Variation in Interlanguage
with Special Reference to Articles
and Pronouns

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Realization of interlanguage by learners is claimed to be influenced by such factors as situational, linguistic and learning contexts, and also by the learners' putative conscious grammatical knowledge. This paper examines how Japanese EFL learners vary in the production accuracy of such cohesive devices as articles and pronouns when given two different production tasks (i.e. written production task and oral production task). Not all the forms analyzed in the experiment showed the same variation pattern between the two tasks: pronouns and indefinite articles varied in accuracy depending upon which production task was given, while definite articles were found insensitive to the task type. It is argued that realization of interlanguage is affected, not only by the amount of attention required by the task, but also by saliency of the forms and frequency of the learner's past exposure to these forms.

1. Introduction

It has been suggested that interlanguage varies among individual learners and its realization also varies within the same individual learner under different situational or linguistic conditions, or even different tasks. Tarone (1983) cited those studies which showed the differing effects of tasks on the learner's production of interlanguage (Dickerson 1975, Schmidt 1980, Beebe 1980) and claimed that the learner's language varies systematically in accordance with the amount of attention paid to language form required by different tasks: the more attention the task causes the learner to pay to language form, the more grammatical accuracy the learner tends to produce.

However, it is reported that not every linguistic form increases in accuracy under monitored conditions where the learner is supposed to be able to pay much attention to form. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 64) claim that "the linguistic domain of the monitor in most L2 learners is limited to lower-level rules of the language, those that
are easy to conceptualize and do not require mental gymnastics.” It follows from their claim that rules for such forms as the third-person singular present verb marker “-s” will belong to “lower-level rules,” which can be learnt consciously and function as the “Monitor,” whereas the rules for forms like articles, in contrast, will belong to higher-level rules, which are too complex to be learnt consciously and function as the “Monitor.”

Tarone (1985) takes a different view on this matter. She shows that accuracy in such forms as articles and the direct object pronoun “it” actually decreased under a monitored condition (i.e. written grammaticality judgement test), whereas the third-person singular “-s” became more accurate under the same task, with the plural marker “-s” having almost the same rate of accuracy in both monitored condition and two less monitored conditions (i.e. description task and narrative task.) She hypothesized that the nature of the tasks would be the cause of the observed decrease in accuracy rates: the narrative task required the most cohesive discourse while the written grammar test required the least cohesive discourse, with the description task in between.

The arguments presented to date can be summarized as follows:
(1) The rules for the use of articles are too complicated to learn consciously, whereas those rules for the use of the third-person singular “-s” and the direct object pronoun are easy to learn.
(2) Krashen’s Monitor Theory claims that consciously learnable forms (e.g. third-person “-s,” pronoun “it”) will increase in accuracy under monitored conditions, and consciously unlearnable forms, forms to be “acquired” rather than “learned” (e.g. articles), will have the same rate of accuracy both under monitored and less monitored conditions.
(3) Tarone shows that the direct object pronoun, one of Krashen’s learnable forms, in effect, decreased in accuracy under monitored conditions, and so did articles, Krashen’s unlearnable forms, under the same conditions. Based on this observation, Tarone hypothesized that this variation was caused not so much by the differing conditions as by the difference in discourse cohesiveness, for which the direct object pronoun and articles are thought to be responsible.

We must conclude at this point that it is not clear whether such forms as the direct object pronoun and articles will actually increase in accuracy under monitored conditions.

The present paper addresses the following questions by experiment:
(1) Do such cohesive devices as articles and pronouns (including the direct object pronoun “it”) vary in accuracy depending upon a monitored condition (written production task) and a less monitored condition (oral production task)?
(2) Do indefinite articles and definite articles (anaphoric “the” and exophoric “the”) actually vary in accuracy across the tasks, depending upon whether or not learners have
conscious grammatical knowledge about the rules?

In our experiment we kept the tasks within a single discourse mode (i.e. "narrative") so that the variation in accuracy would not be due to the difference in discourse cohesiveness of the tasks themselves.

2. Experiment Design and Procedure

2.1 SUBJECTS AND FORMS

Subjects are 80 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Administration and Social Sciences at Fukushima University, taking Freshman EFL courses. They are from two groups: Group A (41 subjects) and Group B (39 subjects), respectively. The students in each group are at approximately the same level in English proficiency.

The forms analyzed in the experiment are articles and pronouns. Definite articles are further divided into anaphoric "the" and exophoric "the." Pronouns include both the direct object pronoun "it" and personal pronouns ("she," "her," etc.).

