Repair and Relevance of Differential Language Expertise in Second Language Conversations

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This paper examines the relevance of differential language expertise in ordinary conversation between speakers of Japanese as a first and second language. Adopting a conversation analytic perspective, the study focuses on other-repair as one sequential environment in which the participants recurrently orient to their differential linguistic knowledge. Specifically, it will be shown that language expertise was made relevant (a) when one participant invited the other party’s repair and (b) when the participants encountered a problem in achieving mutual understanding. On such occasions, the interlocutors oriented to the differences in their linguistic knowledge through their talk and other interactional conduct. The study thus provides evidence for differential language expertise as a participant category that emerges on occasion but bears no relevance for the participants during most of their talk.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of ‘native speaker’ has been one of the most prominent categories in applied linguistics, especially in the domains of second language learning and teaching. Applied linguists inherited Chomsky’s designation of an (idealized) native speaker competence as the proper object for the study of grammar, and the expansion of competence from grammatical to communicative competence (Canale and Swain 1980; Hymes 1972) did little to challenge the native speaker’s reign as model and standard for those with membership in the complementary category, that is, nonnative speakers. But increasingly, objections have been raised. These objections partly center on the difficulty of defining, in theoretically grounded and empirically supported terms, the category of native speaker; partly they problematize the adequacy of imposing a native speaker standard—were it possible to define such a criterion—on speakers of second and foreign languages (e.g. Cook 1999, 2003; Davies 1991; Kachru and Nelson 1996; Rampton 1990). These authors and others have deconstructed the ‘native speaker’ as an essentialist category that is poorly supported by sociolinguistic evidence. With varying emphasis, they have pointed out that language users may be native speakers of more than one language; native speaker status does not necessarily correlate with a high command of the language, nor with particular investment in it; speakers’ proficiency in their linguistic repertoires is
relative, domain- and activity-dependent, and may change over time. As an
alternative, Rampton (1990) has proposed to supplant the category of
‘nativeness’ by that of ‘expertise’, arguing that expertise differs from
identification, is learned rather than fixed or innate, both relative and partial,
and can be assessed and contested. This notion is attractive in view of
research documenting that even within one activity, participants may shift
roles of relative expert and novice, whether in professional activities among
participants speaking a first language (Jacoby and Gonzales 1991) or in peer
interaction among students in foreign language classrooms (Ohta 2001).

Rampton’s notion of expertise—more precisely, differential language
expertise (Kasper 2004)—is compatible with the view held in conversation
analysis (CA) according to which membership in social categories is not
treated as a stable attribute. However, in order to accommodate expertise
in a conversation-analytic perspective on interaction, the notion has to be
applied in a more radical version because in CA, language expertise, like
any other social category or attribute, is not primarily subject to an outside
observer’s judgment. Instead, analysts are licensed to invoke descriptions
pertaining to the participants only when the parties orient to such matters
through their talk and other interactional conduct (Drew and Heritage 1992;
Schegloff 1991, 1992). Consequently, whether or not language expertise is
relevant at any point in the interaction is determined by the participants
themselves through their observable orientation to linguistic matters.
In that sense, CA treats differential language expertise from a radically
emic perspective (Markee and Kasper 2004).

CA’s radically emic viewpoint was adopted by two recent studies of
membership categorization (Sacks 1972, 1992) in intercultural interactions
in Japanese. Nishizaka (1999), who analyzed radio interviews between
a Japanese talk show host and non-Japanese callers, revealed how ‘doing
being Japanese or a foreigner’ and ‘doing cultural differences’ were
oriented to by the participants within and through the development of
the interaction. Similarly, Mori (2003) investigated how participants in
intercultural conversations demonstrated the relevance and irrelevance of
interculturality. By closely examining multiparty interactions among
Japanese and American college students who met for the first time at
a student-organized conversation table, Mori describes how the participants
utilized cultural differences as a resource for organizing their participation,
especially in the delivery of questions, the selection of respondents to the
questions, and the treatment of uncertainties emerging in the question–
answer sequences. Although the study reported below adopts the same
analytical stance as Nishizaka (1999) and Mori (2003), there are two notable
differences between their studies and mine. First, while their analyses
focused more on differences in cultural than linguistic background, this
study centers on the participants’ differential language expertise.1 Second,
while the interlocutors in Nishizaka’s and Mori’s studies did not have
a previous history of interaction at the time of recording, the participants
in this study are pairs of friends who occasionally meet and talk to each other in their daily life. Interaction between acquainted participants and interaction between unacquainted participants have been found to generate sequentially different types of interaction. Compared to ordinary conversation involving acquaintances, interactions among unacquainted participants tend to include more sequence-initiating actions (e.g. questions) to help participants get to know one another (Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984). In Mori’s (2003) study, the question-answer sequences demonstrating the relevance of cultural and language differences emerged partly because the participants met for the first time when the data were collected. By contrast, the conversations between friends analyzed below feature few sequence-initiating actions for getting to know one another; hence their occasional orientations to differences in language expertise do not appear to be related to a lack of interpersonal familiarity.

Two interactional activities in which participants with different language backgrounds display their orientation to differential language expertise are repair and correction, and such sequences will be the focus of this report. By this I do not mean to suggest that it is only in ‘remedial’ sequences that the participants orient to differences in linguistic expertise, but such orientations were especially salient in this type of sequence. In the next section, therefore, I will briefly review the notions of repair and correction in CA.

OTHER-REPAIR AND OTHER-CORRECTION IN CA

In their pioneering work on the nature and organization of repair, Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) examined naturally-occurring conversation between native speakers of American English. The phenomena addressed in that study were actions dealing with a wide range of problems of speaking, listening, and understanding. These include but are not limited to errors or mistakes, and nothing can be exempt a priori from being repairable. Instances of repair can be found when there is no apparent error (e.g. word searches). Conversely, apparent errors might not be repaired either by the speaker or the hearer.

