

Student-Initiated Student-Repair in Classroom

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Abstract

This paper analyzes a classroom data of English class on short-term study abroad programme, and focuses on how Japanese students repair their mistakes. Although teachers usually play an important role in correcting students' mistakes in a classroom, students occasionally do amend their utterances. The data shows how the student cooperates with other student in order to repair own mistake by using Japanese *Aizuchi* (backchannelling). Through the analysis of repairs using *Aizuchi* in class, it helps teachers understand why communication breakdown occurs and prompts students to achieve communicative competence in their target language.

Introduction

The Japanese express their listenership in communication in various ways. *Aizuchi* (backchannelling) is one of the most effective tools to achieve this, and it has been widely researched by Japanese scholars. Maynard (1987) shows that the Japanese use *aizuchi* more than twice as frequently as do Americans. Horiguchi (1997) presents five functions of *aizuchi*: 1) display of listening; 2) display of understanding; 3) display of agreement; 4) display of disagreement; and 5) expression of emotion.

In this paper I will discuss the crucial role of Japanese *aizuchi*, such as 'un', 'etto' and 'dakara', using extracts from an English lesson. Even a slight change in the intonation of *aizuchi* can show the speaker's confusion and lead to repair of the conversation. I will analyze how students' teamwork functions through the efficient use of Japanese *aizuchi* in a case of student-initiated student-repair taken from the transcription followed by mainly Richards's system (2005).

Transcription system

My transcription is based on Richards' since his transcription system seems to cover almost all of basic features which I want to represent. However, I added two modifications in order to describe unique pronunciation by Japanese speaker of English. Carroll (2005) explains that typical Japanese

English feature is tacking vowels to word-final consonants and she refers to it as ‘vowel-marking’. Although at first I transcribed only discourse markers in Japanese such as ‘etto:::’ and ‘dakara:::’ in a distinctive way, I found it unnatural and unreal because it seemed that utterances by Japanese students sound like a native speaker except discourse markers. To avoid this confusion, I followed Carroll’s system pointing out that ‘final velar consonants /k/ and /g/ are always paired with /-u/ rather than /-o/ and that /t/ and /d/ may be marked with either /-o/ or /-u/’ (Carroll 2005). I also changed Japanese words into italic with bold in order to distinguish them from English words.

The role of *aizuchi* ‘un’ with falling intonation and ‘etto’

Three basic positive responses of the addressee are ‘hai’, ‘ee’ and ‘un’. These are distinguished by their level of politeness or formality. ‘Hai’ and ‘ee’ are used in a polite and formal way, whereas ‘un’ is used in more informal and casual speech (Tsukuba Language Group, 1998, cited in Angles et al, 2000, p. 55). Mizutani (1988) refers to *aizuchi* as follows, “one will listen until the completion of one part of the other’s speech then use them in the role of prompting more, as if saying ‘I have understood thus far. Please continue’ (quoted in Angles et al, 2000, p. 69).

Extract 1

- 01 T: Okay
 02 S1: ↓ ***Un***
 03 T: so (.1) it’s been a long long time =
 04 S1: =*sou sou sou*
 05 T: ↑ yeah
 06 S1: ↓ ***un***

Responding to the teacher’s (T) opening statement of the class in Line 01, the learner (S1) uses ‘un’ with falling intonation to express the display of listening in Line 02, responding to his teacher’s (T) opening statement ‘Okay’ in Line 01. In Line 06, another ‘un’ is used by S1 to show his agreement with his teacher’s utterance. Basically, S1 uses ‘un’ with falling intonation as a positive response to his teacher in Extract 1.

Extract 2

- 01 T: do you have many things to tell me?
 02 S1: hh hh many-i ↓ *kana* (.) *ma*
 03 T: not many?
 04 → S1: in Golden Week-u, I:: went-o to (.) ***ett:::o*** outside-o live-u event-o

- 05 T: ↓ o::kay
 06 S1: with-u my e::: **ett:::o** nephew-u (.) *de* =
 07 T: =okay. we say outdoor live [event
 08 S1: [outdoor-a live-u event-o *ka*
 09 T: uhhn

In Extract 2, S1 uses ‘ett:::o’, which is a stretched form of ‘eeto’, in Lines 04 and 06. Sadanobu and Takubo (1995) observed ‘eeto’ in soliloquy speech, which needs no connective function. They conclude that ‘eeto’ is utilized in order to monitor the speaker’s own mental operation rather than to maintain the flow of conversation. This process of self-monitoring will help the speaker to search for his or her words or consider what statement should be made next. The authors also mentioned that ‘eeto’ may lead to a situation in which speakers can invite ‘rescue’ by the addressee from difficulties and so promote smooth conversation (Sadanobu and Takubo, 1995). In Line 04, S1 starts to explain how he spent the holiday called ‘Golden week’ and uses ‘ett:::o’ after a micro pause in order to search for suitable words. Again in Line 06, S1 adopts ‘e::: ett:::o’ while considering the appropriate words. Sadanobu and Takubo (1995) propose that *aizuchi* initiates the positive effect from addressee (sic), S1 succeeded in getting T’s display of understanding in Line 05 by employing ‘ett:::o’.

