Teaching Pragmatics in Japanese as a Foreign Language

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外国語としての日本語における語用法の教え方

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Abstract

This paper introduces new material for teaching Japanese as a foreign language (JFL). I present sample JFL material that I developed targeting for intermediate level American students at universities in the United States. Specifically, I focus on conversation openings and introduce material which contains dialogues, oral practices, and cultural explanations that will aid students in understanding appropriate language use in some specific contexts. The material aims to raise the students' pragmatic awareness in Japanese and enables them to produce language appropriate to the context. Teaching pragmatic competence to foreign language learners is a vital component of language acquisition. Learners are expected to know how context affects the choice of form and function of an utterance in a particular speech community when interacting with native speakers of the target language. I expect the materials to contribute to JFL education and to reduce misunderstandings between native speakers and learners in natural discourse.

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　本稿はアメリカの大学の中級レベルの学生に日本語を教えるために私が作成した教材を紹介する。この教材は会話の始まりに着目し、会話練習や文化的背景の説明を含んでおり、学生が特定の場面に応じた言葉使いや会話手法を理解し、学べるよう作成してある。言語習得を考えた時、場面に応じた言語運用能力を学習者に教えることは重要であり、また、学習者は学んでいる言語のネイティブスピーカーとコミュニケーションを行う時に適切な言葉使いや会話手法を用いることを期待されている。この教材で学ぶことにより、日本語学習者が場面に応じた語用法を理解し、日本人と会話をする時にミスコミュニケーションを少しでも減らすことを期待する。

Introduction

This paper introduces new material for teaching Japanese as a foreign language (JFL). Specifically, I will present sample JFL material that I developed targeting for intermediate level American students at universities in the United States. The material focuses on raising the students' pragmatic awareness in Japanese after they have learned basic beginning level grammar and enables them to understand discourse structure and produce language appropriate to the context. Intermediate level in this paper specifically refers to third year Japanese courses in the American college system. This level follows the beginning level (the first and second year Japanese courses), which contains around 250 hours (e.g., 50-minute classes for 5 days a week for 30 weeks or 2 regular academic years) of in-class instruction.

Teaching pragmatic competence to foreign language learners is a vital component of target language acquisition. Learners are expected to know how context affects the choice of form and function of an utterance in a particular speech community when interacting with native speakers of the target language. For advanced learners with high linguistic proficiency, a lack of pragmatic competence may lead to utterances that could be considered rude or insulting or otherwise contribute to considerable misunderstanding. This is particularly important in the Japanese context where cultural, social, and contextual appropriateness is highly valued in verbal interaction. Learners of the Japanese language must be continually exposed to pragmatically appropriate language use including different contextual aspects of the language through classroom instruction and practice.

Teaching pragmatics requires a variety of resources including materials which can provide students with natural conversational models. However, my investigation of Japanese language course descriptions at various colleges revealed that very few commercial textbooks are used in intermediate and advanced levels in college level Japanese classes in the United States. Many Japanese programs create their own materials to meet their students' needs for those levels. This suggests that there may not be sufficient commercial materials available for educating students beyond the beginning level.

Anecdotal episodes collected from American learners of Japanese with intermediate-level proficiency indicate that opening and closing conversations with native speakers are still some of the most difficult parts for them. Researchers (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig et. al.,1991; Gudykunst & Nishida,1994; Kataoka with Kusumoto,1991) also discuss how these segments in conversation could be culturally specific and the learners must be aware of the conversational rituals in the culture of the target language to be successful in communication.

Having a good command of pragmatic competence helps "the speakers accomplish

goals as social actors who do not just need to get things done but must attend to their interpersonal relationships with others at the same time" (Rose & Kasper, 2001, p.2). Learners at the intermediate level are usually capable of getting things done in their target language, however, pragmatically inappropriate utterances in the very first segments of conversations can lead both native and non-native participants to major misunderstandings and damage interpersonal relationships.

Thus in this paper, I will focus on conversation openings and introduce material which contain dialogues, oral practices, and cultural explanations that will aid students in understanding appropriate language use in some specific contexts. I expect the materials to contribute to JFL education and to reduce misunderstandings between native speakers and learners in natural discourse.