Repair in the CA sense deals with any problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding, such as clarification requests, understanding checks, repetitions, restatements, offers of candidate hearings, and the like, and it includes but is not limited to corrections of linguistic errors. A repair sequence constitutes a sequence of actions in which participants initiate and solve (or fail to solve) a problem in the talk, and the actions ‘supersede’ other actions in progress (e.g. a next turn constructional unit (TCU) in a turn, a next turn in a sequence, an element of story-telling, etc.) (Schegloff 1997a, 2000).

Repair may be initiated either by the speaker of the problematic talk (self-initiated repair) or by the other speaker (other-initiated repair). The repair may then be carried out by the speaker of the problematic talk.
(self-repair) or by the other speaker (other-repair). Schegloff et al. (1977) found a preference for self-initiation and self-repair over other-initiation, other-correction, and other-repair. They also found that the occurrence of other-correction and other-repair is highly constrained in terms of their local sequential environment. For example, other-correction appears regularly just after understanding checks and verbal invitations of other-correction, which ‘exhibit an orientation to its dispreferred status’ (p. 379).

Thus, self-initiated and other-initiated other-repair and other-correction, the phenomena I will be examining in this paper, were found to be less preferred than self-repair in ordinary interactions between first language speakers of American English. However, Schegloff et al. (1977) also mention that other-repair may be more frequent in interactions among ‘not-yet-competent’ speakers. This comment stimulated some interesting CA studies on repair in second language interaction, although they focused primarily on other-initiated repair rather than other-repair (Firth 1996; Wong 1994, 2000a, 2000b).

Whereas CA has predominantly investigated ordinary conversation and institutional interaction among first language speakers, there is a growing literature on CA of second language speaker conversation (e.g. Carroll 2000; Firth 1996; Firth and Wagner 1997; Gardner and Wagner 2004; Hauser 2003; Hosoda 2000; Kasper 2004; Kidwell 2000; Kurhila 2004; Markee 2000, 2004a, 2004b; Mori 2002, 2003; Seedhouse 2001, 2004; Wagner and Firth 1997; Wong 1994, 2000a, 2000b). These studies found that, generally speaking, second language conversations are ‘normal’ conversations in which the basic methods of conversational organization (e.g. turn-taking, sequence organization, repair) found in first language conversations also operate, and that second language speakers and their interlocutors rarely orient to linguistic proficiency during interaction. Some of the CA studies above directly addressed the issue of when and how participants in second language interaction orient to differential language expertise. For example, Kasper (2004) analyzed dyadic German conversation for second language learning between a beginning foreign language (L2) speaker and a first language (L1) speaker at a North American university. She found that although participants’ social attributes of the target language expert and novice were omnirelevant in the setting, most of the time the participants oriented to other social categories such as movie watchers and female acquaintances. Interestingly, Kasper found that when the participants oriented to differential language expertise, it was predominantly invoked by the L2 speaker in the form of codeswitching. Furthermore, Kurhila (2004), who investigated L1–L2 Finnish conversation in institutional settings, demonstrated how participants’ orientation shifted between language expertise and such institutional identities as secretary and customer. In examining repair and correction sequences, Kurhila also found that when language expertise was brought into focus, it was almost always triggered by L2 speakers’ activities that displayed linguistic trouble. L1 speakers, on the other hand, rarely
commented on L2 speaker’s linguistic efforts and kept orienting to their institutional role. However, when L1 speakers oriented to their language expertise, they displayed their orientation by correcting L2 speakers’ language use.

While Kasper (2004) and Kurhila (2004) examined interactions that were institutionally constructed, this paper examines repair and correction sequences found in casual L1–L2 conversation between friends. Although Wong (1994, 2000a) also analyzed repair sequences in L1–L2 conversation between friends and showed that repair may be a prime candidate for a CA analysis to find unique or characteristic features of second language interaction, Wong’s studies do not directly address the issue of how participants’ orientation to their differential language expertise is revealed in the repair sequences.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how bilingual friends and speakers of Japanese and English, in conversations predominantly conducted in Japanese, orient to their differential language expertise in repair and correction sequences.

DATA

The data analyzed for this study are based on 15 sets of L1–L2 conversation and 15 sets of L1 conversation in Japanese, involving 15 speakers of Japanese as L2 and 40 speakers of Japanese as L1. Five of the L1 speakers participated in both the L1 and L1–L2 conversations. All conversations were casual ones between friends or acquaintances who knew each other through a class, work, or other aspects of their daily lives. Each conversation lasted from 15 to 60 minutes, yielding a data set of approximately 15 hours in total. The data were collected on various occasions, including lunch breaks at workplaces and restaurants and private get-togethers at schools, restaurants, and participants’ residences. The L2 speakers of Japanese were all L1 speakers of American English who reported that they had above upper-intermediate proficiency in Japanese. They had been living in Japan for a period ranging from 6 to 20 years and spoke Japanese in their professional and/or private lives. Many of them had family members who were L1 speakers of Japanese, and seven of them had completed a series of three courses leading to a certificate in teaching Japanese. The conversations for this study were audio- and video-recorded by myself or by the participants upon my request. Permission for the recording was given by all participants before the recording took place. The video camera was placed in front of the participants, and the audio cassette player was placed between the participants.

In order to collect ‘natural’ data, two points were considered. The first has to do with ‘reactivity’ (Maxwell 1996), or what Labov (1972) calls the ‘observer’s paradox’, the concern that we can never be sure whether the observed interaction is unfolding as it would have if there had been no observer. Thus, I did not observe the conversations while recording except in the two cases when I was one of the participants. However, the presence
of the recording devices may influence the conversation. In fact, the recording equipment itself may become a topic of conversation (ten Have 1999). In the present data, there were a few instances in which the participants actually talked about the functions of the video recorder used for collecting the data during their conversation. Then again, the assumption of an observer’s paradox itself may be ill-founded. As Goodwin (1981) notes, participants to an activity never interact as if they were not being observed; on the contrary, they organize their talk and other conduct in terms of their coparticipants’ behavior. Moreover, the focus of CA work such as this study is not the topical content of the interaction but its structural organization. Therefore, even when the participants talk about the recording procedure and equipment, the structural organization of their interaction remains unaffected; they organize their turns and sequences as they do on other occasions.

