <u>*. . nanka*</u> th〜 there are people who are doing linguistics here *nanka*'

(15)　(Talking about wine)

　E:　うん　ワイエーエルティーエー　えーとアールエーかな？ <u>. . . なんか</u> 変な名前なんですよ＝

　　　'Yeah, Y-A-L-T-A- uhm R-A I think it was? . . . *nanka* it was a strange name'

(16) (After being asked whether M was in Malaysia because of his parents' work)

  M: ［やいやあの＝ . . . その . . . <u>なんか</u>　学校のなん . . . あの＝なんでしたっけエクスチェーンジプログラムで　それであの＝マレーシアにちょっと１年ぐらい行って

'No, it wasn't. Well＝ . . . that . . . *nanka* school uhm . . well＝what was it, exchange program, with an exchange program well＝(I) went to Malaysia for a year and . . . '

(17) (After being asked where M wanted to work)

  M: ええ んだもんで ま 日本に戻って仕事するか あるいは <u>. . . なんか</u> ふたりともあの＝<u>. . . なんか</u> マレーシアとかシンガポールに住んでたことあるんで . . . そのへんで 仕事してもいいな＝とは言ってるんですけど

'Yeah. And so uhm, (we are thinking) whether to work in Japan or <u>. . . *nanka*</u> both of us uhm＝ <u>. . . *nanka*</u> lived in places like Malaysia and Singapore... so we are saying that it may be good to work there as well'

From examples (14) to (17), なんか is found after an unfilled pause. These examples also exhibit other signals that indicate a problem in formulating the utterance: the restarts, with . . . どう and そ，and the phrase なんていうか, 'how should I put it' in (14):「<u>. . . どうなんていうか . . . 何人か . . . なんかそ日本語を . . .</u>」. The speaker in (15) also expresses her doubt in the spelling by saying かな？ which is preceded by another hesitation marker, or filler, えーと（Backhouse 1993: 180; 山根 2002: 50）. (16) also shows the speaker having a problem as shown by the stallings before and after なんか:「<u>あの＝ . . . その . . .</u> なんか 学校の<u>なん . . . あの＝なんでしたっけ</u>」. (17) presents

two occurrences with なんか preceded by a pause, and the second occurrence of なんか also accompanies a pause filled with あの＝ just before the unfilled one:「あるいは <u>. . . なんか</u> ふたりとも<u>あの＝ . . . なんか</u> マレーシアとか」.

(b)-2　ま（あ）なんか

(18)　(After being asked whether M has the same major since undergraduate)

　M:　やいえいえ．　あの学部のときは　あのなんでしたっけ　国際関係学
部ってとこにいてそれで　なんでしょうね　そのときまあ〈@<u>まあ な
んか</u> いろいろ . . . やってたんですけどね@〉. . . (H) なんか 途中で
いろいろ . . . ((utterances omitted))

　　　'No, no. Uhm, as an undergraduate, uhm what was it, I was at a place called the Faculty of International Relations and, what was it . . . at that time uhm, *__maa nanka__* I did various . . . things. . . *nanka* while I was there I was doing this and that . . . '

(19)　(After being asked about whether he had an enjoyable experience since he came to Canberra)

　M:　なんですかね＝ . . . ま たまに＝あ こないだ なんか イースターブ
レークで あの 友達の家に行ってメルボルンに［あメルボルンの近
くなんですけど，

　　　'What would that be＝ . . . uhm sometimes＝oh the other day *nanka* during the Easter break, I went to a friend's place in Melbourne, it was near Melbourne'

　S:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　［あ＝

　　　'Right＝'

　M:　<u>ま なんか</u> その＝家で . . . なんか メルボルンはほとんど見なかった
んですけど，((utterances omitted))

'*ma nanka* in that house . . . *nanka* I didn't see much of Melbourne but
. . .'

