Reported Speech by Japanese EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study discusses the errors in written reports of Japanese EFL learners when they use a reported speech to describe a TED presentation of their choice as a part of a course on English Presentation. A better understanding of these reported speech errors helps us delve into the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. On surface these errors may seem like a grammatical error in terms of the use of pronouns and tense forms, but these errors can lead us to a deeper understanding of reported speech in English and Japanese.

Keywords: English, Japanese, reported speech, tense, pronoun

Reported speech in Japanese

When someone other than the speaker of a statement reports the utterance, it could be called a reported speech. However, the form of the reported utterance can be directly quoted as in (1) or it can be reported based on the understanding of the person who reports the statement depending on the context as in (2) and (3).

(1) She said, 'It's raining heavily, I cannot go to school.'

(2) She refused to go to school because it was raining heavily.

(3) She regretted her not being able to go to school because it was raining heavily.

In Japanese, this distinction between a direct and an indirect speech becomes difficult to understand unless the shared knowledge of the interactants is taken into consideration. Coulmas (1985: 57-58) presents

the intricacies of not being able to distinguish between direct and indirect speech in Japanese. Sentence (4) can have possible translations as stated in (4 a – f) and direct interpretations as in (4g) and (4h) are also possible.

(4) Ganbareba wakaru yōni naru to kare wa itta.

> Try-hard-if understand become COMP he TOP say.PAST

> (4a) He said that if I'd try hard I would understand.

> (4b) He said that if you'd try hard you would understand.

> (4c) He said that if she tried hard she would understand.

> (4d) He[1] said that if he[1] tried hard he[1] would understand.

> (4e) He[1] said that if he[1] tried hard they would understand.

> (4f) He[1] said that if he[2] tried hard they would understand.

> (4g) He said: 'If I try hard I will understand.'

> (4h) He said: 'If you try hard you will understand.'

In Japanese, grammatically the embedding of complement clauses and direct quotations is marked by the same quotative particle *to*. If the verb honorific forms, deictic pronouns and some sentence final particles do not indicate speaker perspective because all these can be dropped, there is no way to distinguish between direct and indirect speech. There are no changes in the word order or tense. Coulmas (1985: 56) explains the use of a sentence final particle *yo* in (5b) the embedded clause that functions as an emphasis particle and suggests that it has the speaker perspective and that makes it direct speech unlike (5a) that does not have the particle.

(5a) hoteru no heya kara nigeta hitobito wa 'matatakuma ni kuroi kemuri ga jūmanshita'

> hotel GEN room from escaped people TOP immediately DAT black smoke NOM fill.PAST

>> to katatte iru.

>> COMP tell.PROG be.PRES

'The people who escaped from the hotel are saying that the rooms filled with black smoke immediately.'

(5b) hoteru no heya kara nigeta hitobito wa 'matatakuma ni kuroi kemuri ga jūmanshita

hotel GEN room from escaped people TOP immediately black smoke NOM fill.PAST

> yo' to katatte iru.

> ! COMP tell.PROG be.PRES

In this paper, I use the theories of public and private self in Hirose (2000, 2018) and compositional approach to interpreting English tenses in Wada (2001) to explain the errors in English reported speech by Japanese EFL learners.

English Reported Speech Errors by Japanese EFL Learners

The data collected for this study is part of the classroom written assignment by the university students. The students gave an English summary report of a TED lecture that they had chosen themselves to hear. They could choose to hear the lecture in English or Japanese or both. The errors that were noticed in the reported speech can be generalized in terms of the pronouns and tense errors of the embedded clause of direct and indirect speech. First, I focus on the use of pronouns in the reported speech of the written assignments that I received. Some representative examples are given in (6) – (8).

Pronouns

(6) She said that introversive person have great creative power through some examples her showed.

(7) He advised the graduates that your experience will somehow connect in your future.

Tense

(8a) 'Keep looking, don't settle'

(8b) He said if you haven't find it yet, you should keep looking and don't settle.

Public and Private Self in English and Japanese

Hirose (2000, p. 1626)[1] explains that in Japanese there is a clear distinction in public and private expression. Public expression is an act of communication and presupposes the presence of an addressee as in example (9)

(8) Ame da yo

　　rain COP I.tell.you

　　'It is raining, I tell you.'