Pragmatics and Its Teaching

Output is necessary for developing fluency in oral production (Skehan,1998). By producing the target language orally, language learners can notice gaps between what they want to say and what they can actually say (Swain,1995). Although practice in oral production should take place from the early stages of foreign language learning, lower level instruction naturally tends to focus on using target grammar to develop oral production skills, rather than focusing on pragmatics of the language. Researchers have shown how grammar teaching can be done without isolating it from communication, i.e., focus on form (e.g., Dekeyser,1998; Doughty and Williams,1998; Ellis,1998; Long,1996; Spada,1997).

Current beginning level JFL textbooks well-incorporate these ideas and contain a variety of tasks that utilize the learned grammar in oral practices. For example, one of the currently published text *Yookoso!* (Tohsaku,1994;1995) includes such tasks as information gap, pair work activities, games and role plays, as well as some mechanical exercises. Other texts published after *Yookoso!* (e.g. *Genki* by Banno et. al., 1999a; 1999b; *Nakama* by Makino et. al., 1998; 2000) followed this trend and contain a number of activities that could be conducted as student-centered communicative tasks.

Acquiring speaking skills enables learners to control communicative interactions and gives them autonomy when participating in discourse. Once basic output skill is achieved, learners are expected to produce the target language in a pragmatically appropriate manner, especially in interactions with native speakers of the target language. Thus it is important to teach how to use the language appropriately in the target social contexts. Foreign language teachers are expected to raise students' consciousness toward pragmatic functions in the target language (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig et. al.,1991; Rose,1994).

However, the decision of which pragmatic system should be taught may be

problematic in some languages, for example, in ESL/EFL (English as a second/foreign language) classes (Rose,1994). English is spoken in a variety of countries and cultures around the world and thus has many different pragmatic systems within a single language (Kachru & Nelson,1996). JFL, on contrast, should not have this type of problem, or at least not to the same degree as English, since Japanese is spoken primarily only within Japan as a first or a second language, the exceptions being a few immigrant groups in Hawaii, North and South America (Shibatani,1990).

What makes the acquisition of Japanese pragmatic competence complex is contextual factors such as the formality of the setting and the gender and social status of the speech-act participants, as well as of the person being talked about in discourse (Shibatani,1990). For example, Japanese people change their communication styles in reference to *uchi*, "internal or in-group," and *soto*, "outside or out-group," situations (Maynard,1997). These styles may be difficult to learn without understanding Japanese culture and how it influences communication.

Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) argue that communication behavior is based on habit, intention, and emotions. They claim that people use their own habits to communicate and form their own intentions when they think about what to do in particular situations; people also react to others on an emotional basis. The expressions of these sources differ between cultures, and thus, as Gudykunst and Nishida describe, Japanese and North Americans must understand each other's culturally unique behavior to understand how they communicate.

Any individual who participates in communication, especially interculturally, is expected to understand differences in culture-specific communicative behavior. However, due to the lack of cultural explanation and discussion of the differences in the classroom, many second language learners are ill-prepared to handle this responsibility. By teaching the skills and knowledge required to successfully navigate intercultural communication, students can develop a natural sense of the differences between speakers and refine their pragmatic competence in preparation for conversations with native speakers of their target languages.

Regardless of the Japanese language complexity, the development of JFL materials has been generally successful. At the beginning level, some of the current textbooks (e.g., Banno, et. al.,1999a; 1999b; Makino et. al.,1998; 2000; Tohsaku,1994; 1995) adapt authentic conversation to help students acquire the basic structure of the language with a variety of communicative activities and cultural explanations. In more advanced levels, the materials incorporate a variety of functions and contexts of the language to introduce natural language use in real life situations (e.g., Miura & McGloin,1994).

When teaching pragmatics in a foreign language classroom, the instruction should first

focus on implicit, then explicit teaching (Houck, 2001). In implicit teaching, teachers first should attempt to have the learners notice the differences in speech acts (see Rose,1994; Fujimori,1998, for some sample consciousness raising tasks). After this, some explicit explanation about cultural factors is appropriate (e.g., Morrow,1995; Fujimori,1998) in the case of JSL, issues such as formality, levels of directness, and other related aspects should be introduced.

Once students gain enough knowledge of pragmatics and the environment of the target language, they should be encouraged to start producing the language, first in controlled tasks, then spontaneously. Students need to be encouraged to use the language creatively but appropriately to complete controlled tasks where the possible outcomes are limited due to careful preparation of the tasks by teachers. These tasks include jigsaw (e.g., Morrow,1995; Bardovi-Harlig et. al.,1991) and discourse completion (e.g., Morrow,1995; Fujimori,1998). Finally, such spontaneous tasks as role plays allow students to produce the target language more freely.

