

CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS

ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS FOR JAPANESE SPEAKERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

M. P. Jain (1976) classifies errors into systematic and asystematic. Systematic errors "show a consistent system, and internally principled and free from arbitrariness." In contrast, asystematic errors

do not exhibit a rule-patterned consistent system: they are not always internally principled, yet they are not totally arbitrary. This type of errors represent generalizations which remain, for one reason or another, hypotheses, and the learner is unable to give them the status of rule; they are often open to unsettling influences. The result is that though the learner may have seemingly arrived at a hypothesis, he is not able to apply it with any degree of consistency in handling his performance data. These are areas of indeterminacy in his syllabus which give rise to systematic-unsystematic errors. xxx It seems that because of the apparent copious opposition between rules and arbitrariness in the surface structure of English, certain areas within the structure of English are more

facilitative of indeterminacy than others. In many English-as-a-second language teaching situations, three such typical areas are: articles, prepositions and the tense system. The major difficulty about them is that they do not submit themselves to any easy generalization or overgeneralization based on some consistent regularity.

For Japanese students, prepositions do indeed present difficulties. This project was undertaken to find answers to the following questions:

1. What does indeterminacy mean as far as the acquisition of English prepositions by Japanese speakers is concerned?
2. What kind of strategies do the learners use in this indeterminacy area?
3. What does the time sequence mean in this indeterminacy area?
4. Application

II. Procedure

1. Informants

I collected my data from six Japanese students at C. E. S. L. (Center of English as a Second Language) and S. I. U. (Southern Illinois University.)

The first informant had been attending at C. E. S. L. for two months.

The second informant had been studying English for three months.

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The third informant had been in America for five months.

The fourth informant had been studying at S. I. U. for eight months.

The fifth informant had been staying in America for thirteen years.

The sixth informant had been teaching English for twenty-five years in Japan.

2. Data

- a. Oral test: induced questions with cues.

Example: Where do you usually watch television? (home)

I usually watch television at home.

- b. Translation test: Translation from Japanese into English. Most sentences were identical with the ones which I used orally. However, I could not induce some of the prepositions which I got from the translation.

III. DEFINITION OF INDETERMINACY

I defined errors as indeterminate or determinate by the following method.

Oral	Translation	Error
+	-	Indeterminate Error
-	+	Indeterminate Error
-	-	Determinate Error

When an informant made an error in the translation test, it

became +oral, -translation and the result is an indeterminate error. When he made an error in the oral test, it became -oral and +translation and the result is also an indeterminate error. When he made errors in the both tests, I defined it as a determinate error.

IV. RESULT OF ERROR ANALYSIS

I analyzed errors based on Richard's taxonomy of errors and others. (Richard's taxonomy of errors summarized by John H. Schumann and Nancy Stenson, 1975: 5)

Interference: error resulting from the transfer of grammatical and/or stylistic elements from the source language to the target language;

overgeneralization: error caused by extension of target language rules to areas where they do not apply;

Performance errors: unsystematic errors that occur as the result of such things as memory lapses, fatigue, confusion, or strong emotion;

Strategies of Communication and Assimilation: error resulting from the attempt to communicate in the target language without having completely acquired the grammatical forms necessary to do so;

Simplification: omission of words;

Unique: errors from other sources;

The following figure shows the result of error analysis. Sixty-eight percent of the errors are from interference. (see Table 1)

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V. STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ERRORS

I asked the informants the sources of errors based on the previous taxonomy. The following figure is the result of the student perception of errors. (see Table 2)

Table 1

Error Time	Inter-ference	Over-general-ization	per-form-ance	Communi-cation Strategy	Simpli-fication	Unique
2m.	13	1	4	0	4	0
3m.	12	1	1	1	1	1
5m.	6	0	2	0	1	0
8m.	9	0	1	1	1	0
13y.	7	0	1	0	1	0
25y.	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2

Error Time	Inter-ference	Over-general-ization	per-form-ance	Communi-cation Strategy	Simpli-fication	Unique
2m.	0	3	8	7	0	0
3m.	0	1	4	10	0	1
5m.	0	0	2	7	0	0
8m.	0	5	3	4	0	0
13y.	0	7	1	1	0	0
25y.	0	0	0	0	0	0

The total number of errors and the student perception of errors are not the same. The informants did not explain some errors.

VI. INTERFERENCE

A. Interference: error resulting from the transfer of grammatical and/or stylistic elements from the source language to the target language.

I got my idea of interference from Stockwell's Hierarchy of Difficulty and J. C. Catford's comparative charts for many different systems in the field of relational concepts to which they are related.

In analyzing my data, the errors which are from the absence of subcategorization in Japanese are defined as interference errors.

Japanese	English
De	by
	on
	at
	against

Japanese has only "De" concept which covers four subdivided areas in English.