In (18) and (19) above, a filled pause ま（あ）precedes なんか. (18) shows
obvious problem with expressions that precede ま（あ）なんか as in「あの学
部のときは あのなんでしたっけ 国際関係学部ってとこにいてそれでなん
でしょうね そのときまあ〈@まあ なんか . . .」. There are two occurrences
of まあ that precede なんか. In addition to the なんか in M's second turn,
occurring after ま，M's first turn in (19) indicates that the speaker's thought
is not neatly organized, as can be seen with fillers, prolongation of a vowel,
another use of なんか，and frequent use of あ：「なんですかね＝ . . . ま たま
に＝あ こないだ なんか イースターブレークであの 友達の家に行ってメル
ボルンに あメルボルンの近くなんですけど」. Also in the second turn there
is the lengthening of a vowel as well as a pause after the occurrence of ま な
んか with another use of なんか following:「ま なんか その＝家で . . . なん
か メルボルンはほとんど . . .」.

(c)-1　. . . なんか . . .

(20) M:　［もう１週間ぱ＝っと朝から晩までやるのが２回ぐらいあって
　　　　. . . で今回も　なんか　シドニーのやつも２週間わーっと週末
　　　　ずっとやってっていうのがあって . . . なんか . . . あんまり
　　　　〈XXX〉学生生活って感じしないですね.

　　　　'There were classes for a week which go from morning to evening,
　　　　there were two of them . . . and this time also *nanka* the one in
　　　　Sydney, it was also for two weekends. (there are such classes)
　　　　and . . . . *nanka* . . . it doesn't really feel like (I am leading) a
　　　　student's lifestyle'

(c)-2　まあ なんか あの

(21) S:　彼女の専攻は？

'What is your girlfriend's specialization?'

M:　まあ なんか あの インドネシアのいま政治のことやって

'*maa nanka ano* she does Indonesian politics . . . '

(c)-3　. . . や なんか まあ

(22) M:　今は なんか 国際法のほうとかやってんですけど . . . や なんか ま＝ いろいろって感じですね.

'Now (I am) doing an International Law but . . . *ya nanka maa*, it's like this and that'

From (20) to (22) above showed the instances of なんか both immediately preceded and followed by filled and/or unfilled pauses, clearly indicating delay in production of utterance.

(d)-1　(. .) Explicit problematic expressions/Multi-word filler＋なんか

(23) S:　環境法っていうのはこれは？

'What is this environmental law?'

M:　やなんでしょうねあの＝ なんか 法律＝環境問題の法律っていうのをやってんですけど,　((utterances omitted))

'Uhm, what would it be . . . well＝ *nanka* law＝ what I am doing is law about environmental problems'

(24)　(After having found that S's wife who is Australian used to study in Japan)

M:　でもよく . . . でも奥さん日本にいたんだったら なんか 日本に住む

ほうが...〈@あれじゃない@〉ですか なんか.

'but quite well . . . but if your wife used to live in Japan, *nanka* isn't living in Japan sort of like that *nanka*'

(d)-2　なんか＋explicit problematic expressions

(25)　(After finding out that M's girlfriend's specialization is Indonesian Politics)

S:　インドネシアの政治大変ですよね,

'Indonesian Politics is tough, isn't it?'

M:　ええ

'Yes'

S:　〈@か書けない状況じゃないですか 何も なんか もう日々変わっちゃ ［って

'Isn't it impossible to write anything, *nanka* it changes all the time'

M:　［ええ＝ ... 本当に大変そうですねやっぱ 特に今 なんか すな？ レフォールマスとかいう なんか 民主運動って言うんですか,

'Yeah＝ . . . it seems really difficult as expected, especially now (she is doing) *nanka* something called すな？ レフォールマス *nanka* is it called democratic movement?'

S:　(0)［うん うん

'Yes, yes'

M:　　［ま民主運動って言わないかも知れないんですけど そういうことについてやってるんで なかなかなんて言うんでしょうね＝ ちょっと今書くのも大変そう〈XXX〉.

