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Article

Research Notes on Non-Native Speaker — Non-Native Speaker Negotiation in Oral Communication Classes

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Abstract

The purpose of these research notes are to take a practical look at negotiation moves that are occurring in non-native speaker dyads in order to consider the types of Language Related Episodes (LRE) that occur in certain communicative activities and to get a better understanding of the types of interactional moves and level of negotiation that is happening in my classroom.

Introduction

A key to becoming an effective language teacher is to understand how students learn. Long's (1991) Interactional Hypothesis (IH) states that Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is facilitated by the native speaker (NS) or more competent interlocutor and interactional adjustments that are triggered by negotiation work. (p. 451). Long essentially claims that the building block of learning a second language can be found in *negotiation for meaning*, or the interactions, reformulations, and feedback that occur when people try to communicate. Recent research by Sato and Lyster (2007) looks at differences in negotiation in NS-Non-native Speaker (NNS) dyads and NNS-NNS dyads, specifically for Japanese EFL learners. Sato and Lyster found significant differences in the modified output of NNS-NNS dyads and NS-NNS dyads (p. 134). This research showed that NNS dyads had more elicitation feedback while NS-NNS dyads had more reformulation feedback. Sato and Lyster also found that there was a similar number of LREs proportionally whether the interaction was in NNS dyads or NS-NNS dyads (p. 133).

In this paper, I would like to look at some instances of feedback or negotiation in NNS dyads in my second-year Oral Communication class of students and Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. More specifically, I want to examine the nature of the negotiation and offer ideas to make negotiation more effective in the future.

Theory

Much of modern Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory supports the idea that conversational interaction enables second language acquisition (Morris & Tarone, 2003); (Mackey, 2002); (Lyster & Mori, 2006). In order to better understand interactional feedback, it is important to look at the theory behind it.

Positive evidence is the input students get from textbooks and classroom activites. It refers to the information given to learners. It is often in the form of vocabulary, questions or phrases, or model conversations. Most language teachers would agree that giving learners input or models of the language is important to development. However, in this paper, I would support the argument that while input is necessary, it is insufficient without interaction (Hatch, 1978).

Negative evidence is of key importance to trying to understand *negotiation of meaning*. In Long's IH (p. 451) he states that negotiation for meaning elicits negative feedback. Negative evidence provides information to learners about what is not possible (Lightbrown & White in Morris, 2003).

There are two types of negative evidence: preemptive and reactive. Preemptive negative evidence is presented to learners before they try to produce structures. An example might be explaining common grammatical mistakes that should be avoided before doing an activity. Reactive negative evidence is, "…a response to a nontarget utterance" (Morris, 2002). Reactive negative evidence can further be divided into two forms: explicit and implicit. Explicit reactive negative evidence is corrective feedback or error correction. Implicit negative feedback, often referred to as *interactional feedback*, includes recasts and other negotiation moves.

The *communicative paradigm* in language teaching, as opposed to the *empty vessel* paradigm, infers that second language (L2) development can occur through interaction. Mackey (2000) found that, "learners who were actively involved in the interaction produced more developmentally advanced structures than learners who did not take part in any interaction" (p. 472). Furthermore, she found that development was not immediate and showed up on later tests suggesting that thinking time or processing time is essential for some learners' development. Mackey further suggests that interaction is important as a "priming device" necessary for learners to focus attention on areas which they are working.

Sato and Lyster (2007, p. 131) describe *modified output* as, "learners' repair moves that contain more comprehensible and/or accurate versions of their initial erroneous responses." Sato and Lyster examined the differences in interactional moves of Japanese EFL students when speaking in dyads of learner-learner and learner-NS. Surprisingly, they found that while grammatical input was higher in NNS-NS dyads, there were more interactional moves in learner-learner dyads (2007, p. 124). In this study, Sato and Lyster found certain factors relevant to the types of interactions found in learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads. One factor was learners conveying meaning by using katakana which was useful in LL dyads but not in L-NS dyads. Another factor was familiarity in LL dyads or a lack of need for interaction in L-NS dyads because the NS interlocutors' were often able to "guess" what the learner was trying to say and less of a need to modify their output.

Of significance to EFL oral communication classes in Japan, is also the possibility that most students native language is Japanese and there are often instances of students negotiating in L1.

