

Directional Control in L1 and L2 Interview Situations

L1とL2を使ったインタビューにおいて
英語学習者が話しの流れをコントロールする度合い

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Kikuchi, Todd, Walker & Wong (2002) のインタビューにおける日本人英語学習者の言語行動の先行研究をさらに深く追求するため、関西大学の Dual Degree Program で勉強している日本人の英語学習者 5 人に英語と日本語でインタビューを行ってもらった。先行研究では、インタビュー相手の英語能力によって学習者がインタビューで directional control を維持する度合いが決まるという結論であった。本研究では、英語と日本語でインタビューをする場合の directional control の維持度を比べた。母国語では directional control を保つのが容易であろうという予想に反して、学習者は英語のインタビューの方が directional control を維持した。これは学習者が英語においてはインタビュー形式を保とうとするが、日本語においては目上の人に会話のコントロールをゆだねるという文化的理由によるものではないかと思われる。

Abstract:

Building on previous research, this study investigated issues of directional control between native and non-native speakers in interviews in English and in Japanese. Japanese students learning English in the Dual Degree Program at Kansai University were asked to do two interview tasks, one in English and one in Japanese. Contrary to our expectation that learners would show a greater degree of directional control in Japanese, it was found that most of the

learners showed more control in English. While a previous study had indicated that students similar to those in this study were unable or unwilling to maintain directional control in interviews in English when the interviewee was a native speaker of English, or when the interviewee's perceived level of English proficiency was high, this study found that the students are more able to maintain control in English than in their native language. Thus, it is concluded that directional control may, in some situations, have less to do with the students' perceived level of language proficiency than with their assessment of the cultural conversational norms of the person with whom they are speaking.

Introduction: The Previous Study

Since the present study is based on previous research, it is first necessary to present a summary of this foundational study. Like the present study, the previous study, *Communicative Behavior of Japanese Students of English in an Interview Setting* (Kikuchi, Todd, Walker, and Wong, 2002) had as its subjects, students in an English course specifically for those enrolled in the Dual Degree program (DDE) at Kansai University. The DDE course is an English for Academic Purposes course designed to prepare Kansai University students who already have spent a significant amount of time in English-speaking environments for study at Webster University in the United States. The students attend Webster University in their second or third year and are thus able to earn degrees at both Kansai University and Webster University, hence the name "Dual Degree".

The teachers who carried out the original study had noticed that the students in the DDE course "appeared to use distinct conversational styles with different teachers" (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:34). With their native-English-speaking instructors, students seemed more reticent and less willing to nominate topics, whereas with their ethnically Japanese teacher, a near-native speaker of English, students "seemed to be much more assertive in their use of English, speaking longer turns, engaging in cross-talk, and often asking questions" (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:35). To investigate why this might be, the researchers designed a study to investigate this phenomenon via a task involving interviews with both native English speakers and non-native (Japanese) speakers of English.

The interview task simulated a roommate interview situation. Small groups of students were asked to interview various candidates (who were the previously mentioned native and non-native English speakers) in order to choose one person to be their roommate in a house. The interviews were conducted entirely in English, regardless of the background of the interviewee. These interviews were recorded and the data subsequently was analyzed.

One of the first things the researchers noted was that "the students were not engaged in normal, freewheeling conversations with their roommate candidates" (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:38). The

conversations in fact exhibited the characteristics of an interview, as defined by Barone and Switzer, “[An interview is] a communication interaction between two (or more) parties, at least one of whom has a goal, that uses questions and answers to exchange information and influence one another” (1995:8). Indeed, the DDE students, in preparing for the task, had made lists of questions they wanted to ask, and the researchers noted that, “since questions and answers are used in interviews to achieve a specific goal, topics introduced by questions may only be pursued and developed up to the point where the interviewer feels that s/he has obtained enough information to make an assessment of some kind” (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:39). They also emphasized that in this interview task, as in Barone and Switzer’s definition of an interview, the participants were trying to influence each other: The interviewers were trying to persuade the candidates of the desirability of becoming their roommate, and the interviewees were trying to persuade the interviewers of their desirability as a roommate. It should be noted that this type of interview differs in some respects from the type of interview task described in the present study; this will be explained in more detail later in this paper.

