

Effects of Interlocutor on Modified Output of Japanese Language Learners

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### Abstract

Recent research in second language acquisition has focused on the effects of interaction on learning by examining various factors such as types of tasks and learner proficiency levels. This study focused on one particular factor: Native speaker (NS) versus non-native speaker (NNS) as interlocutor.

This study investigates the interactional patterns of American Japanese language learners and whether they modify their oral output differently with a peer, or with a NS interlocutor. Through follow-up interviews, this study also explores the learners' perceptions during communicative tasks. The participants were four American learners of Japanese enrolled in an elementary-level course at a small Midwestern college. Conversations of two learner-learner dyads and four learner-NS dyads were audiotaped, transcribed, and then analyzed to determine effects on learner output. The learners were then interviewed individually after the last session.

The researcher found that there was a difference in the amount of modified output between learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads. The learners modified their initial utterances more in learner-NS dyads than in learner-learner dyads. In the interviews, it became clear that when the learners saw the gap between their L2 forms and the target language forms, they modified their non-target-like utterances. The findings suggest the benefit of interaction with NSs in the L2 classroom.

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Abstract.....  | 2  |
| Acknowledgements.....                                    | 3  |
| Table of Contents.....                                   | 4  |
| List of Tables and Figures.....                          | 7  |
| Chapter  |    |
| 1. Introduction.....                                     | 8  |
| Background.....  | 9  |
| Statement of the Problem.....                            | 10 |
| Purpose of This Study.....                               | 10 |
| Research Questions.....                                  | 10 |
| Definition of Terms in This Study.....                   | 10 |
| 2. Literature Review.....                                | 13 |
| What is Interaction?.....                                | 13 |
| The Input Hypothesis and The Interaction Hypothesis..... | 14 |
| The Output Hypothesis and The Noticing Hypothesis.....   | 15 |
| The Affective Filter Hypothesis.....                     | 16 |
| Feedback and Modified Output.....                        | 17 |
| Native Versus Nonnative Interlocutors.....               | 19 |
| Second Language Learning.....                            | 20 |
| Communicative Tasks in Second Language Classroom.....    | 20 |
| Studies of Interaction in Japanese Language.....         | 21 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 3. Methodology.....  | 24 |
| Research Design.....   | 24 |
| Role of Researcher.....                                      | 24 |
| Participants.....  | 25 |
| Procedures.....  | 25 |
| Tasks.....   | 26 |
| Data Analysis.....   | 27 |
| Transcriptions.....  | 27 |
| Coding.....  | 27 |
| Interviews.....  | 30 |
| 4. Results.....  | 32 |
| The Results from the Interactional Sessions.....             | 32 |
| The Overview.....  | 33 |
| Analysis of Triggers.....                                    | 34 |
| Analysis of Feedback.....                                    | 35 |
| Analysis of Responses.....                                   | 36 |
| The Results from the Interviews.....                         | 40 |
| The Overview.....  | 40 |
| Perceptions of the Activities.....                           | 41 |
| The Interlocutor Effects on the Interactional Movements..... | 41 |
| 5. Discussion.....   | 45 |
| Conclusion.....  | 45 |
| Limitations.....   | 47 |

Implications.....49

References.....51

Appendix.....55

## List of Tables and Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1. Composition of Learner-Learner and Learner-NS Dyads at Time 1 and 2.....  | 26 |
| Table 2. Coding Categories.....  | 28 |
| Table 3. The Six Dyads: The Number of the Interactional Movements for Each Dyad...   | 33 |
| Table 4. The Learner-Learner Dyads and the Learner-NS Dyads.....   | 34 |
| Table 5. Opportunities to Repair Errors in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS<br>Dyads.....  | 35 |
| Table 6. Feedback Types Provided to Learners in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS<br>Dyads.....   | 36 |
| Table 7. Modified Output and Non-modified Output in Learner-Learner Dyads and<br>Learner-NS Dyads.....   | 37 |
| Table 8. Relationships Between Response Types and Feedback Types in Learner-Learner<br>Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads.....                                     | 38 |
| Figure 1. Trigger in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads.....   | 35 |
| Figure 2. Feedback Types Provided by Learners and NSs.....   | 36 |
| Figure 3. Response Types (modified output and non-modified output) in Response to<br>Each Feedback Type in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads..... | 39 |
| Figure 4. An Example of Picture Used by Dyads in the Line Drawing Task.....  | 55 |
| Figure 5. An Example of Schedule Used by Dyads in the Information Gap Task.....  | 55 |

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Today, it is no exaggeration to say that almost everyone in the world has learned a second language at some time in his or her life. According to The Washington Post (2015), approximately 1.5 billion people all over the world learn English, and the number of English learners is larger than French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, German and Chinese learners combined. The number of foreign language learners has been growing as the demand for language skills has advanced with increasing globalization.

Compared to English, which is the language most commonly taught in the world, Japanese as a second language has a short history. It began in the late 19th century in the United States to meet the demand of Japanese American children to learn their parents' language. Japanese is considered one of the most difficult languages to learn. According to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) (n.d.), Japanese was categorized as a category four language, along with Arabic, Chinese, and Korean, which means that it takes the longest time for English speakers to acquire. Japanese has its own unique features, which makes it a challenge to learn. For instance, it has three different writing systems and two syllabary systems. In addition, languages such as English tend to provide important information near the beginning of the sentence while in Japanese this appears at the end of the sentence. Thus, in Japanese, verbs are typically placed at the end of the sentence.

Despite the difficulty of the language itself, the number of learners of Japanese has been increasing in the United States. According to the recent Japan Foundation's



survey (2013), the number of Japanese learners in the United States was 155,939 in 2012, an increase of 10.4% in the number of learners since the 2009 survey.

## **Background**

The claim that output is important for second language (L2) acquisition has been acknowledged in foreign language instruction since Swain proposed the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985, 1998), and interaction with Native Speakers (NSs) rather than with peers is a current trend to encourage learners' communicative success. However, Sato and Lyster (2007) have questioned this idea, providing a rationale for arranging peer interaction during language instruction. The authors studied how Japanese learners of English as a second language (ESL) interact differently when they work on communicative tasks in learner-learner versus learner-NS dyads. They found that learners modified their output significantly more with a peer than with a NS in response to the interlocutor's feedback. Their findings indicate that, if we consider that modified output facilitates L2 development, learners tend to interact more beneficially when they interact with each other rather than with native speakers. Results of their study revealed that participants felt under pressure and more passive during interactions with a NS because the former perceived the latter as 'perfect' speakers, explaining that they did not have to or did not want to ask questions. The learners even thought it was not necessary to modify their first output because NSs had a good ability to guess what the learners were trying to say. In contrast, when learners interacted with peers, they felt more comfortable and more willing to ask questions about language. In response to each other's feedback, learners tried to make their output more comprehensible by generating and assessing

alternatives. Thus, the authors state that communicative tasks involving learner-learner interaction should be integrated into classroom activities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although many researchers have been investigating interlocutor effects in L2 settings, there is little research that investigates how American learners of Japanese as a foreign language interact with other learners, versus with native speakers. This research investigated the effects of learner-learner and learner-NS dyads in Japanese language learning.

