

Studying Second Language Learners' Language Behavior from Conversation Analysis Perspective

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Abstract : This paper on second language teaching and learning uses conversation analysis (CA) approach and focuses on how second language learners of Chinese do repair when making clarification requests. In order to demonstrate their behavior in interaction, a comparison was made to study the differences between native speakers of Chinese with non-native speakers of Chinese. The significance of the research is to make second language teachers and learners aware of repair and how to seek clarification. Utilizing the methodology of CA, the research involved two sets of naturally occurring recordings, one of native speaker students and the other of non-native speaker students. Both sets of recording were telephone talks between students and teachers. There were 50 native speaker students and 50 non-native speaker students. From multiple listening to the recordings, the parts with repairs for clarification were selected for analysis which included the moments in the talk when students had problems in understanding or hearing the speaker and had to seek clarification. For example, 'Sorry, I do not understand' and 'Can you repeat the question?' were the parts as repair to make clarification requests. In the data, there were 43 such cases from native speaker students and 88 cases from non-native speaker students. The non-native speaker students were more likely to use repair to seek clarification. Analysis on how the students make clarification requests during their conversation was carried out by investigating how the students initiated problems and how the teachers repaired the problems. In CA term, it is called other-initiated self-repair (OISR), which refers to student-initiated teacher-repair in this research. The findings show that, in initiating repair, native speaker students pay more attention to mutual understanding (inter-subjectivity) while non-native speaker students, due to their lack of language proficiency, pay more attention to their status of knowledge (epistemic) switch. There are three major differences: 1, native Chinese students more often initiate closed-class OISR (seeking specific information in the request) such as repeating a word or phrases from the previous turn while non-native students more frequently initiate open-class OISR (not specifying clarification) such as 'sorry, I don't understand'. 2, native speakers' clarification requests are treated by the teacher as understanding of the content while non-native learners' clarification requests are treated by teacher as language proficiency problem. 3, native speakers don't see repair as knowledge issue and there is no third position in the repair sequences to close repair while non-native learners take repair sequence as a time to adjust their knowledge. There is clear closing third position token such as 'oh' to close repair sequence so that the topic can go back. In conclusion, this paper uses conversation analysis approach to compare differences between native Chinese speakers and non-native Chinese learners in their ways of conducting repair when making clarification requests. The findings are useful in future Chinese language teaching and learning, especially in teaching pragmatics such as requests.

Keywords : conversation analysis (CA), clarification request, second language (L2), teaching implication

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