'Uhm, it may not be called a democratic movement but (she is doing) something like that and so it is quite, what should I say＝ it seems difficult even to write anything at the moment'

In the above examples from (23) to (25) なんか is immediately preceded or followed by a multi-word filler or expressions that indicate that the speaker is searching for the right word. In (23) the speaker is having difficulty answering what environmental law is to a non-specialist, and the problem is indicated by 「<u>やなんでしょうねあの＝なんか</u>」. Phrases such as 「なんといいますか」, 'how should I put it/ what shall I say' are regarded as a filler（Backhouse 1993: 180; 山根 2002: 50）. Since a phrase such as 「なんでしょうね」 in (23) is not a question directed to the interlocutor it is reasonable to regard it as a filler as well. While the speaker in (24) has managed to complete the utterance, it was with an unspecific predicate, 「<u>〈＠あれじゃない＠〉ですか</u>」 directly preceding なんか, which would roughly translate as 'isn't it sort of like that' and explicitly expresses the spaker having difficulty in making a lexical choice. Also, at the beginning of the utterance there is a restart with 「でもよく . . . でも」. In (25), M is having a problem getting out of a correct term as shown in the second turn. There is a restart: 「今 <u>なんか すな？ レフォールマスとか</u> <u>いう</u>」 and an explicit question directed at the interlocutor for confirmation: 「<u>なんか 民主運動って言うんですか</u>」. Even after producing a word 「民主運動」, M expresses his uncertainty about the use of the term with the phrase 「<u>ま</u> <u>民主運動って言わないかも知れないんですけど</u>」.

The cases of なんか from (26) to (29) below present the instances where the last syllable of the word directly preceding なんか is lengthened. These words are not interjections or backchannels and therefore exclude cases such as ああ or おお. The lengthening of the syllable indicates 'formulation problems' (Fox Tree and Clark 1997: 152). Therefore, although not as explicit as in those cases where the speaker had difficulty finding the right term, as shown from (23) to (25), these cases also show that the speaker had some difficulty. It is clear, at least, that these uses contribute to a delay in the

production of an utterance. In (30) and (31) なんか is preceded by a restart. (27) and (29) show that the word just preceding なんか was also lengthened, and in (29) it is also preceded by a filled pause and inhalation, marked with (H), which results in a substantial delay: (27)「なんか 農場みたいなところ で . . . その＝人の＝ なんか」; and (29)「あと あチーズは なんか あの＝ (H) 味の＝なんか」. In both cases other occurrences なんか preceded these delays.

(e)   Lengthening of the last syllable of a word/restart＋なんか

(26) E: でも 4 キロぐらいは増えてるんですよ，で日本にいた<u>ときも＝ なんか</u> (H) その前にちょっと . . . 食べ歩きをよくしてたもん で太ってたんですね？ 通常の体重にくらべて.

'but I've gained about 4 kilos, and when I was in Japan＝*nanka* before that . . . I often went to various restaurants to eat, and so I had gained weight, right? Compared to my usual weight'

(27) M: ((utterances omitted)) あの その＝友達のいえが なんか 農場み たいなところで . . . その＝<u>人の＝ なんか</u>〈@親戚に全員あっ て@〉. . . なんか そん＝なに たくさん親戚にあったことが［な かった〈ですから〉

'. . . uhm that friend's place was *nanka* like a farm . . . and that friend＝*nanka* I met all the relatives of that friend . . . *nanka* I have never met so many relatives and so . . . '

(28) M: や＝あんまり考えてないですね いま<u>仕事＝ なんか</u> 探してるん ですけど いろんなちょっと . . . やっぱりどこで働くかってい うのが ちょっと今大きい問題なんで

'No＝(we are) not thinking that. Right now jobs＝*nanka* (we are) looking for jobs, but various uhm . . . well, where we will be working is a bit of a problem at the moment'

(29) E:　あと あチーズは なんか あの＝(H) 味の＝なんか 相乗効果っていうか＝，あのきのう飲んでたワインは なんか . . . あか赤だったんですけど＝((utterances omitted))

'and oh, cheese *nanka* uhm＝ the taste＝*nanka* shall I call it a synergy effect, uhm, the wine I had yesterday was *nanka* . . . red, it was red but . . . '

(30) A:　でもでも なんか おなかすいて＝あまいものとか食べちゃうじゃないですか＝?

'but but *nanka* I would eat something sweet when I get hungry, right?'