### **Purpose of This Study**

This study aims to clarify how the interlocutor, either peer or NS, affects the learner's interactions and production of modified output during communicative tasks. Findings from this study could be applied to L2 classroom activities. Data was collected with quantitative and qualitative methods.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do Japanese language learners respond the same, or differently to feedback provided in a learner-learner dyad versus a learner-NS dyad?
2. How do learners perceive their interactions with peers versus native speakers, and do their perceptions affect the way they interact?

### **Definition of Terms in This Study**

**Interlocutor.** Interlocutor refers to a person who takes part in a conversation or dialogue. In other words, it means a conversation partner. Thus, the people who are talking together are each other's interlocutors.

**Language-Related Episodes (LREs).** LREs defined as "Any part of dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 326).

**Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads.** A dyad is defined as two individuals involved in an ongoing interaction. Learner-learner dyads consist of two learners of a language interacting and learner-NS dyads consist of a learner and a NS interacting.

**Modified Output.** Modified output refers to L2 learners' modification of their previous utterances in response to the interlocutor's feedback.

### **Summary of This Chapter**

This chapter introduced the topic and the background. Today, many students engage in language learning in school. The number of Japanese language learners has been growing in the world. In order to teach a foreign language effectively, teachers should be aware how learners acquire a second language. Even though much research has been conducted in L2 settings, there have been few studies that focus on Japanese language learning. Therefore, this study aims to clarify the interaction of learner-learner and learner-NS dyads in Japanese language learning in order to explore effective methods in language learning.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

In this chapter, previous research related to the focus of this study will be presented. The purpose of this study was to examine how Japanese language learners interact differently depending on the interlocutor (other learner or NS) during practice sessions. This chapter first will open with the definition of interaction within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Then, the main theoretical background of interaction in SLA is summarized. After that, the theories in SLA related to this study follow. Next, the researcher will briefly explain the second language learning and communicative tasks. Lastly, given the purpose of the current study, previous studies on the impact of interlocutor on communicative interactions are presented in detail in the concluding section.

#### **What is Interaction?**

According to Longman English Dictionary, interaction is defined as “The activity of talking to other people, working together with them” and “A process by which two or more things affect each other.” In the field of SLA, interaction refers to the conversations in which learners participate (Gass & Mackey, 2015). Researchers have uniformly acknowledged that interactions are important because through interactions, learners receive information or feedback about whether their utterances are correct, and more importantly, if they are incorrect. In addition, interaction provides learners with opportunities for modifying non-target-like output when communication problems arise.

### **The Input Hypothesis and The Interaction Hypothesis**

As described in the aforementioned research, we see interactional movements between teacher-learner and learner-learner frequently adapted communicative instruction in L2 classrooms. The research on conversational interactions has been a central issue in the field of SLA. The theoretical foundation of those studies can be traced to early theories in SLA.

According to Krashen's input hypothesis (1985), "Humans acquire language in only one way - by understanding messages or by receiving comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). Comprehensible input is that which contains language slightly beyond the current level of the learner's competence (VanPatten & Williams, 2015). In other words, language acquisition is facilitated during human interaction in the target language environment. There, learners are exposed to comprehensible input in the target language. However, in order for acquisition to occur, the input needs to be slightly beyond the learner's current level of linguistic competence.

Along with Krashen's input hypothesis (1985), Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis asserts that comprehensible input is necessary for language learning. Moreover, when meaning is negotiated, comprehensible input usually increases, and learners tend to focus on salient linguistic features (Ariza & Hancock, 2003). Long states that negotiated interaction plays an important role in driving L2 development forward. He says that negotiation for meaning "Facilitates language acquisition because it connects input [what learners read and hear], internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output [what learners produce] in productive ways" (Long, 1996, p. 451-452). According to Long (1996), negotiation for meaning is defined as the following:

The process in which, in an effort to communicate, learners and competent speakers provide and interpret signals of their own and their interlocutor's perceived comprehension, thus provoking adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure, message content, or all three, until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved. (p. 418)

### **The Output Hypothesis and The Noticing Hypothesis**

In contrast, Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985, 1995) argues that comprehensible input is not adequate for acquiring language. Swain (1985) studied French immersion programs in Canada. She found that the students did not demonstrate native-speaker competence although they had spent years in the programs and had a level of competence in L2. She hypothesized that this was because the students were lacking sufficient opportunities to use the target language in the classroom context. Based on this research, Swain proposed that Comprehensible Output should also be considered because language production (output) forces learners to move from a semantic use of language to a syntactic use of language (Gass & Mackey, 2015). The Comprehensible Output Hypothesis states that learning happens when learners notice a gap in their linguistic knowledge of the L2 (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). When noticing this gap, they may be able to modify their output. The Noticing Hypothesis was developed by Schmidt (1990), and asserts that noticing is a necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input to intake for learning. He said that "If noticed, it becomes intake" (Schmidt, 1990, p. 139).

In summary, Swain claimed that output is a significant factor in L2 learning, contradicting Krashen's position that denies or ignores the role of output. However, she

does not say that output is the only source of language acquisition. Rather, her claim is that, “Sometimes, under some conditions, output facilitates second language learning in ways that are different from, or enhance, those of input” (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, p. 371).

### **The Affective Filter Hypothesis**

However, Krashen (1998) questioned the Output Hypothesis. He said that output, especially comprehensible output, rarely happens, and this is problematic and does not contribute much to linguistic competence (Krashen, 1998). He argues that “Even when acquirers do talk, they do not often make the kind of adjustments the CO (Comprehensible Output) hypothesis claims are useful in acquiring new forms” (Krashen, 1998, p. 175). Furthermore, another problem of output is that it pushes learners to speak up in a second language, thus raising their affective filter and resulting anxiety, and hindering acquisition. According to current SLA theory, The Affective Filter Hypothesis says that in order for learning to occur, learners need to be in a condition of anxiety-free relaxation (Schinke-Llano & Vicars, 1993). Thus, learners who feel comfortable and have a positive attitude toward language learning have low filters, and this allows them to access comprehensible input (VanPatten & Williams, 2015). In contrast, if learners are in an uncomfortable situation or a stressful environment, their affective filter goes up, preventing learners from accepting input.

