

Truncated Speech and Its Repair

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Abstract

This paper examines speech errors, especially focusing on truncated words, and its repair when occurring in spontaneous speech in Japanese. Our data shows that the production load from a long phrase does not relate to speech errors. Truncated words occur even in a short utterances. However, there is a restriction in repair of speech errors. That is what we call the RC-repairmen rule. Speakers cannot repair one word in a relative clause.

Index Terms: spontaneous speech, truncated word, intonation unit, relative clause, production load

1. Introduction

The research on speech errors began in the 1900s, and numerous discussions have been carried out within the field of psycholinguistics and linguistics. It is said that we make one or two errors for every 1,000 words spoken. Considering that the average pace of speech is 150 words a minute, a slip is bound to occur about once every seven minutes of continuous talk. There are several types in speech errors: exchange errors, perseveration, anticipation, shift, substitution, blends, additions, and deletions. However, not much discussion has taken place concerning the repair of speech errors, especially in languages other than English. This paper examines the phenomena from the linguistics perspectives. We investigate speech errors, especially focusing on truncated words, and its repair when occurring in spontaneous speech in Japanese.

2. Data

Natural conversation data between parent(s) and their children are used for our analysis. The data was collected from 2013 to 2015. The number of participants is 7: 4 adults and 3 children. The ages of the children are 4, 7, and 10 years old as of 2015. The participants were instructed to record their conversation once a month over one to two years. Each conversation lasted 11 to 35 minutes. The total length of the data that we will use in this paper is 12 h 25 min.

3. Research Questions

This paper discusses the following research questions:

- 1) if the length of a sentence affects speech errors
- 2) if there are any syntactic conditions for repair

4. Results

4.1. Frequency of truncated words

Among the 12 h 25 min. of data, there were 2,230 truncated words. This means that a speaker produced 3 truncated words

per minute on average. Adults made more truncated word errors than young children. The reason for this is that adults produced longer and more syntactically complicated sentences.

4.2. Production load and emergence of a truncated word

Terao (2002) analyzed the distance between the error and its target word by the number of mora. Yamashita & Kondo (2009) claim disfluency markers (fillers and errors) are more likely to occur before long phrases than short phrases overall. They suggest the reason is because producing a long phrase in Japanese poses a production load. However, our data shows that the emergence of truncated words is not triggered by a syntactic unit, but by the intonation unit. An Intonation unit (IU) is a mental unit proposed by Chafe (1994). IU reflects how the brain processes speech. It is a segment of speech that occurs with a single prosodic contour (pitch and rhythm contour).

Observe the truncated word ‘yatte%’ in example (1) below. It is in the subordinate clause, and the subordinate clause is shorter than the main clause in terms of the number of mora. If we look at the repaired utterance in terms of an IU, it is one IU. The speaker intended to say the original proposition in one IU, but she stumbled at the early beginning of the utterance. The symbol ‘%’ indicates a truncated word. The word with an underline is a repaired word.

(1) George yatte%, George yatte-tara daitai nanka
do do-if almost something
shogat% kisotekina koto manabu.
primary:school basic thing learn
‘If the children watch% watch (Curious) George, they can learn primary school% basic thing’.

Not always, but many truncated words occur at the beginning part of an IU. In the next example, the clause to which the truncated word belongs is a subordinate clause. The subordinate clause is shorter than the main clause.

(2) ya%, yapp% yappari navi ga aru kara
as:we:expect navigation SUB there:is because
mayowa-naku-te ii ya.
lose:way-NEG-and good SP
‘It’s good, as we expect we don’t lose the way because we have a navigation (system)’.

Our data show that the occurrence of a truncated word is not affected by the length of the phrase, as Yamashita & Kondo claim. It emerges even in a short utterance like example (3).

(3) A and B are talking about what their child likes to eat.

A: keeki ja%--
cake isn't

'Is not a cake--'

B: iya ton% tonkatsu desu yo=
no pork pork-cutlet COP SP

'No, it's pork cutlet.'

The data suggests that a gap in producing an IU causes a truncated word. Speakers have a proposition in their mind before they produce it. Speakers want to produce an IU without any disturbance. But when the word is not produced on time and then creates a gap, speakers tend to abandon the production in the middle, which results in a truncated word, and they try to produce it from the beginning again.

4.3. Repair of truncated word

Terao (2002) states that speakers usually go back to the beginning of the word and say it again when they have a filler such as 'aa' or 'uu'. However, our data show that speakers repair speech errors without such a filler in most cases. But our data shows that there are some syntactic restrictions in repairing. When speakers realize an error or when a smooth IU production fails, speakers often abandon the word, make it truncated, and repair it. When they do, there are some syntactic restrictions. That is, speakers cannot repair one word in a relative clause. We call it the RC-repairmen rule. When a speaker realizes an error in a relative clause, s/he has to repair the whole clause again as seen in example (4) below.

(4) suupe ne. dare no=,.. dare ga tabeteru su%, dare ga
soup SP who of who SUB eating who SUB
tsukut-ta= suupu desu ka?
make- PAST soup COP Q

'It is soup. Whose, who is eating, who made that soup?'

However, if the error word is not in a clause, but with an adjective, speaker can repair the target word only. See the example (5) below.

(5) demo konaida wa e, chotto yasui mika% ka%
but the:other:day TOP a:bit cheap orange
ano= ringo, ima seeru n natteru ringo katteki-ta.
well apple now on:sale NOM become-ing apple buy-PAST

'But the other day, little bit cheap orange#, apple, I bought apples on sale the other day.'

Another noticeable thing is that the truncated words are head noun in these examples.

5. Conclusions

This paper investigated the truncated words and its repair in Japanese spontaneous speech. Our data shows the following findings:

- 1) Adults have more truncated words than young children. It is because adults produce longer and more complicated utterance than children do.
- 2) Many truncated word are head noun. Not always, but many occurred at the beginning part of an IU.
- 3) The emergence of truncated words is not triggered by a syntactic unit, but it is related to the intonation unit.

4) RC-repairmen rule: speakers cannot repair one word in a relative clause.

6. References

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