報告

Error Analysis of Speaking Skills of Second-Language Learners: A Case Study of Two Japanese Learners

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1. Introduction

Students tend to struggle to learn a second language such as English in Japan from a language teacher almost on a daily basis at school. Some seem to succeed while others do not, though they are learning under similar conditions, at least similar external conditions. How about internal ones that lie beneath the surface?

In cognitive linguistics, it is thought that "vocabulary" and "grammar" go hand in hand. Without the connection of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary knowledge, and vice versa, communicating and composing sentences in English is meaningless. Conversely, even a native Japanese speaker makes grammatical errors in everyday life.

As is often discussed, interlanguage is one of the keys to exploring the mind of those who use a language. Selinker (1972) points out that native speakers of a language have a different linguistic system from learners of that language. Innumerable attempts have been made so far to clarify the differences between a native speaker and a learner.

In light of the previous findings, this study poses one other question: Is it possible to reveal the similarities and differences between two learners of the same nationality who have been learning in different environments? There have been few studies on this question.

Corder (1967) says that one of the reasons for errors is that language learners are in the developmental stage of the language acquisition and that those errors occur because they do not have enough knowledge about the rules of the target language.

In his term, an error in the stages of development is an error due to the verbal characteristic of the target language. In addition, an error by the interference of the native language is an error as a result of the strong influence of the native language when a language learner speaks the target language.

The objective of the present study is to shed light on the characteristics of speeches of two learners through Error Analysis proposed by Corder (1967) and seek the effective ways to improve their linguistic skills.

2. Methods of Analysis

This section presents the approaches to the analyses of the utterances by two second language learners engaged in the same communicative task. The two students

are asked the same question: What do you think about the Japanese educational system. The interviews with the learners start with some questions about their own linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds, specifically which part of Japan they are from or how they were exposed to the target language.

The details of the learners' linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds are as follows:

The nationality of Learner 1 is Japanese. She was born in Japan, but a few months after her birth her family moved to California in the United States and lived there until she was four years old. After coming back to Japan, she attended ordinary kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school in Japan and gained sufficient exposure to Japanese. Afterwards she went to an American high school in Tokyo. That was the beginning of her official bilingual education. She spent four years at the high school and then went to the University of Melbourne. She has no trouble using Japanese as a twenty-two-year-old Japanese woman.

Learner 2 is also Japanese. She was born and raised in Japan and went through a traditional Japanese educational system from nursery school to high school. After graduating from high school, she went to a nursing school to become a nurse. While studying nursing in Japan, she had a strong desire to help those in need overseas, so she decided to study abroad for the purpose of learning English and nursing skills. She is twenty-three years old and has been studying nursing at a TAFE (Technical And Further Education) institution in Melbourne for approximately one year. She does not like grammar but enjoys speaking English.

All the data for this case study were collected in Melbourne, Australia in 2011. A digital voice recorder was used to record the subjects' speech. The interviews were conducted in a very relaxing setting over soft drinks and snacks.

First, part of the transcripts of both questions are examined for each individual and then the critical comparison is made to find out the similarities and differences between the two learners from the phonological, lexical/syntactic, and discourse viewpoints.

3. Analysis of Learners 1 and 2 from Different Aspects

The following transcripts are of a twenty-two-year-old fourth-year undergraduate student at a university in Australia (Learner 1: L1) and a twenty-three-year-old TAFE student (Learner 2: L2). The first question is "How did you learn English in your childhood?" as an ice breaker, followed by the question "What do you think about the Japanese educational system?" Each utterance is analyzed in terms of pronunciation error, stress/intonation error, utterance incomplete, syntactic error, and lexical error.

Each is also followed by a more appropriate answer in italics in consideration of her intended message.

L1 Spoken text: How did you learn English in your childhood?

S1 So I had pronunciation since I was little.

I have learned proper pronunciation since I was little.

pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: none
syntactic error: "had pronunciation"
lexical error: none

S2 And I thought, I think <u>umm</u>, my parents thought it was a waste that I already had speaking ability, like intonation or pronunciation, so they wanted me to extend that.

I think that my parents thought it was a waste of talent that I would lose my speaking abilities such as intonation or pronunciation since I already had them and that they wanted me to expand them.

pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: "I thought"
syntactic error: "it was a waste that…"
lexical error: "ability," "extend," "that"

L1 Spoken text: What do you think about the Japanese educational system?

S3 After the experience many people dropped out because they thought, oh, you know, I am not really, you know, teaching is not for me, or something.

After the experience many people dropped out because they thought that teaching was not for them.

pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: "I am not really"
syntactic error: "is," "me"
lexical error: none

S4 So I think it's shocking that Japanese, <u>umm</u>, universities don't let the student teachers experience teaching till their last year.

