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## An analysis of conversation repairs by non-native speakers of Japanese: from the perspective of grammar in interactions and 2nd language acquisition

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**Abstract** This study investigates conversation repair in interactions by non-native speakers of Japanese (L2J) whose native language is English (L1E). This study focuses on syntactic elements of repair that speakers use in conversational interactions and considers the correlation syntactic aspect and second language acquisition.

**Key Words** : conversation repair, second language acquisition, grammar in interaction

### 1. Introduction

This study analyses conversational repairs in L2 Japanese speaker interactions from the perspective of correlation of syntactic elements of repair and second language acquisition (L2 acquisition). Previous studies about repair began based on data from daily conversations in English and have analysed the types of repair, the organization of them and their position in interactions. In addition, some research on conversation repair (e.g. Fox et al., (1996)) focuses on the relationships between syntax and repair and demonstrates the difference of repair between languages that can be attributed by the syntax of both languages. Many studies on repair in L2 interactions that include participants with unequal linguistic competence were motivated by the suggestion of the preference for self-correction over other-repair by Schegloff et al. (1977), and these studies have tested this in L2 interactions.

Recently, researchers have begun to focus on repairs in ELF (English as a lingua franca) interactions and analysed repairs by non-native speakers with differing first languages; however, most of the previous research on repair has not analysed L2 conversations by speakers who share the same first language. In addition, this

research has not studied the syntactic features of repair in these interactions and has not analysed the relationships between such syntactic features and their acquisition.

This study focuses on the syntactic features of repairs in interaction by L2 speakers of Japanese who share the same first language, English, and analyses the acquisition by comparing interactions according to L2 competence level.

### 2. Repairs in conversation

When there is a failure in understanding between conversation participants, a problem in hearing, speaking and/or comprehension must be addressed. These problems are called ‘trouble sources’ that are repairable (Schegloff et al., 1977). According to Schegloff et al. (1977), the basic structure of repair consists of three components: 1) trouble source, 2) repair initiation, and 3) repair completion. There is also a sequential organisation called ‘repair segment’ that includes some stages that begin by ‘repair initiation’ and end by the outcome of the participants’ conversational sequence.

## 2.1 Repairs in conversation

Who initiates repair and who repairs the trouble source are important according to Schegloff et al. (1977). They divide repair initiations into two types: self-initiation and other-initiation. In addition, they divide 'who repairs' into two types: self-repair and other-repair. The combinations of 'who initiates the repair' and 'who repairs the trouble source' are as follows:

### <types of repairs>

- (1) Self-initiated self-repair
- (2) Other-initiated self-repair
- (3) Self-initiated other-repair
- (4) Other-initiated other-repair

## 2.2 Position of repairs

Repair can be initiated in various places in relation to the trouble source and Turn Constructional Unit (TCU) that contains the trouble source. Schegloff et al. (1977) list four different places for repair initiation:

- (1) Within the same turn
- (2) At a transition space
- (3) In the next turn (3-1) (delayed other-initiation of repair)
- (4) After the next turn

## 2.3 Sequential organization of repair: sometimes fails

And how repair is organised in conversational interaction have been analysed. Participants in conversation sometimes fail to repair trouble sources or repair initiation is rejected. A co-participant in conversation locates a trouble source in another's utterance. In one case, a speaker whose utterance includes a trouble source accepts and corrects, and in another, this speaker may reject or fail to correct.

## 2.4 Preference for self-repair over other-repair

Schegloff et al. (1977) observed the preference for self-repair over other-repair. As one potential reason,

opportunities for self-repair exist prior to those for other-repair, because the speaker may repair his/her utterance within his/her turn and before the turn transition occurs.

## 2.5 Repair and syntax

Relationships between repair and syntax have received relatively little attention except for the study by Fox et al., 1996, which focuses on the relationships between syntax and repair from a cross-cultural perspective. They limit their conversation data to "same-turn self-repair," and demonstrate the difference of repair between languages that can be attributed to the syntax of both languages. Mainly using English and Japanese conversation data, they demonstrate that repair is organised differently across the two languages, and that those differences arise from syntactic differences across the two languages. For example, some morphological repairs in Japanese do not occur in the English conversations, and repair by repeating a part of a noun phrase occurs in the English conversations, but Japanese speakers do not make use of clausal recycling as repair in Japanese conversations. Fox et al., 1996 demonstrate that these differences in repair are affected by syntactic differences in each language.

