

Who Takes the Leading Role in Peer Group Conversation Between NSs and NNSs of English? - Focusing on question form & frequency

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1. Introduction

In the field of ESL / EFL, there has been much research focused on NS-NNS pairs in Western educational settings. These studies have shown that NSs take the leading role in a conversation. However, as Park & Nakano (2001a) argues by giving examples from an analysis of synchronous communication activities, interactions between NNSs can enhance English proficiency. In addition, through interaction among culturally different peer groups, learners will show cross-cultural similarities and differences of strategies and patterns on the target language acquisition. In Park & Nakano (2001b)'s study, they also manifest there could be some crucial differences in terms of their pragmatic strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is especially to show what the most significant different factors are in the peer group conversation.

2. Purpose

The primary aim of this paper is to identify that question form and its frequency are found to be the most important factors in conversations between NNSs of English. The present study examines the peer group chatting data over three semesters. A learner of English who has a higher developmental stage takes leading roles in terms of question form and its frequency to make the conversation more active and clear.

3. Subjects and Data Analysis

12 pairs (Korean-Japanese) of NNSs who participated in the Korea-Waseda Cross-Cultural Distance Learning Program (KWCCDL) are examined. The data is comprised of their chatting scripts from April 2001 to July 2002. This chatting data is analyzed by comparing Korean and Japanese students. In terms of question form, the analysis is based on Pienemann, *et al* (1998)'s study on developmental stages for

question formation. In the present study, the data analysis focuses on three main factors as seen below:

- 1) Question Form
- 2) Question Frequency
- 3) Purpose of Question Used

4. Results

4.1 Stages for Question Formation between NNSs

Pienemann, *et al* (1998) demonstrated a framework for describing second language question strategies for learners of English, and mentioned that second language learners follow the developmental sequence in question formation. As Table 1 is shown below, the higher the stage is, the more complicated question formation becomes, that is, *Stage 1* reflects the most simple question form such as a single word or a simple phrase, etc. On the contrary, *Stage 6* represents the most complex form such as Tag, Negative or Embedded question etc. The following shows Pienemann, *et al*'s developmental stages for question formation.

Table 1. Developmental stages for question formation

(Pienemann, *et al* 1988)

Stage 1: Single words, formulae or sentence fragments

Ex) *'For children?'* / *'A dog?'*

Stage 2: Declarative word order

Ex) *'The boys throw it?'*

Stage 3: Wh -fronting, no inversion, do - fronting, other –fronting

Ex) *'What you have?'* / *'Is the picture has two planets?'*

Stage 4: Inversion in wh- + copula and 'yes/no' question

Ex) *'Where is the sun?'* / *'Is there a fish in the water?'*

Stage 5: Inversion in wh- questions with 'do' or 'auxiliaries'

Ex) *'How do you say?'* / *'What's the dog doing?'*

Stage 6: Complex questions

- Tag question, negative question embedded question

Ex) *'It's better, isn't it?'* / *'Why can't you go?'*

Therefore, this study suggests that ‘question form’ could be one of the important linguistic features in the perspective of English proficiency. Most of all, we consider how second language learners can use question forms appropriately and fluently in a real situation as one of the most significant communication strategies. There is a difference to some extent between possessing the knowledge and knowing how and when to use it. In this connection, the question form that learners use in a real conversation can be an important factor in determining their English proficiency.