I think that it is shocking that Japanese universities don't let the students experience teaching until their last year.

pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: none
syntactic error: none
lexical error: "the student teachers"

L2 Spoken text: How did you learn English in your childhood?

S5   Well, in Japan, we started to learn English at the age of twelve, maybe thirteen.
      In Japan we started to learn English at the age of twelve or thirteen.
pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: none
syntactic error: none
lexical error: none

S6   I like, liked English in junior high school, but in high school we have to memo…, study many things, [   ] grammar, vocabulary, and many tests, so it was difficult and I didn't like English so much.
      I liked English in junior high school, but in high school we had to memorize many things such as grammar and vocabulary, and there were many tests and they were difficult, so I didn't like it so much.
pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: "memo…," "and many tests"
syntactic error: none
lexical error: "like," "have," "such as"

L2 Spoken text: What do you think about the Japanese educational system?

S7   I don't like, *hora,* school uniform. No, ah, I like other school's uniform. My school was famous and I studied a lot.
      I don't like our school uniform. I like other schools' uniforms. Our school was famous for its academically high level and I studied a lot.
pronunciation error: none
stress/intonation error: none
utterance incomplete: none
syntactic error: none
lexical error: "uniform," "famous"

S8   I am jealousy about other schools because they have much free time. Also

maybe Australia. I am happy now because I don't have to wear school uniform now, yeah.

I was jealous about other schools because they had much more free time. Also I may envy people in Australia. I am happy now because I don't have to wear school uniform now.

pronunciation error: none

stress/intonation error: none

utterance incomplete: "maybe Australia"

syntactic error: none

lexical error: "am," "jealousy," "have"

3.1 Phonological level

Learner 1 tends to use "uptalk" (rising intonation) at the end of many sections. For example, in S2, she talks like this: "And I thought, I think umm, my parents thought it was a waste that I already had speaking ability （ ↑), like intonation or pronunciation （ ↑), so they wanted me to extend that （ ↑)."

One specific feature among Japanese speakers of English is to add vowels to consonants at the end of words. It cannot be heard in her utterances. In the case of learners with good pronunciation like hers, especially in Japan where there are strong self-consciousness and peer pressure in the classroom, it has been pointed out that some students consciously adopt this style of speech in order to avoid a perceived social stigma attached to speaking English too well. Hers is not the case.

On the other hand, S7 for Learner 2 contains an awkward sound for "and." "d" is pronounced [do] in katakana as if it had a vowel. Katakana pronunciation is one common strategy among Japanese learners to conceal their shyness and show their national identity. In this case, however, it is not certain whether she adopted it intentionally.

Strangely enough, Learner 1 sometimes uses Japanese while speaking English, though there are no tangible data available about this. The way she uses the two languages sounds so natural that the audience might wonder how she can manage that. It seems that she can shift the mode between the two languages freely without any interferences of one to the other from the syntactic and phonological points of view.

As a matter of fact, I have heard her say "*denji-ha*" (electromagnetic wave) in Japanese while she was referring to her cell phone in English. If other Japanese learners say any single word in Japanese in the same situation, they will be regarded as a kind of poor speaker of English. Learner 2's "*hora*" in Japanese is a case in point. However, it does not hold true for Learner 1. It seems as if her better pronunciation and fluency in speaking overshadowed her lapse of memory. It could even be said that her occasional Japanese words make her English sound all the better for those unexpected insertions.

3.2 Lexical/Syntactic level

S1 has a syntactic error and the sentence sounds awkward, but somehow it manages to convey the learner's intended meaning to the audience. This sentence provides us with two aspects.

First, the learner's utterance sounds like a combination of "I had good pronunciation when I was little" and "I have had good pronunciation since I was little." This might be a negative transfer from her second language: Each sentence affects the other.

Second, "I had pronunciation" can be understood by Japanese learners of English, but it does not make any sense in English. It might stem from her Japanese way of thinking, so it is thought to be a negative transfer from her first language.

The learner tries in vain to say a complex sentence in S2, though her intended meaning is understandable to the audience. The noun "ability" should be plural. Accordingly, the pronoun "that" should be replaced with "them." She misuses the verb "extend" for "expand." This is one of the common errors that English learners are apt to make no matter how careful they may be. Some learners may not be aware of the difference between the two words in the first place. In addition to this, this misspelled word cannot be detected even through an automatic spelling checker in a word processor just as in the case of "form" and "from." It is not clear whether she simply misuses the word although she could use it properly or she does not know how to differentiate the usages of those words.

S3 ends in failure of the sequence of tenses and the change of pronoun.

The phrase "the student teachers" in S4 is a lexical error in this context. The phrase "let the student teachers experience teaching" sounds redundant or even strange. A student teacher is a student who is experiencing teaching at the moment. She should have said "let the students experience teaching."

