

**L1 – L2 speaker interaction in a study abroad setting:
Communication strategies, word searches, and intersubjectivity**

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The challenges of maintaining intersubjectivity in interactions between learners and native speakers (NS) are considerable. It is common, for example, for mutual understanding to be compromised and the progressivity of communication to be disrupted by lengthy negotiations and word searches (WSs) (Egbert, Niebecker & Rezzara, 2004; Gardner & Wagner, 2004; Gumperz, 1982; Kurhila, 2006) in which communication strategies (CSs) are deployed, responded to and manipulated in order to locate missing words and maintain intersubjectivity (Kurhila, 2006; Mazeland & Zaman-Zadeh, 2004; Willey, 1999). Analyzing word searches and how CSs are used is thus critically important to understanding how L1 and L2 speakers jointly address trouble and restore mutual understanding.

Analyzing approximately nine hours of video-recorded naturally-occurring conversations over eight weeks of study abroad between three learners of Japanese and their L1 speaker host family members, the present study uses conversation analysis (CA) to explore how the participants manage intersubjectivity using communication strategies in word searches (WSs). Specifically, the study asks the following questions: (a) how do participants deploy, manipulate and respond to CSs as interactional resources to co-construct meaning and progressively disambiguate the sought-for referent?, (b) how are linguistic and non-linguistic resources such as intonation and eye gaze used in conjunction with CSs to organize participant structure and relevant action in the unfolding talk?, and (d) Can a microanalytic, interactional approach like CA redefine our understanding of how strategic mechanisms like CSs are used in interaction?

The analysis shows how strategies fit into the structural organization of adjacency pairs and how conditional relevance plays an essential role in how the participants deploy, manipulate and respond to communication strategies, all of which is made visible in the talk. It also uncovers several aspects of CS use that have not been noted in the literature before and that contradict findings in studies using a traditional SLA approach. First, the analysis shows how, despite being traditionally labelled either “interactive” or “compensatory”, both types of communication strategies are used interactively by learners and the host family members as resources to resolve WSs. The data also reveals how eye-gaze plays an important role in how strategies function in interaction. That is, even when learners use strategies labelled “compensatory” in traditional taxonomies, they may not be actively seeking help from their interlocutor if their eye-gaze is averted. Moreover, strategies the learners use are affected by language specific or cross-linguistic features that are not accounted for in traditional CS taxonomies. In particular, strategic use of demonstratives such as the Japanese use of *are* (that over there) and specific types of foreignization (katakana-ization) are not represented in SLA taxonomies. Moreover, contrary to the SLA perspective of learn CS use as a sign of incompetence or linguistic deficiency, it is the learner’s interactional competence that allows her/him to successfully deploy CSs, anticipate, respond to and clarify meaning with L1 speakers to resolve word searches.

Overall, the study shows how CS use fits into the structural organization of talk that facilitates participants’ co-creation of meaning and resolution of word searches. It also shows how turn-by-turn, microanalytic approaches like CA can challenge traditional notions of strategy use and further our understanding of CS use in interaction.

References

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