

## UTILITY OF A NEAR PEER REVIEW TASK FOR JAPANESE LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** Although there is a large number of research reports on peer review practices and tasks in ESL/EFL (English as second and foreign language) settings, relatively little research has been conducted on this practice in the Japanese language learning classes (Ikeda, 2002). Furthermore, almost all previous studies, regardless of languages, have investigated peer review practices as in-class activities. Thus, this study aimed to illustrate an extension of peer review practices as near peer review tasks where higher-level Japanese learners correct homework completed by lower-level learners outside of the classroom. Conversation Analysis framework is employed to explore how students engage in language learning tasks.

**Keywords:** peer review, Conversation Analysis, TBLT, scaffolding

### OBJECTIVE

1. Illuminate how intermediate-level Japanese language learners (the participants) develop talk-in-interaction as they engage in a near peer review task.

### METHOD

#### Participants

The participants were two female students who were taking a second year Japanese course in Fall, 2011 in a large University in the Southwest U.S. The author was not teaching the participants at the time. One participant was 23 years old (Participant “C”) and the other (Participant “R”) was 20. Participant “C” was a native speaker of French, although her English proficiency was high enough to engage in undergraduate study in the university. Thus, I operated under the assumption that for this project, her L1 was English. Participant “R” was a native speaker of English. The participants were asked to grade the first year students’ homework because it was felt it would be a useful learning experience for them and because they had the L2 skills and knowledge to grade the homework fairly and appropriately. Their then-current instructor of the participants indicated that their Japanese proficiency levels were high in terms of performance in their second-year classes.

#### Materials and Procedure

The materials consisted of the audio recording and the resulting transcript of that recording. The interaction of two participants engaged in the near-peer review task was

recorded for 100 minutes. Both participants understood that their interaction was being recorded. The researcher was not present during the task. The participants were not provided any instructions besides being asked to grade the homework without using an answer key. The interaction between the participants was transcribed verbatim following the CA transcription conventions appearing in Wong and Zhang Waring (2010). The participants were not told to what language to use while reviewing the homework on their near peers. The participants graded the homework of seven U.S. undergraduates in a first-year Japanese class at the same institution. The homework was two sections from the workbook from *Genki I* (Banno, Ohno, Sakane, & Shinagawa, 2000), a text and workbook series commonly used for Japanese instruction in the U.S. The homework was mainly comprised of translation items and the production of Japanese sentences based on some pictures. The names of the first-year students were hidden to protect their privacy.

### Conversation Analysis

Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) define Conversation Analysis as “the systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction: talk-in-interaction” (p. 11). Recently, Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA) has been incorporated into SLA and language pedagogy fields (Seedhouse, 2005), although there is much debate concerning how CA should contribute to SLA research (Mori, 2004; Mori, 2008; Seedhouse, 2005). Regardless of approaches to CA, however, almost all previous research emphasized and made use of close examinations of transcripts. Transcripts following CA conventions reveal many areas of interest to applied linguists such as second language acquisition, pedagogy, and curriculum. For example, a number of CA-based studies have illustrated that tasks prepared by teachers are often transformed into different tasks by students who engage in the tasks. Meticulous examinations of moment-by-moment interactions are also used to illustrate how participants in conversations promote their learning through interactions and how various factors, such as L1 and L2 usages, proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, teacher and student dynamics, and students’ personalities affect classroom structures.

To explore how the participants develop talk-in-interaction as they engage in a near peer review task, a fine-grained transcript was developed. The transcript was reviewed three times without looking for any specific communicative functions. Although it is conventional in CA studies that the turn comprises the basic unit of analysis, where a turn is a verbalized unit that is bound by another interlocutor, it seemed necessary to analyze the transcript in terms of the utterance as well due to the high occurrences of code-switches, where the utterance is a verbalized unit that is bound by a pause. To illustrate is a segment from the transcript:

01C: oh my go:d okay. She:: okay {E = 2}

02 R: <kore sore are {J = 1}

Line 1 contains two utterances. After the first utterance “oh my go:d okay,” there is a micro-pause, which separates the first utterance from the following utterance, She:: okay. Line 1 comprises a turn, and Line 2 comprises another turn because the interlocutor for each turn is different. The number in curly brackets indicates the number of the

utterances in that turn; {J = 1} means that one Japanese utterance was made in that turn, and the number preceded by “E” indicate the number of English utterances (E = 1). Turns were classified as either English or Japanese turns on the basis of the ratio of the English or Japanese utterances in a turn. For instance, if over 50% of a given number of utterances was in Japanese, then the turn was categorized as Japanese. If a turn was determined to be a Japanese turn, the turn number was underlined and typed in bold font (e.g., 02).

## FINDINGS

As the transcript was reviewed iteratively, some intriguing features emerged. First, as participants engage in the task, the participants actively discuss some previously learned grammar structures. They shared their what they know about specific grammar points in order to make sure that their grading is accurate, especially when they did not agree on correct answers. By working collaboratively, each participant contributes his or her knowledge to complete the task. Second, without being guided which language to complete the task in, the participants used both L1 and L2. This was worth noting, since the author anticipated finding that the majority of the interactions would be carried out in their L1. It was true that more turns and utterances were made in their L1; however, in terms of utterances per turn, L2 was almost as equally used as L1 (for participant C, 1.42 utterances per turn in the L2 versus 1.43 in the L1; for participant R, 2.07 utterances per turn in the L2 versus 2.20 in the L1). This suggests that participants were generally not just saying single words but rather phrases and sentences. Third, the transcript demonstrates that the participants made use of L1 and L2 for different purposes and both serve inevitable functions for language learning. For instance, L1 was often employed to ask for clarification, disagree with another interlocutor, and share humorous errors in the homework, while L2 was observed when the participants encountered possibly wrong answers, tried to reinforce newly learned knowledge, and practiced problematic pronunciations.

## CONCLUSION

Through close examination of the transcript, this study provides some pedagogical insights. First, a near peer review task would be an ideal task for a review purpose in that the task forced the learners to access their previously stored linguistic knowledge, and the learners get opportunities to clarify or moderate their knowledge by asking and answering questions. Second, this study suggests that learners need to be allowed to use both their L1 and L2 in classroom. The L1 and L2 served different functions, which are all inevitable for the participants to complete the task. Although the current SLA trend emphasizes the high usage of L1 and limits L2 in the classroom, learners might need the help of their L2 in order to fully complete classroom tasks.

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