The Influence of comprehensible input on foreign language acquisition

- "Lexicon" -

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Abstract

After the emergence of Krashen’s (1980, 1985) "comprehensible input" theory, the effect of international modification on comprehension has become the main area of scholarly concern, with a number of investigations being undertaken, both from the theoretical and empirical perspective in an attempt to identify the factors that make input comprehensible to the learners of a foreign language. However, one of the principal questions still to be addressed by research on foreign language and second language teaching is the way that native speakers, teachers and non-teachers alike, modify their speech, making their input comprehensible to learners.

In this thesis, in the first instance, communication strategies of two native speakers of Japanese are compared to delineate the modification features adopted by them in communication with a small group of beginner learners of Japanese. On the basis of distribution of the lexical features characterising each native speaker’s utterances, the efficacy of their individual strategies was tested for comprehensibility by using the amount and type of the learners’ participation in the interactions as the yardstick. It was found that the speech which contained many "teacher talk" features elicited a much greater degree of response from the learners than that of the speech which bore a greater resemblance to "native talk". However, despite
the fact that the learner group participated more vigorously in conversation with the native speaker who modified along the "teacher talk" lines, some doubts are being expressed about the value of the interaction as a truly learning experience. It is proposed that an interaction where foreign speakers are forced to adopt a number of strategies for negotiation of meaning is by far more challenging and should be considered as more effective in terms of language acquisition.

1. Introduction

The purpose of research in second or foreign language education is to identify the variables that may facilitate or impede acquisition of the target language. The variables may relate to the learner, the teacher, the instructional treatment, the instructional environment or some form of interaction among these factors. Thus, the ultimate goal of research in foreign language education is to identify, describe and predict the processes through which learners acquire the target language. Since the 1970s, research in foreign language acquisition has begun to pay attention to the role of the learners' linguistic environment as input to their developing linguistic competence. Such environment may be, and most often is, the foreign language classroom. However, other environments such as, interactions with native speakers of the target language are also considered to be an important influence on learners' progress in the language. In all instances, therefore, the degree to which learners are able to communicate in the target language can serve as the yardstick measuring their progress. It can be said that study of interaction in a foreign language classroom, or outside a formal classroom environment, constitutes the central feature in evaluating the teaching and learning processes marking the different stages of the target language acquisition. Thus, within the foreign language classroom, usage of the target language for teacher-learner communication can be regarded as the medium through which teachers teach and learners demonstrate what they have learned. Similarly, usage of the target language in native speaker-learner situations can be regarded as the medium through which learners demonstrate their ability to communicate in the target language in an out of the classroom environment. The way teachers and learners use language to communicate in foreign language classrooms mediates between teaching, learning, and foreign language acquisition. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of classroom interaction is essential to all individuals concerned with foreign language education (Johnson 1995:p3). Similarly, the way native speakers and learners negotiate meaning in out of classroom situations can provide a valuable insight into the processes of foreign language acquisition. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of native speaker-learner interaction is equally essential for foreign language educators.

