

awa life

Connecting With
Students Through
Sports

September 2026

428

2026 Tokushima Prefecture
Japanese Speech Contest



Yokai of Japan:
Karakasa-kozō

Nihongo Know-It-All:
Yojijukugo

Photo: Hiwasa Hachiman Shrine Autumn Festival

Awa Life is a Bi-monthly Publication of the Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association

Welcome to September! Did you enjoy Tokushima's Awa Odori last month? I hope everyone got all their dancing in! I always enjoy this time of year, as it feels like everything starts to wind down for the fall and winter months. That being said, in Shikoku the weather tends to stay fairly summer-like until the end of September. In addition, September is also one of the rainiest months in Japan, so make sure to gear up! Of course, as with any change in the weather/seasons, you may find yourself more vulnerable to illnesses these next few weeks, so please be sure to take good care of yourselves.

This year, September has also gifted us with three(!) national holidays in a row on the 21, 22, and 23rd. Not only that, but those dates fall on a Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, so many people will have five days off work or school in a row, including the weekend before. Thank you September 2026!

For all of those who like writing, please feel free to submit an article to us at any point in time about basically anything. There are a few limitations though, such as you can't write about religion, politics, commercial activities or businesses, or anything that we deem inappropriate. But, other than that, we would be more than happy to receive articles about anything and everything including but not limited to concerts, lectures, other events, culture, sports, community group information or anything cool that's happening in your local community. Additionally, please keep articles around ~400-700 words (if writing in English), or ~1000 characters (if writing in Japanese). If you have any questions or want to check if your topic will work, feel free to reach out to us before you start writing.

We highly appreciate all of your articles and we love reading them. So if that writing bug of yours is buzzing about, grab a pen or a computer and write and send away! Please send all submissions to our email:

awalife@gmail.com

Your editors,
Riley and Lisa

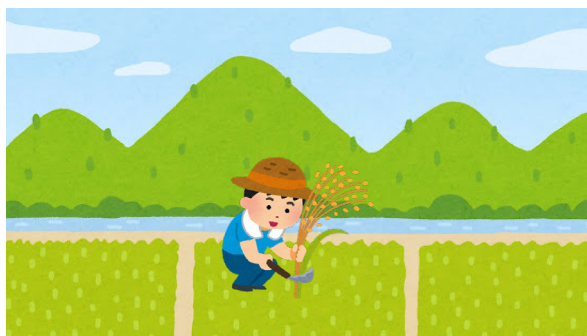
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Download a PDF file of Awa Life or view the online version by going to TOPIA's website!



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なるとしかがわとよひこきねんかん



2026 Tokushima Prefecture Japanese Speech Contest

On July 18, 2026, the Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association, in collaboration with the Tokushima Prefecture, held the Prefecture's 37th annual Japanese Speech Contest for Foreign Residents at Awa Gin Hall. 14 participants from 10 countries presented, many adorned in the traditional garb of their cultures as they spoke in fluent Japanese. The speeches addressed a number of topics such as the contestants' experiences with success and failure living in a foreign country, Japanese society and manners, and the various lessons they've learned during their time in Japan.



In addition to the general division, this year's competition featured a new Junior/High School division in which two junior high school students took the stage to share their thoughts and dreams for the future.

Amidst the steep competition, the judges ultimately crowned Michael (Miki) Gabriel Morales Balmeo, Coordinator for International Relations, as winner of the general division. Miki's speech,

which you can read an English translation of below, spoke to the crowd by tying in beloved aspects of Tokushima's culture. The presentation was engaging and full of energy, and the audience found themselves drawn in to the world of Awa Ai.

My Awa Indigo-dyed Self

By: Michael Gabriel Morales Balmeo (Grand Prize Winner)

Slowly dip the cloth into the dye, lift it and gently squeeze, then expose it to the air. Its defining characteristic is that with each dip, the color becomes deeper and darker. This is called Aizome, or indigo dyeing. To tell you the truth, when I arrived in Tokushima last year, I

was like a plain white cloth. I knew nothing about Tokushima, had no friends nor connections; even my apartment was empty. All of this, however, was necessary for me to be fully immersed in the world of Awa and to be dyed with indigo.