Considering these factors, I would like to examine the nature and observe the types of negotiation moves that are occurring in my oral communication classes and certain communicative activities. I have chosen to use the coding from Sato and Lyster (2007) with some minor modifications.

A brief explanation of the coding system is as follows:

Sato and Lyster (2007) termed episodes of negotiation or grammatically inaccurate utterances as *language-related episodes* (LREs)(2007). Sato and Lyster further divided LREs into three interactional moves: *triggers, feedback* and *responses.* Triggers are the origin of the negotiation move and can stem from one of two types: incomprehensibility or inaccuracy. Feedback are the interactional moves that *immediately* follow the trigger. There are two main types of feedback that are further broken down into subgroups. The first type of feedback is *elicitation.* Elicitation feedback is further divided into three types: 1) Clarification requests, 2) Confirmation requests without modification of trigger, and 3) Non-verbal signals.

The following definitions were used in the coding of Sato and Lyster (2007):

Types of elicitation feedback:

Elicitiation feedback is defined as, "feedback (that) generally requests clarification or confirmation without providing reformulations of the erroneous utterance contained in the trigger".

Clarification requests are defined as, "utterances with rising intonation 'designed to elicit clarification of the interlocutor's preceding utterance(s)'".

Example: S1: Where were the they going to do?
S2: Sorry?

Clarification request without modification of trigger is defined as "a move used to confirm an interlocutor's incomprehensible and/or inaccurate utterance without modifying it".

Example: S1: I put my purse on the car.
S2: On the car?

Non-verbal signals are defined as frowning, gestures and interjections to show difficulty in understanding their interlocutor.

Example: S1: I was…overwhelmed.
S2: Huh?

Types of reformulation feedback:

Reformulation feedback is defined as, "feedback (that) provides correct target forms either through recasts or confirmation requests that modify the trigger".
Recasts "reformulate erroneous utterances, minus the error."

Example: S1: They will go Chicago day after next…day's…
S2: They'll go the day after tomorrow.
S1: Yeah, the day after tomorrow.

Confirmation requests with modification of trigger "modify incomprehensible and/or inaccurate utterances."

Example: S1: …and they didn't ate lunch yet.
S2: They haven't eaten lunch yet?

Procedure and Context

The classroom context used for this research were two second-year Oral

Communication Studies (OCS) classes at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. Both classes were in the Department of Global Business and in general, student abilities were consistent in comparison to other students at NUFS. Students conversations were video taped in the Speaking Lab at the university. The Speaking Lab includes seven digital video cameras connected to two VHS video recorders in partitioned off areas. In this lab, students are able take home video for transcriptions of the conversations or assignments they did in class. The conversations were assessments based on conversations done in class in previous lessons. Topics were taken from the previous classes and students were required to speak on one, two or a combination of the two topics. The conversations were not used for student evaluations but students later transcribed the conversations and submitted them for grading. Students were encouraged to use conversation strategies studied during the course, use new vocabulary and expressions provided by the text and teacher and to speak with a goal of communicating rather than complete accuracy.

Approximately 210 minutes of video was observed and 21 instances of LREs were transcribed.

Results and Observations

The same coding as Sato and Lyster (see above) was used to observe the videos from the classes. From the 210 minutes of video the following data was observed:

LRE type	# of instances
Clarification request	5
Clarification request without modification of trigger	5
Non-verbal signals	3
Recasts	6
Confirmation requests with modification of trigger	2

The following examples are of LREs taken from the transcripts:

Clarification requests:

R: If you get married…(*eto*)…you can…can you…pass the…your money by your husband? Uh, husband no. No husband. Uh…Boyfriend.

L: **Huh?**

R: Boyfriend...boyfriend. pass your money by your boyfriend.

L: Yes.

R: I don't want to pass my wife.

Clarification request without modification of trigger:

3: My father….along time ago when I am a child he…for me…he was a star.

2: **Star?**

1: **Star?**

3: Star….Superman! Superman.

Non-verbal signals:

L: ….and (looks at dictionary) the total of money…(**makes counting money gesture**)

R: Cash count! Count?

L: Count! Count! And count the total of money.

Recasts:

R: I don't eat much.

L: Why?

R: Cheer…cheerleading. I play cheerleading…

L: **Practice!**

R: *So so so so!*

Confirmation requests with modification of trigger:

R: Curry rice on the Natto.