In native speaker-learner interactions, be it the foreign language classroom or another type of less structured environment, it is the native speaker who serves as the most important model for acquisition of the linguistic and behavioural native norms of communication. Consequently, the importance of native speaker input into the interaction cannot be disputed. That the input will be in some way modified, to match the competence level of the addressee/s, is a fact attested to by numerous studies (e.g. Frey 1988). However, the features of modification may vary to some degree between the speech produced by foreign language teachers and that of non-teacher native speaker interlocutors. Modifications to the former are often referred to as "teacher talk" while those to the latter are known in sociolinguistic literature as "foreigner talk". However, the distinction between the two is not clear and the term "foreigner talk" has been applied by many researchers to describe modifications in the speech of teachers during classroom instruction (Steyaert, 1977; Gaies,
1977; Chaudron, 1979, 1988; Henzl 1979; Long and Sato 1983; Gass and Medden 1985; Brulhart 1986; Milk 1990; McGroarty 1990). Furthermore, while it is generally accepted that "teacher talk" in a foreign language classroom might differ in some features from "foreigner talk" addressed to learners in non-classroom contexts by other native speakers, some controversy exists whether this difference is sufficiently significant to warrant classification into two separate registers. It has been claimed that simplifications in teachers’ speech are neither systematic nor sufficiently qualitatively distinct to constitute a special sociolinguistic register as has been argued for "foreigner talk" (Chaudron 1988 p. 55). Rather, it appears that the adjustments in teacher speech to non-native-speaking learners serve the temporary purpose of maintaining communication-drafting information and eliciting learners’ responses and do not identify the interaction as an entirely different social situation (Chaudron 1988 p.55). Obviously, modifications in the speech of a teacher, who is fully conversant with the language competence of his/her students, will be largely adapted to their level of comprehension. Teachers, being fully aware of the range of vocabulary and syntactic structures the learners have acquired at a particular stage of the course, will tailor their speech accordingly. Therefore, speech directed to learners at the early stages of language acquisition will be characterised by use of high frequency vocabulary and simple syntactic structures that, in due course, will become progressively more complex in step with the learner's progress. But, however simplified the "teacher talk" might be, its characteristic feature is that it very seldom, if ever, violates the syntactic rules of the language. In other words, by adjusting his/her speech to the competence level of the learner, the teacher through appropriate adjustments to his/her native-talk register, provides a “correct” model for the learner to follow. "Foreigner talk", on the other hand, is characterised by a rather haphazard application of simplification, based not on the first-hand knowledge of the addressee’s level of competence but rather on individual belief as to what a foreigner might or might not understand. Irrespective of whether "teacher talk" and "foreigner talk" are two separate registers or one, research into native speaker input, teacher or otherwise, follows a similar path by focusing on the kinds of questions that native speakers ask, the amount and type of talking that native speakers do, the type of error correction and feedback that native speakers give, and the speech modifications that native speakers make when talking to foreign language learners.

Since the 1980s, considerable attention in research on foreign language acquisition has been given to the role of native speaker/ teacher input. Input is a general term that refers to the variety of language to which learners are exposed. It refers to both the linguistic as well the functional aspects of the language. Krashen (1982) has advocated the importance of comprehensive input to successful language acquisition. Linguistic simplifications, including syntactic simplifications, serve the purpose of making input language more comprehensible to the learners. For the learner, understanding what is said to him/her plays a very important role in facilitating production of language. Further research by Krashen (1985) claims that learners should be exposed to a lot of comprehensible input that is at or just above the proficiency of the learner. Since foreign language learners in reality have very few opportunities to interact with native speakers of the target language outside the classroom, provision of "quality input" is thus in the hands of the teachers (Lightbown, 1991). Ideally, by providing suitably structured input, including instruction in the behavioural norms of interpersonal interaction, teachers should prepare their students for interaction with native speakers of the target language in a variety of social situations.

1.1 Objectives of Research

The aims of the research from which this paper is derived are to identify and compare features that, in the perception of two native speakers of Japanese, interacting informally with learners of Japanese, constitute a "comprehensible input"). The particular focus of this investigation is on the evaluation of the relative merits of such input as viewed from the
learners’ perspective. By analysing learners’ linguistic and behavioural responses to the demands of interaction with the said speakers, it is intended to demonstrate the efficacy of a range of features as facilitators of comprehension and, by implication, language acquisition.

This research extends the framework of “foreigner talk” in Japanese, pioneered by Skoutarides (1986), by focusing on a communicative situation with different configuration of variables. Skoutarides analysed speech by Japanese businessmen, directed to a class of students, which dealt with fairly complex topics pertaining to their respective occupations. This investigation, on the other hand, is focused on communication strategies, including gestures, facial expressions, etc., of native speakers conversing on much simpler topics with individual students in an informal, non-classroom setting. Following the precedent set by Skoutarides (1986), this research also sets no hypotheses and should be regarded as being an extension of studies on language simplification in Japanese, carried out within the “comprehensible input” framework.