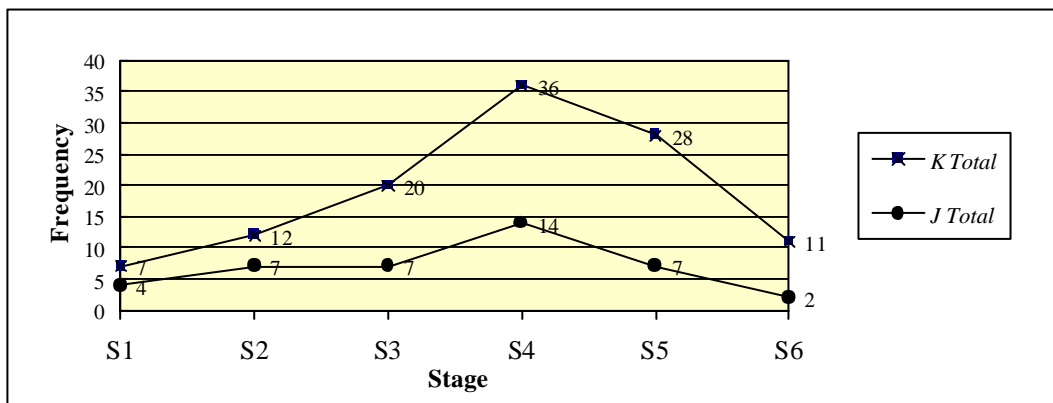
The results of data analysis for developmental stages for question formation are as like:

Table 2. Frequency of Korean and Japanese Students

Stage	K 1	K 2	K 3	K 4	K 5	K 6	K 7	K 8	Total	J 1	J 2	J 3	J 4	J 5	J 6	J 7	J 8	Total
1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	2	7	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	4
2	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	12	1	0	0	1	0	2	3	0	7
3	1	0	1	0	1	6	4	7	20	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	2	7
4	10	1	8	4	2	3	5	3	36	0	3	2	1	3	0	4	1	14
5	2	4	7	2	1	5	1	6	28	0	1	0	1	1	2	2	0	7
6	2	2	1	2	0	2	1	1	11	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total	18	12	18	9	5	18	14	20	114	1	4	2	6	5	5	14	4	41

K= Korean, J= Japanese

Figure1. Comparison of Korean with Japanese Students



As we can see in Table 2 and Figure 1, in terms of the question formation and its frequency, the Korean subjects tend to use more advanced question forms than Japanese subjects and also the Korean use questions much more often than Japanese in their conversations. Namely, the question forms Korean subjects often used are observed to be from *Stage 3* to *5* while Japanese subjects used only *Stage 4* the most even though the frequency was low.

Findings show that according to 'Developmental stages for question formation'; first, Korean participants use questions the four times as often as Japanese in the total frequency: second, the Korean subjects tend to use a higher stage of question forms than Japanese subjects. We assume this reason is that Korean participants have unique question strategies that represent a stronger will to lead the conversation compared with Japanese participants.

4.2 Stages for Question Formation between NSs

To be more precise, we also examined the developmental stages for question formation and its frequency of NSs. We extract one episode of a TV sitcom, of which the quantity is similar with one chatting data between Korean and Japanese. This episode is also analyzed according to Pienemann, *et al* (1988)'s developmental stages for question formation. As shown below in Table 3 and Figure 2, NSs use question forms ranging from *Stage 3* to *6*, especially, *Stage 4* and *5* are used most in their real conversation. This result verifies that there are very similar tendencies concerning the stage and frequency of question formation, which both Korean subjects and NSs used in each conversation.

Stage	Native Speaker
1	5
2	18
3	23
4	36
5	26
6	23

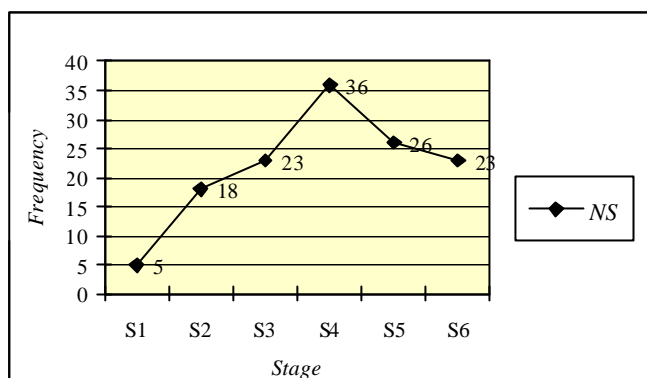


Table 3. & Fig 2. Frequency of Native Speakers in one episode of a TV sitcom

Note: NBC TV sitcom` Friends` Episode 7: The One with The Proposal (2002)

4. 3 The Purpose of the Question Used between NNSs

In this part, we deal with the purposes of questions Korean and Japanese participations used are. We examine the intention of question second language learners used in a real situation as one way to verify their communication strategies. Through this process, we show what the most various significant different factors are in the peer group conversation focusing on questions.

