



[BOOK REVIEW] DEVELOPING INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE IN A JAPANESE STUDY ABROAD CONTEXT

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Abstract

(Developing Interactional competence in A Japanese Study Abroad Context) is a book focusing on second language learning acquisition by Naoko Taguchi. It is a study describing the process of second language acquisition which focuses on the development of interactional competence in a Japanese study abroad context. The book contains nine chapters, which explain the introduction of the study, the method, speech style and style shift in language learning; how incomplete sentences in the Japanese language are produced; and the case histories in the study abroad experience. This book is a qualitative study of learners studying abroad in Japan and explains changes in their interactional competence, such as change in the use of speech styles, style shifting between the polite and plain forms, and the function of incomplete sentences. This function is one of the main characteristics of the Japanese language. The main goal of this book is to enable researchers such as postgraduate students to learn more about second language acquisition and to assist learners in becoming competent L2 speakers in the target community.

Abstrak

Book review kali ini membahas buku yang berkaitan dengan Akuisisi pembelajar bahasa Kedua dengan judul 'Developing Interactional Competence in a Japanese Study Abroad Context' oleh Naoko Taguchi. Di dalam buku ini membahas tentang proses akuisisi bahasa kedua yang memfokuskan pada pembelajaran studi di luar negeri untuk membangun kompetensi interaksional bahasa Jepang. Buku ini terdiri dari Sembilan bab yang menjelaskan tentang pengantar mengenai penelitian kali ini, metode penelitian, speech style dan style shift dalam pembelajaran bahasa, bagaimana kalimat tidak lengkap terbentuk dalam bahasa Jepang dan deksriptif kualitatif mengenai studi kasus pengalaman studi di luar negeri. Buku ini termasuk kedalam penelitian kualitatif pembelajar bahasa Jepang di Jepang yang melakukan studi lanjut dan menjelaskan bagaimana perubahan dalam kompetensi interaksional mereka, seperti perubahan penggunaan dalam speech style dan style shifting antara bentuk polite dan bentuk normal. Dan bagaimana fungsi-fungsi dari kalimat-kalimat tidak utuh. Tujuan utama dari buku ini adalah memungkinkan bagi para peneliti seperti mahasiswa pasca sarjana dan peneliti pemula untuk belajar mengenai akuisisi bahasa kedua dan membantu para pembelajar menjadi kompeten sebagai Penutur bahasa kedua di komunitas target dalam hal ini di Jepang.

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BOOK REVIEW “DEVELOPING INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE IN A JAPANESE STUDY ABROAD CONTEXT”

Developing Interactional Competence in a Japanese Study Abroad Context,” by Naoko Taguchi, is a study describing the process of second language acquisition which focuses on the development of interactional competence in a Japanese “study abroad” context. The book contains nine chapters, which explain the introduction of the study, the method, speech style and style shift in language learning; how incomplete sentences in the Japanese language are produced; and the case histories in the study abroad experience. This book is a qualitative study of learners studying abroad in Japan and explains changes in their interactional competence, such as change in the use of speech styles, style shifting between the polite and plain forms, and the function of incomplete sentences. This function is one of the main characteristics of the Japanese language. The main goal of this book is to enable researchers such as postgraduate students to learn more about second language acquisition and to assist learners in becoming competent L2 speakers in the target community.

In the first few chapters, Taguchi defines interactional competence. Taguchi cites Young (2008a), listing three categories of resources: identity, linguistic, and interactional. These resources are the basis of Taguchi’s study of the L2 Japanese learner’s development in a face to face conversation. Taguchi focuses on the linguistic resources of the Japanese language: speech styles (e.g. the polite and plain forms) and incomplete sentence ending.

Taguchi explains the number of previous studies that have examined Japanese learners’ use of the polite and plain forms (Atsuzawa-Windley & Noguchi, 1995; Chen, 2004; Cook, 2001, 2008; Iwasaki, 2010, 2011; Marriott, 1995; Masuda, 2011; McMeekin, 2007, 2011; Uenaka, 1997). The context of study abroad is also discussed, in that a variety of social settings can be an optimal environment for the acquisition of speech styles and can facilitate socialization into the appropriate use of those speech styles. Incomplete utterance endings in Japanese conversation are furthermore introduced. According to Maynard (1989) the Japanese language is well-known for its frequent ellipsis of particles, and verbal and nominal phrases. Taguchi explores the use of incomplete sentences in Japanese conversation and examines how L2

learners have difficulty in using incomplete sentences.

Furthermore, Taguchi describes case studies in study abroad as a site for language learning. Study abroad presents a rich environment for language learning because learners can explore a full community of language and cultural practices, and this proves easier than a formal classroom. This chapter shows an overview on study abroad previous studies. Taguchi states that the result of the research in study abroad experiences may vary, and to minimize the different outcomes, a new method data of collection through a longitudinal study is needed, combined with qualitative analysis of context and individuals.

In Chapter 4, the methodology of this study is described, including participants, data, and data analysis methods and data collection procedures. The participants in this study were 18 international students, 4 males and 14 females. They were intermediate-levels (3 and 4) learners in the Japanese program, who did not have any previous overseas experiences, and majored in various disciplines, such as Psychology, Computer Science, Comparative Studies, and International Studies. Informal conversations about daily life topics were recorded for about 20 minutes at the beginning and at the end of the semester. Although this study collected 18 international students’ data, Taguchi further analyzes only eight of the interviewees in order to gain insight into the relationship among interactional competence. Whether those eight participants can be representative or not remains unclear.

