

**Teaching Repair:
Raising Learners' Awareness of the Features of Second Language Conversations**

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Abstract

This report is concerned with the practical application of conversation analysis (CA) for Japanese language instruction, and displays how CA's distinctive approach can contribute to an awareness-raising pedagogy which seeks to develop the students as reflective conversationalists. In class, students focused on "repair", and analyzed second language conversations comparatively alongside key features of conversations by native speakers. In this report, the procedure of the activity and the learners' own findings will be presented. In addition, this paper will discuss the potential of this activity to raise learners' awareness of conversational features and to enhance their abilities to incorporate these features better in their own everyday conversations.

Key words: repair, conversation analysis, awareness-raising activity, and JSL

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning how to have a conversation is important. Each of us engages in conversation on a daily basis, and it is the means by which we handle our daily lives and get things done.

Furthermore, as Hatch (1978) suggested, it is the foundation of all language learning; it is the medium through which we acquire languages. Conversation analysis (CA) offers a wealth of knowledge about conversations, and it could be an important resource for second language teachers if they wish to deepen their understanding of conversational rules and practices. Nevertheless, it is not easy to apply CA within the context of teaching. As Schegloff, et al. (2002:17) pointed out, there needs to be a bridge between CA findings and pedagogy. This study is intended as one such bridge between CA findings and pedagogy, and, more specifically, is concerned with the practical application of conversation analysis (CA) for Japanese language instruction.

In the author's class, students focused on "repair" (Schegloff, et al., 1977), one of the constitutive features of talk-in-interaction, and analyzed second language conversations comparatively alongside key features of conversations by native speakers. The purpose of this activity was to enhance learners' awareness of the features of both native speakers' conversations and nonnative speakers' conversations, and to develop reflective learners/conversationalists. In this report, the procedure of the activity and the learners' own findings will be presented. In addition, this paper will discuss the potential of this CA-informed activity in helping to raise learners' awareness of conversational features and to enhance their abilities to incorporate these features better in their own everyday conversations.

2. CA AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATION

CA is a unique approach to analyzing languages and social interactions. It originated in sociology in the 1960s and later on, CA spread rapidly to other academic fields including

Applied Linguistics (e.g., Markee, 2000; Schegloff, et al., 2002; Gardner & Wagner, 2004). One of CA's fundamental concerns is to find out what people do when they talk. To achieve that goal, CA researchers analyze actual instances of talk, ranging from casual conversations between friends to talk in more formal settings such as classrooms or doctor-patient consultations.

CA's characteristic approach is to analyze the data from an emic perspective. The emic perspective is a way of looking at language and social interactions from an insider's perspective in order to understand their talk and actions (Wong & Waring, 2010:6). CA is different from other emic approaches such as the ethnography of speaking in that CA researchers do not obtain insiders' perspectives by interviewing the speakers directly. Instead, they attempt to find out how the participants treat each other's talk in, and only in, the details of interactions themselves; not only the form or the content of the utterances, but also tiny elements such as pauses, the timing of speaking, and sound stretches are examined. For that reason, CA requires naturally occurring data that has been recorded and transcribed in detail.

The cumulative body of CA research on daily conversations up to this point in time could be an important resource for second language teachers; how participants use verbal and nonverbal methods as situated resources to engage in conversations successfully. There are existing studies which are concerned with practical procedures and the results of the deployment of CA to enhance speaking skills. For example, Wong & Waring's (2010) study provides a comprehensive introduction to the basic concepts and findings of CA, and suggests ways of applying that knowledge to teaching second language conversation skills. There are also several studies which explore the use of transcripts within the classroom, as a tool for raising learners' awareness of the particularities of conversations so that they can identify significant interactional features of conversations, to understand what these features do, and how conversations work (Bowles & Seedhouse, 2007:320-321). Burns, Gollin & Joyce (1997) advocate using transcripts of non-native speaker (NNS) talk and comparing

them with native speaker (NS) transcripts. Lynch (2001, 2007) describes a reflective noticing activity in which students' self-recordings are transcribed by the students themselves and used as class discussion material, and students analyze their own performances. Sayer (2005) further refined the comparative method by linking it with students' speech performance. Packett (2005, 2007) also adopted a comparative training technique in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class, and explored how the students can be able to both perform and reflect on the targeted sequential practice after the awareness-raising activity.

As mentioned above, there is now a growing body of CA-informed teaching methods and activities. This study is also one which intends to make use of CA results with the aim being to raise learners' awareness through the use of transcripts, and aid in bridging the gap between CA and second language teaching.