Schinke-Llano and Vicars (1993) studied the correlation between negotiated interaction and lowered affective filter. In other words, they studied the learners’ levels of comfort depending on different degrees of interaction. The participants were 110 language students enrolled in French, Spanish, and Italian courses. They were presented



with four activity types: 1. teacher-fronted activity with group response, 2. teacher-fronted activity with individual response, 3. small group problem solving activity, and 4. dyadic activity with two-way information gap questions. Activity one was considered as requiring negotiated interaction the least, and activity four as requiring the most. The researchers found that three of the four groups reported feeling most comfortable with students-centered activities (three and four), and three of the four groups reported feeling least comfortable with teacher-fronted activities (one and two). Their study suggested that the different types of interaction have an effect on lowering a student's filter, and the best type would therefore be that with more student-to-student interaction. To sum up, social contexts, including teacher-student relationships and peer interactions may influence learners' affective filters and language learning.

### **Feedback and Modified Output**

When the meaning of the learner's utterance is not clear and not understood by the listener, it is likely that their interlocutors will ask for some confirmation or clarification of the learner's message, which will result in some modification of the learner's original output. As employed in this research, the term "feedback" refers to some kind of response to what the learner has said. There are two types of feedback: explicit and implicit. Explicit feedback can be realized as explicit corrections while implicit feedback is feedback that does not overtly point that an error has been made. Also, implicit feedback is more commonly provided in natural conversation whereas explicit feedback is relatively infrequent (Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003). Since this study arranged for negotiated interaction between two participants, the researcher was

concerned with only implicit feedback, which includes negotiation. According to Gass and Mackey (2015), implicit feedback can be divided into four forms:

- Confirmation checks: expressions that are designed to elicit confirmation that an utterance has been correctly heard or understood. (e.g. *Is this what you mean?*)
- Clarification requests: expressions that are used to elicit clarification of the interlocutor's preceding utterances. (e.g. *What did you say?*)
- Comprehension checks: expressions that are used to verify that an interlocutor has understood. (e.g. *Did you understand?*)
- Recasts: a rephrasing of a non-target-like utterance using a more target-like form while maintaining the original meaning. (Gass & Mackey, 2015, p. 186)

“Modified output” refers to output that learners modified their previous utterance in response to the interlocutor's feedback, and which contains more comprehensible and/or accurate output than their initial utterances (Sato & Lyster, 2007).

Research on factors that influence how output is modified has investigated the impact of: Task type in which the participants are involved (e.g. Iwashita, 1999), participation pattern in settings (e.g. Shehadeh, 2004), the interlocutor type (NS versus NNS) (e.g. Sato & Lyster, 2007; Mackey et al., 2003; Polio & Gass, 1998), and the participants' characteristics (e.g. age, gender, proficiency, and familiarity) in the interaction (e.g. Kim & McDonough, 2008, Mackey et al., 2003; Poteau, 2011; Davis, 2009). The purpose of the current study is to examine the differences the way learners interact as a result of the interlocutor type: learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads.

### **Native Versus Nonnative Interlocutors**

If learners benefit from interaction with their interlocutor, it is important to explore if there are any different effects of interacting with a peer learner, versus a Native Speaker (NS). Moreover, assessing feedback provided by learners may clarify the value of learner-learner pair work and contribute to the design of classroom instruction (Mackey et al., 2003). There are many studies that have compared learner-learner dyads with learner-NS dyads during communicative tasks. Overall, the recent research has shown that fellow learners' feedback could prompt modified output (e.g. Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos & Linnell, 1996). As discussed in Chapter 1, Sato and Lyster (2007), who studied L1 Japanese learners of ESL, found that the learners modified their output significantly more when they received feedback from their peer learners, as compared to NSs, regardless of the feedback type.

Mackey et al. (2003) studied the effects of interlocutor type on the provision and incorporation of feedback in task-based interaction. Specifically, they compared NS-NNS interaction to NS-NS interaction, as well as adult interaction to child interaction. They found that in the adult interaction, learners were more likely than NSs to give their interlocutors an opportunity to modify their output following feedback even though there were no significant differences in terms of production of modified output between NS-NNS and NNS-NNS dyads. In short, the type of interlocutor seemed to have no impact on the output learners produced in response to the interlocutor's feedback. However, they found that, in child dyads, learners produced significantly more modified output with each other than with a NS, and it seemed that they were able to utilize feedback more when their interlocutor was a peer.

Although neither of the studies provide conclusive proof that modified output leads to better learning, they point out the possibility that peer interactions could promote learning through productions of modified output (Adams, Nuevo, & Egi, 2011). The current study aims to compare the interactions in learner-learner dyads and in learner-NS dyads.

### **Second Language Learning**

In order to enhance students' language learning, the communicative approach is employed in many L2 classrooms in the United States. The communicative approach emphasizes communication through interaction in the target language. In communicative language teaching, teachers use many activities such as role-play, information gap, interviews, pair-work, group work, and games.

### **Communicative Tasks in Second Language Classroom**

According to Willis (1996), a task is defined as "An activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (Willis, 1996, p. 23). The role of tasks is important in communicative language classrooms because using tasks enhances language opportunities for learners, improves the learners' speaking, and makes classroom resemble real-life language situations. Tasks can be classified either one-way or two-way. In one-way tasks such as a picture-drawing task, information that is conveyed is held by one person. In two-way tasks such as a jigsaw task, there is an information exchange in that both participants hold information that is necessary to complete the task (Gass & Mackey, 2015). Iwashita (1999)

compared a one-way information gap task and a jigsaw (two-way information gap) task with Japanese language learners. She investigated which tasks provide more opportunities for learners to modify their initial utterance in response to feedback and to what extent the learners actually take advantage of those opportunities. The results showed that more negotiation and modified output occurred in the information gap task (one-way task) than in the jigsaw task (two-way task).

### **Studies of Interaction in Japanese Language**

Much research on conversational interaction has been conducted in L2 settings, but most of them are in ESL settings (e.g. Sato & Lyster, 2007; Macky et al., 2003; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000; Adams et al., 2011; Gass & Polio, 1998), and there are some in Spanish and French (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Poteau, 2011). Iwashita (1999, 2003) has conducted research in Japanese as a second language (JSL) setting. As discussed above, she examined the role of task-based conversation in a JSL setting. Although the population of learners of Japanese has been growing in the world, still little research has focused on Japanese language learners. Thus, more studies are needed in order to instruct the target language effectively.

This researcher hypothesized that due to the linguistic differences of Japanese and other languages such as English, learners of Japanese may interact differently, and the present study might produce different results than those in previous research. Thus, the present study investigated interactional patterns of American learners of Japanese as a foreign language during communicative tasks. By targeting a less commonly taught

language compared to English, the researcher hoped to clarify the effective instruction and to provide pedagogical implications for Japanese instructors.

### **Summary of This Chapter**

This chapter summarized the literature related to interactional studies in the SLA. Interaction is defined as two or more people communicate with and react each other. It has been believed that interaction provides language learners with the opportunity to practice the target language in a context in which they have been exposed in their L2 classroom. Furthermore, interaction plays an important role in the learning process by assisting learners to obtain input and feedback from the interlocutor and to modify their output in a way that expand their current interlanguage capacity (Pica et al., 1996).