L: Uh?

R: In the? At the? Put?

L: **Natto on the curry rice?**

R: Ah! Natto on the curry rice. Very good.

In addition to the instances of negotiation as coded by Lyster and Ranta, I also found a similar amount of instances where negotiation was avoided, ignored or abandoned. In these cases, I coded the Non-instances *NON-LRE.* Often in these cases, students failed to negotiate in English for several reasons.

Some examples:

Example 1

R: Volunteer *katsudo…katsudo….katsudo* (looking up word in electronic dictionary)

L: Volunteer work.

R: Volunteer work?…hmmm. (finds word) activity! Volunteer activity.

In this case, Student R could have tried to express himself using a different word but chose to look up the word in the dictionary in effect avoiding negotiation. Also, he failed to take the advice of the Student L and use the word he found in the dictionary, even though Student R seemed to be familiar with the word also avoiding modified output.

Example 2

R: Should you always obey your parents?

L: No, I…(*shinai to ikenai?)* (**Negotiation in Japanese**)

R: (Shakes head "yes").

L: No, I don't think so.

Example 3

R: What's something you wouldn't do for free?

L: Uh, maybe (**whispers in Japanese to check meaning**)…I…I…I buy…sell…sell my car.

R: Oh, how much is your car?

Example 4

2: I can't kill. I can't kill…person.

3: I want to *shinu* (die)…I am…I want to die..

1: I (you) want to die? (laughing)

3: I want to die *janai. Shindemo ii.* I'm going..I'm going…I'm dying…*mo ii.*
1: *Nani? Shinitai?* (**Negotiation in Japanese**)
3: *Shindemo ii.*
1: Why you can die?

Another often observed phenomenon was students ignoring triggers, or breakdowns in conversation. It is possible for cultural reasons they do not want to correct their partner or they do not want their partner to feel as if she has made a mistake.

Example:
L: How about you?
R: Tomorrow, I will go shopping with my friend. I want to buy new shoes, or sandal. And new clothing.
L: Oh, **Have you get money from parents?**
R: When I was junior high school student, I got money from parents, but now I have part-time job so, I don't get money from parents.

In this case, it us unknown why the student R would interpret the question as, "Have you ever got money from your parents"? Especially, since the likely answer to that question would be "yes" from nearly anyone. It is also possible students are using the context of the previous conversation but in this case the only thing discussed before was student L's plans for the weekend. Another factor may be the similarities of the educational background of many students is the same; for example nearly all students in Japan use the same text books to study English, there are likely similarities in the errors made by the students. Because the student who is not speaking may be unfamiliar with the correct form, they are able to understand the meaning of the speaker even though there are severe problems in form. Often, students are not negotiating instances that would likely be hard to understand from a speaker of a different L1 background.

It is also possible that social and cultural attitudes are affecting students' willingness to make negotiation moves. There are several instances where students are avoiding conflicting language likely because it does not seem polite to them to tell their partner they made a mistake. In fact, there are long stretches of conversation where no negotiation takes place at all. Several factors could also be students do not trust their own accuracy enough to question their partner's mistake; they are not aware there has been a mistake; their confidence level is just high enough to make conversation.

Implications

Recent research has shown that negotiation interaction is important for L2 development. In particular, in my OCS classes often Japanese native speaker dyads are used for conversation practice. Because both students' L1 is Japanese, the temptation to negotiate in L1 is obvious and common. Students need to be aware of the importance of not avoiding negotation and if possible negotiating in L2. An effective way to do this may be through the use of video. Video could be used to give examples of instances of effective negotiation as well as missed opportunities. It could also be a chance to introduce language that is necessary to negotiate in L2. The video could be incorporated into a lesson plan that required students to practice negotiation moves in exercises and gave them a chance to become familiar with how to react to communication breakdowns in a nurturing setting. Along with teaching students some negotiation moves language and practicing in class, students would likely be more aware and better prepared to make negotiation moves in L2 that would be authentic and effective.

To further make use of video, student conversations could be filmed and later transcribed by students. Points of negotiation could be reflected on and talked about by students, teachers and as a class activity if the students were comfortable.

Ultimately, having students who are aware and able to negotiate effectively in L2 could be of great benefit to students of a communicative conversation class.

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