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Use of Corrective Feedback in the Classroom: A Reflective Analysis

Ethan Taomae, Teachers College Columbia University, Tokyo

Introduction

Corrective feedback has received substantial attention in the second language acquisition (SLA) literature. Long (1996), in his Interaction Hypothesis, has proposed that feedback during conversational interaction could help to facilitate second language development. By receiving feedback, learners are made aware that their utterances are problematic and as a result, may notice a gap in their linguistic knowledge (Schmidt, 1990). Furthermore, corrective feedback may provide an opportunity for learners to produce modified output, which according to Swain's Output Hypothesis (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2007) is an important part of the acquisition process. A number of studies have shown corrective feedback to have positive effects on language development (Long, et al, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; McDonough, 2005).

Second language teachers are often well aware of the positive effects of corrective feedback but other aspects of corrective feedback may not be so clear—such as how to provide corrective feedback, when to do it, and how often to do it. Studies have shown that experience and education positively correlated with the amount of corrective feedback that teachers provided (Mackey et al, 2004). Furthermore, practitioner research could help to raise awareness of one's own practice in providing corrective feedback (Vazquez & Harvey, 2010). The purpose of this study is to reflect upon my own practice and examine how I provide corrective feedback in my class and to what extent that feedback is noticed by my students.

Literature Review

Corrective feedback plays an important role in the L2 classroom. Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified six types of corrective feedback that teachers used in their research of French



immersion classes. In the order of their frequency of use, the corrective feedback methods were: recasts, elicitation, clarification requests, explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition. Recasts were by far the most commonly used form of corrective feedback and have been found to be used extensively by teachers in both ESL and EFL contexts (Sheen, 2004). In terms of learner uptake, recasts were also found to be the least effective. One reason for this is the often ambiguous nature of recasts (Braidí, 2002; Lyster, 1998b, Lyster & Mori, 2006; Nicholas, et al, 2001; Seedhouse, 1999). Lyster (1998b) found that teachers used recasts in the same manner and frequency that they used non-corrective repetition. In addition, recasts are often used to serve discourse functions other than just correction as they are often used to add information or as confirmation checks. Studies have found that recasts were used most often to correct grammatical errors (Lyster, 1998a) and as a result, learners may have difficulty in recognizing the error in form, particularly if they are focusing on meaning (Nicholas, et al, 2001). Recasts also give little indication of where errors occur. Furthermore, many teachers tend to mitigate and point out correction in an indirect manner, as they would in real conversations. However, this only serves to make it more difficult for learners to identify that they were being corrected (Seedhouse, 1997).

While recasts were found to be used mainly with grammatical and phonological errors, elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition were mainly used with lexical errors (Lyster, 1998a). These types of correction served as prompts for the students and as a result were more successful in getting demonstrated uptake (Lyster, 2004). Uptake is defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as “a student’s utterance that immediately follows the teacher’s feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher’s intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student’s initial utterance” (p. 49). While uptake is one way to measure noticing, Mackey and Philp’s (1998) argued that uptake did not necessarily equate to learning and that their study using intensive recasts showed how recasts could lead to interlanguage development even without identifying uptake immediately after the recast.

A factor that may be important in students’ noticing linguistic form is how explicit the correction is (Ellis, et al, 2006; Sheen, 2006). Philp (2003) found in her study that several variables contributed to learners’ noticing of recasts: the length of the recast, the number of changes the recast made from the original statement, and the proficiency of the learners. This is supported by Sheen (2006) who found that characteristics like pronunciation-focused, shorter



length, and substitution made recasts more salient. Lyster and Mori (2006) examined interactional feedback, uptake, and repair in Japanese and French immersion contexts for native English speakers. In their study, they found recasts to be the most frequent form of correction in both contexts. In the French immersion context, prompts (i.e. elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition) were found to be most effective. This remained consistent with the findings above. However, in the Japanese context, they found that recasts were the most successful. This led Lyster and Mori (2006) to form the *counterbalance hypothesis* which states:

Instructional activities and interactional feedback that act as a counterbalance to the predominant communicative orientation of a given classroom setting will be more facilitative of interlanguage restructuring than instructional activities and interactional feedback that are congruent with the predominant communicative orientation. (p. 294)

In contexts that focus primarily on form, recasts may be a salient way to provide corrective feedback. On the other hand, recasts may not be very effective in communicative classrooms where learners would have difficulty distinguishing between repetition for confirmation of meaning and that of corrective feedback. Therefore, prompts may provide more salient ways for learners to attend to form while negotiating meaning. Very few contexts focus primarily on one or the other so using a variety of corrective feedback methods is necessary. There may also be a number of other factors such as learner developmental level, area of language, and the linguistic features that might mitigate how effective corrective feedback might be (Nicholas, et al, 2001).