## 2.6 Repairs in L2 interactions

The research on repair in L2 interaction were motivated by Schegloff et al., 1977's analysis of the preference of self-repair over other-repair and tested this idea in both pedagogical settings and non-pedagogical settings. In addition, they describe that repair in L2 interaction plays an important role differing from that in L1 interaction. L2 interaction involves participants with unequal linguistic competence in which some pedagogical goals should be accomplished. The studies demonstrate various kinds of strategies of repair special to speakers whose role is either "teacher" or "student."

## 2.7 Repairs in interactions by L2 speakers of Japanese who share the same L1

Most previous research on repair has not analysed the interactions by L2 speakers with the same L1 in which there is only L2 communication and teachers or instructors are not present; that is, there is no competence

inequality in the L2. Furthermore, the previous studies on conversation repair have not focused on the syntactic features of repair in L2 interactions and the relationships between such syntactic features of repair and their acquisition.

This study focuses on the syntactic features of repair in interactions by L2 speakers who share the same L1 and investigates how L2 speakers use repairs in their L2 interactions and acquire “how to use repairs” in L2 conversational interactions according to the learners’ L2 competency level.

### 3. Conversation Data

The data in this study consist of conversational interactions videotaped and transcribed in which pairs talk about given topics freely. Only the L2 Japanese conversation data from these participants is analysed.

#### 3.1 Participants in conversation

Twelve native speakers of English (L1E) from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia were involved in this study. Six pairs of five-minute to seven-minute interactions were recorded. A pair with the same L2 Japanese competence talked about two given topics in each session. The ages of the participants ranged from twenty to thirty years of age. Before the data session, questions were asked pertaining to nationality, age, length of living in the U.S or Japan, length of learning their second language (Japanese). Below provides a brief summary of the participants’ information.

**Table 1: Japanese Conversation Data (L1 English)**

#### Basic level speakers of Japanese

Speaker	Nationality	Age	Experience living in Japan
S1	American	20's	less than 1 year
S2	American	20's	None
S3	American	20's	None
S4	American	20's	None

#### Intermediate level speakers of Japanese

Speaker	Nationality	Age	Experience living in Japan
S5	American	30's	3 years
S6	Australian	30's	5 years
S7	American	20's	4 years
S8	British	30's	6 years

#### Advanced level speakers of Japanese

Speaker	Nationality	Age	Experience living in Japan
S9	British	30's	10 years
S10	British	30'd	12 years
S11	British	30's	10 years
S12	American	30's	15 years

#### 3.2 Data collection procedure

All data in this study were collected in both the United States and Japan from 2006 to 2010. Japanese conversation data were collected at Boston College in Massachusetts, the United States and Tokorozawa Kyoiku Centre in Japan. Japanese conversation data in which speakers (L1 English) were required to communicate only in Japanese were collected for analysis. Altogether, twelve conversation sessions by six pairs were recorded. The sessions in which pairs with the same L2 competence (basic / intermediate / advanced) talk about two given topics for five to seven minutes were recorded by digital video recorder. The conversation topics were easy and familiar in daily life, e.g. hobbies, travelling, and daily news broadcasts.

#### 3.3 Data transcription

Conversation data recorded on DV tapes were digitalized into computer files and transcribed according to the transcription conventions of conversation analysis. The transcription notation used in this study is provided in Appendix A.

#### 3.4 Three levels in Japanese conversation data by non-native speakers

This study uses the experience of Japanese learning and the periods of living in Japan as criteria of Japanese proficiency. Conversational interactions by six pairs were collected and divided by proficiency levels of Japanese into advanced, intermediate, and basic level speakers of Japanese.

- (i) **basic level:** speakers with no or less than a year's experience living in Japan, or speakers having some difficulty in communicating in Japanese
- (ii) **intermediate level:** speakers with one to nine years' experience living in Japan who can communicate only in Japanese but sometimes have slight difficulty
- (iii) **advanced level:** speakers with 10 or more years' experience living in Japan who do not have difficulty in communicating only in Japanese

#### 4. Analysis

##### 4.1 Japanese conversation by L2 Japanese, L1 English speakers

This study indicates the grammatical features of repair in interaction by L2 speakers of Japanese observing what kinds of repair they use in L2 conversation and analyses the relationships between the syntactic features of repair and their acquisition. Furthermore, this study considers which syntactic system these learners use, and whether they acquire the syntactic system of their L2 or use the one of their L1 when speaking in their L2.

##### 4.1.1 Repairs by basic level speakers

In observing the conversational interactions by basic level speakers, most of the repairs were "self-initiated self-repairs" within the same turn by a speaker in which trouble sources are included. Some grammatical features were observed in self-repairs by basic level speakers. Below is a frequent example:

##### (Example 1) Basic level speaker

S1: un.. Watashi ha .....watashi no kazoku ha

takusan tabemono wo tabemasu...  
( I ... my family eat a lot of food)

Speaker 1 self-initiates repair within his own utterance (within his turn). This is understood by the pause in his utterance indicating he did not know or was uncertain which case particle he had to use. He self-repairs after the pause by using the genitive case "no" in place of the nominative case "ha." There were many of these kinds of self-repairs within the same turn in these L2 interactions by basic level speakers.