In the 1980s and 1990s various new theories of language acquisition have emerged (Crozet 1996, Crozet & Liddicoat, 1997). However, to date, these “new” ideas remain largely in the realm of theory as very little empirical research has been undertaken to test the new approach to what should happen in a second/foreign language classroom (Ellis 1990; Johnson 1995). Furthermore, such research as has come to light in recent years is predominantly based on data from ESL classes, that is on environments of language acquisition significantly different to those in which foreign language teaching occurs. This lack of research is particularly noticeable in relation to teaching of Japanese as a foreign language to adults. Consequently, the question as to what represents “comprehensible input” to beginner learners of Japanese needs to be addressed. This, in turn, requires revisiting some of the “foreigner talk” and “teacher talk” concepts in order to ascertain the type of language, modified or otherwise, which the beginner learners are likely to understand and to which they are likely to respond. In other words, the main objective of the investigation reported in this paper is to delineate the features of “comprehensible input” which are most conducive to promoting language output from the learners.

With this objective in view, this paper reports some of the results obtained by analysing two case studies, representing two different types of “comprehensible input” produced by two native speakers of Japanese addressing a group of Australian learners of Japanese.

2. Data

2.1 Participants

The subjects, whose speech and behaviour in a specific communicative situation provided the data for this investigation, have been chosen on the basis of availability. Since this investigation has been carried out in Australia, it has been extremely difficult to access a suitable number of non-teacher native speakers of Japanese who could spare the time to visit the designated venue for the purpose of informal conversation with the students. However, in selecting the two native-speakers from the very small pool of volunteers, due attention has been paid to personal attributes that would allow a comparative evaluation of their respective communication strategies to be made. In regard to the learners, a general invitation to participate in this research was issued to the students at the intermediate level of Japanese language course and the three students representing the language learner sample were the only volunteers.
2.1.1 Native Speakers (NS)

Two male native speakers, coded NS1 and NS2 participated in this research. NS1, aged between 60-65 years, is a retired Japanese language teacher with approximately 30 years experience in teaching Japanese at tertiary level in Australia. He is fairly conversant with the language program studied by the student sample but had never actually taught this level of the course nor had he ever taught the particular students. His command of English is very good and his academic background is in applied linguistics. He has not met any of the three students prior to the conversation sessions.

NS2 is also aged between 60-65 years and, similarly to NS1, is a retired teacher but not a language teacher. NS2’s field is Japanese history, which he taught at the high school level in Japan. At the time of the conversation session, NS2 has been in Australia for approximately 6 months, visiting the university as an exchange scholar. NS2 occasionally participated in the activities of the Japanese section by helping with the taping of reading passages for students’ private study, conducting informal conversation sessions for students wishing to improve their competence in the spoken language, giving talks on the Japanese education system to advanced classes and similar. NS2 has had only a very brief exposure to the Japanese program at this university and none at all to the coursework studied by the three students. NS2 has very low competence in English and no academic background in applied linguistics. He has met one of the three students very briefly prior to the conversation sessions described in this investigation.

2.1.2 Language Learners (LL)

The three LLs are male, intermediate level students of Japanese. LL1 and LL2 are aged between 20-23 years, while LL3 is 35 years old. All three are very motivated high achievers with great interest in Japan. At the time of the conversation sessions, they had been studying Japanese for three semesters, which means that they had covered most of the basic grammar, including the honorific system, and should have had a reasonable range of vocabulary and kanji (Chinese characters). The Japanese program they were studying includes separate conversation periods based on a variety of situational dialogues. During these periods, students are introduced to and expected to practice a fairly comprehensive range of functional expressions like, thanking, apologising, requesting clarification and similar. They are also instructed in various aspects of non-verbal etiquette pertinent to the situations covered in the dialogues. Consequently, the three LLs, theoretically at least, were adequately prepared for interactions with Japanese personnel outside the classroom environment.