Methods

Context and Participants

The participants in this study were employees at a company in Tokyo. The company subsidized an English class that met once a week for two hours. There was no formal enrollment in the class as students voluntarily attended when their schedules allowed for it. The class size ranged from two to six members. The students came from various departments in the company



(e.g. general affairs, sales, information technology) and held various positions (e.g. office staff, system engineers, and sales managers). The level of the students ranged from beginner to intermediate.

Although the classes were held at the company office, the curriculum for the class was negotiated with the students to be “everyday English” and not necessarily business English. Activities often consisted of “free conversation” mixed with task-based activities. No text book was used and materials were arranged by the instructor.

Data Collected

Two members attended the class during the session in which data was recorded. The first hour of the lesson was recorded by placing a voice recorder in the middle of the table during the session. The audio was later reviewed for examples of implicit corrective feedback. Part of the audio was transcribed using the standard CA transcription methodology (Appendix 1). The segment being analyzed consisted of one of the students explaining the plot of a movie she had seen recently (Appendix 2).

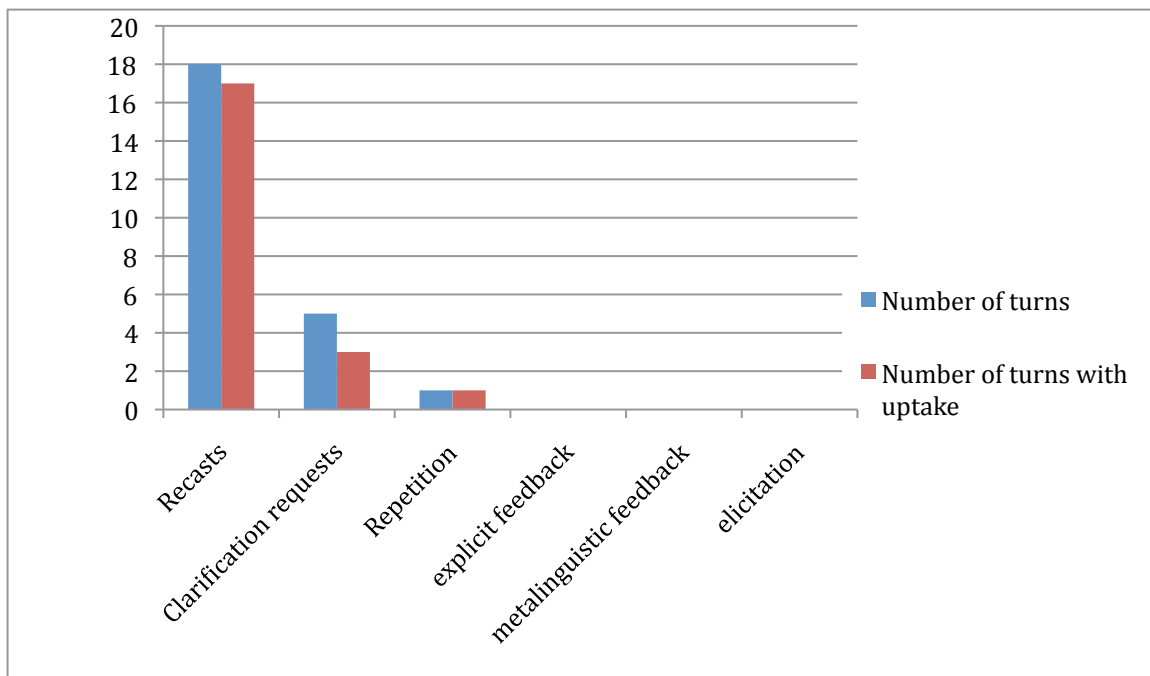
The transcript was analyzed for examples of corrective feedback and uptake and was categorized according to Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) analytic model. Recasts were defined as feedback from a teacher that reformulated a student’s utterance without the error. Explicit correction referred to feedback that clearly defined the error and provided a correct form. Elicitation referred to the technique of prompting a student to give a correct form. Clarification requests were feedback that indicated to the student that the teacher had not understood either due to meaning or form. Metalinguistic feedback was defined as comments related to the form of an utterance without giving the proper form. The last was repetition which was defined as the repeating of an incorrect form. In addition to corrective feedback, student uptake was also examined. Uptake is the reaction by the student in the turn immediately following the feedback. Uptake can take one of two forms. One is a correct reformulation of the error by the student such as repetition or self-reparation. The other is a response that acknowledged the feedback, but did not repair the error. An example is when the learner says “yes” in response to feedback or the learner tries to self-correct but makes a different error. Only correction that was initiated by the teacher was analyzed.