2.2 DATA COLLECTION

A written production task was administered to the subjects in Group A. A series of pictures taken from Tarone and Yule (1989) (see Appendix 1) was presented to them. They were given a sheet of paper and then instructed to write in English what happened in the pictures in a way they would write a brief essay on the episode to show their friends. The "supermarket" and the "shelf" in the pictures were specified in the instruction given. The subjects were told to use these specified words in producing their story. Some words (e.g. bottle) were already given so that the subjects might not find the task too difficult to do. They were given 10 minutes for task. (A pilot experiment carried out indicated that a 10-minute-task was enough.)

An oral production task was administered to Group B. The same series of pictures used in the written task was presented to them. But this time they were instructed to describe the episode orally. They were given two minutes for the task. (Another pilot experiment had shown that two minutes was enough.) Each subject's response was tape-recorded and transcribed in standard orthography for subsequent analyses.

An error correction task was carried out to investigate the subjects' conscious grammatical knowledge about the rules for the use of articles. At the start of the second session of the experiment implemented a week after, we returned the work to each subject (in the case of Group B, the transcribed version) and asked him/her to correct the errors underlined; a caret (\) was inserted where a word was found missing. In correcting each error, the subjects were also asked to make either of the following two choices:

(A) I am conscious of the rule.
(B) This way of saying sounds correct.
Those who marked (A) were asked to write down what the rule was that they were conscious of. In case they were unable to formulate the rule, they were encouraged to give whatever reason for correction. Some articles used correctly were also underlined and subjects were also asked to choose either of the two reasons above. (See Appendix 2.)

2.3 SCORING PROCEDURE
Each group's accuracy rate in the use of each form was calculated according to the following formula:

\[
\text{Accuracy rate} = \frac{\text{Total correct uses across the subjects}}{\text{Total obligatory contexts across the subjects}} \times 100
\]

Repetition and repair frequently occurred in the orally produced data in Group B. The following are typical examples: “a woman—a woman came—uh—a woman has—uh—come in the supermarket”; “a old woman—an old woman went shopping.” Such repetition and repair were treated as single obligatory contexts, respectively.

3. Predictions
The following predictions are made for the experiment.
Prediction 1: Almost the same accuracy rate will hold regarding personal pronouns between the written task and the oral task; the accuracy rate of the direct object pronoun “it” will be higher in the written task than in the oral task.
Prediction 2: With the subjects who have conscious grammatical knowledge about the rules of articles, the accuracy rate of articles will be higher in the written task than in the oral task.
Prediction 3: With the subjects who do not have such knowledge about the rules of articles, the accuracy rate of articles will not vary across the written and oral tasks.

4. Rationales
The various rationales for the above predictions are as follows:
(1) Rationale for Prediction 1
After six years of learning and exposure to the case forms of personal pronouns (“lower-level” rules), the subjects are supposed to have “learned” and “acquired” them. If acquired knowledge is independent of the “Monitor,” personal pronouns are predicted not to vary in accuracy depending upon whether or not the task is monitored. As to the direct object pronoun “it,” though the subjects are also supposed to have acquired its case form, we predict that it will be omitted more frequently in the oral task than in the written task for the reason that “it” is apparently redundant in Japanese discourse style:
in Japanese discourse the form “soreo” equivalent to English direct object pronoun “it” is often omitted. We expect that when the subjects cannot sufficiently monitor their English, as during the oral task, they will frequently omit “it” due to L1 discourse interference. As the result, its accuracy rate is predicted to decrease in the oral task. (2) Rationale for Prediction 2

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), articles are not included in the linguistic domain of the Monitor mostly because of its complexity, and therefore the learner’s conscious grammatical knowledge about the article rules does not function as the Monitor even under monitored conditions, such as the written task, much less under less monitored conditions, such as the oral task. If we follow their argument, we should expect more or less the same accuracy for article use both in the written task and the oral task. However, when we take into account the nature of formal instruction given to the subjects, their argument does not seem to apply wholly to our subjects. They have been encouraged to learn consciously some of the article rules as part of the English grammar in classes in junior and senior high schools. In other words, as far as Japanese EFL learners are concerned, they are supposed to have consciously learned some article rules and have placed them within the domain of the Monitor.