As usually described, English is a rigid SVO language in which subject and object are unmarked and relatively fixed in their order with regard to the verb and verb subject agreement. Japanese is a verb-final language (SVO), and the order of nouns that must be followed by case particles or postpositions is flexible. Sometimes subjects, objects, or even verbs are omitted in Japanese discourse.

It is thought that this influences the use of case markers for L2 speakers of Japanese and their relative difficulty in acquiring them. L2 speakers gradually acquire this Japanese case marking system. A lesser example of this kind of self-repair was observed in L2 interactions by advanced speakers. In comparison with basic level speaker interactions, intermediate level speakers sometimes made grammatical errors in case markers but can communicate only in Japanese by not correcting small errors (See Example 2). Advanced level speakers can correct less grammatical errors as trouble sources in using more complex case systems (Example 3).

##### (Example 2) Intermediate level speakers

S5: jyuhasai, chigau, koukousei no Toki kara zutto, kyoumi ga motte ru. Elissa ha? (no self-repair)

S6: ano, watashi ha ano yama nobori to suno-bo-do.

(S5: 18 years old, no, since I was a high school students, interest have (I). How about Elissa? )

(S6: ah, I ahm, climbing mountains and snowboarding.)

In example 2, Speaker 5 mistakenly used the wrong case marker "ga" where she had to use "wo." The intermediate level speaker of Japanese, however, may understand the main stream of the conversation without correcting small grammatical errors. This may be

caused by the Japanese non-bound case system: the order of nouns followed by the case particles is relatively flexible and sometimes the role of a noun without a case particle is understandable due to a highly dependency on context. Consider the following:

- (i) Kyomi (ga) motte ru
- (ii) Kyomi (wo) motte ru
- (iii) Kyomi (Non marker) motteru

The expression (ii) using objective case is the correct form of Japanese. The expression (i) included in Example 2 using nominative 'ga' is an incorrect form, because the speaker had to use the objective particle 'wo.' Native Japanese speakers, however, can understand the meaning without correction due to (i) being only a small mistake in form. Furthermore, native speakers of Japanese can understand even number (iii) in which the case marker is missing.

This may be caused by the Japanese flexible word order system in which nouns can appear at some places with various case particles by changing their roles. Learners of Japanese can gradually acquire not only this case system that decrease Japanese learners' grammatical errors in case marking but also higher context dependency special to Japanese than a rigid word order system. Next, consider the following example:

### (Example 3) Advanced level speaker

S9: demo sore ha, sore demo,  
ano sou iu club de ha mou kinen ni natta.

((but, th.. They... even at those clubs,  
smoking was banned.)

This is an interaction by advanced level speakers of Japanese. Speaker 9 self-corrects the nominative case by using a slightly complex locative expression. As seen in this example, learners of Japanese with advanced L2 competency can correct grammatical errors (nominative case) into more complex and precise forms of Japanese without hesitation. Next, consider the other type of self-repair by basic level speakers (Example 4).

### (Example 4) Basic level speaker

S2: ah.. Jyaa, tabe ma sen, a tabe masu ka?  
(S2: ah, so, (you) do not eat, a, do you eat?)

<<self-repair by changing the inflection form of a verb>>

Basic level speakers of Japanese often self-correct this kind of inflection form of a verb. Basic level speakers often make mistakes in using verb forms. Speaker 2 wanted to ask a co-participant in interaction whether he would eat it or not, but the speaker was not able to use the correct form of question and used the negative form of the verb 'taberu.' This type of repair as correction was often observed in conversation interactions by basic level speakers. Next, consider Examples 5 and 6.

### (Example 5) Basic level speaker

S1: Olympic ha ... ninety-eight? Nineteen ninety-eight?

Olympic ga ari masu. ari ma shita.

(S1: Olympic in 98? 1998? (use English expression)  
There is Olympic, There was)

### (Example 6) Basic level speaker

S4: ah.. Watashi ha ah... sukii suru, ah.. koto ga ari  
masen... de shita.

(S4: ah, I, ah, ski, ah, have not skied yet.)

These examples show the self-repair by changing verb tense. Basic level speakers often make errors in using the correct tense forms of verbs. These kinds of repairs were often observed in this study.