2.2 The Setting

To enhance the feeling of informality, the conversation sessions were held in a small staff tea-room. All participants sat around a table without a particular pivot seating being assigned to the NSs.

2.3 Purpose of Interaction

The two NSs were invited to meet individually with the three students for a simple conversation. They were advised of the real purpose of these interactions and gave their permission to have the sessions video-taped. The LLs were informed that the sessions will be video-taped and, similarly to the NSs, readily gave their consent. The fact that all participants were fully aware that the sessions would be video-taped for research purposes might have had some inhibiting influence on the naturalness of the conversations but, in my opinion, not significant enough to invalidate the data.
2.4 Topics

It was expected that topics would evolve naturally in the process of conversation. However, to facilitate students’ initial comprehension, the two NSs were asked to initiate the conversation with fairly simple “classroom” topics such as the study of Japanese, hobbies and interests and similar. It was assumed that the three LLs, being familiar with the appropriate vocabulary through the coverage of similar topics in their coursework, would find it fairly easy to contribute to the conversation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method of collecting data

The conversation sessions were video and audio-taped. To avoid the possibly inhibiting presence of a regular teacher (myself), which might have had a very detrimental effect on the spontaneity of the conversation, the video and audio recording equipment was set up to record the sessions automatically.

3.2 Method of analysis

The methodology adopted for this research is a qualitative evaluation of data obtained from the two sets of video tapes recorded during the two separate conversation sessions involving NS1 and NS2, in that order, and the three LLs. Due to the constraints imposed by the specified length of this paper, the detailed analysis of data is limited to the simplification features on the level of the lexicon. Although the predominant method is qualitative analysis, this is supported by tables and graphs presenting quantitative data on such features as the quantity of speech produced by each speaker and the type of lexicon each of them used to make himself understood to the LL group. Lexical count is based on the Alpha unit method, used by Skoutarides (1986), whereby the count includes only semantically independent units of speech.

4. Analysis of Data

4.1 Lexical output – NS Data

Figure 4.1  Total lexical output – NS1/NS2: LLs jointly
Figure 4.1 shows the proportionate contribution to the conversation made by the two NSs and the LL group, in their respective conversation sessions, in terms of quantity of the total lexical output. As illustrated by the graphed information, the quantity of speech produced by the NSs was substantially larger than the lexical output of the LL group. Of the 1052 (Interaction 1) and 1282 (Interaction 2) items of vocabulary excerpted from the tape recordings, 70% and 73% were produced by NS1 and NS2 respectively, with LLs jointly accounting for only approximately 30% in each session. This result is not an unexpected one as it confirms the results of prior research in interactions between native and non-native speakers of a language whereby, be it a foreign language classroom or a non-teaching environment, quantity of speech produced by the former by far exceeded that of the latter (Skoutarides 1986, Chaudron, 1988)

4.2 Lexical Variation – NS Data

4.2.1 New and repeated vocabulary

As shown in Figure 4.2.1 the speech of both NSs was characterised by a large number of repetitions of the same lexicon. The distribution per speaker shows a difference of approximately 10% between the two sets of data. NS1 introduced 223 (32.9%) new words with the remaining 67.1% accounting for repetitions of the initially used vocabulary. NS2’s total new vocabulary is 330 (42.9%) and the remaining 57.1% are repetitions. However, analysis of the texts shows that the purpose of repeating the initially introduced words differed between the two speakers.

Within the "repetition" category in NS1’s data, approximately 30% of vocabulary items were used to reinforce the message he was trying to convey, while the remaining 70%, initially introduced in a given topic, were repeated in the context of subsequent topics or sub-topics.

Example 1

NS1: Ichinenkan nihongo o benkyo shita n desu ne…… Ichinenkan.