After collecting the raw data, the researchers analyzed the data in terms of “directional control,” which is defined by Barone and Switzer as “the power of the individual participant to influence the substance of an interview, including what information is introduced, what topics are covered, and what topics are omitted” (1995:61). The researchers noted that in interview situations, “directional control is generally exerted by the interviewer” (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:40). In order to ascertain the participants’ degree of directional control, the researchers looked at things such as the total speaking time of each participant, who broke silences most frequently, and the “breakdown point,” which the researchers defined as the “the transitional point when students moved from scripted questions to more free conversation,” by asking questions such, as “Uhm, I think that’s it. You wanna ask something?” or “Do you have any questions?” (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:42). In general, the findings of the previous study can be summarized as follows:

- The DDE students were not able to maintain effective directional control of their interviews. In other words, the normal interview structure (where the interviewer exerts directional control) broke down.
- How quickly the DDE students ceded control of the interview (the breakdown point) seemed to be related to the students’ assessment of the interviewee’s English proficiency.
- The breakdown point occurred much earlier with the native English speakers than with the non-native speakers.
- The DDE students seemed more reluctant to take control of the interview when faced with a native English speaker roommate candidate (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:50).

The Present Study

One of the interesting speculations that the previous study gave rise to was the notion that learners' ability or willingness to exercise directional control might be, to some extent, a function of *who* they are talking to. Native/non-native speaker status, ethnicity of the interlocutor, and degree of proficiency in the target language were all suggested as possible influences on the learners' exercise of directional control. Thus, in the present study, we set out to explore some of these issues from a slightly different perspective in an attempt to shed further light on these issues of directional control.

The Students

A general picture of the students can be found in Figure 1 below. As in the previous study, all of the students had studied in an English-speaking country, with some variations in the length of time and location of study. As can be deduced from the chart, two of the students, C and E, were older than the other three students. Indeed, C and E were second year students at Kansai University while A, B, D were first year students. In general, the students' ages and backgrounds were quite similar to one another and to those of the students in the previous study. Pseudo initials have been assigned to each student in order to maintain anonymity.

Figure 1. Student information

Student	Gender	Age	Location of Overseas Study	Length of Stay	Type of Stay	Place of Study
A	M	19	U.S.A.	11 months	Home stay	Public high School
B	F	18	Australia	10 months	Home stay	Public high School
C	F	20	New Zealand	10 months	Home stay	Public high School
D	F	18	Canada	11 months	Home stay	Public high School
E	M	21	Canada	2.5 years	Home stay	Public high School

The Interviewee

In the previous study, the interviewers conducted group interviews with a number of different candidates. This presented the researchers with a number of variables, such as the varying gender, ethnicity, age, and perceived English proficiency. In an attempt to eliminate some of these variables, in this study we decided that all of the students should interview only one single interviewee. This is one aspect in which this study differs markedly from the previous study.

The interviewee for this study was a 28-year-old Japanese female. The interviewee teaches English at Japanese universities, and had completed a Master's degree at an American university. She had lived in the U.S.A. for slightly over 3 years. The researchers, knowing the interviewee on a personal basis and having had extensive contact with her, deemed her English proficiency as being high enough to pass as a native speaker with the students who would be interviewing her.

The Question

Since the previous study indicated that the students were less able or willing to maintain directional control with native speakers of English, we decided that it would be interesting to investigate to what extent the students' abilities to maintain directional control in English and Japanese varied. Since perceived language ability seemed to affect directional control, we hypothesized that students would be better able to hold on to directional control in Japanese than in English.

Procedure

The task given to the students was in two stages.

Stage 1.

For the purposes of this study, the students were led to believe that the interviewee was a 28-year-old Japanese-American female, who had recently completed a Master's Degree in the U.S.A and who was now teaching English at a university in Japan. This was done for several reasons.

In the previous study, the researchers had noted that the students tended to give up directional control earlier with the interviewees who were obviously native speakers of English. Ethnicity of the interviewee was suggested as a possible factor in the degree to which students maintained directional control. As was mentioned, one of the initial questions that the researchers of the previous study posed was why their students seemed more talkative in English with their native-Japanese instructor than with their native-English speaker instructors. Did they perhaps feel more comfortable with someone who "looks Japanese"? By setting up this study in this manner, we hoped to be able to compare students' behavior with a "native speaker" of English who looks Japanese, with their behavior in Japanese with a

Japanese person. Also, by having the same interviewee as both the “native English speaker” and the Japanese, we hoped to control for variables that might cause the students’ interview behavior in English to differ from their interview behavior in Japanese, such as gender, age, physical appearance (including ethnicity), and individual personalities and conversation styles.