## 4.1.2 Repairs by intermediate level speakers

Next, we will consider some self-repair strategies which can be seen in interactions by the intermediate level speakers. This deals with two kinds of syntactic features of self-repairs.

### 4.1.2.1 Nominalization of verbs

One of the self-repair strategies by intermediate level

speakers is the nominalization of a verb. Consider Example 7.

**(Example 7) Nominalization of a verb (intermediate level speaker)**

S6: watashi mo.... watashi mo kaku ga suki,  
 kaku no ga suki.sou.  
 (I.... I also like writing, like to write.)

Intermediate speakers also use the repair by ‘nominalization of a verb.’ This is a difficult Japanese grammatical item for beginners. As seen in this example, this kind of use was often observed in intermediate level speakers. Speakers use not only simple self-repairs by the change of case marker, they also use repair by nominalization of a verb. In Example 7, a speaker used the mistaken nominalization form of the verb “kaku,” then, self-repairs by using the correct form. This indicates that L2 learners gradually become able to use self-repair for complex Japanese forms in accordance with the acquisition of the form.

**4.1.2.2 Repair by clausal recycling**

Another type of self-repair observed in interactions by intermediate level speakers is the self-repair form by clausal recycling. This self-repair in Example 8 is “clausal recycling” that includes subject, verb, and object.

**(Example 8) Clausal recycling by intermediate level speakers**

S6: ano, hard drive ga iri kon de naka tta.  
 Enter it.  
 S5: un??  
 S5: pasokon ga hard drive wo yoma na kata.  
           S          O          V

(S6: ah, hard drive did not en...’Enter it’.)  
 (S5: what?)  
 (S6: PC did not load the hard drive.)  
 <S6 uses English expression ‘hard drive’>

Fox et al., 1996, analyse the scope of recycling in self-repairs in which Japanese data (L1) shows only constituent-internal recycling (e.g. self-repair by only recycling a verb). Japanese speakers do not make use of clausal recycling that is usually seen in their English

data.

In the interaction seen in Example 8, an L2 speaker whose L1 is English uses the pattern of L1 (English) grammatical features while speaking only in L2 (Japanese). Some influence of L1 is thought to be shown in the L2 interaction in this example. If the co-participant is a native-speaking Japanese, he/she is thought to say only “yomi koma naka tta” as a repair and can understand what the speaker has said by listening to only part of the expression. S5, however, who is a native English speaker, uses the English (L1) pattern (‘clausal recycling’ (Fox et al., 1996)) and repairs subject, object and verb after a co-participant indicated misunderstanding in what S6 had said.

Interestingly, S5 (intermediate level speaker) uses the Japanese grammatical pattern SOV not SVO (English pattern). We can say that the speaker is in the process of Japanese language acquisition (L2), and she has acquired some part (Japanese SOV system) but has not acquired the L2 repair strategies ‘recycling only some parts’ that includes ‘omission of some elements in utterances.’

**4.1.3 Other initiation of repairs**

As described above, only a small number of other-initiation of repair were observed in basic level interactions. Interactions by intermediate and advanced speakers, however, had more examples of other-initiation of repair and other-repairs by co-participants compared with interactions by basic level speakers.

**(Example 9) Other-initiated self-repair by intermediate level speakers**

S7: arubaito. De, sono mondai ga atta toki ha, Fujiya  
 ga tyotto 1 kagetsu 2 kagetsu, 3.... =  
 S8: wakann nai!!  
 S7: = 7 kagetsu. Sou yasu n de de kanojyo shigoto  
 nakatta kedo...

(S7: part-time job. And when there was the problem, Fujiya have some.. 1 month, 2 months, 3...

(S8: I don’ know!.)

(S7: **7 months. So (she) did not work. She did not have jobs but...**)

In Example 9, the utterance by Speaker 8 is the other-initiation of repair. In the conversation data of this study, other-initiation of repairs are sometimes observed in interactions by intermediate and advanced level speakers.

#### 4.1.4 Other-repairs by basic and advanced level speakers

Schegloff et al. (1977) notes that self-repair has preference over other-repairs except for a small number of cases in which inequality exists in interactions, such as adult and child. One potential reason is that the opportunities for self-repair exist prior to those for other-repair, because the speaker may repair his/her talk within his/her current turn before the turn transition takes place.

The research on repair in L2 interaction was motivated by Schegloff et al. (1977)'s analysis of the preference for self-repair over other-repair and tested this idea in both pedagogical settings and non-pedagogical settings. In addition, they describe that repair in L2 interaction plays an important role different from that in L1 interactions. L2 interaction involves participants with unequal linguistic competence in which some pedagogical goals should be accomplished. The study demonstrated various kinds of strategies of repairs special to the speakers whose roles are "teacher" or "student."