(You have studied Japanese for one year, haven’t you? One year)
Example 2

**NS1** Gakki wa nani ka hikemasu ka? *Gakki...gakki.*

(Do you play a musical instrument? *Musical instrument....musical instrument*)

In NS2’s data, however, the majority of repetitions occurred as a part of his strategy to make his message comprehensible. In fact, repetition of non-understood lexicon might be considered one of the characteristic features of NS2’s communication strategy. Analysis of the transcribed text reveals that, in some instances, he repeated the same word up to ten times in an effort to make it understood. However, as pointed out by Chaudron (1988), too many repetitions of the same non-understood element are not a successful communicative tool in achieving comprehensibility. In this case also, NS2’s strategy of repetition does not seem to have met with a great deal of success. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

NS2: Ano, *jishin* ga Nihon ni wa aru no shitteru deshoo. *Jishin... shittemasu ne. Jishin shitteru?*

(I assume that you know there are earthquakes in Japan? Earthquakes.... you know, don’t you. Earthquakes...do you know ?)

**LL1**: Sumimasen, wakarimasen.

(Excuse me, I don't understand)

### 4.2.2 Type of Vocabulary

**Table 4.2.2a** Type of vocabulary introduced for the first time (no repetitions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Kango</th>
<th>Wago</th>
<th>Gairaigo</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Proper nouns</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NS1</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NS2</strong></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terminology used in Table 4.2.2a is as follows: *kango* are Sino-Japanese words; *wago* refers to native Japanese vocabulary; *gairaigo* are loanwords (mainly from English); proper nouns include all names of people or places, while the term “hybrid” was chosen to include compounds coined by combining *kango/wago, wago/kango* morphemes or by proper nouns combined with a morpheme of Sino-Japanese origin (e.g. *Furansugo* – French language).

Table 4.2.2a presents an overview of all types of lexicon, excluding repetitions, used by NS1 and NS2. However, to obtain a more precise picture of each speaker’s choice of vocabulary, personal names and other proper nouns are excluded from Table 4.2.2b
Table 4.2.2b Type of vocabulary without proper nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Kango</th>
<th>Wago</th>
<th>Gairaigo</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage figures listed in Table 4.2.2b show similarities as well as differences in the etymological composition of speech produced by NS1 and NS2. As shown by the tabulated figures, the percentages for kango vocabulary in NS1’s and NS2’s data is approximately the same. However, NS2 used approximately 10% more wago vocabulary than NS1. A difference between the etymological composition of the two speakers’ discourse is shown also in the ‘gairaigo’ and ‘English’ categories: NS1 used approximately 5% more of both gairaigo and English vocabulary than NS2. The overall distribution of kango and wago, despite individual differences, is very similar to that found in other research on conversational style of Japanese (Tanaka, 1978; Skoutarides, 1986) in which the tendency is to use the more common level wago vocabulary in preference to the more formal kango synonyms.

Although quantitative representation of the choice of vocabulary by the two NSs does not show a great deal of difference, analysis of the text reveals that NS1 used mainly common usage kango vocabulary, well within the range of lexicon introduced in the beginning stages of Japanese language courses. On the other hand, NS2 tended to use more difficult vocabulary, generally used in more sophisticated contexts than the topics of classroom interaction. For instance, NS1 introduced only 12 (26.7%) “difficult” kango words which might not have been understood by the LL group. Of these, he post-corrected 4 items to English and pre-corrected his speech in regard to 3 items by first introducing the English word before offering the Japanese equivalent.

**Example of post-correction:**

NS1: *hatsuon-tte wakaru deshoo…pronunciation*

(I expect you understand the word pronunciation…..pronunciation)

**Example of pre-correction:**

NS1: *niece to iu no wa nihongo de mei to iimasu.*

(Niece is *mei* in Japanese)

As indicated above, NS2, in contrast to NS1’s choice of kango vocabulary, used many sophisticated words, the meaning of which, due to his lack of competence in English, he was unable to explain by substituting English or other means. 29 (40.3%) of his kango vocabulary represent words outside the lexical range of the LL group.
Examples of NS2 vocabulary:

*Budoo* (martial arts); *boojutsu* (martial arts); *koobai* (red tones [autumn foliage]); *koshoo* (breakdown); *higai* (damage), etc.