After the task and some information about the interviewee (name, age, the fact that she had studied in an American university) were introduced, the students were asked to prepare to hold an interview in English lasting approximately 5-7 minutes. However, to encourage the use of English and to be able to compare students’ interviews with a “native speaker” of English and their interviews with a Japanese person, the students were led to believe that the interviewee could not speak Japanese. The students were told that in their questions they should focus on the academic aspects of studying in the U.S.A with a view for getting any practical advice that the students themselves could use when they went to study at Webster University.

In order to ensure that the students actively engaged in the interviews and did not simply read their questions one by one, students were told that they would have time to prepare their questions for the interview, but that they would not actually be allowed to take their written notes into the interview. The students were then given approximately twenty minutes to prepare for their interviews, after which they were taken into a separate classroom where the interviewee was waiting. The interviews were conducted in this classroom in a one-on-one fashion (as opposed to the group interviews of the previous study). The students agreed to allow us to record their interviews, so all of the interviews were recorded.

Stage 2.

Two weeks after the first round of interviews, the students were informed that they would be holding another interview with the same interviewee. The main differences for this interview were:

1. It was revealed that the interviewee was actually a native Japanese speaker and that the interview would be in Japanese.
2. The theme for this interview would be day-to-day living in the U.S.A. and cultural differences between Japan and America.

Again the students consented, and these interviews were also recorded for later analysis.

Before proceeding to examine the data collected in these two rounds of interviews, it is important to acknowledge that these interviews differed in some respects from those conducted in the previous study.

Types of Interviews

While the interview task used in this study shares the previously cited characteristics of an interview noted by Barone and Switzer, “a communication interaction between two (or more) parties, at least one of whom has a goal, that uses questions and answers to exchange information and influence one another”

(1995:8), it resulted in interviews with some differences from the interviews in the previous study. The differences between these two sets of interviews are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Types of interviews

Type of Interview	Primary Purpose	Secondary Purpose	Interviewer Qualities	Interviewee Qualities	Outcome / Success
Selection	gather information, evaluate	promote self, employer	knowledge of job and law, able to listen and assess	preparation, self-confidence, self-awareness	find good match
Journalistic	gather info	entertain, report the news	able to do research, listen, record accurately, probe	expertise, good listener, articulate on the issues	good story that draws readers & viewers
Research	gather info to learn about a population	apply info to specific needs	consistent, accurate, good listener	willing to participate, honest	valid & reliable data

(excerpt from Barone and Switzer, 1995:24)

The interviews in the previous study are probably best classified as “selection” interviews. Although Barone and Switzer discuss selection interviews in terms of employment situations, the characteristics noted in the chart above, when applied to the interview situation of the previous study, seem quite applicable. For example, Barone and Switzer state that the primary purpose of a selection interview is to “gather information and evaluate” and that a successful outcome would be to “find [a] good match” (1995:24). This seems to be very similar to the goals and outcomes of the interview task in the previous study (choosing the best roommate).

However, the interviews in this study could not be classified as selection interviews. They seem to share characteristics of both “journalistic” and “research” interviews. For example, like journalistic interviews, the main purpose of the interviews was to “gather info” on a subject about which the interviewee had some “expertise” (Barone and Switzer, 1995:24). However, the interviews’ secondary purpose seems very similar to that of research interviews, “apply info to specific needs,” as does the desired outcome of “valid & reliable data” (Barone and Switzer, 1995:24).

In spite of these differences between the two sets of interviews, the interviews from the previous study and the present study remain generally comparable. They both still meet Barone and Switzer’s basic definition of an interview (1995:8), and the interviewer in either set of interviews would still be expected to be the one exerting directional control. As directional control was the main focus of the research, we believe that the fact that these two interview tasks resulted in slightly different types of interviews does not necessarily prohibit making comparisons between the data of the previous study and this study.