Secondly, in all 30 sets of conversation, no attempt was made to standardize the conversations by providing instructions for topics to address. Rather, the participants were encouraged to talk about whatever they would normally talk about.

Transcription and translation conventions for the entire data sets were adapted from Jefferson (1984) and Maynard (1997) (see the Appendix for transcription conventions). The transcripts are organized according to a three-line format, which includes the original Japanese utterance (in italics), the morpheme-by-morpheme translation (in plain type), and the vernacular English translation (plain type in inverted commas).

Although the primary aim of this study is to investigate how the participants’ differential expertise in the language of interaction is made relevant in repair and correction sequences, I occasionally refer to the corpus of L1 conversations for comparative purposes.

RELEVANCE AND IRRELEVANCE OF DIFFERENTIAL LANGUAGE EXPERTISE

In this section, I will begin by examining some conversational segments in which differential language expertise is evident to the observer but not treated as relevant by the participants. I will then discuss some segments in which the participants orient to their differential expertise through their interactional conduct.

Irrelevance of differential language expertise

Interaction between ‘competent adult members’ of the same speech community is anything but flawless, yet despite ambiguities, incompleteness, disfluency, and errors in linguistic form, interaction is (perhaps surprisingly) robust (Coupland et al. 1991; House et al. 2003). Although the repair kit first described by Schegloff et al. (1977) bears witness to the recurrent need for
interactants to amend problems in the reception and production of speech, these authors also note that in natural conversation between L1 speakers of American English, speaker’s grammatical errors are usually not treated as problematic and repaired (Schegloff et al. 1977). Rather, participants adopt a ‘letting-it-pass’ principle (Garfinkel 1967) and continue to pursue the business at hand.

The corpora of Japanese L1 and L1–L2 conversations display the same overall tendency. Participants do not usually initiate or provide corrections or repair of their co-participants’ apparent mistakes, as seen in Extract (1).

((Emmy and Nobu are talking about Emmy’s friend.))

1 Nobu: yu- yudaya no hito wa motteru yo kekkou. Je- Jewish Gen people Top have IP quite ‘Quite a lot of Je, Jewish people have {American citizenship’

2—Emmy: un maa amerika ni ima nat ta hito wa [kedo.] Yeah well America to now became past people Top but ‘Yeah, well, as for the people who became America now, but,’

3 Nobu: [un] Uh-huh Uh-huh’

4 Emmy: demo sore o yame you to site ta. But that Acc stop try QT do past ‘But[my friend] tried to quit it.’

5 Nobu: nande amerika de ( ) datte dekiru n zyan. Why America in even can do NR TAG ‘Why? He can even do ( ) in America, can’t he?’

In Extract (1), in line 2, Emmy makes a lexical error and produces amerika ni ima nat ta hito (‘people who became America now’) instead of amerikazin ni ima nat ta hito (‘people who became Americans now’). Moreover, in the same sentence, Emmy makes another grammatical error: she connects wa (topic marker) with kedo (‘but’). In Japanese grammar, a verb, a copula, or an adjective precede kedo, and connecting a case particle with kedo is ungrammatical. However, neither Emmy nor Nobu attempt to initiate or provide repair in the following talk. Emmy and Nobu display understanding of each other by providing sequentially appropriate next utterances: line 2 by Emmy is a comment and a partial agreement to what Nobu said in line 1, line 3 is a continuer produced by Nobu,7 line 4 is a report by Emmy on her friend, and line 5 is a comment by Nobu on the report. Thus, in Extract (1), at these moments of their conversation, the participants do not treat Emmy’s errors as interactional trouble.

Examples of sequences like (1), where linguistic errors go unattended by the participants and do not impede the interaction either at the time of their
production, immediately afterwards, or later in the interaction, are regular occurrences in the data and little would be gained by adding further evidence. They suggest that by default, participants in interaction attend not to isolated linguistic forms but to their co-occurrence with other vocal and nonvocal resources, their sequential context and the action(s) accomplished by the utterance. As speakers with more limited expertise in the language of interaction, L2 speakers may make linguistic errors more frequently than L1 speakers. Yet, as noted above, L1 speakers are in no way exempt from imperfect language use such as linguistic error and disfluencies. Extract (1) shows the importance of distinguishing between observable displays of limited language expertise that the participants may or may not register but which they do not treat as relevant to the interaction, and differential language expertise that the participants orient to through their interactional conduct and thus treat as relevant. One recurrent sequential environment in which differential language expertise is demonstrably relevant for the participants is other-repair.

Relevance of differential language expertise

The participants’ differential language expertise can become a matter of displayed interactional relevance when they delay the action in progress by initiating and solving problems of speaking, hearing, and understanding, and the repair activity becomes interactional business in its own right. In the following, I will examine the relevance of differential language expertise in sequences of other-repair. Specifically, the discussion will be focused on two types of repair sequence in which the co-participants treat their differential language expertise as relevant in their talk: (a) when one speaker invites the other’s repair; and (b) when there is a problem with mutual understanding.

Repair invitation by L2 speaker

In both the L1 and L1–L2 conversations, we see that other-repair is initiated in the course of word searches. Whether trouble in finding a word is experienced by an L1 or L2 speaker, the trouble source speaker invites other-repair through such repair-initiation techniques as sound stretches, nonlexical perturbation (e.g. uh, uhm), cut-offs, rising intonation, the question marker ka, and explicit expressions of ignorance. In addition, the trouble source speaker occasionally deploys nonverbal resources such as gaze, posture, raised eyebrows, and head tilts to self-initiate other-repair. In the L1 conversations, the occurrence of other-repair was uncommon, but when it occurred, it was always initiated by the trouble source speaker in the course of a word search. However, in the L1–L2 conversations, in addition to self-initiating other-repair in the course of a word search, the L2 speakers also engaged in a particular repair-initiating practice in which they made their limited L2 expertise relevant: they occasionally stopped the turn...
constructional unit (TCU) in progress in order to check the correctness of the vocabulary item they had just produced. In such cases, the L2 speakers located the repairable by marking the vocabulary items with rising intonation followed by sound stretches, cut-offs, and/or nonlexical perturbation often accompanied by some nonverbal signs such as looking closely at their interlocutor, tilting their heads, and raising their eyebrows as they produced the items. In the discussion below, I will call this overt way of soliciting their interlocutors’ help ‘vocabulary check’.