The main parts of the books are Chapters 5, 6, and 7. ‘Speech styles’ explores the proportion of the polite and plain form as it changed over the semester. Taguchi begins to describe the interactional development of the participants in the ability to use language that is appropriate to a specific register. Chapter 5 reports on the distribution of the 18 learners’ polite and plain forms at the pre- and post- conversation sessions. The learners’ studies here demonstrate a major change in their dominant speech styles from the beginning to the end of the semester. However, there is also consideration given to individual variation in their choice of speech style. According to Taguchi, this study did not cover individual learners’ perception of the speech style, and the role of subjectivity in the choice of speech style is only suggested.

By examining learners' style shift between the plain and polite forms, and between the different participants' structures, Taguchi analyzes interactional competence as displayed in the learners' ability to use appropriate speech styles that correspond to changing situations like talk-in-progress, e.g., a three-way conversation in which they talked to their peers and at the same time with the researcher. According to Taguchi, this style shifting reveals L2 learners' ability to move between boundaries and discourse practices, and to adapt and align their communicative behaviors to a dynamic and changing context.

Taguchi also analyzes one of the main characteristics of Japanese conversation, which is incomplete sentences. Incomplete sentences in a Japanese conversation play an important linguistic role in the process of joint meaning making, and therefore contribute to learners' interactional competence. Describing the development of interactional competence among the 18 learners of Japanese during their semester study abroad program, Taguchi explains that learners are capable of making use of joint turn construction and that they can perform a variety of social actions when completing each other's' turn. Joint turn construction can help learners demonstrate empathy and shared perspective, and can elaborate on the topic-in-progress.

The description of the speech style of each participant might have more objectivity if the data were supported with an individual learner's perception. Also through the style-shifting chapter, the author enough explanation for conducting three groups of a conversation.

The last part of the chapter presents four cases that reveal individual variation in the extent of social networking and the degree of community involvement during study abroad. The findings of each participants are explained according to the relationship that they develop through interaction with the community. Dewi's case involved successful integration within her local community, resulting in a higher level of intercultural competence. She continued to practice established sociocultural language skills in a variety of communities and social networking over time. Another participant was Lin; her progress are similar to Dewi. By attending their activities regularly, they established their position in the community and contributed to their goals. Lin's case exemplifies L2 development through participation in communities and linguistic socialization.

Taguchi explained that communities can form effective platforms for learning linguistic variations--the polite form, plain form, and honorifics--because these three communities each present different social configurations and distinct linguistic repertoires reflecting those in configuration. Ann's case, for example, showed different results, because her immediate community was her host family. She understood speech forms because she had direct interaction with her host family. Anna used her own speech style as a tool to always express her personal stance of respect and formality. Because of her background in a different social community, she was able to make a decision on what form of linguistic style to use and she also could make a decision, case by case, while she was interacting in her community.

The last participant was Adrian. Adrian experienced a struggle integrating into the local community. Adrian was a highly motivated student when he first came to Japan, but he was not able to adjust with the community very well. These findings were somewhat different, considering he had a high motivation, commitment and positive attitude. But his intermediate-level of language ability did not allow him to gain a complete understanding of social context and cultural knowledge in communication. Taguchi stated that successful interaction is a matter of collaborative effort of participants working toward a shared understanding.

The final chapter shows two unique Japanese structures, speech styles and incomplete sentences. Learners showed conspicuous progress in their treatment of incomplete sentence endings. They adopted a more naturalistic way of speech with interactional resources. This study contributes to the existing literature of interactional competence in the areas of speech styles and incomplete sentence endings. Taguchi gives four cases which exemplified individual learners' variations on linguistic outcomes of their study abroad experiences. Through these four case histories Taguchi aimed to give detailed descriptions of learners' changes in interactional competence. A previous study (Young, 2011) provided little evidence of how the changes happened. This study described changes but at the same time sought to understand the meaning of those changes by collecting qualitative data on individual learners' study abroad experiences.

EVALUATION

This book is essential for language learners and researchers, especially learners acquiring a second language in a study abroad context. Each chapter explores and explains clearly step by step how the author analyzed the process of second language acquisition. This study mainly discusses interactional competence focusing on speech style, and style shifting and incomplete sentences in the Japanese language. A study abroad setting was also considered as facilitator of second language acquisition in this study.

This study has a thorough analysis focusing interactional resources in Japanese conversation by illustrating how each participant progresses from the beginning of the semester until the end of the semester. Taguchi's intention was to observe the progress of each learner and how they develop in interactional competence. Therefore, the author used many kinds of data analysis such as a recording session of a conversation; an interview to provide an insight into the relationship among interactional competence and individual differences in these experiences; a motivational survey also was administered to assess various outcomes of intercultural service experience; and lastly the author was asked for a Japanese contact survey at the end of her research in order to document the amount of out-of-class contact with Japanese native speakers.

Although the participants in this study are 18 international students who have different first language backgrounds, the main focus of this study was 4 participants' cases. According to Taguchi herself, the limitation of this collected data allows only somewhat limited interpretation of the participants' interactional development in relation to their sociocultural experiences within the local community. The reason she selected 4 participants with different backgrounds was not explained in the case histories' chapter.

I think it would also be interesting to analyze from the point of view of first language influence, for example selecting participants who have the same first language background, then further analyzing this in the setting of study abroad. Various backgrounds of first language of the participants could also be considered to vary results. The case of Adrian, one of the case histories explained in Chapter 8, might be used to exemplify a totally different sociocultural background of L2 and first language.

Despite these limitations of the qualitative data, I believe this book could enrich our knowledge of how to analyze interactional competence, especially for Japanese as a second language. Also, the investigation of how learners' communication strategies and personal qualities develop can contribute to research on L2 acquisition on site.

In conclusion, this book provides perspectives in conversational interaction analysis different from previous studies such as Geiss (1995), Young (2011) and Usami (2002). In my opinion, it is a valuable resource for all students, researchers and teachers in this area.

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