1<2+

According to the Stockwell's Hierarchy of Difficulty, this case is the most difficult for the learners, because the learners have difficulty finding their basis for selection.

B. Data: The following are the data of interference.

1. Local Prepositions

a. J. E.

De	by—near
	on
	at
	Ni-Mukatsute—against

Grammatical Sentence (G.S.) He is studying at the desk.

Errors:

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2 months (2m) He is studying on the desk.

8m. He is studying by the desk.

He is studying against the desk.

13y. On the desk.

study on the desk.

b. J. E.

Ni	at
	on
	in

G.S. He lives at 21, 4th street.

Errors:

2m. He lives in 21, 4th street.

3m. He lives on the 21.

5m. I live on 21.

13y. I live on 21.

c. Gekijo wa shiyakusho no mukaeni arimasu.

Subj. Marker

The theater is across the street from the city hall.

Japanese English
 0 the street

Errors:

2m. The theater is across the city hall.

3m. There is the theater across the city hall

The theater is opposed to the city hall.

8m. The theater is across the street at the city hall.

2. Temporal prepositions

a. J. E.

Madeni	till
	until
	by

G.S. I'll return by the end of this year.

Errors:

2m. I'll return till the end of this year.

3m. I will be back until the end of this year.

G.S. I will stay here till the end of this year.

Error:

8m. I will stay here by the end of this year.

b. J. E.

Ni	in
	on
	at

G.S. Spring semester will end on May 10th.

Error:

3m. Spring semester will end in May 10th.

G.S. I usually go to the movies on Sunday night.

Errors:

8m. I go to the movie at Sunday night.

13y. I go to the movie at Sunday night.
In Sunday evening.

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c. J. E.

Kara	from
	since

G.S. I've stayed here since 1975.

Error:

8m. I've stayed here from 1975.

3. Others

a. J. E.

De	of
	on
	from
	in
	by
	with
	at

2m. I copied them in encyclopedia.
(from)¹

3m. I copied my information by encyclopedia.

2m. I find out words by dictionary.
(in)

2m. I cut the paper by knife. (with)

3m. I cut it by knife.

5m. I did it by knife.

I opened a can by a can-opener.

8m. I cut the paper by knife'

2m. I wrote a letter on blue ink. (in)

2m. Wine is made of grapes. (from)

Desk is made from wood. (of)

3m. California is famous with oranges.
(for)

2m. My house was sold at _____ yen.
(for)

1. The prepositions in the first parenthesis are the appropriate prepositions.

My house is sold by good price.
(at)

My house is sold for good price.
(at)

5m. His father was killed by cancer.
(of)

13y. His father died from cancer. (of)

8m. I came here for business. (on)

b. J. E.

Ni	to
	into

G.S. Please divide the cake into five pieces.

Error:

2m. Please divide the cake to five pieces.

c. J. E.

Ni-tsuite	about
	on

G.S. The professor wrote a thesis on the electricity.

Error:

2m. The professor wrote a thesis about the electricity.

3m. The professor wrote the paper about literature.

VII. SOURCE OF INDETERMINACY

The source of indeterminacy is the absence of subcategorization in the concepts of the Japanese speakers. Figure 1 shows that interference runs parallel with the indeterminate errors.

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Without the concept of English prepositions, what are the learners doing in English? I tried to analyze the psychological aspect of learners using the student perception of errors according to Tran-Thi-Chau (1975 : 126).

...neither EA nor CA¹ offers satisfactory solutions to the problem of difficulty in SL learning. Both fail to take into account the psychological aspects of the problem-namely what takes place in the learner himself. Yet recent psycholinguistic views on learning processes and learners' errors suggest that it is necessary to take the learner into consideration if we are to find more satisfactory solutions to the problem of predicting and explaining SL learner's behaviors: xxx In this study a psychological dimension-the learner's view, and specifically his perception of difficulty was investigated and related to the outputs of EA and CA in an attempt to evaluate on experimental grounds, the relative merits and shortcomings of each method and to find a more adequate approach to the problem of difficulty in SL learning: xxx Once the problem areas are detected the resources of EA, CA and the students' perception should be combined in order to adequately explain the causes of difficulty.

I used student perception in order to know their psychological strategies.

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1. EA is an abbreviation for Error Analysis and CA for Contrastive Analysis.

VIII. INTERFERENCE TO STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION AND ASSIMILATION

In the student perception, my third informant suggested that without the knowledge of appropriate prepositions, he had to use other prepositions by analogy in order to communicate. Apparently, he used communication strategies. Strategies of communication and assimilation produce errors resulting from the attempt to communicate in the target language without having completely acquired the grammatical forms. As he did not have the subcategorization of English prepositions in his concept as a result of Japanese interference, he used strategies of communication and assimilation.

Data.

2m. He is studying on the desk.