Unlike the L2 speakers in the L1–L2 conversations, the speakers in the corpus of L1 conversations did not deploy these methods to initiate other-repair on everyday vocabulary items.9 The ‘vocabulary check’ occasionally found in the L1–L2 conversations may be taken as one form of a request for confirmation. In responding to a request for confirmation, one responds with either agreement or correction. Responding to a request for confirmation on content matters is not a repair in the sense that it does not address any problems of the speaker’s speaking or the hearer’s understanding or hearing. A request for confirmation occurs when a current speaker considers that the information is within the ‘territory’ of the recipient (Kamio 1994, 1997a, 1997b). According to Kamio, information is within the territory of a person when: (a) the information is obtained through the person’s internal or direct experience; (b) the information embodies detailed knowledge which falls into the person’s professional or other expertise; or (c) the information is about persons, facts, and things close to the person. While a request for confirmation usually focuses on content or factual matters, ‘vocabulary checks’ deal with the language of the interaction. Unlike a request for confirmation on a content matter and a response to it, a ‘vocabulary check’ and its response constitute a repair sequence in the sense that it addresses a problem of the speaker’s speech production.

As discussed above, a request for confirmation occurs when a speaker considers that the information resides in the domain of a hearer. Thus, L2 speakers may assume that information on the language of the interaction itself resides in the domain of the L1 speaker and thus, when they encounter problems with speaking the language, they occasionally request confirmation on a linguistic item they produce. In other words, by checking everyday vocabulary items, the L2 speakers themselves, at that moment, although it is not necessarily beyond them to complete the repair sequence, orient to themselves as a ‘novice’ in the language spoken in the interaction while they treat their interlocutors, at that moment, as a language expert.

The complementary orientation to novice and expert status through the practice of vocabulary checking explains why vocabulary checks are such rare occurrences in the L1 conversations. In the L1 conversations, since the L1 speakers had no reason to assume that their interlocutors were any more expert in the language of ordinary conversation than they
were themselves, even when they had problems of speaking, they did not
typically resort to this overt way to solicit help on the language items they
were producing.10

Some examples from the L1–L2 conversations are presented below. In
Extract (2), following Bill’s vocabulary check (line 2), Koma provides
other-repair (line 3).

1 Bill: un. >sou sou sou.<($) demo ($) anmari nanka:
Uh-huh right right right but not much like
2 → ima yatteru sira na?<$ano::: kyouyui:::n kaigi?
now doing know Neg uhm meeting
‘Uh-huh, right, right, right. But not much, like, the
talk {they’re} doing now, you know, uhm, a kyouyui:::n
meeting?’
3 Koma: >kyouin < un.
teachers yeah
‘Teachers, yeah.’
4 Bill: un. na- de:: oretati wa de na=
Yeah no- and we Top attend no-
‘Yeah. No-, and we don’t atten-’
5 Koma: =un.=
Uh-huh
‘Uh-huh’
6 Bill: =de naku temo]
attend not even if
‘Even if {we} don’t attend.’
7 Koma: [uhn.
Uh-huh
‘uh-huh’
8 Bill: ii kara: de nai uhuhuh hhuh [hhuh hhuh.]
Okay because attend not
‘Since it’s okay, {we} don’t attend.’

In the extract above, Bill and Koma are talking at Bill’s office at school. In
line 2, when Bill encounters the word kyo:yui:::n kaigi, he locates the
repairable with sound stretches and upward intonation. Moreover, he stops
the turn still in progress at the point that this item is produced. As shown
in the rest of the interaction in this extract, if he had not stopped the
turn here, the whole turn would have been ima yatteru kamosirenai kyouin
kaigi aru desyo? Oretati wa de naku temo ii kara de nai (‘There is a teachers’
meeting that may be going on now, isn’t there? We don’t attend because
we don’t have to.’) However, Bill stops the turn after producing kyo:yui:::n
kaigi. In addition, when Bill marks the lexical item prosodically, he
simultaneously also marks it nonverbally. Bill looks down as he produces
ano::: (see Figure 1) but as he produces kyouyui:::n kaigi, he turns his
gaze back at Koma by slightly shifting his body orientation to Koma
Then in the next turn, this lexical item, marked in both prosody and gesture, gets repaired: Koma provides the repair, uttering *kyouin* (**‘teachers’**). Following Koma’s repair, Bill accepts the repair and goes back to the main sequence of interaction (line 4).
In Extract (3), Jeff pursues other-repair from Haru.

(3) [Jeff-Haru:20:09-21:04] Jeff:L2 Japanese; Haru:L1 Japanese ((Jeff is telling Haru that the relationship between Haru and his friend reminds him of a hypothetical relationship discussed in a class.))

1 Jeff: sou nazeka minna soui kankei o suru=
‘Right. Somehow, everybody {speculates that they’re} having an affair.’

2 Haru: =a:=
‘Oh’

3→ Jeff: =ano:: (): nan desu ka ano::: sui- suitei?==
uhmmm what COP:POL Q uhhmm est- estimation
‘Ummm, what do you say, uhhmm, est, estimation?’

4 Haru: =u:[n]
uh-huh
‘Uh-huh.’

5→ Jeff: [su]isoku?==
speculation
‘Speculation?’

