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**How Do Non-native Speakers Evaluate Native Speakers' Explanations?
An Analysis of Perspectives and Linguistic Behaviors
Affecting the Evaluation**

YANAGIDA Naomi

The number of foreign residents living in Japan is increasing year by year, and nearly all of them have occasion to visit local government offices. In response to this rapid increase in the number of non-native speakers of Japanese, various proposals have been made for the use of *Yasashii Nihongo* ('Easy Japanese') to facilitate communication. Many efforts have been made to this end, and specialists in Japanese Language Education have become involved in such ways as providing training in the use of Easy Japanese.

However a question arises: how are the adjustments in language use made to convey information in Easy Japanese evaluated by the non-native speakers who are recipients of that information? It is vital to take the recipients' point of view into account when evaluating the effectiveness of measures such as Easy Japanese, but so far few studies reflecting this seem to have appeared. This study examines interactions that non-native speakers experience in dealing with local authorities, focusing on explanations provided by native to non-native speakers, analyzing how the non-native speakers evaluate these explanations, and thereby clarifying the perspectives that influence their evaluation, and how these perspectives are expressed in the native speakers' verbal behavior.

For this analysis I use as a framework the factors constituting native speakers' evaluation that I extracted in a previous study. These factors are arranged in two groups, "overall impression" and "evaluated behaviors." The first group consists of two factors: "active engagement" and "calm attitude," while the second consists of "explanation appropriate for the recipient," "concrete explanation of language" and "explanation targeted for non-native speakers."

In this study I conduct two analyses of these factors in native speakers' explanations. In the first analysis I elucidate which factors influence the evaluations of the explanations by the native speakers, and the second analysis builds on this to elucidate the concrete verbal behavior that influences the evaluations.

Analysis 1 examines the correlations between the raw scores of evaluations by non-native speakers and their rankings of the native speakers' explanations. The data for this analysis concerns three types of textual data (a lexical item, a sentence, and the text of a short announcement), which were explained in the presence of a non-native speaker by two native speakers with little experience

in communicating with non-native speakers (one male and one female), and by two with experience in teaching Japanese to non-native speakers (one male and one female), resulting in data consisting of 12 recorded explanations. The evaluations were performed by 60 non-native speakers (44 Chinese, 8 Korean, 4 Russian, and 1 Thai, German, Portuguese and Vietnamese). Of these 37 were advanced learners who had achieved the N1 level on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, and 23 intermediate learners at the N2 level or lower.

The non-native speakers evaluated the three types of explanations for each of the four native speakers on a five-point scale for 20 items corresponding to the three “evaluated behaviors” factors and for 18 items corresponding to the two “overall impression” factors. The averages of these scores for each factor were then calculated. The non-native speakers were also asked to rank the four explanations of each type of textual data from one to four, and to give a free-form explanation of each ranking. By calculating the correlation coefficient between the average evaluation scores for each factor with the rankings of each explanation, it was possible to determine which factors had the greatest effect on how the non-native speakers evaluated the explanations.

The results show that the factors “active engagement,” “calm attitude” and “explanation appropriate for the recipient” had a greater affect than the remaining two. This finding suggests that the degree of involvement in the conversation and adjusting one’s speech to the partner’s degree of understanding are more effective than fine linguistic adjustments.

Analysis 2 was performed to determine which verbal behaviors had the greatest influence on evaluations by the non-native speakers. The discourse data for the native speaker whose explanations were most highly ranked (the female with experience in teaching Japanese) was compared to the data for the one whose explanations had the lowest ranking (the male with experience in teaching Japanese). In addition, the factors which showed the greatest difference between averaged scores for the relevant items were determined, and the non-native speakers’ written explanations for their rankings were examined. This comprehensive analysis made it possible to locate the positions in the discourse data that illustrate the verbal behaviors characterized by those factors showing the greatest difference in scores: “active engagement” and “explanation appropriate for the recipient.”

High evaluations were found to result from the highly-ranked explainer’s active involvement, which was seen in the great quantity of utterances, and in the cooperative atmosphere created when the explainer’s utterance would overlap with the recipient’s, predicting what the recipient was intending to say, and also from the explainer’s consideration for the recipient’s degree of understanding, seen in repeated utterance corrections in response to indications of the recipient’s difficulty in understanding. On the other hand, while the lowest-ranked explainer attempted to employ a style of speech identified as easy to understand in previous research on Easy Japanese, such as by speaking in short sentences, his passive engagement seen in a paucity of utterances, and his employment of behaviors seen as typical of instructors of Japanese, such as asking the non-native speaker to say what they did not understand, or to explain the meanings of words, resulted in an asymmetry with the recipient and a low evaluation.

Based on these results, it can be said that non-native speakers evaluate the explanations of

native speakers in terms of their degree of engagement in the conversation, their response to the recipient's level of understanding, and in the establishment of a relationship of equality.

The concept of Easy Japanese tends to focus one's attention on linguistic adjustments, but the results of this study demonstrate that when a non-native speaker receives an explanation from a native speaker, their evaluation of the explanation will not depend simply on whether they managed to understand the explanation, but also on the basic attitude shown by the explainer, that is how sincerely they were engaged with the recipient.

All of this suggests that whether in a contact situation between non-native and native speakers, or in a situation with only native speakers, the participants want to achieve mutual understanding based on mutual respect, which is a prerequisite for communication to take place. Accordingly, it is important for local authorities, even before making any linguistic adjustments, to be aware of the importance of a sincere attitude toward non-native speakers. Further, specialists in Japanese Language Education involved in the dissemination of Easy Japanese must not forget the importance of this fundamental principal.

(Hitotsubashi University)

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