3. REPAIR

The practice of repair includes various ways for conversation participants to deal with problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding of talk, such as clarification requests, understanding checks, offers of candidate hearings and corrections of linguistic errors (Schegloff, et al., 1977). Our everyday conversations are full of such things as errors, imperfections, mishearings, but there is a system that helps us reach and maintain mutual understanding. Anytime we need to avoid or avert miscommunication during a conversation, repair helps us, for example, clarify what we say, check our understanding of what another has said, or correct something, so that we can maintain the conversation.

Repair is relevant when there is something problematic in maintaining the conversation, that is a "trouble-source" (Schegloff, et al., 1977:363). A trouble-source is a

word, phrase or utterance which the participants treat as problematic. For example, in extract (1), D's utterance in line 01 is the trouble-source. C couldn't hear what D said, and for C to answer D's question in line 01, C has to momentarily stop the ongoing topic and solve the listening problem.

- (1)
[Schegloff et al., 1977:367-modified]
- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 01 | D | Well did he ever get married or anything? |
| 02 | C | Hu:h? |
| 03 | D | Did he ever get married? |
| 04 | C | I have no idea. |

Repair is an interactional process which is composed of “repair initiation” and “repair outcome”. “Repair initiation” is the practice of targeting a trouble-source, and “repair outcome” is the solution or abandonment of the problem. In the excerpt above, C initiates repair by saying “Hu:h?” in line 02, and the solution is provided in line 03 by the trouble-source speaker D. Following the repair sequence, C can answer D's original question in the end in line 04, and both of the participants can now continue with the original topic.

Repair practices were chosen as the focus of the author's lecture class because second language learners are not necessarily attuned to repair practices in their target language, and they might need explicit instruction, even if they can do it competently in their native language. There are many types of repair practices, but, due to quite strict time limitations, the focus was narrowed only to other-initiated self-repair; repair which is initiated by other and completed by the trouble-source speaker himself/herself, as exemplified in extract (1). During the lecture class, students compared NNS conversations to NS conversations in that respect.

4. TEACHING REPAIR: THE PEDAGOGIC CONTEXT

This CA-informed awareness-raising activity took place as a part of a lecture series whose main focus was Japanese Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. The lecture series lasts the whole semester, but each time a lecture occurs a different presenter comes and gives a lecture on a different topic. My lecture was in the 13th week out of the 15-lecture series. It was 90 minutes in length, and the title was “Let’s analyze intercultural conversations”.

There were about 30 students in the lecture. Most of the students were exchange students who, prior to arriving in Japan, studied Japanese language and culture at universities in their home countries. Their oral proficiency levels were intermediate or advanced, according to either the result of ACTFL-OPI (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; Oral Proficiency Interviews), or a Japanese language class placement test conducted by the university. The lecture series was also open to Japanese students, and thus, there were also several Japanese students in attendance.

5. AWARENESS-RAISING ACTIVITY: THE FEATURES OF SECOND LANGUAGE CONVERSATIONS

The lecture proceeded in the following order:

- (1) Explaining the purpose of the activity
- (2) Explaining some key concepts of CA and repair
- (3) Group work 1: Analyzing NS conversations
- (4) Group work 2: Analyzing NNS conversations
- (5) Class discussion

While explaining the purpose of the activity, I encouraged the students to pay greater attention to, and to become conscious of, conversational features of which they are usually unconscious, to find the ways to engage in a conversation, and to reflect on their own behaviors when they analyze NNS conversations. Through this comparative method, students might be able to incorporate the features they notice into their subsequent performances, and improve their conversational skills.

Following the brief introduction, some important concepts of CA and repair were presented to the students. I started with some questions such as “When you couldn’t hear or understand what the other person said, what do you do?” These questions were designed to stimulate the students’ thinking about interactional practices, and to find out what they know about repair in their native language and/or Japanese language. Students were also instructed how to read the transcripts¹. Subsequently, I introduced some important concepts of CA, such as “turn”, “sequence” and “repair”². After I provided some examples and explained about repair, students completed small exercises. I gave them several examples of repair segments, made them specify what the trouble source was, when the repair was initiated, and what the repair outcome was³. The purpose of this exercise was to solidify and extend students’ understanding, and make them ready for the following group-work task. I gave students about 10 minutes to work individually, and then checked the answers as a whole-class group.

After the preliminary stage, students formed groups of four or five members, and analyzed two distinct sets of data. The first data set was NS-NS conversations. The students were distributed handouts with 4 segments, each of which included repair. Then, for each segment, students discussed (1) what the trouble source was, (2) when the repair was initiated, and (3) what was the outcome. After the small-group discussion, we shared our ideas, insights and observations as a whole class. The purpose of the first group-work task was to allow students to get to know that there are certain ways to have a conversation, and that it is not a random undertaking even if it is an everyday, ordinary conversation. The result of this

group work also laid the foundation for the next group task, analyzing second language conversations.