Discussion

After analyzing the recorded data from the interviews, we were surprised to find that, contrary to our expectation that students would display greater directional control in their native language, in fact, the opposite was the case. That is to say, they displayed greater directional control in the English interviews. Let us examine the data that gave rise to this surprising conclusion.

Examination of the data

The first analysis we performed examined the percentage of questions and topics posed in the interview (by either the interviewer or interviewee). A summary of this data can be found in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Percentage of total questions asked by students

Name	English Interview	Japanese Interview
A	94	65
B	94	86
C	76	100
D	83	85
E	71	100

As would be expected in an interview situation, most of the questions were asked by the interviewers in both sets of interviews. Whether or not students asked a higher proportion of the total questions (including those asked by the interviewee) in English or Japanese varied from student to student. In either case, the students overwhelmingly asked the majority of the questions in both the English and Japanese interviews, ranging from 71%-94% in the English interviews and from 65%-100% in the Japanese interviews. This would seem to indicate that students were not inhibited.

Similar results can be seen in the data regarding the percentage of topics which were initiated by the students (as opposed to topics initiated by the interviewee).

Figure 4. Percentage of total topics initiated by students

Name	English Interview	Japanese Interview
A	89	33
B	64	90
C	90	100
D	93	67
E	78	100

Again, as would be expected in an interview situation, the interviewers initiated the vast majority of the topics, with the exception of A, who only initiated 33% of the topics in the Japanese interview. Since

A's behavior was in contrast with that of the other students on other points in addition to this one, it can perhaps be assumed that these differences are due to A having a different personality or conversation style from that which predominated in the other students. In any event, we can see that here again, students were not inhibited. In the English interviews, the percentage of topics they nominated ranged from 64% for B to 93% for D. In the Japanese interviews, A excepted, the percentages were from 67% for D to 100% for C and E.

We also looked at the percentage of total turns taken by the students and the interviewee. As might be expected in an interview, with its question-and-answer-style of interaction, the percentage of turns taken generally hovered around 50% for the students, 50% for the interviewee. This data can be seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Percentage of total turns taken by students

Name	English Interview	Japanese Interview
A	51	45
B	48	61
C	49	51
D	47	39
E	48	48

While at first glance, this might suggest some symmetry in the level of directional control between the students and the interviewee, a look at the percentage of the silences broken by students and the percentage of total speaking time leads us to believe that the roughly 50%-50% witnessed in turn-taking behavior probably has more to do with the question-and-answer format of the interviews, and less with levels of directional control.

Where the differences in behavior between the English interviews and the Japanese interviews begin to become evident is in looking at the percentage of the silences broken by students, and the percentage of total speaking time. As Figure 6 below indicates, the students seemed to feel much more responsibility to break the silence in the English interviews than in the Japanese interviews.

Figure 6. Percentage of total silences broken by students

Name	English Interview	Japanese Interview
A	89	38
B	63	33
C	100	67
D	56	50
E	67	50

Although they were the interviewers and ostensibly responsible for the flow of the conversation (directional control), the students only felt the need to break the silence about half of the time in the Japanese interviews. E and D both broke the silence 50% of the time in Japanese, C 67% of the time, and

B and A broke the silence 33% and 38% of the time, respectively.

In contrast, in the English interviews, the students broke the silence much more actively. Other than D, who went from breaking the silence 50% of the time in Japanese to 56% in English, marked jumps in the percentage of silences broken in English were observed for most of the students. In the most drastic example, A went from breaking 38% of the silences in Japanese to breaking 89% of the silences in English. These data suggest that the students felt a greater responsibility to maintain the pace of the conversation in English. An even fuller picture emerges when this data is combined with the data concerning total speaking time.

Figure 7. Percentage of total speaking time by students

Name	English Interview	Japanese Interview
A	16	26
B	22	11
C	23	13
D	23	18
E	31	27

Figure 7 illustrates the percentage of the total speaking time during which the students spoke. In an interview situation, it would be expected that interviewees do more of the speaking since they are the ones answering questions. These interviews were no different, with the interviewee doing as much as 89% (with B) of the speaking in the Japanese interviews and as much as 84% (with A) in the English interview. What is interesting here is the difference between the amount of speaking the students did in the English interviews and the Japanese interviews. Again excepting A who differed from the other students in speaking for a higher percentage of the time in the Japanese interviews, all of the students spoke for a higher percentage of the time in the English interviews than they did in the Japanese interviews. For example, B, who only spoke for 11% of the time in the Japanese interview, increased her contribution to the interaction to 22% of the speaking in the English interview. Why did the students feel the need to speak more in English than in Japanese? And why were they able to, given that Japanese is their native language?