2026 Tokushima Prefecture Japanese Speech Contest

I first came to Tokushima in July 2025 as a Coordinator for International Relations under the JET Program. At the time, while I felt the joy and excitement of embarking on a new journey, I also had my fair share of worries and loneliness. It was the first time I had been separated from my family, and I often found myself thinking, “Can I really survive on my own?” and “Man, I miss my cats.” Communication at work proved difficult as well—as much as I wanted things to go smoothly I had trouble understanding some of the Japanese flying around the office. That’s the Awa-ben dialect for you. Instead of “the computer ‘broke’,” (*kowareta*) I learned that it’s “busted” (*megetotta*). Needless to say, it was a steep learning curve.

As I spend my days living in Tokushima, I have gradually come to learn more not only about Awa-ben, but also about Tokushima and its traditional “Awa” culture. For example, as I walked through the streets of the once-bustling indigo trading hub of known as the Udatsu Townscape, I felt like I had slipped back in time during to the Edo-period and learned the history of the Japanese idiom “*udatsu ga agaranai*.” Also, I participated in the world-famous Awa Odori dance festival that takes place in Tokushima City every year during the Obon period in August. As I danced along to this 400-year-old traditional performing art, I felt that I truly shared the spirit of the festival with the other participants.

Furthermore, through my activities in Tokushima, my circle of global connections has expanded. I’ve been blessed with many amazing encounters by participating in volunteer initiatives, as well as attending Japanese classes and exchange sessions within the prefecture. I’ve interacted with both the warm-hearted locals and people from foreign countries alike. I’ve come to feel that, indeed, as the saying goes, “Encounters are the treasure hunt of life.” Thanks to everyone, not only have I learned more about Tokushima and Japan, but a whole new world has opened

up, leading me to a new discovery—that just like Aizome, through repeated interactions we deepen our understanding of one another, and in the process, we are imbued with the beautiful colors of friendship.

Currently, over 9,000 people of foreign origin live in Tokushima. They are individuals with diverse



Grand Prize Winner Miki

ways of thinking and varied life experiences. The environment and culture in which they were raised, their nationalities, and the languages they speak are all different. However, I believe that this diversity provides a precious opportunity for us to share with and learn from one another. It is precisely through being exposed to new ideas and different perspectives that we gain the chance to develop a global mindset and cultivate our humanity. Tokushima’s vision of “Diversity Tokushima” and its aim to realize an inclusive society

and build a future where everyone can shine all connect to that single idea. To achieve these goals, we need initiatives that resonate deep within our consciousness, and the key to this lies in exchange with others. Exchange has the power to open up new worlds.

Everyone, among those 9,000 people, there might be someone like the “blank canvas” I once was. There might be someone who hasn’t yet found the courage, confidence, or resolve to take that first step into a new world. If such a person ever appears before you, please do not leave them behind—reach your hand out to them. Gently give them the push they need to take that first step, and make them feel that they have a place to belong here in Tokushima—not as a minority or a guest from overseas, but as a full-fledged member of society. Like the whirlpools of Naruto, let’s involve those around us and expand the circle of exchange and **Ai* here in Tokushima!

“Ai” can mean both “love” and “indigo” in Japanese.

Connecting With Students Through Sports

By: Jaden Kozelj, ALT

On an impossibly hot summer afternoon, I find myself in the stands of a high school baseball game. It's the bottom of the 8th inning, we're up by a single run, the bases are loaded and the other team's last batter has just stepped up to the plate. Our pitcher, a third year student who throws with a nasty left hand, adjusts his hat to shade his face from the blistering sun. He's pitched every inning so far, all he has to do is get one more out to secure the victory. Silence swallows the field as he throws his final pitch, a loud ding! rings out as it makes contact with the bat, the ball flies towards third base. In a matter of seconds, the third baseman has snagged the ball out of the air, tagged the player on his base and launched the ball to first, where the captain is waiting with an open glove. The throw connects, all 3 opposing players are ruled out, the game is over. The players on the bench rush the field, celebrating their victory. In the grand scheme of things, it's a single step in a long and difficult journey to Koshien, but it is a step nonetheless, one that keeps the dream alive.