As I point out in Extract 1, S1 chose to use ‘un’ with falling intonation to show his understanding and agreement with the teacher. Also, S1 uses ‘ett:::o’ to search for the words for his explanation.

The role of *aizuchi* ‘un’ with rising intonation and ‘dakara’

In contrast to Extract 1, S1 changes his intonation from falling to rising in Line 07, even though S1 had used ‘un’ with falling intonation just before this, in Line 03. Angles et al (2000) point out that the use of ‘hai’, ‘ee’ and ‘un’ with rising intonation shows surprise or confusion, and note how important they are for the addressee to determine the meaning.

Extract 3

- 01 S2: *ma* (.)Okayama’s members(.) we:re very-i glad-o *ano* to (.) for Kyoto gig-u
 02 T: uhn, for the Kyoto gig yeah::
 03 S2: ↓ **un**
 04 T: nice, they look like they had fun, too
 05 T: so (.) it was a really nice gig yeah
 06 T: why you couldn’t come to the gig?
 07 S1: ↑ **un**
 08 T: you couldn’t come to the Golden Week gig?

- 09 T: why is that? =
 10 S1: =*dakara::: dakara:::* [*ittauun:::n*
 11 → S2: [*a::: naruhodo*
 12 T: *a:::* it started at seven yeah =
 13 S1: =*dakara:::*
 14 T: sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry ↓ yeah
 15 S1: *dakara* I went-o to afternoon kana live-u event-o daytime-u
 16 T: there was daytime event?
 17 S1: *dakara* (.) that it was
 18 → S2: *a:::* outside-o
 19 → S1: outside-o=
 20 T: =*a:::* right, right right right
 21 T: I see. so you came back Kyoto in the [*evening* for work
 22 S1: [*sou sou sou de yeah*

After S2's story about 'Golden week', T changes the topic by using 'so' and selects the next speaker by the *wh*-question to S1 in Line 06. T requests the reason for S1's absence from the Kyoto gig. In Line 07, S1 shows his confusion by using 'un' with rising intonation. T reformulates the question in order to clarify the message or meaning in Lines 08 and 09.

Slightly changing the intonation of 'un' triggers the sequence of repair. S1 tries to reply to T's request for clarification and starts to use 'dakara' in Lines 10, 13, 15, and 17. If S1 were simply searching for the words for explanation, S1 could have used 'eett:::o', as demonstrated in Lines 04 or 06 of Extract 1. S1, however, chooses the word 'dakara' instead of 'eett:::o' this time. Matsui (2002) proposes that the fundamental function of 'dakara' is to suggest the reframing of another utterance or assumption. The frequent appearance of 'dakara' implies that these are the relevant utterances to reformulate in S1's mind. Although T tries to initiate self-repair by introducing 'a:::' as an interjection in Line 12, S1 continues to use 'dakara' immediately after T's utterance in Line 13. Surprisingly, S1 repeats 'dakara' to repair the breakdown in communication even after T's apology for the misunderstanding in Line 15. S1 makes a repetition of 'dakara' again in response to T's clarification of the situation in Line 17.

The first person to become aware of S1's intention is S2, since S2 whispers 'a::: naruhodo', which means 'I see' in English, immediately after S1's first 'dakara' in Line 11. S2 interprets 'dakara' as S1's signal of reference to previous utterances. Moreover, in Line 18, S2 supports S1 by means of the marked word 'outside-o' in Line 04 of Extract 2, which is changed into a more natural form by T in Line 07 of Extract 2. S1 promptly repeats 'outside-o' and contributes the repair in Line 19. Finally, T displays her understanding in Line 20, and succeeds in recapping the story in Line 21. S1 evaluates

T by saying ‘sou sou sou’, which means ‘yes, yes, yes’ in Japanese, in Line 22. Thanks to this alliance among the students, other-initiated other-repair, conducted only by students, is completed.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined Japanese *aizuchi* through the organization of the repair conducted by students. Although Seedhouse (2004) proposes that ‘Self-initiated self-repair is most preferred, and other-initiated other-repair least preferred’ in classroom, several spontaneous utterances from S2 in order to support S1 are confirmed through the process of other-initiated other-repair achieved by students. I would like to study how the repair is conducted in classroom, especially when a teacher misunderstands or does not know the context.

I would also like to investigate the use of Japanese *aizuchi*, because it will be beneficial to both teachers and students. For teachers, it helps them understand why communication breakdown occurs. For students, it promotes solidarity with other students and triggers more voluntary contributions in their classes.

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