He lives in 21, 4th street.

The theater is across the city hall.

I find out words by dictionary.

I cut the paper by knife.

My house was sold at _____ yen.

Please divide the cake to five pieces.

Total 7

3m. I live on the 21.

There is the theater across the city hall.

I will be back until the end of this year.

California is famous with oranges.

The professor wrote a thesis about literature.

Total 5

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5m. I live on 2l.

I got full marks in the examination.

His father was killd from cancer.

Total 3

8m. He is studying by the desk.

The theater is across the street at the city hall.

My house sold by good price.

My house sold by 1000000 yen.

Total 4

13y. I live on 2l.

Total 1

25y.

Total 0

IX. INTERFERENCE TO OVERGENERALIZATION

In the student perception of errors, my fifth informant answered that she believed she was using the grammatical prepositions. She made overgeneralized errors. Overgeneralization is an error caused by extension of target language rules to areas where they do not apply.

From interference that is the absence of subcategorization of English prepositions, she overgeneralized some prepositions.

Data.

2m. I'll return till the end of this year.

The professor wrote a thesis about the electricity.

Total 2

3m.

Total 0

5m. I did it by knife.

I opened a can by a can-opener.

Total 1

8m. I will stay here by the end of this year.

I've stayed here from 1975.

Total 2

13y. On the desk.

I go to the movie at Sunday night.

In Sunday evening.

My house is sold for good price.

I made 100 for a test.

His father died from cancer.

Total 5

Now, compare the total number of interference which result in overgeneralization with interference resulting in strategies of communication and assimilation. As interference leading to communication strategies decreases, interference leading to overgeneralization increases. (refere to figure 2) Then, compare F1 and F2. Interference leading to communication strategies runs parallel with the indeterminacy line. Therefore, as the indeterminate errors decrease, overgeneralized errors increase. We can see a very important phenomena here: the process of fossilization. Fossilizable phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subystems. Once they are fossilized, they tend to remain as potential performance, re-emerging in speakers' utterances. (Selinker, 1974: 36) Fossilization is a mechanism which is assumed to exist in the latent psychological structure. Ninety-five percent of the second language learners are supposed to use this structure in learning a second language.

The main processes leading Japanese speakers to the fossilization of English prepositions might be something like this:

1. Interference;
2. Stragegies of communication and assimi-

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lation; 3. Interference-Overgeneralization.

When they reach state 3, they are fossilized.

The main source of Japanese fossilization of English prepositions is from interference; that is, the absence of subcategorization in concept. At the start, there is the use of strategies of communication and assimilation, and later of overgeneralizations, resulting in determinate errors.

X. PERFORMANCE ERRORS FROM THE STUDENT'S PERCEPTION

Performance errors are defined as unsystematic errors which occur as the result of memory lapse, fatigue, confusion, or strong emotions. The informants defined the following errors as performance errors.

Data.

- a. 3m. A lump is above the table. It is above of the table.
- b. 5m. He is behind of the desk. He is behind the desk.

Translation into Japanese.

a. A lump wa the table no ueni is.
Subj. Marker of above

b. He wa the desk no ushironi is.
Subj. Marker of behind

These performance errors can be also explained as interference errors.

3m. I copied my information by encyclopedia.

I cut it by knife.

5m. I cut the paper by knife.

13y. I came to school on foot. By foot.

These errors are from the absence of subcategorization of English propositions in "De" framework. Therefore, most performance errors which were defined by the student's perception of errors can be originally interference.

XI. SIMPLIFICATION: ERROR ANALYSIS AND THE STUDENT'S PERCEPTION

Simplification is the omission of prepositions. The following sentences are the examples of simplification.

2m. It's _____ the front of the theater. (performance)¹

13y. The professor is _____ front _____ the blackboard.
(overgeneralization)

2m. I enroll SIU _____ 1975. (performance)

Osaka International Festival was _____ 1970. (performance)

I go to the movie _____ Saturday night. (performance)

I'll come back home _____ 10th of May. (communication strategy)

3m. I stood _____ line for registration. (performance)

The informants analyzed in the student perception of errors that simplification is the result of performance, communication strategy, and overgeneralization.

The student's perception

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Simplification from

Performance 6
Communication Strategy 1
Overgeneralization 1

According to the student's perception, most of the simplifications are from the performance errors.