The New Material

The new material introduced in this paper intends to develop learners' pragmatic awareness by exposing them to authentic conversations and language use and teaching cultural issues related to language use. Dialogues in the material, for example, are carefully adapted from real interactions among native speakers of Japanese.

Americans in Japan may sometimes encounter instances where Japanese people say things that may appear unclear, rude, or otherwise unexpected. For Japanese people, however, these types of conversations are just as natural and clear as other conversation patterns (see Gudykunst & Nishida,1994, for detailed explanation on differences in communication style). Differences in cultural ways of thinking and behaving lie at the root of these sorts of misunderstandings. These exercises aim to expose some of the Japanese cultural patterns via conversation samples and explanation. By understanding the conversation patterns in this material, Americans could reduce anxiety and confusion when having a conversation with native speakers of Japanese.

The presentation order of practices and tasks in the material follow the above discussions of pragmatic instructions (i.e., implicit teaching first, then move on to explicit). The dialogues created for this material also contain pedagogically modified language yet exhibit language features that have a high probability of occurrence in natural Japanese conversation (Geddes & White,1978).

This new material targets American students in JFL contexts who study at an intermediate college level. It is mainly for those who have a good grasp of basic Japanese grammar and are expecting to frequently communicate with native speakers of Japanese.

However, the conversation patterns provided here can also aid all speakers learning or refining their conversation skills in Japanese, from beginners to advanced students alike.

As mentioned earlier, the material focuses on conversation openings and includes 1) dialogues adapted from authentic discourse to demonstrate to students how the language is used, 2) discussion of the dialogues so the students can talk about any differences that they notice compared to English conversation, 3) cultural notes that explain how culture affects the dialogue and teach students what is expected in Japanese discourse, and 4) tasks to practice the language use first being controlled, then spontaneously.

The material introduced in this paper is only one part of the material that I created. This sample is from the chapter for initiating conversations, which introduces learners to some typical patterns used when starting a conversation either on the phone or in person. The chapter contains three scenes; 1) on the phone with a travel agent, 2) on the phone with a friend living with a family, and 3) meeting a host-family at the airport. Each scene demonstrates a conversation from different settings and contains an explanation of the cultural motivation behind the dialogue and oral practices. I will introduce only the first scene, on the phone with a travel agent, in this paper and explain how students can use and benefit from it.

Scene One

The first scene deals with a phone conversation with a travel agent. It introduces a typical pattern for starting a phone conversation when calling a company. Calling a business place requires some unique styles of interaction. For example, companies usually do not ask a caller's name overtly but simply say *shitsuree desu ga* "excuse me, but". Students can benefit from learning this conversation style when they need to call a travel agency to reserve an airplane ticket, for example.

In this scene, the sample dialogue is given first, followed by a discussion question. In this dialogue, Ms. Taguchi, a customer, is calling a travel agent, Mr. Yokota, at Umeda Travel Agency. A different travel agent answers the phone and Ms. Taguchi asks for Mr. Yokota. The material provides Japanese dialogue both in Japanese orthography in the first line and in Roman characters in the second line, along with its translation in English in the third line for each dialogue.

Learners first read the dialogue and practice it. Then they are expected to discuss what seems natural or unnatural to them in the conversation and consider possible reasons. They should consider how the pattern of the conversation is different from English dialogue in the same or similar contexts. This will stimulate their awareness towards the language use, both in their native language (English) and the target language (Japanese).

In this case, students should realize that the travel agent in the second turn asks Ms.

<Dialogue> Practice the following dialogue in Japanese.

Travel Agent :はい、梅田旅行です。
　　　　　　　Hai, Umeda Ryoko desu.
　　　　　　　"This is Umeda Travel Agency."
Taguchi　　　:すみません。
　　　　　　　横田さんをお願いしたいんですが。
　　　　　　　Sumimasen. Yokota-san o onegai shitain desu ga.
　　　　　　　"Excuse me, but can I talk to Mr. Yokota, please?"
Travel Agent :失礼ですが。
　　　　　　　Shitsurei desu ga.
　　　　　　　"Excuse me, but..."
Taguchi　　　:田口です。
　　　　　　　Taguchi desu.
　　　　　　　"This is Taguchi."
Travel Agent :いつもお世話になっております。少々お待ち下さい。
　　　　　　　Itsumoosewa ni natte orimasu. Shooshoo omachi kudasai.
　　　　　　　"Thank you for always having a business with us. Please hold on a moment."