Article rules typically used in making a narrative are “first-mention use” and “anaphoric use”: when a referent (person or thing), which is an indefinite singular countable noun, is mentioned for the first time in the story, use “a(an)”; when the same referent is repeated, use “the” (anaphora). These two types of articles are expected to be used frequently in the story. In addition, since at the instruction of the tasks the “supermarket” and the “store” were specified, exophoric “the” is also expected to be used. These three article rules are often taught during “grammar lessons” in Japan, and they do not seem so difficult to learn consciously. But the subjects probably have not “acquired” those rules yet, partly because their L1 does not have articles in the linguistic system, and partly because they have not practiced the use of articles enough through communicative activities. In short, some subjects probably have conscious grammatical knowledge about some article rules mentioned above, but they cannot produce articles correctly in spontaneous communication. We expect that their conscious grammatical knowledge will function as the “Monitor” in the written task, where they have “time” enough to be able to “focus” on their English, rather than in the oral task, where these two conditions of “time” and “focus” on form are not met. Therefore we predict that articles will increase in accuracy in the written task than in the oral task. (3) Rationale for Prediction 3

The subjects who have no conscious grammatical knowledge about the article rules will supply articles by “feel,” which is supposed to be unrelated to the Monitor, and which is supposed to function in the written task as well as in the oral task. We predict
that they will achieve almost the same accuracy level across the tasks.

5. Results

5.1 ACCURACY RATES OF PRONOUNS

The frequencies of correct and deviant uses of pronouns are presented in Table 1. The chi-square ($x^2$) tests were used for statistical analyses (Yates' correction was incorporated), and the following findings were observed:

(1) Personal pronouns had almost the same accuracy rate between the written task and the oral task. There was no significant difference in accuracy between the two tasks ($x^2=0.06$, df=1, N.S.).

(2) The direct object pronoun increased in accuracy in the written task. There was a significant difference in accuracy between the tasks ($x^2=12.11$, df=1, p<.001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1. FREQUENCIES OF CORRECT AND DEVIANT USES OF PRONOUNS</th>
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<td>Personal pronoun</td>
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<td>Written task</td>
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<td>Oral task</td>
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5.2 Accuracy rates of articles

The frequencies of correct and deviant uses of articles produced by those who have conscious grammatical knowledge about article rules and by those who have no such knowledge are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. The following findings were observed.

(1) Accuracy rate of indefinite articles: Those who have conscious grammatical knowledge about the use of indefinite articles scored higher in the written task than in the oral task. The difference in accuracy was statistically significant between the two tasks ($x^2=20.06$, df=1, p<.001). Those who do not have such knowledge scored slightly higher in the written task than in the oral task, but the difference in accuracy was not statistically significant ($x^2=0.01$, df=1, N.S.).

(2) Accuracy rate of anaphoric “the”: Those who have conscious grammatical knowledge about the use of anaphoric “the” scored higher in accuracy in the written task than in the oral task, but the difference was not statistically significant ($x^2=.43$, df=1, N.S.). Those who do not have such knowledge, however, scored much higher in the oral task than in the written task, but the difference in accuracy did not reach statistical significance ($x^2=2.31$, df=1, N.S.).
(3) Accuracy rate of exophoric “the”: Those who have conscious grammatical knowledge about the use of exophoric “the” scored higher in the oral task than in the written task, but the difference in accuracy was not statistically significant ($x^2=1.04$, df=1, N.S.). Those who have no such knowledge also scored higher in the oral task than in the written task, but the difference did not reach statistical significance ($x^2=.57$, df=1, N.S.).

6. Discussion

This section proposes to examine the three predictions with reference to the results illustrated above.

(1) Prediction 1

The results turned out to be consistent with the prediction that personal pronouns would produce almost the same accuracy between the two tasks, while “it” would produce less accuracy in the oral task than in the written task. The prediction was also confirmed statistically.

(2) Prediction 2

The results did not prove to be totally consistent with the prediction that those subjects who have conscious grammatical knowledge about the use of articles would produce articles more accurately in the written task than in the oral task. Only indefinite articles turned out as predicted; though anaphoric “the” produced higher accuracy rate in the written task than in the oral task, the difference in accuracy rate failed to reach statistical significance; exophoric “the” produced higher accuracy rate in the oral task than in the written task, though the difference in accuracy was not statistically significant.