The second data set was NS-NNS conversations. Handouts with 6 segments were distributed. Students analyzed each segment in the same way as they had done so for the NS data set, and in addition they were asked to compare the NNS interactions with the result of the first group-work task, noticing differences in the conversational features between nonnative speakers (NNS) and native speakers (NS). The purpose of the second group task was primarily to encourage students to become conscious of the conversational features of second language conversations, and to reflect on their own. Finally after the second group-work activity, the whole class came together once more for discussion, and outlined what they noticed through their earlier group analysis and discussion, sharing their ideas and findings with everyone.

6. STUDENTS' FINDINGS

Through the analysis of two data sets, students found two features of second language conversations; (1) the frequent appearance of gaps before a repair initiator and persistent use of partial repetition of the trouble source as a repair initiator, and (2) inefficiency of understanding display⁴.

6.1 Persistent Appearance of Gaps and Partial Repetition of the Trouble Source as a Repair Initiator

Both NS and NNS often initiate repair by repeating a part of the problematic prior utterance, and also, other-initiations are often delayed⁵. Yet, the difference between NS and

NNS is, while NS also use repair initiators such as WH-interrogatives and understanding checks to pinpoint the trouble type, NNS persistently utilize the delay of repair-initiation and partial repetition of the trouble source utterance to prompt their interlocutor's self-initiation, even though these practices do not necessarily lead them to a satisfactory outcome.

The following excerpt is the distributed segment from a NNS conversation. ST is an advanced Japanese learner from China, and GM is a Japanese native speaker. GM is talking about a TV program she watched prior to this conversation. The TV program said that children were called "little emperor" in China.

(2)

01GM: Sugoi desu yo ne=shookootee tte iun desu ne kodomo no koto o.
awesome COP IP IP little emperor QT say COP IP child of thing OB
"It's awesome, isn't it. (Chinese people) call children little emperors, right?"

02ST: → <shookootee>?
little emperor
"Little emperors?"

03GM: chicchai kootee?
tiny emperor
"Tiny emperors."

04 → (0.2)

05GM: oosama?
king
"Kings."

06 → (1.0)

07ST: → ko- chicchai koo (.) tee?
tiny emperor
"Tiny emperors?"

08GM: kootee tte=kootee wa emperaa desu yo.
emperor QT emperor TOP emperor COP IP
"Emperor means 'emperor' (in English)."

09ST: a: kootee? (.) a: ima wa: ()
oh emperor oh now TOP
"Oh, emperor, oh, now..."

10 (0.2)
 11GM: tte (.) yobareru tte terebi [de itte mashita.
 QT call-be QT tv on say be
"The TV said they (the children) are called that."
 12ST: [a:.
 oh.
"Oh."
 13GM: chuugoku wa: (0.2) ano kodomo ga hitori shika inai kara
 china TO HES child SUB one only be-NG so
"In China, (families have) only one child, so..."
 14ST: soo desu a:. u:n.
 so COP oh HES
"That's so. Oh, hmm."

When GM said children are called “little emperors (shoo-kootee)” in line 01, ST could not understand what she was talking about. So, ST initiates repair in line 02, by simply repeating a part of the troublesome utterance, “shoo-kootee”. However, GM only (and mistakenly) interprets that ST does not know the meaning of “shoo” or “kootee”, and tries to complete the repair by rephrasing “shoo” with “chicchai” in line 03”, and “kootee” with “oosama” in line 05. As a natural consequence, they cannot reach mutual understanding, and ST has to initiate repair once more in line 07. Yet, once again, the same pattern is duplicated. ST’s utterance is delayed and it results in gaps observable in line 04 and 06, and ST only repeats “chicchai kootee?” in line 07, without specifying the actual problem; the understanding of the entire utterance of line 01⁶.

Delay of the next turn beginning and partial repetitions display that there is a problem to solve in order to maintain the conversation, but they *do not* specify the actual problem. We cannot tell if it is a listening problem or an understanding problem, nor do we know which part of the prior utterance our interlocutors could not hear/understand. Also, in the excerpt above, it was not clear enough to GM that ST was having a trouble in understanding the meaning of the whole utterance in line 01. As this excerpt shows, sometimes the NNS persistently uses pauses and partial repetitions, and the problem lasts longer as a natural

consequence.

On the other hand, the NS utilizes not only gaps and partial repetition of the trouble source but also repair initiators such as WH-interrogatives and understanding checks, thereby more accurately specifying the trouble source or problem type. The following excerpt is the distributed segment from a NS conversation. HM is talking about the size of her high school. It is a big school, and there are about eighteen homerooms in each year.

