Research notes on non-native speaker to non-native speaker negotiation in Oral Communication classes

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This practical research looks at non-native speaker dyads in university Oral Communication courses in order to better understand the types of language related episodes (LRE), feedback types, and the level of negotiation that occurs in certain communicative activities. Using a coding system from Sato and Lyster (2007), results confirm that in NNS-NNS negotiation students tend to use more elicitation type moves than reformulation feedback.

この実践研究は、大学のオーラルコミュニケーションの授業において、非英語母国話者のペアを対象に、特定のコミュニケーション・アクティビティーで生じる話し合い活動(language related episode)やフィードバックの種類、受け答えのレベルについて理解を深めることを目的として考察したものである。佐藤やライスターによるコーディングシステム（2007）を用いると、非母国語話者同士の会話のやりとりや受け答えでは、学生はリフォーミュレーション・フィードバック（間違いを指摘せず、別の言葉を用いて文を再構築すること）よりもエリシテーションタイプ（誤り部分の直前で繰り返しをやめ自己修正を引き出すこと）の方法を使う傾向があるという結果が確認された。

Introduction and background

This research represents an effort to bridge the gap from the realm of academic research and apply it to the more practical realm of the classroom with an ultimate goal of having a better understanding of how my students learn from each other. My practical classroom research has evolved from originally looking at student and teacher beliefs about error correction and the negotiation between teachers and students to looking at the negotiation that is occurring in NNS speaker dyads in my classroom now.

Recent research by Sato and Lyster (2007) looks at differences in negotiation in NS-NNS dyads and NNS-NNS dyads, specifically for Japanese EFL learners. In their study Sato and Lyster (2007) tried to determine the differences in feedback that NS give their NNS partners and NNS give to their NNS partners. Results show that NS tend to reformulate and offer recasts to their partners as a way to scaffold conversation. In NNS dyads, it appears that elicitation is the more common form of negotiation. Based on Sato and Lyster's (2007) coding system, I looked at instances of feedback or negotiation in NNS dyads in my second-year Oral Communication class of students at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. More specifically, I wanted to examine the nature of negotiation in order to exploit it more effectively in this classroom setting.

Theory

A key to becoming an effective language teacher is to understand how students learn. 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). Long's (1996) Interactional Hypothesis (IH) states that SLA is facilitated by the NS or more competent interlocutor and interactional adjustments that are triggered by negotiation work. Long (1996) 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. Swain (2005) claims in her Output Hypothesis that "the act of producing language (speaking or writing) constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning" (p. 471). Mackey, Gass, and McDonough (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. 473). Furthermore, they 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.

Terminology

Positive evidence is the input students get from textbooks and classroom activities. 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 (1996) IH he states that negotiation for meaning elicits negative feedback. Negative evidence provides information to learners about what is not possible (Lightbrown & White, 1987, cited in Morris, 2002). 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, p. 396). 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.

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

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.

Coding

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). They 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 includes the interactional moves that *immediately* follow the trigger. There are two main types of feedback, elicitation and reformulation. Both of these 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 definitions used in Sato and Lyster's (2007) coding follow.

Types of elicitation feedback

Elicitation feedback is by defined Sato and Lyster (2007) as, "feedback (that) generally requests clarification or confirmation without providing reformulations of the erroneous utterance contained in the trigger" (p. 130).

Clarification requests are defined as, "utterances with rising intonation 'designed to elicit clarification of the interlocutor's preceding utterance(s)'" (Sato & Lyster, 2007, p. 130).

Example 1. Clarification request sample

S1: Where were 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" (Sato & Lyster, 2007, p. 130).

Example 2. Clarification request without modification of trigger sample

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 the interlocutor (Sato & Lyster, 2007).

Example 3. Non-verbal signal sample

S1: I was…overwhelmed.
S2: (Shrugs) Huh?

Types of reformulation feedback

Reformulation feedback (Sato & Lyster, 2007) is defined as, "feedback (that) provides correct target forms either through recasts or confirmation requests that modify the trigger" (p. 130).

Recasts "reformulate erroneous utterances, minus the error" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997 cited in Sato & Lyster, 2007).

Example 4 . Recast sample

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" (Sato & Lyster, 2007, p. 131)

Example 5. Confirmation request with modification of trigger sample

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 was two second-year Oral Communication Studies (OCS) classes at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. Both classes were in the Department of Global Business. Each class consisted of 16 students making a total of 32 participants for the study. Student conversations were videotaped with permission. The conversations were based on topics from the textbook. 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.

Examples from the data

This section will present some selected examples of LREs from the different categories described previously which emerged from the data.

Clarification requests

In Example 6 two students discuss a hypothetical question about family finances. There is an example of a clarification request, "Huh?" when one student is unable to understand the other student's question.

Example 6. Clarification request

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

Example 7 is an example from the data of two students asking for clarification by repeating the word they don't understand.

Example 7. Clarification request without modification of trigger

3:	My father….a long 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

This example clearly shows how some students negotiate meaning without talking. Note that the second student understands the gesture, provides the appropriate vocabulary, then the first student follows with modified output.