6 Haru: =suisoku suru.=
speculation do
‘[They] speculate.’

7 Jeff: =’suisoku da=
speculation COP
‘[It’s] speculation.’

8 Haru: u:n  sou da ne. demo zenzen sonna nee,
Hmmm right COP IP but at all such IP
‘Hmm, that’s right. But [I don’t have] such
{relationship with her} at all.’

In line 3, Jeff uses two separate procedures in displaying his problem. At the beginning he announces a word search by uttering nan desu ka (‘what do you say’), which sets up a slot for collaborative resolution of the trouble. He then deploys a vocabulary check by stopping the turn constructional unit (TCU) that is still in progress and marking a candidate word with rising intonation. In addition to the verbal action, Jeff’s nonverbal behavior is relevant here as well. At the beginning of line 3, Jeff shifts his gaze from Haru as he hesitates; toward the end of the turn, he returns his gaze to Haru, raises his eyebrows, and says suitei (‘estimation’) with rising intonation. Although suitei is not correct and suisoku suru (‘speculate’) should be used in this context, Haru
does not provide repair (line 4) and utters *un* (‘uh-huh’), which passes up an opportunity to initiate or do repair (Schegloff 1982). Jeff then carries out a ‘third turn repair’ (Schegloff 1997b). Third turn repair refers to self-repair in the third turn following a listener’s brief contribution which neither points out nor repairs a trouble-source in the first turn. As Schegloff notes, by self-repairing an utterance in third turn without prior other-initiation of repair, the repair speaker makes an effort at ‘getting it right’, even though getting it right seems to have little bearing on the understanding of the moment (1997b: 37). In lines 3–4, Jeff may be orienting to ‘getting it right’ linguistically and thereby attending to his limited L2 expertise at that particular moment, while Haru is orienting to meaning and *dis*-attending to his own status as linguistic expert.

While uttering *suisoku?* (‘speculation’) with rising intonation, at line 5, Jeff focuses his gaze on Haru, raises his eyebrows, and leans forward, thereby soliciting repair from Haru. So while as a subsequent action to Jeff’s attempt to produce the candidate lexical item in his preceding turn 3, Jeff’s action in line 5 does a self-repair, it can also be heard as a self-initiation of other-repair and this is how Haru takes it up. In both of its sequential roles, the action in line 5 displays Jeff’s uncertainty of his lexical choice and thereby orients to a momentary lapse in his linguistic expertise. In line 6, Haru finally assumes his expert role by providing repair, *suisoku suru* (‘they speculate’). The word search sequence is closed by Jeff’s partially repeating Haru’s other-repair in a quiet voice. After Jeff’s repetition, the co-participants shift back to the topical talk in line 8 and thereby abandon the orientation to their differential expertise in speaking Japanese.

By analyzing the practices by which L2 speakers overtly solicit other-repair from their L1 interlocutors, we are able to observe their orientation to their own and their co-participants’ differential language expertise. By seeking help on everyday vocabulary items from their interlocutors, the L2 speakers orient to their limited expertise in the language of interaction at that very moment while at the same time, and in a complementary fashion, they treat their interlocutors as language experts. The L1 speakers, on the other hand, orient to their status as language experts by providing help on such vocabulary items.

However, differential language expertise was found to be relevant to the participants not only when the L2 speaker invited other-repair but on other occasions as well. As I will discuss below, when the participants encountered problems of mutual understanding in the course of the interaction, differential language expertise also became relevant.

Problems of mutual understanding

In the L1–L2 conversations, when mutual understanding was not attained because of an L2 speaker’s apparent problem of producing a single lexical item, the L1 speaker offered a solution to (i.e. repaired) the problem. The interactional format employed on such occasions is presented below.
Repair Sequence Format (RSF)

Turn 1 (T1). Talk that contains a repairable item
Turn 2 (T2). Other-initiation (OI) of repair
Turn 3 (T3). Attempt at self-repair (SR)
Turn 4 (T4). Other-repair (OR)
Turn 5 (T5). Acceptance of OR in the form of repetition
Turn 6 (T6). Return to main sequential action

In T1, there is talk that contains a repairable item. In T2, the other party initiates repair targeted at a lexical item in the talk in T1. In T3, the speaker of the trouble-source attempts self-repair. T2 and T3 may be repeated, as will be discussed below. In T4, as the speaker of the trouble source cannot self-repair the problem, the other party provides repair. In T5, the speaker of the trouble source usually accepts the repair by repeating the repaired word. In T6, the interactants go back to the main sequence of interaction. In addition, between T5 and T6, there may be optional turns. Even though at first glance, the RSF does not reveal any particularities of L1–L2 interaction compared to ordinary L1 interaction, as I will demonstrate below, the participants perform activities that invoke their differential language expertise in the details of their turn construction. Extracts (4) and (5) below demonstrate the repair sequence format (RSF) in action.

In Extract (4), Dean tries to ask a question regarding Toku’s business trip, but Toku has a problem understanding the question.

(4) [Dean-Toku:07:152-161] Dean:L2 Japanese; Toku:L1 Japanese

T1 1 Dean: ano:: sigoto kankei no ryokou wa?
uhmm work relation Gen travel Top
‘Uhmm, how about work related travel?’

T2 2 Toku: nm? kankei?
Huh relation
‘Huh? Relation?’

T3 3 Dean: a:: sigoto kankei ryyoukou a a ano () ryokukou zya
uhmm work relation travel uh uh uhm travel COP

4 naku te ano ich e:: nihongo de wa wakan nai kedo
Neg and well tch uhmm Japanese in Top know Neg but

5 ((cough)) () ano:: Osaka: e:: [ka Nagoya e::]
uhmm Osaka to or Nagoya to
‘Uhmm, work relation travel, uh, uh, uhm, not travel but well, tch, uhmm, I don’t know (the word) in Japanese but uhmm, to Osaka or to Nagoya,’

T4 6 Toku: [ah syuttyou]
COP:POL IP
‘Oh syuttyou’

7 desu ne.
COP:POL IP
‘Oh, you mean a business trip.’
In Extract (4), following Dean’s question (line 1), Toku initiates repair targeting a vocabulary item by repeating a part of Dean’s utterance (line 2), and Dean attempts to self-repair searching for the word (lines 3–5). After Dean has searched for the word for a while, Toku supplies a candidate word (lines 6–7), and this is followed by Dean’s acceptance as he repeats the word (line 8). After Dean’s acceptance of the repair, Toku further pursues Dean’s uptake (line 9), and Dean utters hai (‘yes’) and repeats the word again (line 10). Finally in line 11, the interactants go back to the main sequential action: line 10 is Toku’s answer to the question Dean asked in line 1.