(31) E:　((utterances omitted)) 基本的にぶどうって そんなに暑くない . . . ところで 乾燥してて . . . で1日の温度差が 激しいところがいい な なんか そんなのがあって ((utterances omitted))

'Basically the grapes are dried in some place that's not too hot . . . and if the place has an extreme difference in temperature within a day it is good na *nanka* they say this and . . . '

As shown from examples from (7) to (31) it was clear that なんか was used by the speaker with various delaying markers such as filled and/or unfilled pauses, including other (set of) fillers, and other pauses and/or markers which once again preceded them or followed them. These uses of なんか were in one

way or another directly preceding and/or directly following the pauses. In addition to this, a close examination of a longer stretch of the utterances showed that なんか was used in cases where the speaker was either stalling, repairing, restarting, or expressing difficulty in formulating a thought, or choosing the right term.

The remaining 38 cases of なんか were not immediately preceded or immediately followed by delays. These cases are deemed to be more contextually oriented for their interpretation. I have categorized them into three: (k) 'for example' use; (l) hedge to soften the exactness of a word/phrase; (m) dictionary meaning. As was the case with the function of *like* as argued by Schourup (1985), the 'for example' use of なんか is strongly reinforced by the context.

(k) 'For example' use

(32) (Extended version of (23) above)- (23) examined the first なんか of M's first turn.

  S: 環境法っていうのはこれは？

      'What is this environmental law?'

 M: やなんでしょうね あの＝なんか 法律＝環境問題の法律っていうの を やってんですけど，こないだ 最初にやったのが まあっていうか 国内でどんな土地<u>とか</u>空気<u>とか</u> そういうのをあの＝管理する法律が (H) あってあと なんていうんでしょうか なんとかアセスメント．

      'Uhm, what would it be . . . well＝ *nanka* law＝ what I am doing is law regarding environmental problems, the other (semester) the first subject was uhm, it's like what kind of land or air is available within a country, and there is this law which governs these and what is it called . . . something like assessment . . . '

M: う＝ん

'Right'

M: はこんなふうにして行われる<u>とか</u>そういう問題点をどう<u>とか</u>

'...should be implemented in such and such a way and what to do with those problems...'

S: は［＝

'Right＝'

M: ［あと所有権...と，あと＝その＝所有権を利用した 環境＝の... なんていうんですか保護<u>とか</u>ですね

'...and also the ownership and environmental what is it called... the protection of the environment using that ownership or something like that'

S: ふ＝ん

'Right＝'

M: 今は <u>なんか</u> 国際法のほう<u>とか</u>やってんですけど... や なんか いろ いろって 〈@感じですね@〉

'Now *nanka* what I am doing is international law and well *nanka* I suppose this and that'

In (32) from the first turn of M, he is trying to answer S's question asked in the first line; what environmental law is. As underlined in the transcript, とか, 'or something like that' was used 6 times all together in his utterance in three turns he had including the last one following なんか. The last turn of M begins with what he is doing now, after an extended explanation about what he has done previously. Although he finishes his explanation with what he is doing, contextually it may be possible to say that this なんか was used as a form of selective mentioning, as in 'for example what I am doing now is

international law among other things', with the 'for example' meaning reinforced by the use of とか, 'among other things'. If it were to be interpreted in such a way, just like the 'for example' reading of *like* suggested by Schourup, the なんか could be understood as an imprecise rendering of what he has in mind since his mentioning was selective.

Similarly in (35) and (36) presented below, とか is used. Although とか is not used in (33) and (34), the interpretation of 'for example' seems possible within the context. In (33), A is trying to clarify what she meant by giving selective examples of states where wineries are located. M in (34) is giving an example of an enjoyable experience he had prefaced by なんか. Again in (35) M is talking about the subjects he took in the past, and a history subject (or something like that) is given as an example. Here とか なんか in「なんか 歴史とか なんか」reinforces the 'for example' interpretation. A in (36) is giving an example of specific but selective names of cheeses such as Camembert or Brie or something like that:「なんか カマンベールとか ... ブレーとか」. The 'for example' reading is once again reinforced by the use of「～とか～とか」with なんか.

(33)　(Talking about wine)

A:　は＝州によってやっぱ味もちがいます？

　　　'Oh＝ depending on *shuu* (state), does the taste differ?'

E:　あ 種類によって？

　　　'Oh, (you mean) depending on *shurui* (what kind)?'

