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**Developing interactional competence in Japanese: Style shifting across discourse boundaries**

Early models of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980) situated language ability as a psycholinguistic trait that exists within individuals independent from context. More recently, however, language competence has been incorporated into a broader conceptual framework that focuses on dynamic and dialogic aspects of communication. Most notable in this trend is the emergence of interactional competence (Young, 2008, 2011), which views language ability as locally situated and jointly constructed by participants in on-going discourse. Following this theoretical framework, I will discuss interactional competence in Japanese by describing what linguistic and interactional resources enable participants to construct and orient to social actions in Japanese. I will present data on second language (L2) Japanese learners' use of one interactional resource – the ability to signal boundaries in discourse through style shifting during talk-in-progress. Young (2008) defines boundaries as “opening and closing acts of a particular practice that serve to distinguish a given practice from adjacent talk” (p. 71). In order to become interactionally competent, L2 learners must be able to respond to changing contextual figurations (e.g., topics, interlocutors) and transition skillfully between interactional practices.

The data comes from a larger study that investigated the development of interactional competence among 18 international students during a semester study abroad in a Japanese university. The students conversed with a same-age peer for 20 minutes. The researcher occasionally participated in the conversation to ask questions and comment on the on-going topic. The study examined whether L2 learners' use of two primary Japanese speech styles – the polite and plain form – changes between the time when they conversed only with their peer (two-way dialogue) and the time when they conversed with their peer and the researcher (three-way dialogue). Conversation was transcribed and analyzed for the frequency of the polite and plain forms. This presentation will highlight a case of one learner who showed sensitivity to the changing participant structure and demonstrated the ability to shift between the two speech styles corresponding to the change of the addressee.

After illustrating how style shifting can be an indicator of interactional competence in L2 Japanese, I will provide teaching implications as applied to the first two years of Japanese language curriculum. Previous research has revealed that introductory-level Japanese textbooks exclusively focus on the polite form, neglecting the plain form in instruction (e.g., Cook, 2008). Cook contends that this is because the polite form is the safeguard for foreigners, arising from the belief that foreigners should speak politely. However, use of the plain form is critical in certain situations because the plain form indexes social meaning of affect and solidarity. Hence, classroom instruction should focus on both speech styles as appropriate to participants, settings, and goals of interaction. Critically, teachers should inform students that both forms can co-exist in a single conversation, and speakers often shift

between these forms corresponding to the on-going discourse. I will illustrate the indexical approach to teaching speech styles by introducing exemplary instructional tasks from previous empirical studies.

### **References**

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