An EFL Learner's Continuum

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Abstract

Corrective feedback within the structure of Gibbons' process based on teacher mediation and mode continuum (2003) provides an integrated approach to language learning that can potentially suit the language learning needs in many Japanese EFL settings. The first section of this paper will provide a brief overview of literature in reference to: error correction, teacher mediation, mode continuum and a common Japanese EFL setting. The final section of this paper will identify and analyze nonstandard features of one Japanese EFL student's interlanguage and also address the issue of facilitating error correction, through the use of Gibbons' integration of teacher mediation and mode continuum.

Error correction often strikes up debate in ESL/EFL teaching communities. In many Japanese EFL contexts, few opportunities exist for students to speak English outside the classroom. This reality is further augmented by "considerable linguistic and conceptual distance between teacher and students, especially when they do not share the same language, assumptions, and life experiences" (Gibbons, 2003, p. 248). Using the constructs of teacher mediation and mode continuum, this paper proposes the facilitation of error correction as a co-constructive process between student and teacher which provides the necessary focused practice and proper consultation to help Japanese EFL

learners develop practice skills to maintain English language learning.The first section of this paper will provide a brief overview of the literature in reference to: error correction, teacher mediation, mode continuum and concludes with a description of a Japanese EFL setting. The final section of this paper will identify and analyze nonstandard features of one Japanese EFL student's interlanguage, while error correction is facilitated through a modified version of Gibbons' combined method of teacher mediation and mode continuum.

Error correction

Error correction is a form of information intended to restructure or reteach a student's incorrect answers. Panova and Lyster (2002) list seven types of error correction: recasts, translation, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, explicit correction,and repetition (p. 582–583). The authors also recommend that it is best to use various types of error correction rather than focusing on just one method (p. 592). In a Japanese EFL setting, Sato's study on the effects of error correction in the form of recasts indicated student recognition and repair of errors, culminated in a higher quality of student writing (2012). Another EFL study based in a Japanese university, which examined the practice of teacher error correction in the form of recasts reported student requests for more learner autonomy in order to address their own errors. Results also indicated that teachers should be more competent in explaining grammar issues (Deng, 2016). Arguments have been made against error correction based on ineffective teacher feedback strategies and poor student response (Truscott, 2007, Zamel, 1985 as cited in Deng, 2016).Yet, in support of error correction, Lightbrown, and Spada (2001) state that if students are not aware of their errors, they may not see how their errors differ from the teacher's

discourse (p. 212). A similar paradigm is suggested by Ellis, who states that "…
in both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, [forms
of error correction are] viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and
ensuring linguistic accuracy" (2009, p. 3). With such limited access to practice
speaking English, the Japanese L2 classroom needs to be a place that facilitates
student use of the language, as well as provide examples of proper use of
language; as stated by Norton "learning cannot proceed without exposure and
practice … the more exposure and practice, the more proficient the learner will
become" (Norton, 1995, p. 7). An argument which further supports the use of
error correction can be found in Nation and Yamamoto's integrated approach
to language learning, which suggests that "time on task" is essential to the
mastering of language (2012). In layman's terms the authors state that in order
to improve skills, a certain amount of practice time is required in order to make
an effective difference (p. 180). Practice time in the form of error correction can
provide students with a map of where to take the next learning step because,
without error correction, how can students determine what they need to learn,
or if there is any improvement in their language learning efforts.