XII. CONCLUSION

A. Conceptualization of Linguistic Relativity (Catford, 1971:8)

As I analyzed above, most errors regarding prepositions are from interference: interference in concept. What is the linguistic concept? Sapir said, "The environing world which is referred to is the same for either language; the world of points is the same in either frame of reference. But the formal method of approach to the expressed item of experience, as to the given point of space, is so different that the resulting feeling of orientation can be the same neither in the two languages nor in the same frames of reference. (Sapir, 1968:282)

John B. Carroll said that B. L. Whorf made two cardinal hypothesis. First, that all higher levels of thinking are dependent on language. Second, that the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment. This picture of the universe shifts from tongue to tongue. (Whorf, 1962:iv)

Rivers mentioned that this Sapir-Whorf theory had been disputed by other scholars. We cannot deny the fact the lexical sets and grammatical systems of a particular language interpose

a conceptual "grid" between the speaker and his experience of the world, that is the conceptualization of linguistic relativity. (Catford, 1969:88)

Both the English prepositions and the Japanese postpositions are the systems to embody temporal, spatial and other relations. What makes the English speaker's concept differ from the Japanese speaker's is the linguistic relativity within a system.

Spatial system:

Ni	at
	on
	in

Linguistic relativity of English in a spatial system.

According to Bloomfield, the Eskimo language has many subcategories for the single English word, snow.

SNOW	"a" snow
	"b" snow
	"c" snow
	"d" snow

Then, in learning the Eskimo language, the learners have to learn these relative categories.

The same thing is true in learning English. What the Japanese speakers have to learn about English prepositions is this linguistic relativity.

B. Application: How to teach the linguistic relativity of the English prepositions to the Japanese speakers.

When prepositions are presented, the best way is to present a clear picture of relativity of the English prepositions according to the case markers: local, agentive and instrumental.

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It is preferable not to use the translation method. I learned them by the translation method.

I live in Japan.

Ni

I live in Osaka.

Ni

“In” for countries and big cities.

I live at 26 Nishinaniwa-cho.

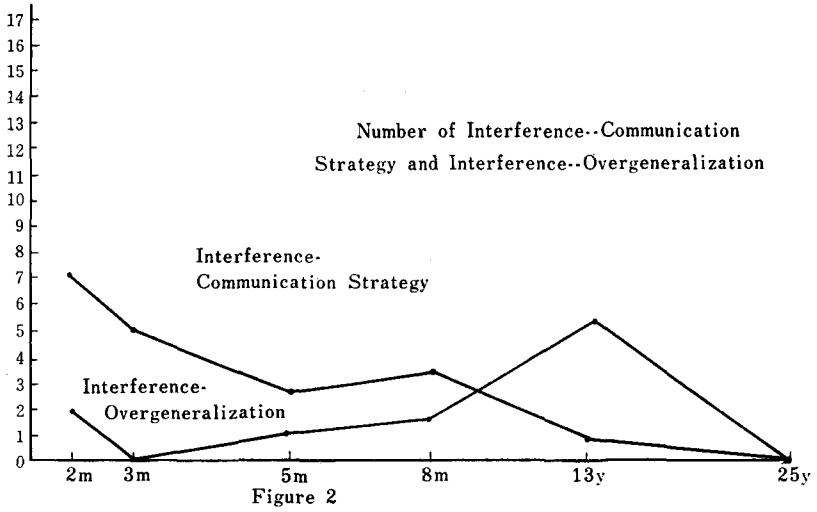
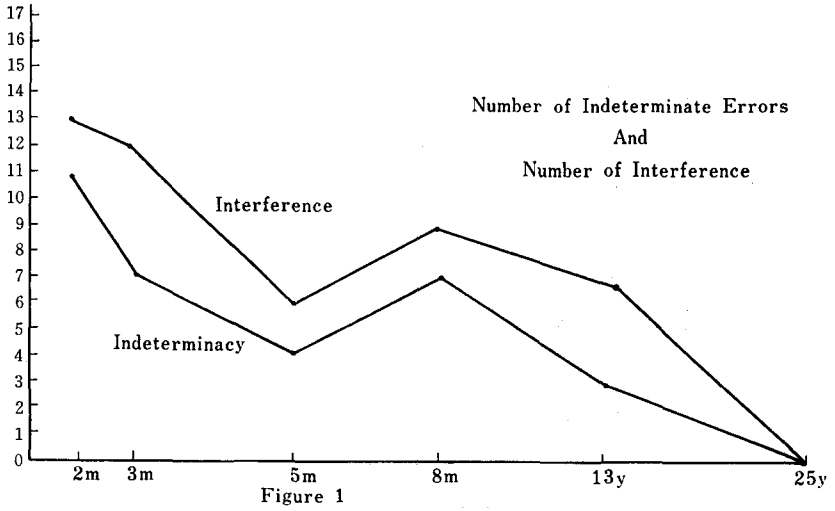
Ni

“At” for small areas.

As a result, the local prepositions remind me of “Ni” first, then I tend to look for the appropriate prepositions. This method can induce errors.

Teachers must have the whole picture of English prepositions first and then present their comparative relations, using visual and other aids to help the learners internalize the linguistic relativity of English prepositions.

In this indeterminate area of English prepositions, it is the teachers and their techniques that can give learners a clear generalization.



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