Studies on modified output have been greatly influenced by Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, which claims that pushing learners to beyond their current level can result in enhancing their language performance. While attempting to produce the target language, learners realize a linguistic problem, and in doing so they are pushed to modified their output. A number of studies supporting the conversational interactions have investigated learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads. Previous research revealed that more interactions occurred in learner-learner interaction than in learner-NS interaction.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of the study was to investigate how American learners of Japanese interact differently depending on the interlocutor type. Detailed descriptions of the research design, the role of the researcher, the participants, the data collection methods, data analysis, transcriptions, and coding follow.

#### **Research Design**

In this study, a mixed-method design was implemented to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. The current study was informed by the design used by Sato and Lyster (2007). The researcher asked the participants to complete practice learning activities outside of class, and then conducted open-ended qualitative interviews to learn how the practice sessions were perceived. The practice sessions were recorded and coded with a rubric designed to evaluate the frequency and type of modified statements made by each learner. The rubric scores provide quantitative data in the form of numerical scores that can be compared across sessions and learners.

#### **Role of Researcher**

The researcher is a graduate student, employed by a liberal art college where the participants were studying. The researcher teaches introductory, elementary, and intermediate classes; the research study was done with the students of the elementary level of Japanese.



## **Participants**

Participants of this study were four American students (two males and two females) of Japanese and two Japanese native speakers who study English at a small Midwestern college as exchange students (one male and one female). The four American learners attended an elementary-level Japanese class, and they all volunteered in this study. The researcher completed the IRB form and received their consent to participate. There were only two Japanese native speakers at the college except for two Target Language Experts (TLEs), including the researcher, who teach Japanese. The TLEs avoided participating in these activities to eliminate the possibility that their presence might affect the learner interactions. Thus, the researcher asked the two Japanese exchange students to take part in the practice sessions. Since this study mainly focuses on the interactions and the modified output of the American learners, the two Japanese exchange students were not interviewed.

## **Procedures**

The data collection was conducted for one week in the middle of the semester. In order to compare the interaction patterns in learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads, the participants were paired in two learner-learner dyads and four learner-NS dyads. Each of the four learners completed two different 15-minute practice sessions; one was with a peer learner and the other with a NS. Two similar information gap tasks were carried out during each session. The follow-up interviews occurred immediately after the completion of their last session. Both the practice sessions and the interviews were done in a quiet

classroom at the college. The composition of the practice sessions is summarized in Table 1 below.

*Table 1. Composition of Learner-Learner and Learner-NS Dyads at Time 1 and 2*

|         | Time 1                | Time 2                |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Group 1 | Learner 1 ↔ Learner 2 | Learner 3 ↔ Learner 4 |
| Group 2 | Learner 3 ↔ NS 1      | Learner 1 ↔ NS 1      |
|         | Learner 4 ↔ NS 2      | Learner 2 ↔ NS 2      |

### **Tasks**

In each session, the participants were given two tasks: (a) a line drawing of a picture of a scene in a room that each participant describes to his/her partner, who had to reproduce it and (b) an information gap activity in which both participants exchange information to complete the task. These tasks are information gap tasks frequently used in L2 classrooms, and each learner has the same amount of information and exchanges it with his/her partner. In the line drawing task, intended to be a one-way flow, the participants describe their pictures. In the second activity, intended to be a two-way task, the participants were each given a schedule and assigned to complete the following task, “Based on the schedule you have, plan to do some activities with your partner and decide when and what time you will do those.” During the tasks, each participant sat on a chair at a table facing his/her partner. They were required to complete the tasks in Japanese without looking at each other’s information.

### **Data Analysis**

Results of the scored practice sessions and the follow-up interviews were assessed for agreement or contrast. For example, the frequency with which a learner provided modified outputs were compared to that learner's perceptions of what happened during the session.

### **Transcriptions**

Both the pair interactions and individual interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Since each practice session lasted for approximately 10-15 minutes, the audio-taped conversations of the four learner-NS and the two learner-learner dyads yielded 90 minutes of interaction data.

### **Coding**

The data were coded on the basis of language-related episodes (LREs). According to Swain and Lapkin (1998), a LRE is defined as "Any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p326). The researcher listened for the learners' errors in Japanese that triggered conversation and the interlocutor's feedback.

Adapting the coding system employed by Sato and Lyster (2007), this researcher coded LREs as a sequence of three interactional moves: triggers, feedback, and responses. Table 2 shows these three coding categories and the subcategories used to analyze LREs in this study.

Table 2. Coding Categories

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Triggers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-target-like utterance</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarification request</li> <li>• Confirmation check</li> <li>• Recast</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Responses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modified output</li> <li>• Non-modified output</li> </ul>                       |

*Triggers* are learners' initial non-target-like utterances that learners produce and result in eliciting the interlocutor's feedback. First, the learners' initial utterances were categorized as either target-like or non-target-like.

*Feedback* consists of interactional moves that immediately follow triggers. As discussed in Chapter 2, there were four feedback types. However, one of the types, comprehension check, did not appear during the conversations, and thus it was excluded from this coding category. Examples taken from the current study show each feedback type respectively:

(1) Clarification request

NNS: *ni wa hidari, ichi wa migi.*

“Two is left and one is right.”

NNS: *un?* <Feedback> Clarification request

“Un?”

(Learner 3-Learner4)

## (2) Confirmation check

NNS: *doyoubi no gozen ha, ijiwara.. ijiwaranai?*

“Saturday’s morning is ijiwara...[ijiwaranai]?”

NS: *[ijiwaranai]? <Feedback> Confirmation check*

“**[ijiwaranai]?**”

(Learner 3-NS1)

## (3) Recast

NNS: *tsukue no shita ga... [b'æg]*

“Under the desk is...a bag”

NS: *bakku. <Feedback> Recast*

“**bag.**”

(Learner 4-NS2)

*Responses* are interactional moves following the interlocutor’s feedback. They were coded based on whether or not the original utterance was corrected. Thus, they were classified as either modified output or non-modified output. If the learner’s responses did not include a modification to the initial utterance, it was considered a non-modified output. The examples of modified output and non-modified output can be seen in example (4) and (5), from the data collected for this study.

## (4) Modified output

NNS: *ringo wa [itsu] ah ue?*

“The apple is on the [itsu]?”

NS: *isu no ue desu ka?*

“Is (it) on the chair?”

NNS: *isu no ue desu. <Modified output>*

“**(It) is on the chair.**”

(Learner 3-NS1)

(5) Non-modified output

NNS: *inu wa mado o shita?*

“The dog is under the window?”

NS: *mado no shita ni imasu ne.*

“There is (a dog) under the window.”

NNS: *un.* <Non-modified output>

“Yes.”