On a different day, a month earlier, I sat in another set of stands to watch the soccer team battle it out in a grueling overtime match that ultimately ended in defeat. Despite the outcome, the emotion from that day sticks with me.

Cheering on the players with my co-workers and other students who traveled 45 minutes into the mountains to support the boys. Watching the time tick down, hoping for a last second miracle that will keep the game going a little longer. Fighting back my own tears at the sight of my students crying, wholeheartedly understanding

the bitter feeling of disappointment that causes them to shield their eyes from the spectators. For some of the third years, this will be their last game, their high school club days coming to a close. For the others, they will wipe their faces and lace up their cleats again in a few months, trying for a second chance to reach new heights.



As someone who has played competitive sports her entire life, I genuinely love these moments. I love the thrill that attending a live sports game gives because the atmosphere brings back all kinds of nostalgic memories from my own school days. But to be truthful, there are other moments that bring me just as much joy, other reasons why I go out of my way to support the various clubs at my school. It's the happiness on their faces when I tell them I'm attending, the pleasant surprise when I wave to them from the crowd. Seeing them in the hallways and telling them "congratulations" or "you fought hard." It's them seeking me out to ask if I'm going to be at their next match or saying "I'm rooting for you!" if I'm unable to make it. This has become my way of connecting with my students, of showing support and engaging with them outside of the classroom.

Being involved in my student's lives has amplified my experience as an ALT in ways I never imagined. There are the boys who are seen as troublemakers that I've now become familiar with, who always stop to talk to me or seek me out to chat about their lives. Girls who are quiet in class get excited to see me cheering as hard as them at their club's games, who then wave to me in the hallways and call out to me if I'm walking around the school. It's also these same students who usually have minimal interest in English that will

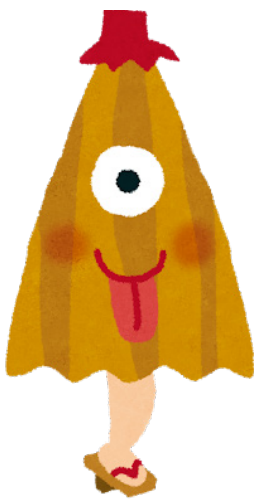
Connecting With Students Through Sports

make an effort to converse with me in English outside of class, genuinely trying their hardest to ask questions and get to know me. While they've told me how happy it makes them to see me at their games or even just to talk casually, I don't think they realize how happy it's made me as well. Not only has it helped me feel incredibly fulfilled in my role as an ALT, but it also brings me

so much joy to know that I've become someone that my students look forward to seeing. In the end, our time in Japan is short, so fostering those connections is what's most important. Showing up and showing out, going outside your comfort zone, making an effort to engage with the people around you, all of these gestures will, I believe, take you much farther than you think.

Yokai of Japan: Karakasa-kozō

By: Riley Henke



tongue; and one leg where the handle would be on a normal, non-demonic umbrella. Occasionally they are pictured to have arms, but the default is just the one appendage, upon which they hop around menacingly (or cutely, depending on who you ask).

Now, I know what you're thinking. "An umbrella hopping around? How scary could it be?" Well, to be honest with you, not very. In the karakasa-kozō legends, about the most trouble they cause is spooking people with their appearance, although some stories say that they have been known to play pranks by licking unsuspecting people with their oily tongues. Not particularly dangerous, but still, it's a big 'no thanks' from me. Overall, these yōkai are thought to have playful spirits, and are well-beloved in Japan by people of all ages.

Speaking of karakasa-kozō legends, where did this critter originate? It's actually not so clear-cut. Most sources indicate that the kasa-obake we are familiar with today came about during the Edo

period (1603-1869). However, the concept of an 'umbrella yokai' has been around much longer. In the *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* (Night Parade of One Hundred Demons Scroll) believed to be painted in the Muromachi period (1338–1573), a similar umbrella demon can be seen. However, this parading fiend is pictured as a humanoid figure wearing a closed umbrella on their head, notably lacking the characteristic one-eyed and one-leggedness of the karakasa-kozō we know today.