Directional Control vs. Control of Language

The researchers of the previous study noted that, in a Japanese conversation, “A distinct role relationship exists among the participants” (Kikuchi, et al., 2002:46). As Hayashi (1996) explains, in a typical Japanese interaction, distinct role relationships emerge, with one person taking on a leadership role. Hayashi states, “The individual who accepted a role of leadership bore the responsibility for the uniformity of other participants’ roles and for the progress of the conversation” (Hayashi, 1996:180-181,

cited in Kikuchi, et al., 2002:46). In contrast, in a typical English interaction, roles were more fluid and characterized by “horizontal interdependency” (Hayashi, 1996:185) in which participants exchanged roles more often. If Hayashi is right, this goes a long way towards explaining the behavior we observed in these interviews.

The previous study found the students deficient in their directional control in English interviews. That is one way of looking at their performance. However, this new study suggests that, while students may not have performed in the same way native speakers of English might have, the students have progressed towards the norms of directional control in English. The fact that most of the students demonstrated a higher degree of directional control in the English interviews suggests that, consciously or otherwise, the students have somehow learned that they are more responsible for participating in the conversation in English. Most likely, their experiences living in English-speaking countries are a key factor in this. The fact that the students spoke more and broke silences more in English can be seen as evidence that they are not deficient English speakers, but learners of English who have to some extent adopted the norms of the target language.

However, in the Japanese interviews, once the students were made aware of the fact that the interviewee is in fact a Japanese and began speaking in Japanese, they reverted to more typically Japanese styles of conversation, allowing the older, higher-status participant to take more directional control of the conversation. This fact highlights the previous point that while they did not adhere to the norms of native speakers of English in the English interviews, neither did they do exactly the same as they would have in a Japanese interaction. In Japanese, they reverted to typical Japanese roles even at the expense of wavering from the interview task at hand. This can be seen in their lower levels of silence-breaking and speaking time. This suggests that for these students, when speaking in Japanese with other Japanese, the norms of that speech community (i.e., that there will be a “leader” who is responsible for the flow of conversation) take precedence over the needs of taking over and doing the interview task.

These findings bring up another interesting point. Since the students are obviously more proficient in Japanese than in English, yet exerted more directional control in English than in Japanese, it seems reasonable to conclude that, at least under the conditions of this study, directional control does not clearly correlate with language ability. Directional control seemed to have more to do with the situation in which they found themselves, and the norms the students perceived as applying. In the English interviews, the interview task to some extent took precedence over the students’ identities as Japanese. In the Japanese interviews, the students’ identities as Japanese took precedence over the interview task.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although our study was designed to eliminate some of the variables that complicated the previous study, we ended up introducing a new variable: Japanese conversational norms. In introducing Japanese, we moved the interview firmly into the realm of Japanese conversational norms. However, a useful result of this was being granted a perspective from which to see how cultural norms of interaction may, under certain conditions, be more determinant of behavior than language proficiency. While there can be no doubt that the students' control of their own language was greater than that of English, this was not manifested as control of the interview. Rather, it seems that when speaking Japanese, they abrogated a greater degree of control to the interviewee, who was allowed to speak for longer, was questioned less frequently and broke silences more often than the student interviewers in the Japanese interviews. This behavior conforms to the norms of Japanese interaction, where a different kind of relationship is established between the participants, one in which control of the conversation is assumed by the higher status participant. In this case, the interviewee, being both older and a professor, corresponded to this role and the interviewees, either consciously or otherwise, adopted a less assertive role.

It is interesting to note that, whereas the previous study found that the student interviewers were unable to successfully exert directional control of the interviews in English, this study found that, while this lack of control may be real, the students were able to exert a greater amount of directional control in English than in Japanese. Culture and the conversational norms of the speech community clearly played a role in determining the degree of directional control students were able to exercise. Future research will be required to examine the nature of this interface in more depth.

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