(Learner 3-NS1)

### **Interviews**

The purpose of the interviews was to find out the learners’ perceptions of the interactions they participated in and to clarify the interlocutor effect. After the completion of the practice sessions, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews. The four learners were asked questions about their perceptions and experiences of interaction with a peer and with a NS. The interviews were held in English and lasted approximately 5-10 minutes for each learner. The oral responses were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The interview questions as follows:

1. Tell me about your experience of having sessions with a peer and with a NS.
2. Did you feel a difference between the two sessions?
3. Which session did you prefer? Tell me why.
4. Which session do you think is more beneficial? Tell me why.
5. According to your experience, would you rather work on class activities with a peer or a NS?

### **Summary of This Chapter**

This chapter illustrated the methods of data collection and analysis. A mixed-method was conducted to compare the learners' interactional moves in learner-learner dyads with those in learner-NS dyads and their perceptions. The researcher obtained the data from pair-interaction sessions and follow-up interviews, intended to capture the learners' perceptions during the interactions with a peer and a NS. Among 17 students of the Japanese elementary class, four students agreed to participate in the research. In the practice sessions, the participants were asked to complete two tasks (a one-way task and a two-way task). After the last session, the researcher conducted the individual follow-up interviews. The interactions were transcribed and then coded based on the LREs. The results of this data analysis will be presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This chapter will present the findings from the data gathered from the practice sessions and the interviews. The purpose of this study was to clarify the effects of the interlocutor during communicative tasks in Japanese language learning. The mixed-method was used to determine and compare the amount of interactional movements, triggers, feedback, and modified output in learner-learner dyads and in learner-NS dyads. Furthermore, this researcher used a qualitative method to discover the learners' perceptions of their communicative interactions. The audio-taped conversations of the four learners-NS dyads and two learner-learner dyads were transcribed and then coded according to the categories identified in the previous chapter. The individual interviews were also transcribed and then used to interpret the qualitative results and to answer research question 2 about how learners perceive the two different interactions and how their perceptions affect the way they interact. These qualitative results are reported later in the chapter.

#### **The Results from the Interactional Sessions**

The following descriptions display the results from the interactions. First, the overview is presented, followed by the analysis of triggers, feedback, and responses.



### The overview

To answer research question 1, which asked whether learners of Japanese respond to feedback from their interlocutors differently when they work on the activity with each other or with NSs, the occurrence of each interactional movement type in each dyad is summarized in Table 3. First, the researcher identified the total number of the learners' grammatically incorrect utterances. Then, non-target-like utterances that initiated LREs were coded as triggers. The data collected consisted of a total of 22 LREs.

*Table 3. The Six Dyads: The Number of Interactional Movements for Each Dyad*

| Interactional movements            | Dyads |       |        |        |        |        |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
|                                    | L1-L2 | L3-L4 | L1-NS1 | L3-NS1 | L2-NS2 | L4-NS2 | Total |
| Errors (in total)                  | 14    | 29    | 5      | 8      | 8      | 6      | 70    |
| Triggers<br>(Errors with feedback) | 2     | 7     | 2      | 6      | 3      | 2      | 22    |
| Feedback                           | 2     | 7     | 2      | 6      | 3      | 2      | 22    |
| Modified output                    | 0     | 2     | 1      | 3      | 2      | 2      | 10    |
| Non-modified output                | 2     | 5     | 1      | 3      | 1      | 0      | 12    |

*Table 4. The Learner-Learner Dyads and the Learner-NS Dyads*

|                                    | Learner-learner dyads | Learner-NS dyads |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Errors (in total)                  | 43                    | 27               |
| Triggers<br>(Errors with feedback) | 9                     | 13               |
| Feedback                           | 9                     | 13               |
| Modified output                    | 2                     | 8                |
| Non-modified output                | 7                     | 5                |

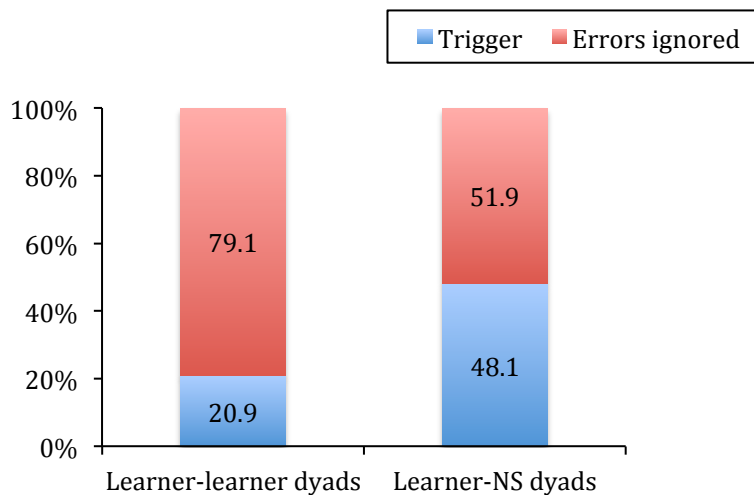
### **Analysis of Triggers**

This analysis investigates how often learners' non-target-like utterances generate LREs in learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads. As shown in Table 5 and displayed in Figure 1 below, when learners interacted with other learners, they made 43 grammatical errors of which 9 (20.9%) generated LREs. The remaining 34 errors (79.1%) were ignored and thus remained errors. On the other hand, when the learners interacted with NSs, they produced 27 grammatical errors and 13 (48.1%) of these generated LREs. These differences were substantial. In learners-NS dyads, almost half of the errors resulted in being triggers of the interlocutors' feedback. In contrast, in learner-learner dyads, only a quarter led to triggers even though the learners made more grammatical errors than they did in learner-NS dyads.

*Table 5. Opportunities to Repair Errors in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads*

|                 | Learner-learner dyads |            | Learner-NS dyads |            |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------|------------------|------------|
|                 | n                     | Percentage | n                | Percentage |
| Trigger         | 9                     | (20.9)     | 13               | (48.1)     |
| Errors ignored  | 34                    | (79.1)     | 14               | (51.9)     |
| Total of errors | 43                    | (100)      | 27               | (100)      |

*Figure 1. Trigger in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads*



### **Analysis of Feedback**

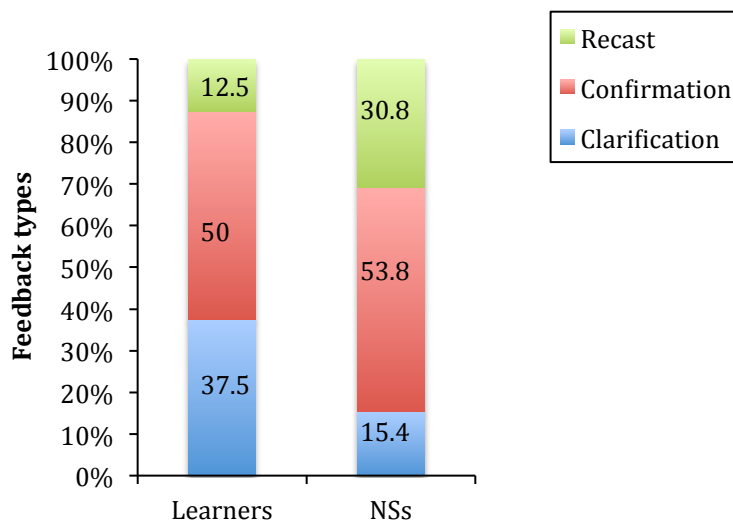
For this analysis, the amount of each feedback type produced by learners and by NSs was compared, as presented in Table 6 and displayed in Figure 2. The results showed that, of the feedback provided by learners and NSs, confirmation check was used the most, respectively 50% and 53.8%. Of the feedback provided by learners, recast was

used only once (12.5%), whereas it accounted for 30.8 % of the NSs' feedback, which was larger than the NSs' clarification request (15.4%).

