

Communication Style of Non-Native Speakers of English as Participants in Conversation: The Roles of Speaker and Listener

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Abstract:

How do non-native speakers of English communicate effectively in conversation conducted only in English? This study investigates the communication style of learners of English focusing on the role of “speaker” and “listener.” The study analyzes the conversational interaction between non-native speakers of English (NNSEs).

A great number of studies have analyzed how speakers or listeners use conversation strategies to communicate effectively: for example, backchannels and conversation repairs. Backchannel (Aizuchi in Japanese) is one of the strategies that shows “listenership” and conducts a variety of roles in conversation. Conversation repair and correction are the strategies that reduce the misunderstanding between participants in conversation and clarify the contents in conversation. Researchers were inspired by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) and have analyzed repairs from a variety of aspects. Previous studies in ELF have frequently reported self-repairs as one of the clarification strategies, which raises explicitness in the current speaker’s utterance in interaction (Kauer 2011, Mauranen 2007). Most of studies analyze such strategies in conversation by native speakers and others investigate them in the context of second language acquisition: interaction between a teacher and a student. However, not many studies have focused on conversation between non-native speakers of English (NNSEs).

This study analyzes characteristics of conversation strategies as both “listener” and “speaker” in conversation by learners of English and demonstrates how participants use strategies as “speaker” or “listener” from the perspective of effective communication. The study also compares conversation by NNSEs with the one by NNSE and NSE (native speaker of English) and indicates the difference between them.

The data in this study consists of interactions videotaped and transcribed in which Japanese university students talk freely in English. This focuses on moments in which difficulty is managed to communicate in only in English and analyze the strategies for it.

The present study revealed that learners of English use variety of strategies in conversation in order to communicate effectively as “listener” or “speaker.” NNSEs use repetition and repairs together with non-verbal strategies as clarification strategies for effective communication. This study also indicated the difference in the strategies to communicate with each other effectively between conversation by NNSEs and the one by NNSE and NSE.