<Discussion> After practicing the dialogue, discuss the following.

Compared to English conversation, is this pattern of conversation natural to you? Why or why not? Is there any part that you thought was unclear? If so, why?

Yokota's name in a different communication style. Simply being told *Shitsurei desu ga* "Excuse me, but" obviously is not clear enough to indicate that a name is being asked for. However, this is a typical way to ask a person's name in Japanese business communication, and the phone call receivers usually expect a caller to be familiar with the style as well. Non-native speakers of Japanese as well as the native speakers who are not familiar with the Japanese business scene are thus often confused as to what they are being asked for.

　　After students have learned the sample dialogue and noticed the differences between Japanese and English in the conversation styles and patterns, they should read the cultural notes as provided below and understand the cultural background and motivation of the conversation patterns and language use.

<Cultural Note>
　　Unlike when calling personal residence, when calling a company, many people do not mention their names at first, but rather ask for the person they need to talk to. In this case, Ms. Taguchi needed to talk to Mr. Yokota and so simply a sked for him. The company usually encourages the employees to know who is calling, so the travel agent asked for the caller's name. Notice the way he asked her name. Instead of saying "May I have your name?" or "Can Iask who's calling?", he simple said, "Excuse me, but...". This is a very typical way compani es to ask someone's name on the phone, and the respondent, in this case, Ms. Taguchi, is expected to know that she is being asked for her name.

　　Once students learn some of the differences between expectations in American and

Japanese conversation, they can start producing the language taking this knowledge into account. First, they practice with controlled dialogues, i.e., completing dialogues in accordance with the other conversation participants as can be seen in the first part of oral practice section below. After this, they can try to freely produce the language in a role play.

Following is the practice section for this scene. The dialogue for practicing controlled conversation in the section 1) is created exactly the same as the sample dialogue that the students learned at the beginning of the scene. When they practice the dialogue, they can refer to the sample dialogue as well as the cultural note to refresh their knowledge. Role play follows the controlled dialogue practice.

＜Oral Practices＞
First practice the following dialogueswith a partner. Afterbecoming comfortablehaving a conversationusing the dialogues, move on to role play practice.

1）Complete the dialogues below and practicethem orally with different people several times. After practicing them, compare and discuss your answers in class.

Travel Agent: はい。トラベルインターナショナルですが。
　　　　　　　Hai, toraberu intaanashonaru desuga.
　　　　　　　"Yes,this is Travel International."
You　　　　:
Travel Agent: 失礼ですが。
　　　　　　　Shitsure desu ga.
　　　　　　　"Excuse me, but..."
You　　　　:
Travel Agent: いつもお世話になっております。少々お待ち下さい。
　　　　　　　Itsumo osewa ni natte orimasu. Shooshoo omachi kudasai. "Thankyou for always havinga business with us. Please hold on a moment."

2）Role Play
Two students in a pair. Student A is a travel agent, Mr./Ms. (your own name), and Student B is calling a travelagent, Mr. Goto and Student A answers the phone. Student B asksfor his/her agent, Mr.Goto. If he is not available, leave a message to Student A.

Although I included only one dialogue in the sample, more could be added. For example, students can practice the case where a designated travel agent is not available and asked to leave a message. The role play situation can be also modified if necessary. After students complete the above exercises, instructors should encourage them to have more free conversation practice incorporating the information provided through the material.

Conclusion

In this paper, I presented material for raising pragmatic consciousness in JFL classrooms and for familiarizing American students in intermediate levels with natural and

appropriate use of the language. I focused on conversation openings, an act that non-native speakers speaking a foreign language often have difficulties with. The target audience for the created material is mainly American intermediate level students, but the materials should be useful to anyone who is living or planning to live in Japan.

At this time, the new material introduced in this paper only covers a few specific interactions. A much wider selection of conversation data can be elicited from natural discourse in the future for use in developing this type of material. Regardless, I have identified areas for improvements in the field and the new material provides a start at addressing the shortcomings.

This material does not include any grammar explanation or lists of vocabulary and expressions, but intentionally kept information to a minimum to focus students on learning pragmatic speech; instructors can provide any supplementary information as they wish when the material is used in classroom settings. Of course, grammar points and useful expressions can be also provided to the students along with the cultural input, as long as the main application of this material, developing pragmatic proficiency, remains.

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