The karakasa-kozō is also one of the most famous *tsukumogami*. In Japanese folklore, household items and tools that have existed for over 100 years gain souls and become *tsukumogami*. In the original legend pictured on the *Tsukumogami Emaki* scroll, these tools gained souls after being discarded in the traditional year-end house cleaning. They were resentful about being thrown away carelessly despite their long years of service, so they decided to get revenge on their owners. The story is truly fascinating, and while I don't have the character count to tell it all, I hope you will look it up if you're interested. The [Kyoto University Rare Materials Digital Archive](#) has an English summary of the story available to read online. Spoiler alert: some of the tools find Buddha and become saints.

Despite its affiliation with the *tsukumogami* family, the karakasa-kozō is not generally considered to be a particularly vengeful yokai. Perhaps this is what makes it feel easier to approach; its harmless (albeit invasive of personal space) pranks, unique appearance, and amusing way of moving around have cemented the karakasa-kozō as one of Japan's most beloved yokai.

Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: 鳴門市賀川豊彦記念館

By: Yukari Nagata

徳島で 幼少期を 過ごした 賀川豊彦 (1888-1960)。

ガンジー、シュバイツァーと世界三大偉人の一人と言われ、友愛・互助・平和を掲げて 様々な 社会活動をしてきました。

賀川らの 活動により、貧しい人々や 労働者・農民・女性・子ども等の 権利を 提唱し、戦後に 世界平和運動を おこなってきました。

彼の 様々な 活動を知る 記念館が、鳴門市大麻町に あります。

この施設は、2025 年「世界協同組合文化遺産」に選ばれ、彼の 協力の精神を 伝える たくさんの資料と、周辺の自然と 調和した 施設の外観が 評価されました。

記念館では、平和祈念朗読会や 絵本の 読み聞かせ会などの 活動も おこなわれています。

世界平和を 祈念し、賀川の活動に 触れてみてはどうでしょうか。



Vocabulary List

幼少期 early childhood	掲げる to tout; to uphold	調和 harmony	朗読会 book reading
偉人 great person	権利 rights	外観 appearance	
友愛 fraternity	提唱 (する) to advocate	記念 commemorative	
互助 mutual aid	文化遺産 cultural heritage	祈念 prayer; wish	

Yojijukugo

By: Riley Henke

Nihongo Know-it-all

Have you ever heard of *yojijukugo*? Or perhaps you've seen a string of four kanji with a practically indecipherable meaning and wondered what they were? *Yojijukugo* are four-kanji idiomatic compounds in Japanese. Often, this means that their meanings can not be deduced from the literal meanings of their parts. There is said to be tens of thousands of *yojijukugo* in the Japanese language, some borrowed directly from Chinese, and some being of original Japanese creation. Today, we'll cover some of the most common *yojijukugo*, as well as some of my personal favorites.

一期一会: "one time, one meeting"; Usually translated as "once in a lifetime," this means that each moment and each interaction is a unique, irreplaceable experience and should be treasured as such.

喜怒哀楽: "joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure"; This represents the full spectrum of human emotions.

以心伝心: "communicated via heart"; When something is understood without the need for words.

七転八起: "fall down seven times, stand up eight"; Persevere & never give up!

十人十色: "ten people, ten colors"; To each his own. Everyone is different.

已己巳己: The meaning of this *yojijukugo* comes not from the character meanings, but from their looks. At first all four kanji may appear to be the same, but if you look closely, the first and third are different. Fittingly, this compound means "to look the exact same" or "to be nearly identical."



「を」と「に」

Even for those who have been studying Japanese for a long time, particles can be difficult. Since each particle has a specific connotation, let's think about what those connotations are. Today, let's take a look at “を” and “に,” which both indicate location.

田中：「もうすぐ徳島駅ですね」

ワン：「田中さんの家は、徳島駅の近くですか。」

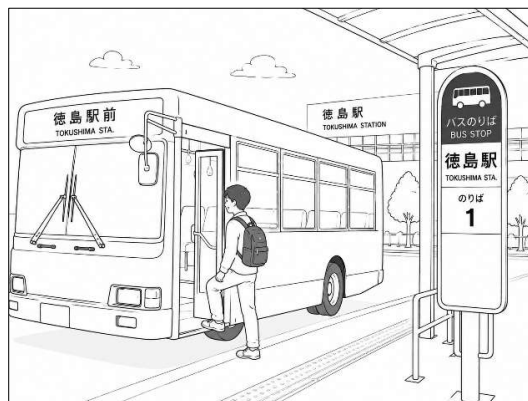
田中：「いいえ。徳島駅で汽車（ ）降りて、
駅からバス（ ）乗るんです。」

ワン：「そうなんですか。」



「を」は、^{いま}今いるところから^{はな}離れるとき→^{きしや}汽車をおりる

「に」は、^{うご}動いて、^い行くところ → ^のバスに乗る



Let's Practice! Fill in the () in the sentences below with を or に.

