

Areas of difficulty in learning Japanese as a Foreign Language: the use of Passive Voice

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INTRODUCTION

Passive voice is a sentence structure in which the recipient of some action becomes the grammatical subject of the sentence. In other words, the passive voice takes the direct object of the equivalent active sentence as the grammatical subject of the sentence. The passive voice is very common in Japanese. Therefore, it is a necessary part of mastering the speaking Japanese language. Passive voice in Japanese is quite complicated, since it has three types of passive forms that learners have to go through in order to become competent at Japanese speech. However, in Literary Sinhala, the passive voice is mainly limited to '*visin*' and '*ladi*'. Similarly, in Spoken Sinhala passive voice is not frequently used in our daily conversations... Therefore, when a Sinhala native speaker learns Japanese as a Foreign Language he is bound to encounter several difficulties in learning complicated passive voice constructions in Japanese. He may find it difficult not only in understanding the given structure, but also in using it in Japanese speech.

PURPOSE

This study focuses on learners of Japanese as a Foreign Language at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. This paper attempts to identify the difficulties that students come across in communicating in Japanese using passive voice. There are certain limits that a teacher can assist students to avoid making mistakes during the process of Foreign Language Acquisition. Unless students realize their areas of weakness and adopt remedial measures, it is not an easy task to be proficient in the language they learn. Therefore, this study attempts to identify the errors made by the students when learning passive voice in Japanese through analyzing the

difficulties they face. Furthermore, it attempts to find solutions in order to avoid or minimize the errors. Thus, the students are expected to enhance their language competency while improving confidence in them.

METHODOLOGY

Many a student learning Japanese as a Foreign Language in Sri Lanka has no confidence in constructing and using passive sentences in Japanese. In order to minimize this area of difficulty and give more confidence to the students in using passive voice, we designed a study to identify the errors that the students make during the use of passive voice in Japanese. Once the difficulties were identified and analyzed, several solutions were found accordingly. We designed and administered interviews and picture descriptions where the using of passive voice was required. The sample for this study was learners of Japanese as a Foreign Language at the University of Kelaniya. The study was completed with a sample of 25 students learning Japanese, and the gathered data were analyzed qualitatively based on the SPSS error analysis method.

RESULTS

After collecting the data through picture description sessions and interviews, the responses were tabulated and analyzed. For the open response questions, the responses were transcribed and categorized, identifying error patterns and similarities between them. This process was subject to an audio recording with the consent of the respondents. Once the interviews were completed the recordings were further analysed to get an overview. The selected sections relevant to the research questions were later transcribed. Accordingly, it was revealed that the complexity of Japanese passive voice, L1 interference on L2 acquisition, cultural differences in the usage of passive voice and lack of practice in constructing passive sentences are among the main reasons leading to the errors that occur when students use passive voice in Japanese.

CONCLUSION

We identified the need to pay more attention to revising the use of passive voice in Japanese at the university although the students have already had more than two years of Japanese at secondary school level. The errors made by the students divulged that the knowledge they had on passive voice was not sufficient to use the language competently.

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KEYWORDS

Japanese as a Foreign Language in Sri Lanka, passive voice in Japanese, foreign language acquisition, L1 interference

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