A:　種類じゃなくて ... しゅ 州で

　　　'It's not *shurui* ... *shu*, *shu*, a state'

E:　［あ＝

　　　'Oh＝'

A:　［なんか　アデレード . . .にもワイナリーがあって ［＝メルボルンの
　　近くにもあって＝

　　'*nanka* Adelaide . . .in Adelaide there are wineries＝ and there are
　　wineries near Melbourne and . . .'

E:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　［ええ ええ

　　'Yes, yes'

(34)　(After being asked about whether he had an enjoyable experience since
　　he came to Canberra)- the first part of (19) above. (19) examined な
　　んか occurring after the current turn of M which is omitted in this
　　example.

M:　なんですかね＝ . . .ま たまに＝あ こないだ なんか イースターブ
　　レークで あの 友達の家に行ってメルボルンに ［あメルボルンの近
　　くなんですけど,

　　'What would that be＝ . . . uhm sometimes＝ oh the other day *nanka*
　　during the Easter break, I went to a friend's place in Melbourne, it was
　　near Melbourne'

(35)　(Talking about how M has changed his major)

M:　((utterances omitted)) そしたら今度は ことばとかまあ イスラム教
　　のこともいろいろ勉強したんですけど

　　'. . . and then I studied things like language and Islam and . . .'

S:　は＝ ［＝

　　'Oh＝'

M:　　　　 ［そのへんの なんか 歴史とか なんか やってるうちに なんか
　　今度環境問題の先生に会って ((utterances omitted))

　　'While I was doing *nanka* history or something like that *nanka* and then

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I met this professor who specializes in environmental problems . . . '

(36) (Talking about wine)

A: い 一般的に 赤ワインと合うチーズっていうのはあるんですか？

'In . . . in general, is there a type of cheese that goes well with red wine?'

E: あるんですよ あたしよくそういうことは知らないんですけど＝, え
＝となんつったかな＝ . . . ちょっと思い出せ［ないですね

'Yes, there is. I am not really sure of these things but＝, uhm＝ what
was it＝ . . . I cannot think of it (right now)'

A: ［<u>なんか</u> カマンベー
ル<u>とか</u> . . .

ブレー<u>とか</u>いろいろ［あるじゃないですか

'*nanka* there are many different types such as Camembert or Brie or . . .'

E: ［うん うん うん

'Yes, yes, yes'

Below are examples of the use of なんか as a hedge in that an employment of
the marker contributes to a mitigation of the exactness of the word/phrase. As
in (37), なんか is added to「非常に硬かった」, 'was very astringent', and this
mitigates the exactness of the utterance to convey an added vagueness「非常に
なんか 硬かった」, 'it was very, sort of like, astringent'.

(l) Hedge to mitigate the exactness of a word/phrase

(37) (Talking about wine)-a later part of (30) above

E: ((utterances omitted)) あのきのう飲んでたワインは なんか . . . あか
赤だったんですけど＝非常に <u>なんか</u> 硬かったんですよ

' . . . uhm, the wine I had yesterday was *nanka* . . . red, it was red but it

was very *nanka* astringent'

(38)   (Interlocutor asked why M chose ANU to study)-an extended version of (11). (11) focused on なんか in the first line. Here the focus is the なんか in M's second turn.

M: ここ＝はですね＝その 環境法の なんか あの いん～ センターみたいのが シドニー大学と あと エーエヌユーにあっ［て,

'(the reason for me to choose to come) here＝is that＝that environmental law, *nanka ano* gradu～ there is a center (for environmental law) at Sydney University and ANU . . . '

S: ［へ＝

'Right＝'

M: で なんか けっこう . . . 有名ななんとかっていうそのマレーシアであった先生にすすめられて ((utterances omitted))

'and *nanka* quite . . . famous, this person . . . it was recommended by this professor who I met in Malaysia'