Schegloff et al. (1977) mostly used L1 English conversational interactions, and researchers who analyse L2 interactions used conversation data in pedagogical or non-pedagogical interactions with most of them analysing teacher and student interactions.

The data collected in this study comprise conversational interactions by L2 speakers of Japanese whose L1 is English with the inclusion of a conversation pair with equal L2 competence; therefore, there are differences from the idea that self-repair has the preference over other-repairs by previous analyses, because the data in this study consists of L2 interactions without L2 competence inequality.

This study shows the different kind of other-repair observed in the conversation data by non-native speakers of Japanese whose L1 is English. Basic level speakers of Japanese sometimes use unique self-initiation strategies of word search in L2 (Japanese) and a co-participant repairs by providing a word or phrase. This is a kind of other-repair is indicated in the following

example:

#### (Example 10) Interaction by basic level speakers

S2: ah..obasan to ojisan ha... tabemono wo..

How to say 'bring'??

S1: ah... motte ima su.

(S2: aunt and uncle ??? Food)

(S1: ah...'have' (this is a mistaken word))

As seen in Example 10, when Speaker 2 lacks knowledge of the correct word/phrase in this L2 interaction, repair by word/phrase searching is initiated by expression in L1 (English) where he should speak in L2 (Japanese). The other participant in the interaction then repairs by providing a candidate for the correct expression.

This is a unique self-initiated other repair example of basic level learners of Japanese not seen in interactions by advanced level learners.

Other-initiated other-repair that is said unseen in L1 interactions, except for examples in which some inequality exists (Schegloff et al. (1977)), is seen in interactions by non-native speakers whose L1 is the same.

#### (Example 11) Other-initiated other-repair by advanced level speakers

S11: ano sou iu club demo mou kin-en ni na tta.

S12: mou kin-en ni naru.

S11: **nari masu.** Sou.

(S11: but th..they.. Even at those clubs smoking was Banned)

(S12: Smoking will be banned.)

(S11: Will be... yeah. )

In this example, the speakers are both L2 Japanese and L1 English. There lacks inequality in L2 competence usually seen in interactions such as teacher-student; however, Speaker 12 initiates (other-initiation) repairs and corrects Speaker 11's utterance (other-repair).

#### 5. Summary

This study focused on syntactic features of repairs in L2 Japanese, L1 English speaker interactions and investigated how these speakers used such repairs in

accordance with L2 competency level in relation to the perspective of L2 acquisition.

### Basic level Speakers

Basic level speakers of Japanese use many self-initiated self-repairs. Some grammatical features of the self-repairs observed in these interactions were as follows:

- (1) They often self-correct by changing the case particles.
- (2) They often self-correct by changing the inflection form of a verb.
- (3) They often self-correct by changing the tense of a verb.

In addition, self-initiated other-repair in interaction were also observed. The basic level speakers of Japanese sometimes use unique self-initiate strategies of kinds of word search in L1 (English) and a co-participant repairs by providing a word/phrases (other-repair).

### Intermediate level speakers of Japanese

As described above, some syntactic features of self-repairs were observed. One is the self-repair by the nominalization of a verb. Intermediate level speakers may be able to use this type of repair in accordance with the fact that the acquisition of Japanese progressed. The other type of self-repair is a form of clausal recycling. The interactions in this study show that L2 Japanese, L1 English speakers use the pattern of L1 grammatical features when they speak only in L2. Some influence of L1 is thought to be shown in L2 interaction, because the acquisition is in progress.

### Advanced level speakers of Japanese

In comparison with basic level learners' L2 interactions, advanced level speakers sometimes make grammatical errors in case markers but can communicate only in Japanese by not correcting small errors. Advanced level speakers can correct less grammatical errors as trouble sources in using more complex case systems. Furthermore, other-initiated other-repairs were observed in non-native speakers' interactions that are not seen in L1 interactions and L2 pedagogical interactions analysed by previous studies.

## 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the syntactic features of

repairs in interaction by L2 Japanese, L1 English speakers in which there is no inequality of language competence as seen in L2 pedagogical settings. Furthermore, this study considered the correlation between syntactic features of repair and its acquisition. This study is part of my research on repair and can be analysed by limited Japanese data, so more detailed observation and consideration on other data is necessary.

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### Appendix A

#### Transcription Notations

[            ]	overlapping utterances
...	pause
=	latching: when there is no interval between adjacent utterances
(            )	translation into L1
<u>          </u>	trouble sources that can be repaired
<u>Initiation</u>	repair-initiation
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Repair</span>	repairs