Results and Discussion

In the transcribed segment, there were twenty-four turns of corrective feedback. Nineteen of these were recasts, five were clarification requests, and one was repetition. Explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, and elicitation were not identified in the segment. Student uptake was identified in twenty-one of the corrective feedback turns. For the individual correction types, uptake was identified in seventeen out of the nineteen recasts, three out of five clarification requests, and the single repetition also had uptake. The results can be seen in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Distribution of corrective feedback



Recasts

Recasts were the most prominent form of correction. Uptake for the recasts here were extremely high. One feature that may have played a role here is salience. Many of the recasts were short, simple, and direct. Furthermore, they tended to follow the student’s attempts at self-correction. Therefore the student had already noticed a gap and the recast served to fill it.



Data Segment 1 [Recast]

- 17) T: What is that about.
 18) S1: *Eto* it is animation. *Ano* (.5) *eto* ghi- it is ghib-ghibili's animation.
 19) T: >Right right<
 20) S1: Ah *ano* famous company, hh
 21)→ T: Yeah studio
 22)→ S1: Studio. yes yes, but I don't like (.) that movie
 .
 .
 42)→ S1: *Eto eto eto moto moto wa nan to iu?* I-I don't like Ghibili's studio movie.

In line 20, the student realizes “famous company” is not exactly the word she was looking for as indicated by the nervous laughter following. The teacher recasts the word “studio” in line 21 which she immediately recognized and repeated (uptake) in line 22 then continued the conversation. This recast was a simple case of substitution. Interestingly, about twenty lines later, she uses the recast word in context in line 42, albeit in an unnatural way.

Data Segment 1 [Recast 2]

- 127) S1: So *eto* one friend is die was die
 128)→ T: Died
 129)→ S1: Died
 130)→ T: One friend died.
 131)→ S1: One friend died. But one friend live- alive. So *ano* this friend (.5) eh come back
 132) eh Yokohama hh hh. That-that-this story-this story in Yokohama.
 .
 .
 143)→ S1: *Ano*: Boy's father is (.5) *ano* died friend
 144)→ T: Uh huh



In line 127, the student tries to self-correct but continues to use the passive voice. The teacher recasts the correct form “died” which is taken up by the student and then the teacher recasts again in line 130 with the whole phrase. Again the student repeats the phrase and then continues telling the story. Later, the student uses the recast form “died” in line 143. In this case, though, the error is in forming the relative clause, which is a structure beyond the student’s developmental sequence. As a result, the teacher chose to ignore it in line 144 with “uh huh” an indicator to continue.

In both examples, the student demonstrated uptake as defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997). However, the student used both of those recasts incorrectly later in the conversation. This implies that the student noticed the recast but failed to intake the knowledge implicit in the feedback. While it is difficult to judge the effectiveness of recasts in the short term, Mackey and Philp (1998) suggest that recasts may benefit in the long term as they can help to strengthen structures and forms already known by the learner. One thing that needs to be accounted for in presenting recasts is whether the learner is developmentally ready to use the recast properly.

Ambiguity in Correction

Although the numbers for uptake was high, there was a high amount of ambiguity in the function of the corrective feedback. As mentioned in the literature, the student often thought the correction was a confirmation of meaning. What this means is that the student responded to the feedback by saying something like “yes” and according to Lyster & Ranta (1997), this would be construed as uptake. However, the problem lies in whether the student notices the correction of form or perhaps just views the recast as a confirmation of meaning.