Example 8. 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

This example shows one student reformulating the other student's mistake. A more thorough recast would have been something like, "Oh, you mean you practice cheerleading?" but this one-word recast achieves the same effect.

Example 9. Recast

R:	I don't eat much.
L:	Why?
R:	Cheer…cheerleading. I play cheerleading…
L:	**Practice**!
R:	*So so so so* ! (Japanese for "Yes! Yes! Yes!")

Confirmation requests with modification of trigger

This example shows one student modifying the original mistake in the form of a question.

Example 10. Confirmation request 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.

Results

After observing 210 minutes of video the following data were observed:

Table 1. Breakdown of feedback

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

This study found that in NNS-NNS dyads, there is more elicitation feedback (13 LREs) than reformulation feedback (8 LREs). Although it is impossible to know exactly what students are thinking, my observations include five primary insights. First, there are long stretches of conversation where no negotiation takes place as students often ignore, avoid, or don't make corrections of their partner's mistakes. On average, there was only 1 LRE for every 10 minutes of video.

Second, students do not trust their own accuracy enough to question their partner's mistakes. Especially with lower level students, it appears they may be unsure of the correction to make.

Next, there are numerous instances where communication breaks down in English but continues in Japanese as the students appear to want to understand what their partner is saying, such as in Example 11.

Example 11. Switching to L1

R: Do you want to marriage rich person?
L: Yes, but not so rich.
R: Not so rich. Oh…
L: *Futsu no hito.*

Sometimes this can lead to a positive result as students are talking about the language in L1, as in Example 12.

Example 12. Talking about English in L1

R: Winter….in the winter is more.
L: More.
R: I have ever…to..*ima made ichiban* (negotiation continues in Japanese but results in English output)
L: most heaviest
R: My weight is most heavy in the winter but now my weight is decreasing.
L: Congratulation.

In other instances the breakdowns that lead to Japanese and negotiation in L1 result in abandonment, as in Examples 13 and 14.

Example 13. Abandonment of and return to English

L:	What did you do yesterday?
R:	Uh, yesterday I played with my friends…at mid-night….So,…I…my…my parents…No!
L:	My parents?! (laughing)
R:	No, no, no….(Japanese *De…*)….(Abandonment)
L:	Do you have a curfew?

Example 14. Abandonment of English

L:	Should you always obey your parents?
R:	*Istumo*? (Japanese)?
L:	Should you always obey your parents (reading slowly [from notes?]) How do you think?
R:	*Eto, itsumo…*(Japanese)
L:	*Ryoshin ni…*(continues in Japanese. Negotiation and discussion is happening in Japanese)

Fourth, students rely on their dictionaries instead of trying to get the meaning from their partner. In some cases, like in Example 15, they even ignore their partner when they are given the correct word.

Example 15. Reliance on dictionary

R:	Volunteer *katsudo…katsudo….katsudo* (looking up word in dictionary)
L:	Volunteer work.
R:	Volunteer work?…hmmm. (finds word) activity! Volunteer activity.

Finally, although it is more obvious on video, students appear to lack confidence or have inhibitions that prevent them from correcting their partner's mistakes. Often it appears that just speaking in L2 seems to be the main goal and correcting or negotiating in L2 may be beyond some students' goals or abilities.

These results are supported by Sato and Lyster's (2007) findings from their study on NNS negotiation, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sato and Lyster's results of NS versus NNS feedback types

Feedback Types	Reformulation	Elicitation
NS	59	41
NNS	34	66

Sato & Lyster, 2007. Reprinted with permission.

Sato and Lyster (2007) also found learners in NNS dyads provided each other with more elicitation feedback while NS-NNS dyads showed more reformulation feedback. They explained the possible differences by showing that the NS could guess what the NNS was going to say thus resulting in more reformulations. In NNS-NNS dyads, learners could sometimes guess what their partner was going to say, too and sound words out in order to avoid an LRE; NNS were more comfortable with their common L1 partner because they had more time to think than when speaking with NS partners who changed topics before the NNS could ask questions.

Conclusion

A modern approach to teaching Oral Communication classes at university is founded on the idea that students can learn from interaction. However, most large teacher-fronted classes only provide the opportunity for students to speak with each other and offer little direct interaction with the teacher. A logistical problem for teachers in this setting is how they can accurately observe students when they negotiate misunderstanding. These instances may be crucial in the process of learning and by looking at the interactions and types of feedback students give each other we can see that students are relating to each other differently than they do when speaking with a native speaker. From the results of this research it appears that students are giving each other more elicitation feedback than reformulation feedback. Students are less likely to correct each others' mistakes by modifying the mistake and more likely to ask again for clarification or even use non-verbal gestures. The students are perhaps doing this because of a lack of confidence or for cultural reasons. Having an understanding of how students negotiate in L2 can inform teachers and help them to be more effective in the EFL classroom.

Previous publication

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Bio data

Troy Miller is an Invited Lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. He lives in Nagoya and enjoys spending time with his family and renovating his house.

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