Equally in (38), the added なんか mitigates the exactness of the utterance. Without なんか here, the interlocutor could have interpreted the utterance as a form of boasting, since what M is talking about relates to this 'famous' professor he knows. The added なんか adds vagueness, and thus a degree of humility to the expression 「けっこう有名な」, 'quite famous', changing it to 「なんか けっこう有名な」, which roughly means 'something like quite famous'. With regard to (39) below, なんか at the end of the utterance after 「. . . 〈@あれじゃない@〉ですか」 was discussed in (24). Here in (39) as well, なんか makes the already non-specific utterance sound even softer, and in turn, this allows the speaker to avoid sounding like a know-it-all about living

in Japan. なんか in (43), once again, prevents the speaker sounding arrogant as a know-it-all. Even if the content of statement is true in real life, S is, after all, talking about someone else's speciality. Similarly, in (41), なんか mitigates 'I also heard that (the Japanese Linguistics here is superb)'. Without the use of なんか would have meant that the speaker is directly self-praising the Japanese linguistics department with which the speaker is associated. なんか in (39), (41), and (43) may be considered as contributing to a smooth interpersonal relationship by avoiding direct self-praise and arrogance, forms of behavior that are "strongly disapproved of by most Japanese" (Sugiyama Lebra 1976: 127–128) for the former, and "most detested by Japanese" (Sugiyama Lebra 1976: 128) for the latter. なんか in (40) contributes to mitigate 「1回もないんですよね」, 'not even once there are such classes'. Since the speaker would definitely know that there are no such classes, it is not adding vagueness to the content. Rather, it is more like that this mitigation attempts to avoid making 「1回もないんですよね」 sound as a complaint. なんか in (42) mitigates the exactness of the word 「不思議なタイプ」, 'unusual type', used by S to describe M's classes. By adding なんか, the exactness of the statement is mitigated and there is, therefore, more chance of minimizing a potential face-threatening act.

(39)　(After having found that S's wife who is Australian used to study in Japan)-same segment as (24) above which focused on the なんか at the end of the utterance. Here the focus is on the first instance of なんか.

M:　でもよく . . . でも奥さん日本にいたんだったら なんか 日本に住む ほうが . . . 〈@あれじゃない@〉ですか なんか.

'but quite well . . . but if your wife used to live in Japan, *nanka* isn't living in Japan sort of like that *nanka*'

(40)　(Talking about M's classes)

M:　((utterances omitted)) . . . で帰ってくるっていうのがあったんです
　　けどもふつう なんていうんですか毎週この時間にやるとか . . . そ
　　ういうのって 1 回もないんですよね なんか.

　　'. . . and came back from an intensive course. Usually, what should I
　　say, there are no classes that meet at the same time every week or
　　something . . . not even once there are such classes *nanka*'

(41)　(Talking about S's study)

M:　どう なんていうか . . . 何人か . . . なんか そ 日本語をこっちでやっ
　　てる人 いますよね なんか 日本語の言語 学 言語学は なんか すご
　　いっていう のは聞いたんです ［けど

　　'How . . . how should I put it . . . a few people . . . *nanka* th〜 there are
　　a few people who is doing linguistics here *nanka*. Japanese Linguistics,
　　I hear that Japanese Linguistics here is *nanka* superb'

S:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　［ああ

　　'Right'

M:　う＝ん

　　'Yes'

S:　［なんか そうみたいですね＝

　　'*nanka* I also heard that＝'

(42)　(Talking about M's classes)-an extended version of (20)

M:　［もう 1 週間ぱ＝っと朝から晩までやるのが 2 回ぐらいあって . . .
　　で今回 も なんか シドニーのやつも 2 週間わーっと週末ずっとやっ
　　てっていう のがあって . . . なんか . . . あんまり〈XXX〉学生生活っ
　　て感じしないですね.

'There were classes for a week which go from morning to evening, there were two of them . . .and this time also *nanka* the one in Sydney, it was also for two weekends. (there are such classes) and . . . *nanka* . . . it doesn't really feel like (I am leading) a student's lifestyle'

S: [ほ＝ なんか 不思議なタイプですよね

'Oh＝*nanka* it is an unusual type'

(43) (Talking about the specialization of M's girlfriend)-the first part of example (25)

S: インドネシアの政治大変ですよね,

'Indonesian Politics is tough, isn't it?'