Looking at the figures listed in Table 4.2.2b from the perspective of native Japanese vs non-Japanese vocabulary, the relevant percentages (*kango, wago and hybrid*) indicate that in overall terms NS2 used approximately 12% more of native Japanese words than NS1. This suggests that NS1 compensated for the "difficult" *kango* words by substituting *gairaigo* or English synonyms. Bearing in mind that the majority of *gairaigo* used in contemporary Japan have their origin in English, they would have been much more readily comprehended by the LLs than the *kango* equivalents

Table 4.2.2b shows also that NS1, despite his high competence in English, used only 13 English vocabulary items (1.8%) in his total lexical output of 737 words. This suggests that NS1, undoubtedly mindful of the request "to speak in Japanese", chose to rely on strategies of lexical simplification within the confines of the Japanese language in preference to using English. Two examples are cited below:

**Example 1:**

NS1: *Imi wa ne, intersection desu.*

(The meaning is: intersection)

**Example 2:**

NS1: *Radical-tte iimasu kedo…..*  

(It is called a radical…..)

As can be seen from the above examples, NS1 used English predominantly for the purpose of clarifying the meaning of words not known by the LLs. All the English words in his data were used in correct English pronunciation.

One of the features of NS1’s communication strategy appears to be reliance on relatively new additions to the *gairaigo* vocabulary.

**Example:**

LL1: How do I say international trade?

NS1: *Intaanashonaru toredo o shitai n desu.*

(I would like to work in international trade)

In the above example, NS1 was asked by LL1 for the Japanese equivalent of English "international trade". NS1, instead of providing the correct but "difficult" items of vocabulary *kokusai boeeki*, opted for *intaanashonaru toredo*, a loanword listed in a dictionary (Sanseido, *Concise Gairaigo Jiten* 1987) but, according to anecdotal evidence from a number of Japanese acquaintances, not yet in popular usage. Apparently, although the terms are understood, they do not usually occur in Japanese in the above context.*Intaanashonaru* might occur in contexts such as, *intaashonaru feaa* (international
fair) but the word *toreedo*, as has been used in Japan, is associated with exchange of professional baseball players. Other words in NS1’s data, listed in the Sanseido, (*Concise Gairaigo Jiten 1987*), but of doubtful popular usage are: *puraibeeto sukuuru* (private school), *kontakuto* (contact), *interudakushon* (introduction) and similar.

In contrast to NS1, NS2 used only three English words. All English words were used to help solve a comprehension problem for the LLs. However, as NS2’s pronunciation was very markedly Japanese, his attempts met with little success, leading to more mis-communication.

**Example:**

LL3: *Hooritsu wa nan desu ka?*  
(What does *hooritsu* mean?)

NS2: *hooritsu….roo….roo*

LL3: Raw?

LL2: Raw….raw…. hooritsu?

As can be seen from the above example, none of the LLs understood the word *hooritsu* (law) and, misled by NS2’s pronunciation, seemed to be puzzled by the relevance of "raw" to the topic of traffic rules in Japan. The particular video-taped segment shows three very puzzled faces. The misunderstanding was eventually cleared by LL2 consulting a dictionary and producing the correct word "law".