　　Whereas, (9) is a private expression where the speaker speaks aloud to himself. It is a thought expressing act.

(9) Ame da.

　　rain COP

　　'It is raining.'

The presence of such sentence final particles *yo, ne* distinguish direct and indirect speech as suggested in (5a) and (5b) above but as is done in English with sentence final expressions like *you know*, *isn't it* and thought expressing sentence equivalents like (9). These two linguistic functions of communicative expression and thought expression become different in the two languages. Hirose (2018, p. 386) gives a contrastive example (10) – (12) in English and Japanese to explain that Japanese has a special word for private self I *jibun* and can refer to any person's private self, whereas, in English personal pronouns are used instead to represent the private self.

(10) {Boku/Kimi/Kare/Kanojo} wa jibun wa oyoge-nai to itta.

　　{I/you/he/she} TOP self TOP can.swim-NEG QUOT said

　　Lit. '{I/You/He/She} said that self can't swim.'

(11) {I/You/He/She} said {I/You/He/She} (self)can't swim.

The use of *jibun* has two different uses. (11) has the viewpoint use that allows for a replacement with a pronoun. The reflexive use, however, does not allow for this replacement in Japanese, as mentioned in (12).

(12)Ken[1] wa {jibun/*kare[1]} o hihanshita.

　　Ken TOP {self/him} ACC criticized

　　'Ken criticized himself.'

Pronoun Errors

When looking at the reported speech errors, we understand the difference in the way public and private self is expressed in the two languages. The learners end up taking time to imbibe this difference and while

they try to understand this, based on the perspective of interlanguage pragmatics, the errors like (6) occur. In (6), which is repeated in (13a), the complement clause has *her* and that is used instead of 'she' in order to replace *jibun* not understanding that the use of *jibun* in this sentence is the reflexive use and it can be a replaced by *'she'* in English. The Japanese equivalent of (6) in (13b).

(13a) She said that introversive person have great creative power through some examples her showed.

(13b) naikoutekina hito wa souzouryoku wo motteru to kanojo wa introvert person TOP creative ACC have.PRES COMP she TOP

    jibun no rei de misete itta.

    self GEN example BEN show.PROG say.PAST

The students end up reporting by using a different form of pronoun. They also used inconsistent pronouns. (7) shows the use of *your* in the complement clause for the subject of the complement clause *graduates* instead of *their*. (14a) is a repetition of (7) and (14b) is its Japanese equivalent.

(14a) He advised the graduates that your experience will somehow connect in your future.

(14b) kare wa sotsugyosa ni jibun no keiken wa nantonaku he TOP graduates DAT self GEN experience TOP somehow

    shourai wo musubu to susumeshimashita.

    future ACC connect COMP advise.PAST

Section 1 explains that reported speech in Japanese whether in direct or indirect speech uses *to* which is different from the use of complementizer *that* in English. Hirose (2000) explains that the direct speech reports the public self of the reporter, that is, the speaker of the matrix clause. The indirect speech, however, is the private self of the speaker of the matrix clause. In indirect speech, the pronoun of the complement clause cannot be associated with the reporter of the matrix clause. (15a) and (15b) explains this theory (Hirose 2000, p. 1641).

(15a) Haruo wa [boku ni ziko no sekinin ga aru] to itta.

Haruo TOP I DAT accident GEN responsibility NOM exist QUOT say. PAST

    Haruo said, ' I am responsible for the accident'.

(15b) Haruo wa { [boku] ni ni ziko no sekinin ga aru} to itta.

    Haruo TOP I DAT accident GEN responsibility NOM exist QUOT say.PAST

    Haruo said that I was responsible for the accident.

    [ ] public expression { } private expression

The use of *your* in (14a) suggests a necessity for a two-step understanding of the difference in the reported speech of the two languages.

The use of a pronoun in the complement clause is ambiguous because of the choice of public or private self of the reporter of the reported speech. This happens because the pronoun jibun has the viewpoint use and it can be replaced by the original speaker or the reporter.

Even though the matrix clause has an object *graduates* and *jibun* refers to the graduates, the reporters ended up using the direct speech form (missing out on the quotation mark) just as (15a) is a direct reported speech.

