INTERCULTURAL JAPANESE-ENGLISH INTERNET CHAT AND RESOURCES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING
異文化間の日英チャットと言語学習資源

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Abstract: Chat can create a natural context for learner independence and identity formation. This study examines the tools learners utilize in online text-based conversations with their peers.

Keywords: Japanese, English, Instant Messaging, Online, Electronic Dictionaries

1. INTRODUCTION

When considering the use of chat for language learning, it is important for teachers and learners to be aware of not only the linguistic and interactional characteristics of intercultural internet chat but also how learners can use resources such as online and electronic dictionaries, websites and even their chat partners to communicate successfully. This poster aims to examine the use of such resources by five advanced university students of Japanese and their five Japanese chat partners in naturalistic settings, and also via a survey of materials available online for the study of Japanese. Naturalistic data was gathered in the form of chat logs, collected over the period of a month, and follow-up interviews, both face-to-face, with the Australian participants, and over the Internet with the Japanese participants. These interviews, coupled with the evidence from the chat logs, revealed interesting patterns of resource usage of learners of different levels and backgrounds.

The stimulated recall follow-up interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed in the case of the Australian participants, and in the case of the Japanese participants, the interview records were collected in the same manner that the chat logs were, by using a function in the program MSN Messenger called 「メッセージ履歴」 or "Message History" which records the date, time, sender, and actual message typed. In both the face-to-face and online follow-up interviews, questions were based upon Neustupný (1990) and Neustupný and Miyazaki (2002), and conducted in the participant's native language. The ten chat logs collected were analysed using Conversation Analysis methods, and the interviews were interpreted in light of a Sociocultural Theoretical framework, to inform the analysis of the chat data.

2. DICTIONARIES

Over half of the participants stated that they had used a reference source of some form in their most recent chat conversation, and those who did not often had extenuating circumstances (such as Miku, a social chatter who had lent her dictionary to a friend). The two main types of reference sources used were electronic dictionaries (5/10 participants) which are small hand-held computers, and online dictionaries (3/10 participants) which are searchable dictionaries accessible via the Internet. Two of the participants used multiple sources, a combination of electronic and online dictionaries. Overall, participants report having used three different online dictionaries:

- Rikai (http://www.rikai.com)
- Jim Breen's dictionary (http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/wwwjdic.html)
- Eijirō (http://www.alc.co.jp).

In many cases, interviews revealed that participants were unsatisfied with the help provided by their electronic dictionaries for two main reasons. Firstly, the usage of electronic dictionaries varies considerably from model to model. Nadia, the education student, used a friend's electronic dictionary, which was unfamiliar to her, and she reports that it "didn't work". Secondly, electronic dictionaries often contain formal language, with little or no explanation of use. This can cause two kinds of problems, firstly, when looking up slang terms, and secondly, electronic dictionaries can often suggest overly formal language that does not fit with the sociocultural context of an informal chat. This is not to say that electronic dictionaries do not have their advantages also. Kaylene stated that she uses her electronic dictionary a lot, and that while chatting, she uses it to look up the spelling of Japanese words. Evelyn relied upon her electronic dictionary rather than asking her chat partner and former host sister Azusa, because it was "easier". Furthermore, electronic dictionaries can be used without switching between windows, as is necessary when using an online dictionary, allowing participants to continue to monitor the chat as they look up a new word.