In S6, S7 and S8, there are some errors in the sequence of tenses and some incomplete utterances. These types of errors are not found in Learner 1's sentences.

3.3 Discourse level

Learner 1 successfully brings the audience into the world of her own.

Learner 1 uses a discourse marker "so" two times at the beginning of each sentence in S1 and S4. These "So"s are not necessary. It seems that she just uses this marker to signpost to the audience in order to summarize one point before going on to the next. They might also be used to close off what has been said. Otherwise it does not make

sense to lead to the next sentence as a conjunction.

The learner uses the filler "you know" frequently (S3 and others) to make sure that the audience does comprehend what she is talking about. Especially in S3 she uses the same fillers twice. She seems to have trouble continuing the speech as that filler is one of the typical insertions to allow the speaker time to think.

She confuses the direct narration with indirect narration: She makes the statement as if it were her viewpoint, instead of others'. This confusion leads to misuses of the sequence of tenses and the pronoun. She might have used the direct narration including an incomplete utterance "I am not really" on purpose to make an impact on the audience. The last part "or something" is a vague language that is deliberately used to soften the impact of the utterance.

"And" is used at the top of S2 to create a conceptual sequence from the previous sentence.

Learner 2 sometimes uses some fillers too, such as "Well" in S5 and "ah" in S7. However, "Well" sounds like one of the formulaic expressions that are taught in the classroom and does not sound natural. The term "ah" sounds like a Japanese filler rather than an English word. She might use the same word even in communicating in Japanese. It seems that "well" is her only conversational strategy to give herself time to continue her sentence.

At the end of S8 "yeah" is an interesting word that can be heard in the utterances by Japanese learners on the beginner level. It is not used to express happiness or excitement. It is used to emphasize the truth or probity of the utterance. For example, when a speaker wants to say "I went to bed at 10 pm" and emphasize the fact, the speaker might say "I went to bed at 10 pm, yeah." This word also has a calming effect on the speaker in making sure that a sentence is finished, by indicating that this is the end of the sentence. It could be said that the speaker wants to confirm that the intended message is conveyed.

Learner 1 uses voiced pauses "umm" in S2 and S4 to give her time to pause and indicate a desire to hold the speaking turn. In S2 she starts the sentence with "I thought," and quickly changes her mind to say "I think." But it seems that she still needs time to organize her idea with an insertion "umm." In S4 she cannot utter the combination "Japanese universities" as one chunk, so she uses the pause to think up the next word and at the same time hold her turn.

The utterance "oh" in S3 is followed by a new or surprising idea that the speaker wants to introduce to the audience. In her case she introduces the reason why many people drop out of teaching course.

Moreover, Learner 1 has been expected to further develop her language abilities by her parents and she has lived up to their expectations. However, there are other factors to maintain for her to continue learning English. One of them is investment (Ellis, 1997, p.42). It is something that gives "learners access to the knowledge and modes of thought that will enable them to function successfully in a variety of social contexts."

In the interview, she mentions that she was a club leader in junior high school and also the student president in high school. She likes sports and belonged to the music club in high school. These extracurricular activities mirror some of her personalities: burning curiosity, vitality, strong leadership, extroversion, cheerfulness, and sensitivity to the sound. Adaptability should also be included, considering many changes of her living environment. Apparently it was necessary to establish her own identity in her various settings so that she could be heard and become the subject of the discourse. All the facts and personalities above stem from confidence based on her language skills. Thus her investment seems to have been paid off so far.

4. Conclusion: Suggestion for Teaching

On the phonological level the utterances by Learner 1 seem to have been automatized to produce authentic pronunciation just like native speakers. Vowels and consonants are differentiated subconsciously, so that the learner can devote all her energy to produce meaningful utterances.

On the other hand, the phonological system for Learner 2 does not seem to be established yet. When focus is on the phonological system, such as pronunciation and intonation, errors occur in her meaning. When more focus is on the meaning of a sentence, inappropriate sounds are produced.

Learner 2 could have produced more authentic pronunciation if she had been interviewed by a native speaker instead of a Japanese such as myself. Superior pronunciation is still teased about among Japanese speakers of English. This mentality, peculiar to the Japanese, might have inhibited the learner from speaking naturally.

As is seen in the sample texts, there are fewer types of fillers in Learner 2's utterances than in Learner 1's. One of the possible reasons behind this fact is that Learner 2 is bound by grammatical items. It is empirically known that people with high level grammar are too much aware of the lexical and syntactic knowledge to speak fluently.

Strangely enough, however, some errors in the sequence of tenses can be found in Learner 2's utterances and these types of errors are not found in Learner 1's sentences. It is fair to say that both learners have sufficient knowledge about the conjugation of verbs and the sequence of tenses that are taught at an early stage of English education.

