

A Study on Interruptions in the Conversations

A Comparison of Chinese Conversations and Japanese Conversations

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This study aims to investigate the distinction of interruptions in small group conversations between Japanese native speakers (JNSs) and Chinese native speakers (CNSs). This study will compare the features of interruptions between the JNSs and the CNSs in the following 3 areas.

- (1) The position where the interruption occurs
- (2) The properties of the utterance of interruption
- (3) The sequence after the interruption

Four pairs of JNSs and the same number of CNSs were selected as the samples in this study. To be specific, 16 Japanese college students and 16 Chinese college students were selected and classed into 4 groups. The number of participants in every group is 4. Participants were then allowed to discuss a topic for 10mins. The topic of the discussion was “What do you think about employment in the recession”. The total time of the discussion was about 96 minutes. The respondents in every group were classmates.

To investigate the features of the interruption, this study is based on the rule of turn-taking that was suggested by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974). The final results indicate that,

- (1) On the position where the interruption occurs, this study classifies the utterances of the interruption into 3 types by the position where it occurred in the output of the previous speaker. These are “the interruption at the end of the sentence”, “the interruption in the middle of the sentence”, and “the interruption in front of the dependent clause”. For the

frequency of the interruption at the end of the sentence and the interruption in the middle of the sentence, significant difference was found between the JNSs and the CNSs. That is, the interruptions at the end of the sentence by JNSs were more than those of CNSs. However the number of interruptions in the middle of the sentence by CNSs are more than those of JNSs. The result relates to the word order between Japanese and Chinese and the mode of their output.

- (2) On the properties of the utterance of interruption, this study classifies the utterances into 4 types according to the relation between the utterance of interruption and the previous utterance. These are “the interruption for gaining the initiative of the conversation”, “the interruption for supplementing the previous speaker”, “the interruption for comment” and “the interruption for cooperation”. In every type, significant difference was found between the JNSs and the CNSs. JNSs always supplemented the comment of the previous speaker. On the other hand, the CNSs always took their turn to express themselves via the interruption.
- (3) On the sequence after the interruption, for the JNSs, the previous speaker took the turn from the interrupter-speaker. In addition, the turn mainly shifted from the previous speaker to the interrupter-speakers. The other participants joined the discussion between the speakers and the interrupter-speakers and shared the floor via short supplementations or comments. However for the CNSs, a third person would take the turn after the interruption or all of the participants of the conversation would compete to take the turn and gain the initiative of the conversation in order to express themselves and construct their own floor after the interruption.

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