Effects of Participating in Multicultural Communication for English Learners on their Second and Third Language Use

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes effects of participating in international communication in English as a lingua franca among second or third language speakers who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. By analyzing English conversations between eight pairs of Japanese students and overseas students from China, South Korea, and Vietnam, this study demonstrates how the English learners attempt to find a way to get close to each other at their first meeting by the language they learned in different countries. Through the conversation analysis in terms of the number of utterances as well as the occurrence of silence and the use of back-channeling, it becomes apparent that social or cultural norms by which the participants form the basis of communication strategies can be different from the ones widely shared in English-speaking countries. Unlike in English conversations between first language speakers, they show a great degree of tolerance to frequent silence and to the extensive use of back-channeling that is often labeled as negative transfer from Japanese linguistic behaviors. Silence can be regarded as a process of making efforts to make themselves understood in English and back-channeling as a sign of showing interests rather than a lack of understanding of English communication style. Furthermore, the shifting degree of involvement in conversations observable in their utterances highlights the moments when their motivations for participation are increased. The research on factors related to positive changes in their attitudes supports the view that learning opportunities through multicultural communication should be actively incorporated into language education.

Keywords: conversation analysis, English education, expanding circle countries, Japanese students, learners' motivations