**4.3 Lexicon as indicator of grammatical complexity**

In addition to the difference between the two NSs in regard to the choice of lexicon, analysis of the data revealed a corresponding difference in regard to simplification of syntactic structures. This is illustrated here by following the paradigm established by Skoutarides (1986, pp121-122) of utilising distribution of lexicon into grammatical categories as an indicator of syntactic complexity. The grammatical categories used for this purpose are as follows:

- **Nouns (N):** common nouns, personal pronouns and nominal deictic demonstratives.
- **Proper nouns (PN):** names of people, places, etc
- **Interrogative nouns (QW):** who, what, where, etc
- **Verbs (V):** ordinary verbs and verbs formed by addition of *suru/dekiru* to Sino-Japanese or loanword nouns.
- **Adjectives (ADJ):** ordinary adjectives, adjectival nouns and adjectival deictic demonstratives.
- **Adverbs (ADV):** true adverbs (eg. *chotto*), adverbs derived from adjectives (eg. *osoku*) and adverbial deictic demonstratives.
- **Numerals (NUM):** primary numbers, number and classifier combinations, dates including bound suffixes (eg *juunen*).
- **Miscellaneous (MIS):** sentence connectives, hesitation markers (eg. *ano*), verbal back-channels (eg *hai*) and similar items which did not fit into any of the above categories.
Table 4.3a Total distribution of lexicon per the grammatical category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QW</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adj</th>
<th>Adv</th>
<th>PN</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NS1</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NS2</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>769</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table shows total distribution of the grammatical items described above. However, to obtain a more detailed description the items repeated by the NSs are excluded from Table 4.3b below.

Table 4.3b Distribution of lexicon per grammatical category (without repetitions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QW</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adj</th>
<th>Adv</th>
<th>PN</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NS1</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NS2</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
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</table>

Information presented in Tables 4.3a and 4.3b shows that usage of nouns and verbs, the main meaning conveying parts of speech, was comparable in both sets of data. However, the higher percentage of adjectives and adverbs in NS2’s speech indicates that he elaborated his utterances with descriptive elements to a greater extent than NS1. As a result, NS2’s speech was somewhat more complex as it offered more elements for LLs to process. The grammatical complexity of NS2’s utterances is further emphasised by extensive usage of "stylistic ornamentation" (Martin, 1975, p914) expressions which add redundancy to the utterance and often obscure the intended meaning to a beginner learner. As these types of expressions are not included in the Alpha unit lexical count, this feature of NS2’s speech is shown by exemplification.

**Example:**

NS2: …..*gaikoku no hito- tte iu no wa amari hooritsu o mamoranai.*

(….. foreign people don’t follow rules very much)

The above utterance could have been expressed more simply by substituting *gaikokujin wa* (foreigner) or *gaikoku no hito wa* (a foreign person) for the *gaikoku no hito-tte iu no wa* (the one called a foreign person) which includes the stylistic elaboration (underlined) that is a redundant element in the sentence.
Stylistic elaborations of this kind occurred very frequently in NS2 speech. In fact, inclusion of redundancies of all kinds in the structuring of his utterances could be said to represent the dominant feature of his speech. Another feature of NS2’s speech was extensive usage of morpho-syntactic contractions which, albeit a common feature in informal spoken language, are not easily understood by beginner learners.

5. Learners’ participation

Evaluation of LLs comprehension of NSs speech was based on an analysis of the discoursal features of their contribution to the two conversations. Comparison of these features revealed that a higher degree of comprehension was achieved in Situation 1 than in Situation 2. NS1’s questions elicited immediate answers as well as a number of topic expansion turns. Furthermore, the proportion of speech acts such as clarification requests, etc. was relatively low. In Situation 2, on the other hand, the proportion of requests for clarification in relation to other discoursal features was very high. Another feature of LLs contribution to the conversation with NS2 was frequent usage of asides in English whereby the LLs were helping each other to decipher the meaning of NS2’s utterances. Analysis of the text revealed that, unlike Situation 1, the LLs had to face a considerable comprehension challenge before communication with NS2 was achieved.

6. Discussion

As already stated in the introduction, the aims of this paper were to identify and compare lexical features that, in the perception of two native speakers of Japanese, interacting informally with learners of Japanese, contribute to the production of a “comprehensible input”.

By analysing the lexical features characterising the two NSs utterances, it was found that the speech of NS1, the retired Japanese language teacher, contained many features associated with “teacher talk” in the classroom. His choice of vocabulary showed preference for basic, common use lexical items, well within the competence of beginner learners. One of the features of his vocabulary usage was fairly extensive recourse to gairago (loan words) or pseudo-gairaigo items which, being mainly derived from English, would have been fairly readily understood by the LL group.