*Table 6. Feedback Types Provided by Learners Versus NS*

| Feedback types        | Learners |            | NSs |            |
|-----------------------|----------|------------|-----|------------|
|                       | n        | Percentage | n   | Percentage |
| Clarification request | 3        | (37.5)     | 2   | (15.4)     |
| Confirmation check    | 4        | (50)       | 7   | (53.8)     |
| Recast                | 1        | (12.5)     | 4   | (30.8)     |
| Total                 | 8        | (100)      | 13  | (100)      |

*Figure 2. Feedback Types Provided by Learners and NSs*



### **Analysis of Responses**

Table 7 shows the amount of modified output and non-modified output produced by learners across dyad types. Learners modified their non-target-like utterances at the

rate of 22.2% in learner-learner dyads and 61.5% in learner-NS dyads, a difference that was significant. This indicates that learners tried to modify their ungrammatical utterances significantly more when they interacted with a NS than with a peer.

*Table 7. Modified Output and Non-modified Output in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads*

| Responses           | Learner-learner dyads |            | Learner-NS dyads |            |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|------------------|------------|
|                     | n                     | Percentage | n                | Percentage |
| Modified output     | 2                     | (22.2)     | 8                | (61.5)     |
| Non-modified output | 7                     | (77.8)     | 5                | (38.5)     |
| Total               | 9                     | (100)      | 13               | (100)      |

Next, the percentage of modified output after each type of feedback was compared to reveal what type of feedback resulted in modifying the learners' initial utterances. Table 8 shows the comparison between the amount of modified output and non-modified output and the comparison of these responses in learner-learner dyads versus learner-NS dyads. The amount of modified output and non-modified output and their percentages are divided following the three types of feedback in Table 8. This analysis shows how the interlocutor variable (either learner or NS) affects the way the learners modify their initial utterances. These comparisons are displayed in Figure 3.

The results showed that a higher percentage of the learners' responses contained non-modified output than modified output, regardless of the feedback type. Recast by one

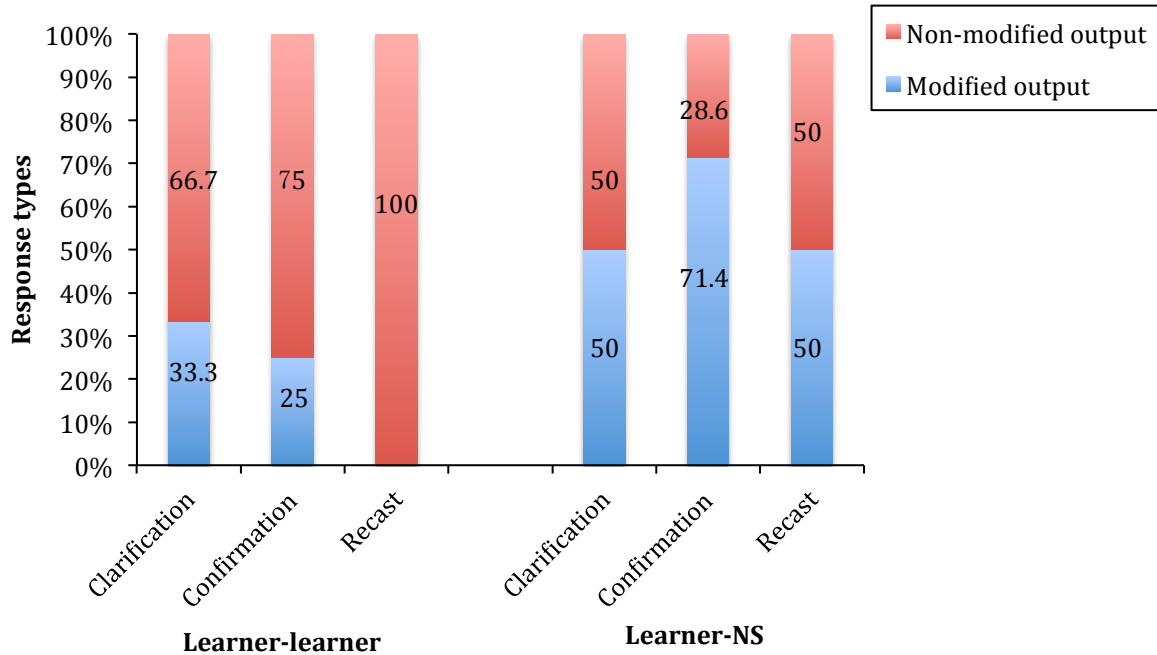
learner did not lead to modified output. Thus, learners tend not to modify their output in learner-learner dyads regardless of feedback type. In contrast, in learner-NS dyads, the learners provided more modified output (71.4%) than non-modified output (28.6%) after the NSs' confirmation check. Also, 50 % of both clarification and recast led to modified output. The researcher found that learners produced more modified output with NSs than with each other but there is no difference among feedback types. These results suggest that even though each occurrence was too small to statistically compare, types of feedback may not have an impact on the amount of modified output in either learner-learner dyads or learner-NS dyads.

*Table 8. Relationships Between Response Types and Feedback Types in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads*

|        | Learner-learner dyads |            |              |            |        |            | Learner-NS dyads |            |              |            |        |            |
|--------|-----------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------|------------|------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------|------------|
|        | Clarification         |            | Confirmation |            | Recast |            | Clarification    |            | Confirmation |            | Recast |            |
|        | n                     | Percentage | n            | Percentage | n      | Percentage | n                | Percentage | n            | Percentage | n      | Percentage |
| MO     | 1                     | (33.3)     | 1            | (25)       | 0      | (0)        | 1                | (50)       | 5            | (71.4)     | 2      | (50)       |
| Non-MO | 2                     | (66.7)     | 3            | (75)       | 1      | (100)      | 1                | (50)       | 2            | (28.6)     | 2      | (50)       |
| Total  | 3                     | (100)      | 4            | (100)      | 1      | (100)      | 2                | (100)      | 7            | (100)      | 4      | (100)      |

MO= Modified output; Non-MO= Non-modified output

Figure 3. Response Types (modified output and non-modified output) in Response to Each Feedback Type in Learner-Learner Dyads and Learner-NS Dyads



Summarizing the results related to research question 1, the researcher found that there was a difference in terms of amount of production of modified output between learner-learner dyads and learner-NS dyads. Learners modified output more in learner-NS dyads than in learner-learner dyads. Interestingly, these results contradicted the findings of Sato and Lyster (2007) that learners provide significantly more modified output with each other than with NSs. In addition, the results found that the probability of learners' modification of their non-target-like utterances corresponded more to whom they interacted with than to what type of feedback they received.