- ① 今朝、9時ごろ家（ ）でました。
- ② マリアさんは11時に大阪（ ）出発したので、もうすぐ東京（ ）着くでしょう。
- ③ このロッカー（ ）カバンを置いてから、プール（ ）入ってください。
- ④ 4月に大学（ ）卒業して、徳島の会社（ ）入りました。
- ⑤ 父は私の部屋（ ）入ってきて、黙って椅子（ ）座りました。
- ⑥ 来週の日曜日、馬（ ）乗れる牧場（ ）行こうと思っています。
- ⑦ 席（ ）立つときは、荷物を持って行ってください。

Events & Memoranda

Hokusai x Hiroshige: The Yasusaburo Hara Collection 特別展「原安三郎コレクション 北斎×広重」

An extraordinary collection of ukiyo-e woodblock prints arrives in Tokushima! This exhibition brings together nearly 220 masterpieces by legendary artists—including Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige—originally amassed by the Tokushima-born industrialist Hara Yasusaburo. Immerse yourself in the breathtaking "Japan Blue"—the vivid hues that captivated the world and influenced artists like Monet and Van Gogh.

Exhibit period: Through Wed. Sept. 23
Inquiries: Tokushima Modern Art Museum
TEL: 088-668-1088

徳島出身の実業家・原 安三郎氏（1884～1982）が蒐集した浮世絵コレクションから、葛飾北斎や歌川広重など名だたる作品約 220 点がここ徳島に大集結！モネやゴッホら、海外の画家たちにも影響を与えた“ジャパングルーン”をぜひ会場でご堪能ください。

展示期間：9 月 23 日（水・祝）まで



お問合せ：徳島県立近代美術館
TEL：088-668-1088

Hiwasa Hachiman Shrine Autumn Festival 日和佐八幡神社秋まつり

The Autumn Festival held at Hiwasa's Hachiman Shrine, which boasts over 700 years of history, is one of the prefecture's premier autumn festivals. As part of the festivities, eight "chōsa" (drum floats) are marched majestically to Ōhama Beach, the famous sea turtle nesting site. This is done to pray for a bountiful catch, safety on the seas, and a plentiful harvest for the year.

Date: Sat. October 10 - Sun. October 11*
*The march to the beach will take place Sunday.

Location: Hiwasa Hachiman Jinja, Minami Town

Inquiries: Hiwasa Hachiman Jinja 0884-77-2474,
hiwasahachimanjinja@gmail.com

日和佐八幡神社は 1300 年頃に現在の地へ遷座したと伝えられ、平成 30 年には創祀七百年祭を斎行しました。例大祭は、8 台の「ちょうさ（太鼓屋台）」がウミガメの産卵地として知られる大浜海岸へ勇壮に練り出す、約 230 年の歴史を誇る県内屈指の秋祭り、大漁祈願・海上安全・五穀豊穡を祈願する伝統行事です。

開催期間：10 月 10 日（土）～ 10 月 11 日（日）
（土曜日が宵宮、日曜日が本祭りです）

開催場所：美波町 日和佐八幡神社

お問い合わせ：日和佐八幡神社 0884-77-2474
hiwasahachimanjinja@gmail.com

Bus Tour: Enjoy Tokushima & Japanese Culture 日本語や徳島の文化にふれるバスの旅

The Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association will be hosting a bus tour in which participants can enjoy Tokushima culture such as Indigo Dyeing and Ningyo Joruri Puppet Theater. We hope you will join us! For more information or to apply, please see TOPIA's website.