Unlike the studies on developmental stages of question formation, there is little research in relation to the purposes of questions. Thus, we designed a categorization based on linguistic and non-linguistic contexts of the chatting data. Looking through the data, we tried to sort out each question according to why and how the questions are used. This could be regarded as subjective and narrowly construable, however, each question does not necessarily have a single purpose and it needs to be understood within a certain context as well.

The sequencing in Table 4 and 5 show purposes of the questions and their frequency that Korean and Japanese subjects used in conversations. The strategies for questions are as follows:

Table 4. Purposes of the Questions Between Korean and Japanese Students

a. Buffering: *Did you check my email?*

- b. Identification: *Is there Akio? / What's your name?*
 - c. Topic Initiation: *So, what's your hobby? / What's your major?*
 - d. Topic Continuation: *What concert is it?*
 - e. Asking the Same Question: *What about you? / And you?*
 - f. Cooperative Comment: *Isn't this fun? / Oh, yeah?*
 - g. Confirmation Check: *Do you mean you take the dog?*
 Comprehension Check: *Do you understand what I'm saying?*
 Clarification Request: *Could you repeat?* (Pica (1994))
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As Table 4 shows, Questions are categorized into 7 items. Before engaging in a real conversation, participants tend to ask if their partners received e-mail from them or if they can see each other on computer screen. It comes out before greeting and identifying themselves; hence we name it 'Buffering.' After their asking each other's names, either one brings up a topic of his own interest or something that can be shared between them. Let us assume that A asks B's major at college as 'Topic initiation,' and the conversation goes on, B asks A's grade at college. Then we see this as 'Topic continuation' question. Unless the topic swifts in a totally different direction, and if it remains within a certain limit, we consider it a topic continuation. Interestingly, there are a number of questions showing agreement or co-operative comments such as 'Isn't it?' and 'Oh, really?' etc. However, these examples do not expect a corresponding answer because this factor also can be a kind of communication strategy. Some participants repeat the same questions by asking, 'What about you?' or 'And you?' We do not put this in the 'Topic continuation' category since it is not seen as bringing up a topic but repeating the same subject. As Pica (1994) asserts there seem to be some strategies to prevent communication breakdown and to double-check each other for better understanding. In Table 5, item g, 'Confirmation check', 'Comprehension check', and 'Clarification request' are some of the communication strategies used. And this does not necessarily have to do with 'Topic continuation' but with 'reaffirmation' of the previous comment.

Table 5. Frequency of the Purpose of Questions in Korean and Japanese Students

		K	K	K	K	K	K	K	K	Total	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
a	Buffering	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b	Identification	3	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	8	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
c	Topic initiation	2	2	5	3	1	3	3	6	25	0	0	0	2	1	1	3	1	8
d	Topic continuation	9	3	1	3	2	8	5	8	39	1	3	0	1	2	3	8	2	20
e	Repeating the question	0	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
f	Cooperative comment	0	2	4	2	1	2	3	0	14	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	6
g	Confirmation check	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	5	0	0	1	1		0	0	0	2
	Comprehension check	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Clarification request	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	3	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

6. Conclusion

Acquisition in a language occurs through consistent interaction. According to Long (1983, 1985)'s studies, interaction focusing on meaning negotiation through conversations was emphasized. This interactional exchange requires continuous feedback from each conversation participant. However, these studies on second language acquisition have been based on interaction between NSs and NNSs. On the other hand, these settings between NSs and NNSs have several difficulties for second language learners. Therefore, the present study can provide a new perspective on second language acquisition by examining interaction between NNSs, and also demonstrate that taking the leading role in a conversation between NNSs is an important factor. As a result, the CCDL data verify that it is 'question forms' which plays a main role among various types of feedback. The variety of question form, its frequency, and the purpose of the question seem to all help conversation to be fluent and smooth. These question strategies will enable English learners to become actively involved and play a vital role in leading a peer group conversation among NNSs.

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