### **The Results from the Interviews**

The following descriptions demonstrate the results from the interviews. Presented first is the overview of the results, followed by perceptions of the activities, and the interlocutor effects on the interactional movements.

#### **The Overview**

The present study investigated not only learners' quantifiable utterances but also how their perceptions of their interlocutors influence their interactional moves, which was the second research question. To answer this question and to explain the results of the practice sessions, the researcher referred to the qualitative data from the follow-up interviews. Although this researcher did not conduct the retrospective stimulated recall session, a procedure often done by providing the learners with a video replay to jog their memories (Gass & Mackey, 2015), she was able to grasp the learners' perceptions of the interactions. In the individual interviews, the learners reported the following perceptions:

1. They felt more nervous when they interacted with a NS than with another learner.
2. While they were nervous in the session with a NS, they felt like they were able to speak more.
3. They preferred interacting with a NS because they felt it was easier with NSs than with each other, and they thought this was a good practice even though interacting with a peer was more relaxing.
4. They thought that both interactions were beneficial, but interacting with a NS was more beneficial because they could learn from NSs.



### **Perceptions of the Activities**

All learners reported that they felt nervous when interacting with NSs. Nevertheless, interestingly, they preferred the session with NSs to the one with peers. Moreover, they thought that interacting with NSs was more beneficial to learn Japanese. A learner said that she could immerse herself in Japanese when she was with a NS:

“It [the session with a NS] was more immersive I think, while the second one [with a peer] I don’t know. Uh. Like even though we didn’t know each other in the first one, it was very, I felt like I was able to try to put more like in... I had to explain myself more, which I think is good, to have to explain.” (Learner 3)

Another learner reported the following about his session with a NS:

“While I was a little more nervous in the session with a NS, it was also um, I felt like I was speaking a lot more. It was easier to understand what I was trying to say or if I wasn’t quite sure what I wanna say, I still had sometime I could comment on. So when I was in the session with a peer, we both were a little confused, so this [the session with a NS] is more of a, more of a free-flowing conversation.” (Learner 1)

### **The Interlocutor Effects on the Interactional Movements**

As discussed above, the number of grammatical errors by learners was substantially different in learner-learner dyads and in learner-NS dyads. Why did learners produce more non-target-like utterances with each other than with NSs? First, NSs were leading the conversation and played a dominant role throughout the task, as previous research stated (Sato & Lyster, 2007). Thus, when interacting with NSs, the learners were

more encouraged to speak up and benefitted from grammar used by the NS. On the contrary, when interacting with other learners, they had to make the most of the knowledge they had in order to complete tasks, and thereby they made more grammatical mistakes. Also, there may be a possibility that learners were more careful in terms of grammatical accuracy when they were interacting with their NS interlocutors. For instance, a learner implied that she did not want to make mistakes when interacting with a NS:

“I was nervous when I was with a NS because I felt like he was a lot, he’s obviously a lot more skilled than I am, and I didn’t wanna seem incompetent in front of him. I want to seem smart.” (Learner 4)

Another learner reported a similar perception:

“I think I was a little nervous like I didn’t want to offend her [a NS] anyway by messing up the words.” (Learner 3)

In learner-learner dyads, it was observed that errors made by learners were frequently ignored by another learner and did not lead to LREs despite the fact that the learners produced a larger amount of non-target-like utterances in learner-learner dyads than in learner-NS dyads.

There were also differences in the amount of modified output in learner-learner versus learner-NS dyads. Why did learners produce more modified output after feedback by NSs than after feedback by peers? Given their NSs’ feedback, learners were able to see their errors and then reproduce the correct form. Therefore, learners were exposed to more grammatical input during learner-NS dyads, and thus more learning occurred. A learner said,

“I can learn from them and I know where I’m making mistakes faster.” (Learner 4)

In learner-learner dyads however, learners tended not to modify their first utterance in response to other learners’ feedback. Instead, they used one word, ‘Yes’, which was considered non-modified output. This may be explained by one learner’s comment. He implied that, when he interacted with a peer, neither of them had access to the correct answer in the target language, and thus they were not able to correct.

“I guess it was, even though I was with a peer and more relaxed, just kind of two individuals trying to figure something happen, and no one really had the answer.”  
(Learner 1)

In summary, the results of the interviews revealed that, although the learners reported that they were more nervous with NSs than with peers, the learners’ level of comfort did not seem to directly affect their interactional moves. Rather, the role of NS as a model of the target language had an impact on production of the modified output. NSs played an important role for the learners to fill the gap between what they produced and the target language forms.

### **Summary of This Chapter**

The present study investigated how American JSL learners interacted differently depending on their conversational partner during communicative tasks. This chapter presented the findings from the practice sessions and interviews.

The findings from the practice sessions showed that learners tended to modify their ungrammatical utterances more in learner-NS dyads than in learner-learner dyads. The follow-up interviews helped to explain this finding. In response to NS interlocutors' feedback, learners tried to reformulate their initial utterances when they noticed their first utterance was incorrect. On the other hand, when learners interacted with each other, they did not modify their output much.

The results of the interviews revealed that all the learners felt nervous in learner-NS dyads while in learner-learner dyads they were more relaxed. However, all learners preferred the interaction with NSs to the one with each other because they thought interacting with a NS who could provide them with correct forms of the language was valuable and good for their learning. It seemed that the learners' level of comfort did not have an impact on their interaction.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This chapter will cover conclusions related to the findings in the previous chapter. This study investigated the interactional movements of American learners of Japanese at Carthage College and how they interacted differently depending on whether their interlocutor was a peer or a NS. This research aimed to clarify the impact of the interlocutor during the communicative interactions in Japanese language learning. The conclusions will be followed by the limitation of this study and further implications.

### Conclusions

The present study investigated the effects of the interlocutor variable in JSL setting. Two questions were examined in this study:

Research Question 1. Do Japanese language learners respond the same or differently to feedback provided in a learner-learner dyad versus a learner-NS dyad?

The results from the practice sessions showed that the learners responded differently to feedback from their interlocutors in learner-learner dyads versus learner-NS dyads. Specifically, the learners modified their initial utterances more frequently with NSs than with peers. The learners tended to modify their non-target-like utterances when they interacted with NSs while they tended not to do it when they interacted with peers. The amount of modified output produced by the learners in the learner-learner dyads versus the learner-NS dyads differed depending on whether the interlocutor was another learner or a NS, but not as a result of the feedback type the learners received. The sample was too

small to be statistically significant, so this finding could not be generalized. However, the researcher found that the interlocutor variable had an effect on the production of modified output.