Gibbons: Teacher Mediation-Mode Continuum

Drawing on Vygotsky's idea that learning originates in social interactions
(Louw et al., 1998), Gibbons' introduces Vysgotsy's sociocultural perspective
of mediation by contrasting the relationship between lawyer and client to the
relationship between teacher and student. The difference being that the client is
continually dependent on the lawyer's mediation of legal language. In contrast,
Vygotsky believed that teachers mediate student learning while facilitating a path
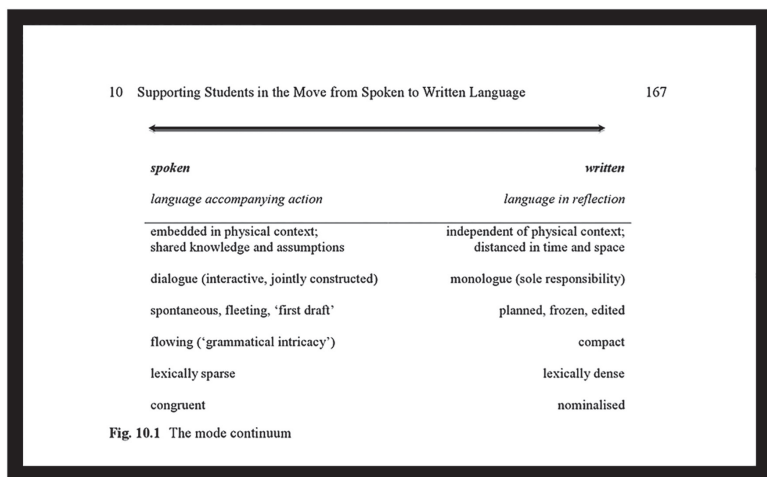to student autonomy (Gibbons, p. 249). Gibbons' use of Vygotsky's reference

Figure 1: Supporting Students in the Move from Spoken to Written Language, Derewianka, (2016, p.167)

to the teacher as a mediator (2003) bears a resemblance to research which suggests that the L2 teacher's role is to gradually pass over the responsibility of language learning to students while the mediator/teacher stands back and offers guidance when necessary (Nation and Yamamoto 2012; Jensen, 2008, Lantolf and Thorne, 2007). From a systemic functional linguistics perspective, Gibbons describes mode (reading and writing) continuum as the student's journey from" expressing their firsthand experience in oral language to … expressing academic knowledge in writing (p. 250)". Derewianka's description of mode continuum in figure 1, illustrates the move from spoken to written language as "language accompanying action at one end, language as in reflection at the other, and with a variety of intermediate states along the way" (2016, p. 167).

Combining the constructs of teacher mediation and mode continuum, Gibbons' research which draws on two ESL elementary school science classes (examining the laws of attraction) shows evidence of an increase in student talk-time and a decrease of teacher talk-time. Also the study implicated an increase

in student autonomy in the correct reconstruction of student discourse and is illustrated in figure 2 (Gibbons, 2003, p. 264). Using a mode of continuum, Gibbons (see Figure 2) demonstrates how a teacher mediates a student-centered approach to learning that allows students to observe their language skills develop in "real-time" (2003). Figure 2 also demonstrates a group effort to bring "… students firsthand experience in oral language to [the expressing] of academic knowledge in writing" (p. 253). Additionally, figure 2 clearly illustrates how the teacher acts as a guide with her students, and engages in minimal teacher-talk, yet mediates just often enough to encourage and increase student talk.

Similar to the work of many researchers, Gibbons promotes exposure to language learning skills while encouraging students to notice grammatical points such as articles or verb-ed endings (Gibbons, 2003; Nation and Yamaoto, 2012; Schmit,

Turn	Student	Teacher	Figure 2
1		tell us what happened	
2	Beatrice: em we put three magnets together/ it still wouldn't hold the gold nail		
3		can you explain that again?	
4	Beatrice: we/ we tried to put three magnets together . . to hold the gold nail . . even though we had three magnets . . it wouldn't stick		
1		tell us what you found out	
2	Michelle: we found out that the south and the south don't like to stick together		
3		now let's/let's start using our scientific language Michelle	
4	Michelle: the north and the north repelled each other and the south and the south also . . repelled each other but when we put the/ when we put the two magnets in a different way they/ they attracted each other		

Figure 2: Mode continuum demonstrates how a teacher mediates a student-centered approach.Gibbons. (2003,p.264)

2010; Lightbrown and Spada, 2001; Wajnryb,1990). The opportunity for students to be aware of their developing language exemplified in Gibbons' process shares a similarity with Schmidt's noticing hypothesis in which the author states, "people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (2010).

Gibbons use of scaffolding also promotes noticing, in that students see within the continuum the difference between their first attempts at speaking and their final product, which illustrates a more refined academic approach to speaking that is much closer to academic writing. Furthermore, it should be noted that Gibbons' use of signaling as a way to invite students, to encourage the reformulation of language further aligns with noticing as the teacher (mediator) draws learner attention (2003) to parts of language learning that students need to attend to (Schmidt, 2010).