Nevertheless, one produces errors and the other does not. The difference lies in automatization. Much more exposure will be needed to put prior knowledge to work automatically. In an environment like Japan where such exposure is not expected, the only solution to the problem is to make an English-language environment artificially. Even 5-minute listening and speaking practice to make up for lack of input and output will make a difference in the long run.

Automatization verifies one hypothesis: Learner 2 constructs sentences in her mind before producing them orally and tries to make them as grammatically correct as possible. There are no fillers in the middle of a sentence made by Learner 2. It is inferred that the learner cannot afford to spend time to insert fillers simply because the learner is too occupied composing sentences in her mind as if she were taking a writing test.

As a result, fillers are avoided subconsciously since they are normally not used in writing tests. Furthermore, the few-second-long pause in S6 is thought to be a sign that sentence-construction, in the mind, is now in progress.

In addition to automatization, a skillful second language learner like Learner 1 must be able to shift the mode from one language to the other. If a speaker has such a strategy, just like Learner 1, the speaker might be able to avoid awkward silence in the middle of the utterances by code switching when an appropriate word does not pop up in mind.

Another possible reason that there are more fillers in Learner 1's utterances than in Learner 2's is that an advanced learner such as Learner 1 tries to make some kinds of rhythms in the utterances. It is often said that an English sentence is made up of rhythms and sounds like a song while the Japanese language sounds very flat. To make a natural flow of words, the skillful learner or native speakers might insert some fillers in the utterances in a natural way.

There is no doubt that Learner 1 is an excellent learner of English, especially by the standard of Japanese learners. Most of the errors made by the learner are local errors, not global errors, which do not make it difficult to grasp Learner 1's intended messages. Every utterance in her spoken texts can convey her intended meaning to the audience almost as it is. However, the nature of the errors, rather than the frequency of the errors, should be under close scrutiny.

It was found that even this advanced learner's interlanguage has a negative transfer from her first and second languages, which was expected from the start, but it is still noteworthy. In the case of Japanese, many negative transfers result from a mixed use of Japanese and English as katakana. One thing that can be done to avoid the confusion is, though it may sound like a cliché, to make a list of katakana-English (e.g. A Japanese "jet coaster" is a "roller coaster" in English.) and clarify the

differences between the two languages. If the list grows, the learner's vocabulary will also increase.

When it comes to speaking, vocabulary should be working vocabulary. Unlike reading and listening, recognition vocabulary is not enough to express your opinions.

Learner 1 started learning English at an early age and has had sufficient exposure (input) to the target language; she has intrinsic (to become a teacher) and extrinsic (to live up to her parents' expectations) motivation; she is extroverted and is not afraid of making mistakes. She seems to be a perfect role model to be bilingual. Yet some errors are found in her utterances.

Learner 2 has been studying nursing at a TAFE school for one year. Although she said, "I didn't like English" in S6, the learner does like it, which is why she is in Australia to learn English as well as nursing. Learner 2 demonstrates a lower level of linguistic competence than Learner 1, but still she has a better command of English as compared with the ordinary Japanese learners, though the definition of the competence is elusive.

As for lexical knowledge, practicing writing is also recommended. Speaking is a productive skill like writing: Speaking is a phonetic form of communication and writing is a character-based form of communication.

Brown (2001, p.331) says: "students learn to write in part by carefully observing what is already written. […] students can gain important insights both about how they should write and about subject matter that may become the topic of their writing." Thus, learners will be able to further develop their writing skills as well as increase their word power. That will be the first step for them toward becoming an academically advanced language learner.

The conception of Error Analysis should also be shared by language learners. Understanding that errors are not bad things at all but actually good things gives them some hints on which parts of language learning to focus on to improve their linguistic skills in more detail. Moreover, the mere awareness of the conception might encourage them to adjust their learning strategy and go on with learning to a higher level. The recognition on both teachers' and learners' sides that some certain errors will occur at a particular time as well as the appropriate error treatment and feedback will facilitate the second language learning.

This is a general study of Error Analysis that covers a wide range of errors in the second language learning process. What is clear is that learners tend to apply the rules they have already learned, whether a native language or a target language, to inappropriate situations. It would be interesting to focus on more specific items such

as the sequence of tenses and articles.

The present study deals with only two second language learners and their language systems are generally unstable, so it is difficult to draw a conclusion from this research. Even so, the consequences we have are beneficial to enhancing the competence of the learners.

Language is one of the most valuable assets for human beings. Teachers must have a great sense of responsibility for teaching such a significant tool in communication to students full of great hopes and recognize that language education will have an immense influence on their lives in the future. They must throw away some selfish ideas in their own interests before they assume this task. Careful planning and consideration are needed for the success of language education. After all, there is no end to learning languages. A continuous examination of many facets of this field would contribute to further development of language education and efficacy and efficiency of second language acquisition.

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