In Extract (5), Taka is informing Gary about products in Winnipeg. As the word natane (‘canola’) causes a problem of understanding, Taka tries to produce the word in English.


T1 1 Taka: oba ga sore de ato ne, (.) esto
Buckwheat Nom that COP:Cont then IP well
natane. (.) natane.
canola canola
‘Buckwheat is one and then, well, natane (canola), natane (canola).’

T2 3 Gary:  si[ra nai] know NEG
‘I don’t know [the word].’

T1/T3 4 Taka:  [kanuua]=
T2 5 Gary: =na- nani?
what
‘Wh, what?’

T3 6 Taka:  kanuua kanuua.
T2 7 Gary:  kanuua. kanuua sira nai. nan desu ka.
know NEG what POL Q
‘Kanuua. Kanuua. I don’t know that. What is it?’
T3 8 Taka: *etto nee (.) eh kanu- kanuuu kanyuuu? kanyuuu.*
Well IP huh
‘Well, huh? Kanu, kanuuu, kanyuuu? Kanyuuu.’

T2 9 Gary:
canoe;
T3 10 Taka: kanyuuu e: *a:to abura o tukuru yatu. abura.*
uhm well oil Acc make thing oil
‘Kanyuuu, uhm, well, oil, the thing that
makes oil. Oil.’

11 (1.0)
T3 13 Taka: *kyanuuu?*
T4 14 Gary:
sore wa canola?
That Top
‘Is that canola?’

T5 15 Taka: *canola °or something."*
16 Gary:
nihongo de na na[ni]
Japanese in what
‘What do you say in Japanese?’

17 Taka:
* [nata]ne.
canola
‘Natane (canola).’

18 Gary:
*nata]ne* canola canola
‘Natane (canola), (canola).’

19 Taka: 
* [nata]ne abura
canola oil
‘Natane abura (canola oil).’

20 Gary: *a so:
oh so
‘Oh, I see.’

21 Taka: *na- nanohana tte aru desyo? [nanohana]*
rape blossoms QT exist TAG rape blossoms
‘There are rape blossoms, right?’

22 Gary: 
* [/> un un un <] yes yes yes
‘Yes, yes, yes.’

23 Taka: *re no tane.*
Those Gen seed
‘Their seeds.’

24 (0.4)

T3 25 Taka: *are ga ka- kannuuu kyanooa*
that Nom
‘They are called ka, kannuuu, kyanola.’

T4 26 Gary: canola.
T5 27 Taka: *cano[la].*
28 Gary: *[a]: yappari=
I see of course
‘I see, of course.’
In Extract (5), following Taka’s production of the word *natane* (‘canola’), Gary initiates repair by explicitly claiming that he does not know the word (line 3). In line 4, Taka utters ‘kannua’ instead of repeating the Japanese word *natane* once again or explaining the word in Japanese. From here to line 15, the participants’ relative status as language experts is reversed as the object of the metalinguistic sequence, conducted in Japanese, is an English word. By attempting to produce the word in English, Taka orients to the possibility that Gary may understand the word better if it is said in English. In line 6, following Gary’s initiation of repair in line 5, Taka attempts to repeat the word twice with the same pronunciation as in line 4. As Taka’s first attempt of producing ‘kannua’ in line 4 overlaps with Gary’s utterance *sira nai* in line 3, Taka may have taken the problem as one of hearing due to the overlap rather than to his pronunciation. In line 7, Gary attempts to repeat twice what Taka said in lines 4 and 7 with exactly the same pronunciation. Yet the repetition is no claim to comprehension, as evident from the immediately following *shira nai* (‘I don’t know’) and request to Taka to supply the word meaning (*nan desu ka* ‘what is it?’). In line 8, following nonlexical perturbations that indicate trouble in speaking, Taka tries to produce the word again. This time, although he at first utters the word with the same pronunciation as before, in the following attempts he says it with slightly different pronunciation. In so doing, he displays his understanding that the problem was caused by his pronunciation. For the first time, he now utters the word with different pronunciation and also formats it with rising intonation, which can be heard to seek confirmation from Gary. As discussed in the previous section, by seeking confirmation of L2 vocabulary items from the coparticipant, the speaker simultaneously orients to him- or herself as being uncertain of whether the produced item is comprehensible or correct and to the possibility that their interlocutor may have better access to the vocabulary item than the speaker. In line 9, this time, Gary comes up with a candidate solution and produces ‘canoe’. However, in line 10 Taka continues his attempt to produce the word, thus implicitly rejecting Gary’s candidate solution. After repeating the word again in the same phonological shape as at the end of his previous turn (line 8), Taka gives up producing the English word and instead explains the meaning of the word in Japanese by offering a ‘functional paraphrase’ of sorts, that is, describing the referent in terms of its most common practical use. Specifically, Taka describes the referent as *abura o tukuru yatu* (‘the thing that makes oil’), with the critical component *abura* ‘oil’ repeated in turn-final position. This shift of repair method proves successful. In line 12, Gary produces the change of state token ‘oh’ (Heritage 1984), which marks an immediately preceding
alteration in the speaker’s knowledge by virtue of something that just happened. In this case, Gary’s production of ‘oh’ indexes the claim that he has identified the word Taka has been producing. Upon Gary’s display of recognition, in line 13, Taka produces the word again with slightly different pronunciation from his previous attempts, formatting it with upward intonation that seeks confirmation. In his next line (line 14), Gary finally provides the repair solution, ‘canola’, and this is followed by Taka’s acceptance of the repair: he repeats the repaired item in line 14, albeit followed by a general extender (Overstreet 2000) that can be heard as mitigating the certainty of Taka’s newly acquired knowledge. However, in line 16, another insertion sequence begins, in which Gary now asks Taka what the word is in Japanese. By virtue of his question, Gary orients to Taka as the more expert speaker of Japanese. This is followed by yet another repair sequence consisting of Taka’s self-repair attempt (line 25), Gary’s other-repair (line 26), and Taka’s acceptance by repetition with falling intonation (line 27). At this point, the coparticipants close the repair and insertion sequence. First, Gary makes a strong claim to understanding (yappari ‘of course’) Taka’s description of canola in the preceding sequence (line 28). In the following turn (line 29), Taka indexes the return to the main line of the topical talk by the turn-initial discourse marker sorekara ‘then’, which connects his upcoming turn-constructional unit to the thread suspended by the repair and insertion sequences.