Date & Time: Sat. Sept. 26, 9:15-16:00

徳島県国際交流協会は、日本語や徳島の文化にふれるバスツアーを開催します。

藍染め体験と人形浄瑠璃と一緒に楽しみましょう！詳細及び申込は、TOPIA のホームページで確認してください。



日時：9 月 26 日（土） 9:15～16:00

Events & Memoranda

2026 Term 2 (Sept. to March) TOPIA Japanese Classes Schedule



Time: 10:30-12:00 Location: Meeting rooms at TOPIA Cost: Free

Textbook: We will be using the "Minna no Nihongo I" or the "Minna no Nihongo II" (2nd edition) textbooks (2,750 yen for the book and audio CD). Please prepare the textbooks on your own. Additionally, there will be themed lessons on various topics such as seasons and life in Tokushima.

DAY	TEACHER	LEVEL	CLASS DESCRIPTION	START DATE
TUE	Ms. Tamaki	Elementary 2・3	We will study various forms and expressions such as potential, volitional, imperative, prohibitive, conditional, reasoning, passive, causative, and honorific expressions. Text: Minna no Nihongo II from Chapter 26~50	Sept. 15th (24 times)
WED	Volunteers	Group Lesson	This is a flexible group study class split up into 4 different groups. *For parents of young children, a childcare worker will be on hand to look after your child during the lesson. (Please make a reservation in advance. Childcare will be offered at TOPIA's meeting rooms or at the child-care facility in the Amico Building (5 min. walk from TOPIA).)	Sept. 30th (20 times)
THU	Ms. Yamada	Beginners	We will take the first step towards learning basic expressions. Text: Minna no Nihongo I from Chapter 1~13	Oct. 1st (20 times)
FRI	Ms. Aoki	Elementary 1	We will study a variety of verb conjugations such as te form, nai form, and dictionary form. Text: Minna no Nihongo I from Chapter 14~25	Oct. 2nd (20 times)
SUN	JTM Teachers	Grammar Review	We will review grammar points from Minna no Nihongo I and II. This class is for people who have studied through Minna no Nihongo II. Text: Minna no Nihongo I and II from Chapter 8~50	Sept. 27th (20 times)
	Volunteers	Group Lesson	This is a flexible group study class split up into 4 different groups.	

* Please register for Group Lessons at least a day before the class. (If you do not sign up in advance and show up on the day of the class, we may not be able to find a group for you to study with.) Additionally, as the number of groups are limited, we may not be able to find a group that suits your level.

* If you are unable to attend class, please call and let us know.

* The Volunteer Classes on Wednesday and Sunday will be cancelled if no students show up within the first 30 minutes.

TUE	Ms. Kimura, Others	Special Beginners Class	A class for those who cannot read or write hiragana or katakana. We will study the basics, such as the Japanese alphabet, greetings, numbers, and items. We will also be learning about Tokushima.	You may join at any time.
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*Classes may be cancelled if there is a typhoon, heavy rain, heavy snow, etc.

TOPIA will post on our Facebook page by 9:00 AM if classes that day are cancelled, so please be sure to check. →



TOPIA TEL: 088-656-3303 Email: topia@topia.ne.jp

Japanese classes are also available at the Anan International Association, Aizumi Town International Exchange Association, Yoshinogawa International Exchange Association, Mima no Sato, Minami Multicultural Coexistence Network "Harmony", the Club for Thinking about Multicultural Coexistence "Tomoni" in Tsurugi Town, Awa International Exchange Association, the NPO "Attakaiyou" in Kaiyo Town, Naruto City International Exchange Association, the Minna Friend Kamiyama Network, and more.

For more information on Japanese classes in Tokushima, scan here →



Consultation Service at TOPIA ・ トピアの相談窓口

TOPIA provides consultation on everyday life, education, labor, medical institutions, and disaster prevention as well as tourist information to overseas residents and visitors. When necessary, we will refer you to the appropriate organization that can assist with your needs. Consultation in English, Chinese, and Japanese is available in person, and in other languages via interpretation service and/or phone. Please note that although every effort will be made, we may not be able to deal with all cases.

Japanese, English, Chinese: Everyday, 10:00 - 18:00 (closed during the New Year's holidays)

Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, 10:00 - 18:00 (closed during the New Year's holidays)

Tel: 088-656-3312 or 088-656-3313 (allows for three-way conversations with an interpreter)