The communication strategy of the NS2 was somewhat different. Modifications intended to make his utterances comprehensible to the LL group were predominantly executed in the form of lexical repetitions. Furthermore, some of the topics NS2 chose to talk about were difficult for the LLs to follow, involving sophisticated vocabulary outside their lexical repertoire.

Having established the main points of difference between the lexical choices of the NS participants, the efficacy of their overall communicative strategies was examined on the basis of the amount and type of participation by the LL group. Analysis of the data revealed that, not unexpectedly, the LLs participated more vigorously in the conversation with NS1. The correspondence between the number of questions asked by NS1 and the answers provided by the LLs indicate that what NS1 had said was mostly understood and that the LLs had very few problems in providing adequate responses. The conversation, or rather the question/answer routine, proceeded at a fairly brisk pace, with only minimal need for NS1 to provide an unknown item of vocabulary or an explanation of the content. The fact that he was able to provide correction of this kind in English undoubtedly contributed to the relatively problem-free progress of the interaction.
In contrast to the interaction in Situation 1, both parties in Situation 2 appear to have laboured intensely to maintain conversation. Collaborative efforts were needed on the part of the LL group to achieve at least some measure of understanding of what NS2 was talking about. In fact, the dominant feature of the interaction in Situation 2 is the large number of English asides with which the LLs translated the content of NS2’s utterances to each other. NS2’s lack of English precluded execution of correction moves adopted by NS1 in Situation 1 and the LLs had no option but to rely on each other’s ability to understand, or partially understand, what NS2 had said. Despite the obvious difficulties, however, a fair degree of communication was achieved through concentrated effort of both parties.

Taking account of the results obtained from the data, one has to concede that the communication strategy adopted by NS1 was more successful in providing "comprehensible input" for beginner learners with low competence in the language. At the same time, however, it has to be pointed out that such conclusion is rather simplistic in the sense that it fails to address the aims of language acquisition. If the purpose of providing "comprehensible input" is to promote learners’ output then, indeed, NS1’s communication strategy produced the desired result. In Situation 1, LLs had very few comprehension problems and could contribute to the conversation without too much effort. However, as most of the vocabulary was familiar to them and the topics were assumedly rehearsed to some extent through prior oral work in class, it is doubtful that they acquired much new language through the interaction. The question/answer routine, following a familiar classroom pattern, presented very few challenges to the LL group.

If, on the other hand, the purpose of "comprehensible input" is to provide a stimulating learning experience, then NS2’s strategy cannot be discounted. In Situation 2, the LLs were forced to use a number of strategies to attain at least a degree of comprehension: requesting clarification in Japanese, guessing, consulting a dictionary, translating for each other’s benefit and, most importantly, maintaining the conversation by contributing topic expansion turns based on comprehension of perhaps only a single word. It can be said, therefore, that while comprehension was not fully achieved, a great degree of learning took place.

One the most important aims of teaching a foreign language is to prepare learners for interaction with members of the target language speech community. As it is highly unlikely that the foreign participants in such interactions would be bombarded with questions of the "teacher talk" variety, the interaction with NS2 provided the LL group with an important lesson in meaning negotiating skills. Consequently, one has to agree with Krashen that, to be of real value, the "comprehensible input" should be aimed slightly higher that the competence level of the learner.

Analysis of the communication strategies of the two NSs was focused in this paper on lexical complexity of their speech. The results indicate that NS1’s strategy, undoubtedly due to his long experience of teaching Japanese, included a number of features generally associated with "teacher talk". He restricted his choice of lexicon to simple, wide distribution Japanese vocabulary, compensating, where necessary, for the more difficult kango vocabulary with gairaigo or English synonyms. NS2’s speech, on the other hand, was much more lexically complex.
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