In the repair sequences exemplified in Extracts (4) and (5), the participants’ orientation to their differential language expertise can be observed in the detail of the turns. In purely structural terms of sequence organization, T1 and T2 can regularly be observed in L1 conversations. In fact, the ‘preferred’ choice is for the interlocutor to initiate repair and let the speaker of the trouble-source self-repair the problem rather than actually carrying out the repair. However, the way T1 and T2 are formatted may be different in L1 conversations and L2 talk. For example, producing sira nai (‘I don’t know’) in response to a common lexical item such as natane is very unusual for L1 speakers. Thus, although the sequential structure of these turns appears to be shared for L1 and L2 conversationalists, the class of troublesome linguistic items may be quite different. The participants’ orientation to their language expertise becomes especially salient in T3, T4, T5, and in the optional turns between T5 and T6. An attempt at self-repair during T3 is often observed in ordinary L1 conversation. However, in the case of L1–L2 conversations, the attempt at self-repair may be repeated and sometimes becomes very long, containing utterances that display the L2 speakers’ orientation to the differences between their L1 and that of their interlocutor, as well as to their limited L2 expertise. In Extract (4) above, besides producing nonlexical perturbations (e.g. ano, e:) (lines 3–5), Dean explicitly states nihongo de wa wakan nai kedo (‘I don’t know {the word} in Japanese but’) (line 4), in which he orients to the lexical gap in his Japanese while also claiming knowledge of the word in some other
language(s). In Extract (5), by switching from Japanese to English, Taka orients to the possibility that Gary may understand the word better in English than in Japanese and that English may work better on this particular occasion. By virtue of this language switch, the participants' roles of ‘expert’ and ‘novice’ are also reversed, demonstrating that the categories of expert and novice are not stable interaction-external ‘participant factors’ but locally occasioned by the participants' efforts to achieve intersubjectivity. Expert–novice roles can be switched during a single sequence, contingent on the current line of topical talk. In T4, after providing the speaker of the trouble-source with plenty of opportunities to repair, the other party, who is an L1 speaker of the lexical item in question, repairs the word. In T5, the L2 speakers in the L1–L2 conversations usually accept the repair by repetition, which is uncommon in the L1 conversations in the corpus. In the L1–L2 conversations, all of the items accepted by repetition were single lexical items or single phrases. This finding is consistent with that of Ohta (2001). Ohta conducted micro-analyses of classroom discourse between learners of Japanese as a foreign language and found that the JFL learners frequently repeated the corrected items following teachers' or other students' correction, and all of the items repeated were single grammatical structures or lexical items. This may imply that even in casual conversation, when L2 speakers orient to their ‘novice’ roles, the interactional structures may become similar to those in language classrooms. Furthermore, in the L1–L2 conversations in my data, even after the trouble source speaker accepted the repair, some optional turns were often observed before the participants resumed the main sequential action in T6. During optional turns, as in Extract (4), we saw further repetition of the repaired lexical item by an L1 speaker to confirm the L2 speaker's uptake of the word. By pursuing L2 speakers' uptake, the L1 speakers oriented to their 'expert' identity. On the other hand, the L2 speakers demonstrated their orientation to their ‘novice’ identity by producing the word repeatedly in response to the L1 speakers’ pursuit. In some other cases, as shown in Extract (5), the participants engaged in further repair work after T6 in order to understand the problematic lexical items in each other's language. In such cases, the participants oriented to the complementary differences in their linguistic knowledge. In short, in the sequences in which mutual understanding was jeopardized unless the L1 speaker repaired the L2 speaker's production problem, the trajectory of the interaction displayed the participants' orientation to their differential language expertise.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of ordinary conversations between speakers of Japanese as a first language and between speakers of Japanese as a first and second language revealed that in both constellations, participants' disfluencies or linguistic errors were usually not treated as interactional trouble. Although such
features in the participants' language use is noticeable for an outside observer and may or may not be registered by the participants, the interlocutors did not orient to less-than-perfect language use during much of their interaction. For the most part, differences in their language expertise was thus not a participant concern. But on occasion, participants did orient to the differences in linguistic expertise between them. The sequential environment in which differentially distributed linguistic knowledge became relevant was that of repair, specifically (a) when one speaker invited the other's repair, and (b) when mutual understanding was jeopardized unless one party repaired the other. Through their talk and other interactional conduct, the interlocutors made relevant to each other the complementary roles of relative target language expert and novice.