Gibbons' process for teaching content in the ESL classroom in a group-oriented, student-centered and teacher-mediated manner also aligns well with Rebecca Oxford's social strategies, which cite that vast L2 learning opportunities are available in "asking questions, asking for clarification, and asking for help …via interaction with others … (Oxford, 2003, p. 14; Ehrman et al., 2003, p. 317). While Gibbons' process (2003) focuses on ESL instruction, its emphasis on "… understanding the dynamics that motivate … inter-group dynamics (Ehrman and Dörnyei1998; as cited in Ehrman et al., 2003, p. 322) provides great potential for application in Japanese EFL settings.

A Japanese EFL setting

In Japan, the origins of foreign language instruction and the influence of the grammar-translation method dates back to the Meiji period (1868–1913).

From that point on, foreign language teaching in Japan emphasized reading and writing. Language instruction basically remained the same in Japan until the late 1980s (Yamaoka, 2010) when in the spirit of introducing communicative language teaching into the education system, the Japanese government hired foreign language assistant teachers in Japanese high schools (Nishino, 2008, p. 29). The transition was not so easy, because, for many Japanese high school English teachers, the grammar-translation method was all they had ever known in terms of English language instruction (Gorsuch, 1998). Even in Japan today, with the pressures of university entrance exams and with the often forty plus students in high school English classes, grammar translation still reigns as a popular method of instruction. (Gorsuch, 1998; Mitchel, 2017; Taguchi, 2005; Goto Butler, 2015). According to Yamaoka in the traditional grammar-translation class, teachers read passages and had the students translate the passages sentence by sentence, followed by a teacher-led correction of the translation. Essentially reading and writing skills dominated instruction in the form of fill in the blanks or copying the teacher's notes with often little emphasis placed on speaking and listening skills (2010). In a Japan-based behavioral study drawing from a population of 924 university students at nine different universities, King concludes that "loss of face" appears to have a purely negative effect on Japanese EFL learners' level of oral production (2011). Studies also found that many Japanese teachers of English in both high school and university settings conducted classes entirely in Japanese. The study also reported that teachers often declined to speak English based on either inability or fear of making a mistake (King, 2011; Gorsuch, 1998). King further states that "silence as a strategy to maintain a positive face appeared to emanate from learners' second language anxiety and is [further compounded] by their preoccupation with providing 'correct' answers" (p. 84). Aspinal (2006) concludes that oral production in the Japanese EFL classroom is also hampered

by the notion that there is only one correct answer (as cited in Hosoki, 2011, p. 12). As a veteran foreign teacher in the Japanese education system, adjusting to the cultural significance of silence and the student's pursuit of one correct answer, can often leave an EFL educator frustrated and drained of motivation. However, a valuable resource can be found in Gibbons' notion that student-teacher co-construction of language facilitates a natural progression of language learning which draws on choices "rather than a finite rule for all" (Gibbons 250–251).

Proper application of Gibbons' approach can capitalize on Japanese EFL students' knowledge of grammar and further build on that knowledge to facilitate more integrated language learning opportunities.

The purpose of the first section of this paper is to help the reader understand the validity of using Gibbons' (2003) method based on teacher mediation and mode continuum to facilitate error correction in a Japanese EFL setting. This is significant because by doing error correction through student-teacher collaboration based on a modified version of Gibbons' method, EFL practitioners in Japan can model lessons to capitalize on what is, more often than not, the Japanese student's extensive experience of studying grammar.

Analysis

Considering the history of EFL instruction in Japan, the mention of studying English to many middle-aged or older Japanese people often sparks memories of long boring teacher-centered classes. This section of the paper will focus on my teaching experience with a 65-year-old Japanese EFL student to whom I give the pseudonym, Mari. A combination of teacher mediation and use of a modified mode continuum (Gibbons, 2003) to suit Mari's language needs (see

figures 3 and 4) provided an in-depth look at establishing a "linguistic bridge", between Mari's current language ability and how she reformulated her language to "represent a more standard form of writing and speaking" (Gibbons, 2003, p. 259).