(3)

01HM: watashi: (.) watashi no gakunen wa: juuhachi hoomu atte
me me of year TP eighteen homeroom be
"My... my year had eighteen different homes (=homerooms)."

02 → (1.0)

03OM: → nani? foomu tte.
what form QT
"What does form (home) mean?"

04HM: juuhachi kurasu?
eighteen homeroom
"Eighteen homerooms."

05OM: e:::::?
wow
"Wow."

06HM: hhhh

07OM: uchi kyuu kurasu demo ooi tte iwareteta noni
we nine homerooms even many QT say-be though
"Our school only had nine homerooms, but still, people said it was many."

When OM heard HM said "juuhachi hoomu" (line 01), she could not understand what it meant. As a result, she displays a lack of understanding with a delay of a reaction in line 02, but it does not prompt HM's repair. Therefore, this time, OM swiftly moves to a specific variation of repair initiator, a WH-interrogative in line 03. OM's "nani? foomu tte." explicitly targeting the trouble type; the problem is the understanding of the word "foomu (hoomu)"⁷.

Consequently, HM can complete the repair in line 04, by rephrasing “foomu/hoomu” with “kurasu”, which is precisely the information that OM sought.

The NS also initiates repair by understanding checks to specify the problem type. In extract (4), IM says “oniichan? oneechan? (Male or female?)” and tries to find out if TE’s older sibling is a male or a female in line 01. However this question form lacks many sentence elements and the meaning is ambiguous. Accordingly, TE needed to initiate repair and clarify what IM meant.

- (4)
- 01IM: he: e oniichan? oneechan?
Oh QT older brother older sister
"Oh well (is your sibling) male or female?"
- 02 → (0.4)
- 03TE: →e? watashi?
huh I
"Huh? Me? (Are you asking if I am the older sister?)"
- 04IM: ue=
older
"(Your) older (sibling) (I'm not asking if you are the older sibling, but I am asking if your older sibling is male or female.)"
- 05TE: =a. ue wa oniichan
Oh older TOP older brother
"Oh. (My) older (sibling) is male"

In line 02, because of the delay of TE’s next turn, there is a slight gap, but soon after that, in line 03, TE moves on to repair initiation by showing her understanding “e? watashi? (Are you asking if I am the older sister?)”. TE’s understanding check specifies that the problem is not of audibility but of clarity of meaning; she is displaying she could catch what IM said and she understood that IM is probably asking whether TE herself is the older sibling. Therefore, IM could complete repair by clarifying her intention in line 04; “I’m not asking if you are the older sibling, but I’m asking if your older sibling is male or female.

6.2 Inefficiency of Understanding Display

Another particularity of second language conversations which the students found is the way to display understanding after repair completion. The students commented they cannot tell if NNS in the data really understood what their interlocutors said because their reaction is only a minimal one such as “Oh” and “Okay”. On the other hand, if the NS could understand what their interlocutor said following their repair initiation, they display their understanding by doing the next relevant action⁸.

For example, in extract (4) above, when TE understands what IM meant in the question “oniichan? oneechan?” in line 01, she indicates she could actually understand by answering the question, “ue wa oniichan” in line 05, which is the next relevant action after a question. TE displayed her understanding by supplying the appropriate second pair part of an adjacency pair. Another instance is OM’s display of understanding in line 05 in extract (3). When OM could understand what HM meant in line 01, she displays her understanding by showing her surprise at such a big number of classrooms by “e:::::?” in line 05.

Nevertheless, NNS’s displays of understanding are only minimal ones such as “Oh” and “Okay”. In extract (2), in line 09, ST only says “a: kootee?”, and even though she proceeds to add some more information by saying “a: ima wa:”, she stops midway in line 10. If ST answered GM’s original question in line 01 (“Chinese people call children little emperors, right?”) here, GM could presume ST’s understanding and the problem would appear to have been solved, but actually this did not happen. As a result, it is unclear to GM that ST actually understood, and rather, GM decides ST’s problem is that she could not understand the utterance in line 01, and starts to add more explanation in lines 11 and 13, so that ST can understand what GM originally meant in line 01. Yet, while ST is listening to the explanation, she only displays her understanding with minimal tokens; “a:.” in line 12, and “a:. u:n.” in line 14. The students commented that they could not tell if ST had actually understood or not in the end. Indeed, ST might have been pretending she understood until the

end. Whatever the case, after line 01, she could have utilized the part or parts of GM's preceding utterance which she could catch, along with a repair initiating WH-interrogative such as "Kodomo ga nan desu ka? (What are you saying about children?)" , "Sugoi tte, nani ga? (What did you say is awesome?)" as an NS might do. In this way, ST could have solved the understanding problem much more swiftly.