The proposed way of examining differential language expertise in natural conversations between L1 and L2 speakers has implications for second language research. First, in order to achieve mutual understanding, interactants employ a variety of resources such as sequential organization, local interactional contexts, gaze, the temporal organization of utterances, and language in all its formal and functional dimensions. Micro-analytic studies of such resources may help to better understand how L2 speakers use the target language in interaction. Second, as this study has demonstrated, on the occasions that participants in ordinary L1–L2 conversation orient to differences in their linguistic expertise, the structures of the conversation may become similar to those of language classrooms, full of interactional practices for dealing with problems in the talk. For example, even though this study examined ordinary conversations, the L2 speakers occasionally assumed the roles of (relative) ‘novice’ through such activities as seeking help on L2 vocabulary and repeating corrected words, while the L1 speakers took on (relative) ‘expert’ roles by supplying lexical items and pursuing L2 speakers’ uptake. Whether inside or outside of formal teaching settings, when participants orient to their differential expertise in the target language, opportunities for L2 learning arise—although such opportunities are in no way limited to the moments when linguistic expertise becomes a participant concern.

Following Rampton (1990), I began this paper by arguing that the static, interaction-external category of ‘native’ and ‘nonnative’ speaker might profitably be replaced by the more flexible, locally contingent notion of target language expertise. In this study, I have limited my observations to repair sequences, especially repair by others, as occasions when differences in linguistic expertise are made relevant by the co-participants in L1–L2 conversation. Future research will have to explore how differential language expertise as a participant concern is evident in other types of interactional sequence.
APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

Adapted from Jefferson (1984) and Maynard (1997)

Abbreviations used in interlinear gloss

IP Interactional particle (e.g. ne, sa, no, yo, na)
Nom Nominative (-ga)
Acc Accusative (-o)
Gen Genitive (-no)
Top Topic marker (-wa)
PT other particles
QT Quotation marker (-to, -tte)
Q Question marker (ka and its variants)
POL Politeness marker
COP Copulative verb
CONT Continuing (non-final) form
NR Nominalizer (e.g. no, n)
TAG Tag-like expression
ONO Onomatopoeic expressions
LOC Locative
NEG for marking negation
PST past

Transcription conventions

[ ] overlapping talk
= latched utterances
(0.0) timed pause (in seconds)
( ) a short pause
co:lon extension of the sound or syllable
co::lon a more prolonged stretch
. fall in intonation (final)
, continuing intonation (non-final)
? rising intonation (final)
; intonation between a period and a comma
¿ a rise stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark
CAPITAL loud talk
underline emphasis
↑ sharp rise
↓ sharp fall
○ ○ passage of talk that is quieter than surrounding talk
< > passage of talk that is slower than surrounding talk
< > passage of talk that is faster than surrounding talk
hh audible aspirations
*hh audible inhalations
(hh) laughter within a word
(( )) comment by the transcriber
( ) problematic hearing that the transcriber is not certain about
"
Idiomatic translation of Japanese utterances

In idiomatic translation

{ } words or phrases which are not explicitly stated in the Japanese versions.

Romanization

*Official romanization system (according to Monbu kagaku syoo ‘the Ministry of Science and Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology’) is used in transcribing data.

BIODATA

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NOTES

1 Some sections in Nishizaka (1999) and Mori (2003) address language differences and linguistic proficiency as well.
2 Therefore, neither a correction by which participants do not stop the next action due (i.e. ‘embedded correction’, Jefferson 1987) nor a correction which does not address any problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding (i.e. correction as a response to a request for confirmation on content matters) is an instance of repair.
3 In the CA literature, the technical term ‘preference’ is not used to refer to psychological motivation or desires. Rather, CA researchers examine the design or shape of turns for evidence of their relative ‘preference’ status (ten Have 1999: 120). For example, as a response to an invitation, an acceptance is preferred because an acceptance can be given quickly, while rejection is usually delayed and requires some explanation. In this case, an acceptance is ‘preferred’ regardless of whether the person who produces the invitation wants the recipient to accept the invitation or not.
4 Below is an example of other-correction following an understanding check (Schegloff et al. 1977: 379).

B: . . . I was thinking this morning, I was having a little trouble in the bathroom, an’ thought ‘Oh, boy, I- n- I- uh- uh this business of getting up at six o’clock’n being ready t’eat, is uh- is not fer me,’ // heh heh
In the example above, other-correction by A follows an understanding check that is marked with an uncertainty marker: an understanding check is carried out in *You mean X?* form. Thus, the format employed in this example is a ‘correction invitation format’, in which one speaker offers a candidate interpretation and the other speaker rejects it.

5 Abbreviations used in the interlinear gloss were adapted from Maynard (1997) and transcription conventions were adapted from Jefferson (1984).

6 The use of the frequency adjectives such as ‘always’, ‘usually’, and ‘routinely’ in CA studies results from the reluctance of premature quantification. CA analysts believe that careful analysis and description of a robust collection of single cases lead to the building of a generalizable description of the phenomenon. In some cases, quantification may be possible. In this process, quantitative analysis is ‘not alternative to single case analysis, but rather is built on its back’ (Schegloff 1993: 102).

7 By producing a continuer ‘uh-huh’, a speaker performs the interactional job of passing up an opportunity to initiate repair (Schegloff 1982).

8 Features of word searches by L1 speakers include nonlexical perturbation, pauses, and the use of distal demonstrative pronouns such as *are* and *asoko* (Fox et al. 1996; Hayashi 2000, 2003; Hosoda 2002; Kitano 1999). Among these, the use of distal demonstrative pronouns occurred regularly among L1 speakers but did not typically occur among L2 speakers (Hosoda 2002).

9 Although the L1 participants in the corpus did not use vocabulary checks, they may do so on other occasions. For example, in content classrooms, L1 students may initiate repair when their teacher produces unfamiliar technical terms. On the other hand, the L2 speakers in the examined set of everyday conversations regularly did vocabulary checks.

10 In the L1 conversations, a similar kind of upward intonation contour was observed when the participants did ‘try-marking’, which is used when a speaker is uncertain whether for this recipient a certain recognitional form (usually a name) he/she used is appropriate to secure recognition (Sacks and Schegloff 1979; Schegloff 1996). In producing try-marking, a speaker produces a recognitional form with upward intonation and pauses momentarily.

11 In the L1 conversations in my data, the recipient routinely accepted repair by just producing acknowledgment tokens such as *un* (‘yeah’) or *sou* (‘right’).

REFERENCES