Mari believes that conversation with a native English speaker is the best way to improve her language skills. She has made several trips abroad to English speaking countries and has had several opportunities to use English in social situations, but admits she had little advice on error correction (Mari, 2019). Schmidt suggests that L2 reliance on social interaction and exposure to English alone often results in an inability to grasp native-like norms of clear grammatical accuracy" (2011). Like Schmidt, many researchers attribute this inaccuracy to an inability to notice the language (Ellis, 2009; Ellis, 1997; Jensen, 2008; Richards, 2006; Schmidt, 2010). "In order to show that it makes more sense to have a range of ways to help … facilitate the learning process" (Nation and Yamamoto (2012, p. 168), Mari was encouraged throughout the process to engage the use of all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Mari's Continuum

Mari prepared a written text (an overseas trip with cousin) which provided content for two lessons that took place within the context of a face to face setting. In contrast to Gibbons' mode continuum/ teacher mediated method based on group work in a L2 science class (2003), Mari's continuum focused on her individual language needs which expressed the necessary grammar corrections needed in her prepared written text. Similar to Gibbons' method, Mari's learning process is based on clarification requests[1], meta-linguistic clues[2], student talk and student-teacher

collaboration.

Like many L2 speakers who have not had the opportunity to notice and correct their mistakes, aspects of Mari's "interlanguage have fossilized" (Ellis, 1997, p. 29). In order not to overwhelm her with corrections, we focused on only the following two errors: 1) those involving misuse of collocations involving the verb "play" and 2) those involving misuse of the two conjunctions "and/but". Schmidt states "that   knowledge of rules and metalinguistic awareness of all kinds belong to [a] higher level of awareness and proposes that noticing is necessary for second language acquisition and that understanding is facilitative but not required"(2010, p.5). In Mari's case, it seemed that both noticing and understanding facilitated more accuracy.

Figure 3 illustrates that by isolating collocations with play, through the use of grammar sheets (see index) Mari viewed a broader picture of the collocations, and then was able to return to reformulate her own text; Ellis refers to this as "noticing the gap" (1997, p. 57). In Mari's case, noticing her mistakes allowed her to apply the knowledge she learned from the worksheet (Figure 3) to reform her sentences to represent a more "standard form of written English" (Gibbons 2003, p.250).

Student Writing	Worksheet	Teacher	Reformulation
I'm not interested in **play golf**. My cousin loves to **play golfing**	Isolation of the verb play through <u>worksheet</u> in order to provide a regulation	If we look at the <u>worksheet</u>, is there any changes you can make to your own text.	I'm not interested in **golf.** My cousin loves **to play golf.**

Figure 3: Mari's Continuum-A. Doiron. (2019).

At this point in the lesson, Mari mentions that she can't remember ever learning about the concept of collocations, though she thinks it might have been covered in a junior or senior high class (Mari, 2019).

Mari's comments align with Gibbons' suggestion that "meanings are constructed

between rather than within individuals and are shaped by the social activity in which they arise and the collaborative nature of the interaction" (2003, p. 238). While the material may have been covered somewhere in Mari's pre-tertiary EFL classes of over 40 students, it was most likely in the form of a fill in the blanks or multiple-choice format. The difference in this lesson was that Mari could now directly speak, read, write and listen while focusing on a specific aspect of the target language and was able to use the specific target language to describe a situation in her life. Rather than end the learning process with a grammar worksheet based on content which has no relation to Mari's context, she can now remember the process in relation to her own thoughts. Referring to figure 4, Teacher: Mari, is it possible to combine the two sentences together? Mari's immediate reaction is to use "and." Then in order to "push [her] to engage in the process of producing the correct form" (Panova and Lyster, 2002 p. 576), she is asked to justify why she used "and" rather than another conjunction. On realizing that what she is saying about her interest in golf is different from what she is saying about her cousin, so she changes and to "but". When further asked to clarify her decision she said, "We are different. I don't like golf, but my cousin likes golf" (Mari, 2019).

