A Study of Meta-linguistic Expressions in Lectures:
The relationship between lecture listening comprehension of Japanese learners and Japanese native speakers

Yuko SAWABE

Key word: lecture listening comprehension, meta-linguistic expressions, meta-macro, meta-micro, note-taking

This paper measures the effect of meta-linguistic expressions on lecture listening comprehension. The term "meta-linguistic expressions" can be defined as "linguistic expressions that refer to the speaker's own linguistic behaviors or expressions which act as discourse markers." Several studies have suggested that meta-linguistic expressions help listeners comprehend the text. However, it is yet to be examined how meta-linguistic expressions affect listening comprehension. Therefore, this study will attempt to raise the question of how Japanese language learners and Japanese native speakers comprehend lectures when listening to meta-linguistic expressions.

In this study, meta-linguistic expressions are divided into meta-macro which relate to global text structuring and theme, and meta-micro which connect text at a more micro, or clause level.

The examination is divided into three sections. The three sections are experimental studies that examine the effect of meta-linguistic expressions.

Experiment 1 involved having 58 advanced level Japanese language learners (hereafter, JLL) and 78 undergraduate and graduate students who were Japanese native speakers (hereafter, JNS) solve listening comprehension tests after listening to two passages with or without meta-linguistic expressions. The subjects were divided into two groups, group 1 and group 2. The subjects were instructed that they would listen to 2

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lectures and take notes, and then answer questions about the passages. The findings indicate that the groups which listened to lectures with meta-linguistic expressions tended to perform better than the groups which listened to lectures without meta-linguistic expressions. Furthermore, when the group that listened to lectures with meta-linguistic expressions was asked to identify the themes and construction of the lecture, relating to meta-macro expressions, they tended to perform better in all but one case. On the contrary, when this same group was asked more detailed questions, relating to meta-micro expressions, no significant differences were found.

Experiment 2 investigated how meta-linguistic expressions relate to note taking. The method was to examine the content of the subjects' notes. The results of the analysis indicated that both JLL and JNS subjects took meta-macro notes. This means that most of the subjects paid particular attention to meta-macro expressions and attempted to retain them in memory. In contrast, meta-micro did not affect note taking significantly.

Experiment 3 examined the relationships between meta-linguistic expressions. In this section, data collection was entirely conducted through individual interviews. 12 JLL subjects and 10 JNS subjects who took part in experiment 1 participated in this final experiment. The subjects were asked to report what they were thinking as they listened to the two different lectures in experiment 1. The results of the analysis indicate that JLL subjects tend to have trouble dealing with vocabulary in lectures and therefore had difficulty in listening comprehension. In contrast, most JNS subjects seemed to be aware of when the meta-linguistic expressions were being used. When meta-linguistic expressions were added, JNS subjects felt it was easier to follow the lectures.

These results show that lectures with meta-macro expressions have a more significant effect on students than those with meta-micro. The findings indicate that meta-macro expressions enhance top-down processes. Thus, listening comprehension that focuses on meta-macro expressions is recommended.

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