Although less commonly used, online dictionaries have several advantages over electronic dictionaries, firstly, in confirming the readings of *kanji*. Nadia revealed in her interview that she used the dictionary web site Rikai after her failed attempt to use her friend's electronic dictionary, to look up the readings of *kanji*. Nadia looked up *kanji* simply to confirm that her own readings of the pronunciation were correct. While checking the pronunciation was not directly relevant to the conversation, it was relevant to Nadia's primary goal of language learning. Kaylene, on the other hand, only used the online Jim Breen's dictionary to discover the readings of *kanji* she did not know. Jacob, too, kept Jim Breen's dictionary open throughout his chat with Miku, "just in case" but decided not to use it for time reasons, commenting that as his chat partner seemed keen he "didn't want to cause a lull in the conversation". Perhaps the most convenient feature that online dictionaries have over electronic dictionaries is the ability to cut and paste characters, words, or entire chunks of text to and from the chat program. When looking up *kanji* in an online dictionary reference source, the user only needs to copy the relevant *kanji* from the chat conversation and paste it into the online dictionary. It is unnecessary to know the radical, number of strokes, number of strokes in the radical, or stroke order, whereas at least one of these pieces of information would be necessary in order to look up the same *kanji* in an electronic dictionary. Furthermore, online dictionaries may be used to translate chunks of text, or gain sample sentences. When Ruriko did not understand one of her language exchange partner Kaylene's turns, Kaylene was able to copy her entire English turn into Eijirō and translate the sentence as a whole, rather than word by word, as would be necessary with an electronic dictionary. Kaylene states that different online dictionaries have different advantages. "I prefer Jim Breen if I'm looking up something in Japanese to English, and I just need to know the vocab. I prefer Eijirō if I want examples on how to use it, because it gives you sample sentences".

While dictionaries, in particular online dictionaries, proved to be a helpful and time-saving form of tool mediation for many of the participants, an over reliance caused problems in the level of formality, and the time required to look words up. In many cases, dictionaries were used in concert with asking a partner, when the dictionary failed to produce the desired result. Directly asking the partner, often, would have been more appropriate.

3. PARTNERS

Negotiation of meaning refers primarily to denser than usual frequencies of various semantically contingent conversation (Long, 1996). In such negotiations, the conversational flow is interrupted to ask questions and provide conversational help such as repetitions, extensions, reformulations, rephrasings, expansions, and recasts (Long, 1996).

Several such dense negotiations were identified in the chat logs. However, it is important to note that because of the nature of the turn management in chat, where multiple concurrent strands may be managed at once, the negotiation of meaning may not appear as "dense". This allows for less interruption to the flow of the conversation, and hence, participants may be more willing to employ negotiation of meaning if it does not pose a threat to their socialising.

Upon encountering unfamiliar language, as in Toyoda and Harrison (2002), participants often noticed a new word and either looked it up in a dictionary or asked their partner about the meaning of a phrase, as part of a clarification request. Partners were also frequently used as a resource after attempts at dictionary use failed. Participants performed this in one of two ways, either directly, by asking explicitly or making a guess and asking for confirmation, or indirectly, by repeating the unfamiliar word followed by question marks or exclamation marks. In response to these clarification requests, chat partners elaborated upon acronyms, used relexicalization, or broke the word down into its constituents and explained each morpheme. However, unlike the participants in Kitade's study (2000), participants in the current study only asked about acronyms and slang, common features of Internet chat. It is possible that because they had access to and frequently used dictionaries, participants only felt the need to ask for clarification from their partner for the types of words that typically do not appear in a standard dictionary.

3. CONCLUSION

The findings above suggest that the nature of chat appears to facilitate repair and the negotiation of meaning, due to its visual nature, and pace. However, more research would be required to assess the relation of turn management style to willingness to negotiate. Most students in the study used dictionaries to some extent, some more than others, and it was found that the delayed aspect of Internet chat facilitated dictionary usage. However, two participants were hesitant to use a dictionary as it may interrupt the flow of the conversation. The turn management of chat in particular appears to have facilitated repair, dictionary use and the negotiation of meaning, allowing participants to manage multiple threads of conversation simultaneously, so that while one thread is temporarily

halted to allow for repair, negotiation, or use of a reference source, other conversational strands may continue to be discussed. Both negotiation of meaning and repair appear to be facilitated by not only the on-screen visual record produced by Computer Mediated Communication, but also the relatively slower pace. Furthermore, chat was found to provide opportunities for attention to form and noticing. Participants were able to practice dictionary use and discover new vocabulary in the chat logs and in reference sources such as electronic dictionaries and websites. A list of resources for teachers and learners resulting from this study and the survey of Internet materials available will be displayed on this poster.

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