Research Question 2. How do learners perceive their interactions with peers versus native speakers, and do their perceptions affect the way they interact?

The results from the interview revealed that all learners preferred interacting with NSs even though they were more nervous with NSs than with peers. They reported that, when they interacted with NSs, they felt that they were able to speak more and to immerse themselves in Japanese. The results suggest that having moderate tension and concentration may be effective to learn language because it keeps the brain working and enables learners to work effectively. Moreover, the learners' reports explained that whether the interlocutor was a NS or a peer affected their interactions. The learners provided more modified output in learner-NS dyads than in learner-learner dyads because the learners noticed and then corrected their mistakes as a result of the NS interlocutors' feedback. These findings support The Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), which states that noticing is the essential starting point for acquisition. Through interaction with NSs, learners' attention directs to their non-target-like forms, and thus promotes the L2 development. Therefore, language learners should have more opportunity to interact with NSs in the classroom.

**Cultural Differences.** Contradicting the previous research, interestingly, it was found that the learners produced more modified output when they interacted with NSs than with each other because, when provided with feedback from their NS interlocutor,

they were able to notice their mistakes and correct themselves. Why did the researcher get different results compared to the previous research such as Sato and Lyster's study (2007)? It could be because there is a cultural difference. Japanese students in Japan, generally, have great respect for authority and do not like to speak up for fear of making mistakes. They do not like to lose face and feel ashamed. American students, however, are encouraged to speak up in class and to ask and answer questions, especially when the communicative approach is used in a language class. Since the researcher conducted this research only in a JSL setting and did not compare the two language settings, this hypothesis cannot be proved. Thus, in the future, it might be interesting to study the interaction of American learners of Japanese and Japanese learners of English and compare the results.

### **Limitations**

**Small samples.** This research was conducted at a liberal arts college in the Midwest where students had less access to Japanese people and culture. The number of students learning Japanese was relatively small. Also, there were only two Japanese native speakers at the college except for the TLEs. Thus, the researcher ended up having two learner-learner dyads and four learner-NS dyads to collect interactional data. More participants are needed to obtain statistic data for future study.

**Tasks.** In order to gather data, involving learners in a range of carefully planned tasks is the most common way for interaction-based research (Gass & Mackey, 2015). In this study, the researcher used two kinds of tasks in each session: the one-way line drawing task and the two-way information gap activity. The researcher had expected to

obtain many learners' utterances, but the 22 LREs generated by four learners interacting with each other and the same four learners interacting with two NSs were not sufficient to permit statistical analysis. Therefore, the tasks employed in this study might not have been appropriate. Instead, the researcher could have used a different task such as a jigsaw task, which enables participants to speak more in the interaction. However, the jigsaw task had never been used before in the researcher's Japanese language classrooms, and the learners might have been confused facing a new activity, so it was not used.

**Task familiarity.** Another limitation is that the participants might have gotten used to the activities when they did them the second time. A student said:

“I feel like I felt more comfortable with this session [the second session with a NS] because I'd already done the previous session and already gone through all the activities. But I don't know if that had anything to do with the partner so much as having done the activities before.” (Learner 2)

In the first session, this learner felt nervous because he had no idea what he was going to do while in the second session, he felt more comfortable engaging in the activities. However, he terminated his recall by saying that he was not sure if his level of comfort depended on either his NS interlocutor or the task familiarity: in the second session, the tasks were the same but different pictures were used.

**The limitation of the participants.** In this study, all learners were in the elementary level of Japanese. They have been learning Japanese for one year and a half. Carthage College has a foreign language requirement that students are mandated to take two semesters to graduate. Thus, some students take the introductory level of courses for the purpose of completing their requirement. On the other hand, students in the



elementary or higher level have fulfilled this requirement and take Japanese for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is possible that different results might have been observed if this study were held with students from a different level. For future study, the researcher could choose learners at other proficiency levels and investigate whether there is a difference of interactional movements with peers and NSs.

### **Implications**

The findings from the interactional activities and the interviews show that interacting with NSs is beneficial for language learning. Based on the findings, the researcher suggests that learner-NS interaction with specific instruction could be integrated into classroom activities as an important source of learning because it enables learners to input the correct form of the target language and then reformulate their own utterances. It is essential to keep in mind that this is not saying that interacting with peers is not valuable. The four learners in the current study acknowledge that interacting with other learners is also beneficial for language learning. It would be good for learners if they could have more opportunity to interact both with peers and with NSs in the classroom even though it may be difficult to set that up because of the number of students and limited class time. A learner said in the interview:

“I think it [interacting with both in classroom activity] will be difficult to set up. But I think that would be a good opportunity to have both: to be able to work with another learner and be able to help each other and also have a NS who does know how to say everything that you would like to say.” (Learner 2)

As stated above, in this study, it is not possible to conclude that interaction with NSs is significantly more beneficial than the one with peers because of the small sample. In addition, further study in different settings is needed. Nonetheless, the results illustrate the importance of taking the interlocutor variable into account and of increasing students' communication in class through interaction with NSs.

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### Appendix

Figure 4. An Example of Picture Used by Dyads in the Line Drawing Task

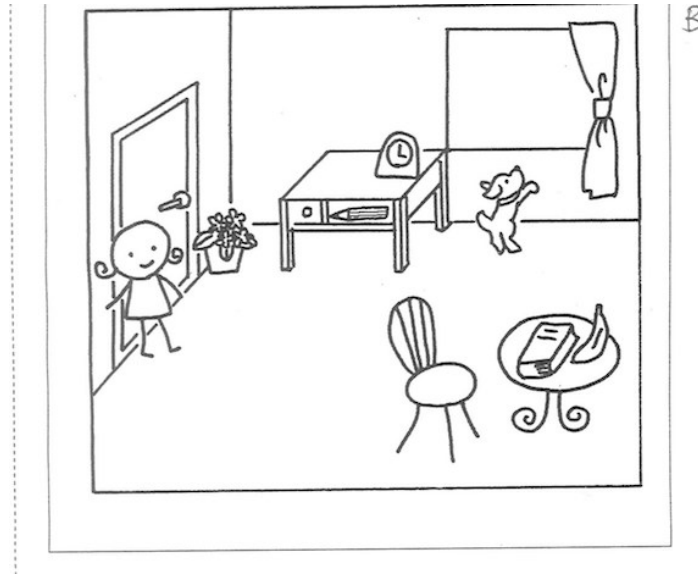


Figure 5. An Example of Schedule Used by Dyads in the Information Gap Task

|     | 午前                                      | 午後                     |
|-----|---|------------------------|
| 水曜日 |   | Class                  |
| 木曜日 | Class                                   | Practice piano (4~6pm) |
| 金曜日 | Class                                   | Go to a party (8pm~)   |
| 土曜日 | Go shopping with a friend<br>(10am~1pm) |                        |
| 日曜日 |   | Do homework (5~8pm)    |