M: ええ

'Yes'

S: 〈@か書けない状況じゃないですか 何も なんか もう日々変わっちゃ [って

'Isn't it impossible to write anything, *nanka* it changes all the time'

As indicated in the dictionary, なんか can be used as an informal form of など, 'such as (with a belittling or humbling meaning)', and なにか, 'something/anything'. The occurrences of なんか that are clearly exchangeable with those two are identified below.

(h)-1　など

(44) E: ポーションがすごくおっきいから＝ . . . 無理して食べちゃう . . .んで すよ あたし なんか 貧乏性なので＝

'I would overeat because the serving portion (of dishes) is quite large and because *someone like me* is a Scrooge-like . . . '

(45) E: でもまだ オーストラリアのほうが ましじゃないですかね＝？その...その環境的には？そのスペイン とかブラジルとか ちょっとおいしいとこに行った 人 なんか はもう...ぶくぶくに

'...but don't you think that Australia is still not too bad as an environment? *Such people* who went to places which have delicious food like Spain or Brazil soon became plumpy...'

In (44), なんか is used with あたし, 'I', the speaker herself. Although it is not clear whether なんか has a belittling meaning or not, this なんか is undoubtedly located in the position where it can be replaced with など, or as a topic maker used according to the rules given in dictionaries and grammar books. If it is to be interpreted as containing a 'belittling' meaning, it could be because なんか is used with 貧乏性, 'Scrooge-like' which indicates a negative side of a personal characteristic. なんか in (45), where it is also exchangeable with など, shows なんか being used for a third-person, people who went to Spain or Brazil.

(h)-2　なにか

(46) S: こっち来て なんか 楽しいこととかってありました？

'Did you have **any** enjoyable experience since you came here?'

(47) E: ん＝でもあの りゅ 留学生活で なんか 楽しいなと思ってらっしゃることありますか？

'Did you have **anything** that you thought as enjoyable while studying overseas?'

(48) E: ...あの＝あたし なんか 書かなくちゃいけないっていうスト

レスが いっつもあるけど＝,

'I am always under stress of having to write <u>something</u> . . . '

(49) E: (0) うん そういう なんか . . . そういうエクストラのストレスが あ まりないから＝, やっぱり勉強するときはして＝, そうじゃ ないときは <u>なんか</u> しゃべったりとか そういうふうに時間過ご してもいいかもしれないけど, ((utterances omitted))

'Um, such *nanka* . . . (undergraduates) do not have such extra stress＝, so they may study when they have to＝, and when they are not studying they can chat (talk about <u>something</u>). It may be the case that it is okay for them to spend time doing that . . . '

> **(h)-3 （と）か なんか**

(50) M: そのへんの なんか <u>歴史とか なんか</u> やってるうちに

' . . . while I was doing the <u>history or something</u> around there'

(51) S: あ＝<u>バーベキューパーティーか なんか</u> やりながら

'Oh＝ while having a <u>barbecue party or something</u>'

M: ん？

'Uh?'

S: ん <u>パーティーか なんか</u> で

'Um, at a <u>party or something</u>'

(52) A: はあ＝ あたし <u>先々週か なんか</u> に

'Oh＝ <u>two weeks ago or something</u>, I . . . '

As insightfully pointed out by 村田 (1990: 41) noun＋か なんか , and noun

＋や/とか なんか cannot be used as a substitute of など. Instead, those cases are considered as なに＋か. This is clearly shown in the cases of なんか from (46) to (49), where なんか is used as a required object of the sentences, in terms of the Valency of co-occurring verbs（i.e. なにか＋ある/書く/しゃべる in (46)−(49)）. Although the なんか in (48) could in written form be interpreted as など, taking on the function of topic marker, the recording clearly indicated that it was an object rather than a topic marker. なんか from (50) to (52), including the two cases of なんか in (51), are either used as とか なんか, or か なんか.