Mari's process also synchronizes well with Lantolf and Thorne's adaptation of Vygotsky's work on mediation in the form of regulation (2007). Using three stages of regulation (object, other and self) Lantolf and Thorne demonstrate how external resources such as building blocks can promote mathematical learning, and how as each stage becomes more complex the resource may change or be unnecessary (2007, p. 200). In Mari's learning situation, in the first stage: object regulation, the grammar sheet serves as an object to help regulate Mari's mental activity. In the second stage:other regulation, Mari received teacher encouragement to apply what she learned from the worksheet to her own text. In the final stage of self-regulation as Mari independently self corrects,

it appears that the process has facilitated what Lantolf and Thorne refer to as "internalization-the process of making what was once external assistance a resource that is internally available to the individual …" (p. 200). Unfortunatelly, the lack of opportunity for many Japanese EFL students to practice speaking English often results in inability to retain information, and as suggested by Lightbrown and Spada, short term instruction or lack of opportunity to review target language may truncate any long-term effect (p. 2016). Mari's lessons reinforced what she learned by speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Through conversation, Mari identified mistakes, which she could rectify after reading and completing the worksheet. Then through teacher-student discussion, she listened to the reformulation of her mistakes made into the correct form. As stated by Nation, there is a uniqueness between the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and the inclusion of all four skills provide more balanced learning opportunities (2007). Japanese EFL students need opportunities to reinforce and recycle language learning skills. Most ESL students will undoubtably meet collocations associated with play or the proper use of conjunctions in day to day activities, but Mari as an EFL student in Japan, will have to figure out a way to work in the correct use of the language points into her memory.

	Figure 4	
Student Writing		Teacher
I'm not interested in golf. My cousin loves to golf.		Is it possible to put these two sentences together?
I'm not interested in golf, and my cousin loves golfing.		
*Do worksheet (see index 2)		So, is "**and**" the best way to combine the sentence?
No		
I'm not interested in golf, but my cousin loves golfing.		Why did you change and to **but**?
I don't like golf, but my cousin does.		

Figure 4: Mari's Continuum -B. Doiron. (2019)
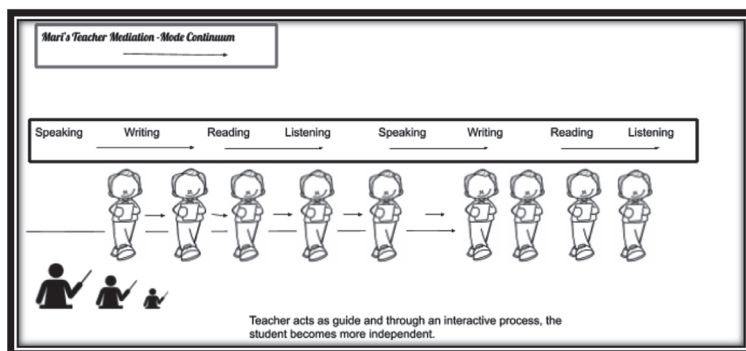
Figure 5: Teacher acts ad guide and through an interactive process, the student becomes more independent. Doiron. (2019)

Discussion

Observing Mari's efforts to correct her text certainly contributes to reflections on teaching practice in regard to the importance of striving for the most effective path to facilitate student learning. The role of mediator/teacher in Mari's process is reminiscent of research by Rogers and Freiberg (1994) which suggests that teacher effectiveness can be facilitated by helping students find resources that promote learning which in turn encourages student autonomy and student self-evaluation (p. 170). In order for Mari to reach a higher level of language accuracy, she needs error correction in a learning context based on a process similar to Gibbons' mode continuum/teacher mediated process, which includes regulated activity that draws on ELL grammar resources. It would also be helpful to read in English on a daily basis, which is an easy method to guarantee regular exposure to how English works. The above suggested resources could be facilitated through grammar worksheets, extensive reading, or watching English movies with English subtitles. It should also be noted here that while Mari's continuum started with speaking, ideally a student's continuum should start with the skill they are most comfortable in or the skill that is most practical

to the learning context.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper argued the importance of error correction based on an adaptation of Gibbons' mode continuum teacher mediated process in a Japanese EFL setting. Language inaccuracy issues such Mari's (this paper's EFL learner research subject) are common within the Japanese EFL setting; further research on issues discussed in this paper drawing on a larger subject scale is recommended in order to determine what provides the best path of study for Japanese EFL students.

Note

1 Clarification request is a form of error correction in which the teacher directs the student to the teacher indicates that the student message needs to be clarified and reformulated (Tedick &Gotari,1998).

2 Metalinguistic clues are a form of error correction in which, the teacher refrains from giving the correct answers but uses questions based on the content to encourage the student to reformulate mistakes (Tedick &Gotari,1998).

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Appendix: worksheets used in Mari's class accessed a

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