Teaching the Tacit Nuances of Japanese Onomatopoeia through an E-Learning System: An Evaluation Approach of Narrative Interpretation

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Abstract : In Japanese, onomatopoeia is an important element in the lively expression of feelings and experiences. It is very difficult for students of Japanese to acquire onomatopoeia, especially, its nuances. In this paper, based on traditional L2 learning theories, we propose a new method to improve the efficiency of teaching the nuances – both explicit and tacit - to non-native speakers of Japanese. The method for teaching the tacit nuances of onomatopoeia consists of three elements. First is to teach the formal rules representing the explicit nuances of onomatopoeic words. Second is to have the students create new onomatopoeic words by utilizing those formal rules. The last element is to provide feedback by evaluating the onomatopoeias created. Our previous study used five-grade relative estimation. However students were confused about the five-grade system, because they could not understand the evaluation criteria only based on a figure. In this new system, then, we built an evaluation database through native speakers' narrative interpretation. We asked Japanese native speakers to describe their awareness of the nuances of onomatopoeia in writing. Then they voted on site and defined priorities for showing to learners on the system. To verify the effectiveness of the proposed method and the learning system, we conducted a preliminary experiment involving two groups of subjects. While Group A got feedback about the appropriateness of their onomatopoeic constructions from the native speakers' narrative interpretation, Group B got feedback just in the form of the five-grade relative estimation. A questionnaire survey administered to all of the learners clarified our learning system availability and also identified areas that should be improved. Repetitive learning of word-formation rules, creating new onomatopoeias and gaining new awareness from narrative interpretation is the total process used to teach the explicit and tacit nuances of onomatopoeia.

Keywords : onomatopoeia, tacit nuance, narrative interpretation, e-learning system, second language teaching