4.   Concluding remarks

Thus far, the current paper has examined なんか in casual conversation. Interestingly, the uses of なんか described in dictionaries were in fact found to be occupying only 12 per cent of the 30 minutes of data. The current paper discussed なんか as a pausal interjection, as having a 'for example' use, and as a hedge. It was shown that なんか as a pausal interjection was used to indicate a delay in the production of an utterance due to a problem on the speaker's part in formulating the appropriate utterance, and thus closely associated with a filled pause (which includes fillers) and/or unfilled pause. These pauses either preceded なんか or followed it. Lengthened syllables or restarts were also found with なんか of pausal interjection. Sometimes these delay were prolonged by fillers that are combined words, or explicit expressions which clearly indicated that the speaker was having problems formulating an utterance whether it be a word or a phrase. As for the use of なんか to say 'for example', it was noted that this was reinforced strongly by the context. Also なんか as a hedge was used to soften the exactness of a word or phrase. Because of these uses, the use of なんか in conversation is likely to be a speaker's attempt at

ensuring smooth verbal interaction, either by avoiding an uncomfortable silence, or by modifying a bold or harsh statement.

There are a few points I would like to examine in consecutive studies. With the aforementioned uses of なんか, and based on Schourup's (1985) analysis of *like*, I would like to suggest that なんか may be implying an 'impreciseness' in three different yet closely related ways. First, with the pausal interjection, 'impreciseness' could mean impreciseness in formulating an utterance, implying that what the speaker is trying to say may not be what is actually produced. The difficulty in formulating an utterance is shown by the use of many pauses and fillers. With the 'for example' use, it is imprecise in terms of information content. This implies that although what has been said may be exact, it may be imprecise because what has been mentioned is selective. Lastly, as for the hedging use, it is imprecise in delivery, in the sense that it adds vagueness and thereby mitigates the directness. If 'impreciseness' were a keyword to describe the function of なんか, it should be able to include the dictionary meanings of the marker. など, is quite self-explanatorily so, since it refers to selective mentioning and impreciseness. By the same token, なにか is unspecific. If the implied meaning of なんか is 'impreciseness', it should also include other suggested meanings such as「なぜかわからないが」, 'without knowing why', or「なんとなく」, 'somehow'. Both of these meanings suggest a degree of impreciseness. Other functions and meanings such as 'softening' and 'indirectness' could also be considered owing to the implication of 'impreciseness'. The other point is the use of なんか in relation to the notion of politeness. The speaker's use of なんか as a pausal interjection indicating word/phrase searching, conveys the speaker's consideration toward the interlocutor. With the 'for example' use as well, some of the examples had なんか used in contexts where the speaker could be considered

as leading the interlocutor to the correct understanding of what the speaker meant.[3] An immediate connection can be drawn between the use of なんか as a hedge with the notion of politeness since softening an exactness of utterance is closely related to minimizing a potential face-threatening act. In order to verify these tentative claims above, and to make necessary modifications, it would be worthwhile to further examine an extended data set.

Transcription symbols

. . . unmeasured pause; (0) latching;, continuing (slight rise); ? appeal;. final; [ ] speech overlap; ⟨@ @⟩ laugh quality over a stretch; ⟨X X⟩ uncertain hearing;: speaker identity/turn start; (H) inhalation; ＝lengthening; (( )) researcher's comment; ～ abrupt cut-off

Notes

1. The data I plan to examine eventually constitutes 150 minutes of conversation. In the current study, due to the limitation of space, I have limited myself to 30 minutes of conversation. The number of なんか occurrences found in the 150-minute segments was 346, which indicates a high frequency of なんか in casual conversation. See Table (a) for details of the total data.

Table a   Details of the 150 minutes of data

Data	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4	Data 5
Length	30 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes
Sex of the speakers	M/M	F/F	M/M	M/M	F/F
Number of なんか per 30 minutes	36	89	22	118	81

Among the 150 minutes of data, I have chosen 15 minutes from Data 2 and another 15 minutes from Data 4. The two sets were chosen not only because they showed the highest number of なんか within the 30 minutes of the data, but also because mixing the two sets of the data includes the same number of male and female speakers. The total number of なんか within the 30 minutes was 93, the target for

   analysis in the current study. The remaining data will be analyzed in consecutive studies.
2. The data was collected and originally transcribed by Akiko Yoshida in 1998 and 1999. I have re-transcribed the data according to discourse analysis transcription, and added translations. I would like to thank my former colleague at the Australian National University, Akiko Yoshida, for sharing her data.
3. I would like to thank Professor Minori Murata for her insightful comment.

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