To sum up this section, the use of pronouns in the direct and indirect reported speech of the learners shows that the two languages have different ways of reporting a thought expression compared to a communicative act with an addressee. The two different uses of *jibun* and it being replaceable by a pronoun only in one of such uses creates a big contrastive difference between the reported speech of the two languages. This results in the errors by the learners, which demonstrates this difference.

Tense Errors

The next type of error noticed were the errors in the tense of the complement clause of the reported speech. When reporting the original speaker's situation the tense of the complement clause did not need to be backshifted always (Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, 2015) based on the meaning of the utterance. For example, '...what he loves' in (16) does not need to be in past tense because the speaker still loves that he had lost. In (17), however, the verb 'drop out' needs to be backshifted to past tense to refer to the time of action in past tense.

    He said that he did not lose his desire to live when he had lost what he loves.

He said that he drop out of Reed College.

The tense errors in the complement clause of a reported speech can be explained using the public and private self as explained in section 3 above. When talking about the compositional approach of interpreting English tense, Wada (2001) cites Hirose (2000) and suggests an explanation for semantic and syntactic differences between Japanese and English indirect speech.

The use of tense in the indirect speech complement clause is attributed to the 'private self' of the reporter when it comes to Japanese, while it is attributed to the 'public self' of the reporter in English.

(15) [Mary said{Nancy [was] pregnant}]

(16) [Mary wa {Nancy ga ninshin shiteiru} to itta]

   Mary TOP Nancy NOM pregnant be-PRES QUOT say-PAST

   [ ] public expression

   { } private expression Wada (2001: 275)

In English, the use of *was* in (15) is the reporter's responsibility to backshift the time of the state of the verb *being pregnant*. Based on the context, the fact of Nancy being pregnant is reported. In Japanese, however, all the elements of the complement clause are attributed to the private self of the original speaker because it constitutes private expression. This is the reason why (18) seems natural to Japanese EFL learners. Reported speech (17) presupposes the utterance in (18).

He said 'I drop out of Reed College.'

Coulmas (1985) explains that in indirect speech, the reporter is free to add some information from the reporter's own point of view with the knowledge of the mental state of the original speaker. Wada (2001: 275) adds that in English in terms of tense, the reporter as public self superimposes his or her public expression on the original speaker's private expression. In (15), for example, underlying the reporter's public expression *was* is the original speaker's private expression *am*.

The Japanese equivalent of (18) and (17), respectively, are (19a) and (19b).

(19a) kare wa (reed daigaku) taigaku suru to itta.

   he TOP Reed College drop out do COMP say. PAST

   He said 'I drop out (of Reed College)'.

(19b) kare wa taigaku suru to itta.

> he TOP drop out do COMP say.PAST

> He said that he (would drop out or dropped out or then drops out).

Wada (2001: 283-284)[2] suggests that the tense interpretation of past tense in a complement clause is polysemous. This happens because of various tense interpretations deictically based on the time of action of the matrix clause and non-deictically because of the presence of two viewpoints, that is, the public self and private self.

Conclusion

The errors in the use of pronouns and tense of the complement clause of the reported speech by Japanese EFL learners confirm the theories about the differences in English and Japanese in terms of public – private self and tense interpretation. The two theories also help us understand why these possible errors occur in the language use of EFL learners. The relevant points understood include:

(a) The pronoun errors in the complement clause of reported speech written by Japanese EFL learners result from the indistinct differences in direct and indirect reported speech in Japanese.

(b) The difference in the use of public and private self in the two languages leads to errors based on the replacement of jibun as per viewpoint and reflexive use of the pronoun in the complement clause and in the backshifting of the tense interpretation in the complement clause.

(c) Tense interpretation of past tense in the complement clause also differs in the two languages. Japanese has more ambiguous tense interpretation due to the possibility of public and private self of the original speaker and the reporter. This leads to tense errors

Notes

1. In this study, Hirose's theory of public and private self includes the semantico-pragmatic interpretation of the speaker's and reporter's viewpoint in a reported speech.
2. Wada (2001) presents a compositional theory of tenses to explain the exceptional cases of tense interpretations in English. In this process, the

author uses Hirose's theory of public and private self to explain the tense of complement clause in English (and Japanese).

Abbreviations

ACC accusative   BEF benefactive   COP copula

COMP complementizer   DAT dative   GEN genitive

NEG negative marker   NOM nominative   PAST past tense

PRES present tense   PROG progressive   TOP topic marker

QUOT quotative

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