7. CONCLUSION

As shown above, through this CA-informed activity, students were able to notice conversational features of which they are not usually conscious. Nonetheless, even if the students can notice such particularities, it is not guaranteed that they can improve their own conversational practices. Therefore, this activity needs to be combined with other tasks, so that the students can directly put into practice the conversational features which they noticed through this activity. During this single ninety-minute introductory lecture, neither warm-up nor follow-up activities were carried out because of time constraints. However, designing some complimentary activities for output is the next step which has to be taken in the near future. Teachers and students are often quite busy, and there is little time for extensive interactional element training or the like. Hence, any such training which is concerned with conversational elements should be compact yet effective.

In addition, the educational effect of this awareness-raising activity has yet to be evaluated. Its effectiveness can only be measured by examining how well students can perform the conversational practices which they have reflected upon. Therefore, comparing performances both before and after such training sessions is a necessary further step which has to be taken in the future.

NOTES

- 1 The transcripts which were shown to the students, and those extracts included in this report, are very simplified versions in comparison to the ones in general CA research. Despite the simplification, the transcripts remained difficult for the students to read. Therefore, during the class, whenever new excerpts were shown, brief contextual information about the conversations were provided. The audio-recordings of the actual conversation excerpts were also played. (NB: Appendix A details key notation and abbreviation conventions that are used in the transcripts of this paper, a summary of which was provided to the students during the lecture itself.)
- 2 I introduced some important concepts of CA because this awareness-raising activity took place as a part of a specialized lecture series whose focus was on Japanese Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Hence, this lecture had another objective in that students should get to know CA as one specific academic field. If this activity takes places in a pure second-language classroom, this stage can be skipped.
- 3 The following is one example of the exercises. On the actual worksheet, there was no English translation, and the transcript was all in *kana* and *kanji*. In this example, the trouble-source is “dizuniirand” in line 01. KK initiated repair in line 02 “e doko?”, while the repair is completed by MS in line 03, repeating “dizuniirando”. MS simply repeated the troublesome word, and it was good enough to KK, so we can say there was a listening problem in this case.

[Sample Exercise]

01MS: iki-tai kedo ima wa dizuniirando ni \$iki-tai na\$. hhh

“I want to go (to Okinawa). But, now I want to go to Disneyland.”

02KK: e [doko?

“Oh? Where to?”

03MS: [e? dizuniiran[do.

“Huh? To Disneyland.”

04KK: [a diz- tookyoo dizuniirando

“Oh. Dis- Tokyo Disneyland.”

- 4 During discussions, I took on the role of teacher-as-facilitator. I did not attempt to show only one correct answer. Rather, I tried to make the students feel free to provide any ideas because the purpose of the class discussion was to make the students share their ideas. During the discussion, I took notes of the students’ ideas, and analyzed them after the class. This section presents the result of the analysis.
- 5 According to Schegloff, et al. (1977: 374), other-initiations are withheld a little beyond the possible completion of trouble-source turn, as it provides an extra opportunity for the speaker of the trouble source to self-initiate repair.
- 6 Even when ST was given the English translation of “kootee” in line 08, the communication problem was

not solved, and ST stopped speaking in the middle of an unfinished sentence in line 09. From ST's reaction, we can see in retrospect that the trouble source was the meaning of GM's whole utterance in line 01, not the meaning of "shoo-kootee" itself.

- 7 This instance includes OM's mishearing of the word "hoomu (home)". She believed HM said "foomu (form)", and targeted the trouble source.
- 8 A sequence which consists of two turns produced by different speakers ordered as a first pair part and second pair part is called an "adjacency pair" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). A particular first pair part makes a particular second pair part conditionally relevant; e.g., a question calls for an answer as the second pair part.

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APPENDIX A

Notations Used for Transcription

.	(period) falling intonation
?	(question mark) rising intonation
,	(comma) continuing intonation
-	(hyphen) abrupt cut-off
:	(colon) prolonging of sound
<word>	slowed speech
hh	aspiration or laughter
.hh	inhalation
(word)	transcriptionist doubt
\$word\$	smiley voice
(0.4)	length of a silence in tenths of a second
(.)	micro-pause: 0.2 second or less
[word	
[word	beginning of simultaneous or overlapping talk

Abbreviations Used in the Gloss

COP	copula
SUB	subject
TOP	topic
OB	object
QT	quotative
HES	hesitation
IP	interactional particle
NG	negative