Why was Prediction 2 confirmed only in the case of indefinite articles but not in the cases of two types of definite articles? We speculate that in the oral task the subjects tended to supply definite articles by being urged to subconsciously “fill an empty slot” during production. Then, why was “the,” and not “a(an),” chosen as a “filler” in the oral
This question could be answered if we look at it in terms of "frequency" and "saliency." Learners have been exposed to definite articles far more frequently than to indefinite articles through six or more years of formal instruction in English. The frequencies of definite articles and indefinite articles used in junior high school English textbooks were counted ("A Complete List of Words and Sentences in English Textbooks Published in Japan - Junior High School -" (1982): Keisuisha). The average frequencies of occurrences among authorized textbooks were 452.6 for "the" and 320.2 for "a(an)," respectively. Though the frequency count deals with junior high school textbooks, our speculation on frequency seems tenable. As regards saliency, definite articles, when spoken, are audibly more salient than indefinite articles. With these two factors of frequency and phonetic saliency working side by side, learners could have subconsciously internalized "the" more "naturally" than "a(an)." The oral task, where their conscious grammatical knowledge about article rules is supposed to be relatively independent of monitoring, might have resulted in more natural (by feel) and more frequent use of "the" as a kind of "filler" for "an empty slot" than the written task. These two factors (i.e. frequency and saliency) seem to be related to the non-significant difference in accuracy of anaphoric "the" across the two tasks, and to the higher accuracy rate of exophoric "the" in the oral task than in the written task. This point will be taken up again in the following section.

(3) Prediction 3

The results of statistical analysis proved to be consistent with the prediction that those subjects who have no conscious grammatical knowledge about the use of articles would not vary in accuracy between the two tasks. The difference in accuracy did not reach statistical significance in any of the three types of articles as predicted. However, the mean scores of anaphoric "the" and exophoric "the" in the two tasks do not seem to support the prediction. As shown in Table 3, those scores were much higher in the oral task than in the written task. At this point, the justification based on the factors of frequency and saliency speculated upon above again seems plausible: definite articles tend to be produced as a "filler" more naturally under monitor-free conditions than monitored conditions. It seems that even those who have no conscious grammatical knowledge about the use of "the" subconsciously supplied "the" as a "filler" in its obligatory contexts. This can be the cause of the higher accuracy rates in the oral task than in the written task.

7. Conclusion

Articles and pronouns varied in production accuracy in the two different tasks (written and oral), though the tasks were within a single discourse mode (i.e. "narrative"). Not all the forms analyzed in the experiment showed the same accuracy level. As
predicted, the direct object pronoun increased in accuracy in the written task, while personal pronouns proved constant in accuracy rate across the tasks. Indefinite articles also varied in accuracy level as predicted. Definite articles, however, did not show the predicted variation.

Our experiment seems to be fairly successful in inducing at least some facets of interlanguage. One facet of interlanguage seems to have the nature quite sensitive to the amount of monitoring. Another facet seems to have the nature sensitive to factors such as phonetic saliency and frequency of the linguistic forms.

It is only by designing the two-way experiment (written [+monitor] and oral [−monitor]) that we are able to glean the nature of interlanguage. This seems to hold particularly true with articles and pronouns.

(An earlier version of this paper was orally presented at the 1990 meeting of the Tohoku Academic Society of English Language Education in Akita.)

References


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富田裕一 1989. 「日本人高校生の中間言語についての一考察　形態素習得順序研究」『中部
Appendix 1

下に1〜4の絵があります。絵を見て何が起こったのかを考えて下さい。この光景を見ていなかったあなたの友人に出来る事説明することにします。話の筋を英語で言う（書いて）下さい。その際辞書等は用いないで下さい。スペリングにさほどだる必要はありません。

(注意)
1. この店は友人とよく一緒に行く店であると仮定します。
2. 絵の中の子供は「ビン」をすぐそばにある棚からとったものとします。
3. supermarket, shelf（棚）という語を必ず使用してください。
(ヒント）ビン（bottle）、たな（shelf）、むすめ（daughter）、〜をとる（take）、〜をおく（put）

Appendix 2 An example of the error correction task

A woman come in the supermarket. A woman see her friend with her daughter. Two begin speaking. Her daughter take a bottle from the shelf. And a bottle was put in a woman's bag.

訂正 A or B Aを選んだ人はルール（理由）を書いて下さい。

①（ ）（ ）（ ）
②（ ）（ ）（ ）
③（ ）（ ）（ ）
④（ ）（ ）（ ）

次は正しい用法です。

A or B Aを選んだ人はルール（理由）を書いて下さい。

⑤（ ）（ ）
⑥（ ）（ ）