Data Segment 1 [Recast 3]

- 56) S1: You you you are want to that movie. You wan- You want- watching that movie
- 57)→ T: Do I want to watch that movie.
- 58) S1: *Sou*
- 59) T: No.



In line 56, the student struggles to form a question and the teacher asks “Do I want to watch that movie?” This is a recast but functions mainly as a confirmation check. The student views it as a confirmation check and replies with “*sou*” which may be loosely translated as “that’s right,” a sign of agreement. From there, the teacher continued the conversation by answering the attempted original question from line 56. Because of the ambiguity, the student did not notice the correction and paid no attention to form. Lyster (1998b) mentioned that teachers use recasts in similar ways to non-corrective repetition and so parsing the functions of recasts that also serve as a confirmation of meaning may be difficult for learners.

Data Segment 1 [Recast 4]

- 143) S1: *Ano*: Boy’s father is (.5) *ano* died friend
 144) T: Uh huh
 145) S1: But girl’s father *isu* (.) *nan to iu* father. father *ano* [hh hh hh hh]
 146) S2: [Hh hh hh]
 145)→ T: So the father is only girl’s father.
 146) S1: Yes.
 147)→ T: And the friend that died is boy’s father.
 148) S1: Yes yes.
 149)→ T: And then we have another friend who tells the story.
 150) S1: *Sou* yes. Great ((claps hands))

In lines 143 and 145, the student neared the end of the explanation of the story but the meaning remained unclear and the student struggled to complete the thought. This was followed by nervous laughter. The teacher helped to negotiate meaning by summarizing what he understood of the story. This was followed by the student’s agreement which culminates in line 150 with an explicit positive assessment (EPA) of “great” and applause. In looking at this sequence, it is clear that the student understood the teacher in lines 145, 147, and 149 and was quite pleased that the meaning was understood. However, it is not clear whether these recasts were perceived as anything but a confirmation of meaning.



Increasing Variability in Corrective Feedback

Through analysis of the transcription, it is clear that recasts are a highly preferred form of correction in my class. While uptake was relatively high, this could be misleading as demonstrated by the ambiguity in the functions of recasts in the previous section. Furthermore, the high number of recasts could be a result of the context from which this is drawn. The sequence of conversation focused on a student telling the plot of a movie which required quite a bit of negotiation of meaning. Nonetheless, it was surprising to see a lack of other types of corrective feedback within the analyzed sequence. There was certainly a considerable amount of opportunity to use other forms and this is certainly something to be aware of in my teaching.

Data Segment 1 [Recast 5]

- 101) S1: But (.5) true story is not same father.
102)→ S2&T: Huh?
103) S1: hh hh
104)→ T: The boy thinks same father?
105) S1: *Sou* yes
106) T: Oh:

The fact that clarification requests were the second most frequent form of correction may not be so surprising since, like recasts, they tend to focus on meaning. In line 102, the teacher and student 2 both use a clarification request. Student 1 responds with laughter. This would be fine except that the teacher followed up with a recast. Ultimately, this negated the value of the clarification request. Like many of the other prompts, a clarification request forces the speaker to reformulate their thought. However, the teacher eliminated this opportunity by using a recast. As a result, student 1 responded to the recast with “sou yes” and eventually continued. It would be interesting to see how the sequence would have differed if the student had been given the opportunity to try again. There were a number of opportunities throughout the lesson where similar actions could have been made by replacing recasts with other forms of correction. In line 57 of recast example 3, instead of asking “do I want to watch that movie,” eliciting the question from the student with a prompt like “do?” would have been much more useful. Using corrective feedback other than recasts can be more useful in creating pushed output. Teachers need to



analyze and reflect on the ways in which they give correctional feedback techniques in order to create opportunities for learners to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge.

Foreigner Talk

There are always new things that teachers can discover when analyzing and reflecting upon their practice. Interestingly, another issue that was identified through the data analysis is *foreigner talk*, which is the simplification of speech, lexically, syntactically, and/or phonologically by a native speaker to accommodate speakers of low proficiency levels (Ferguson, 1968). Foreigner talk can be identified by the use of synonyms and paraphrases, loud, slow speech, exaggerated pronunciation, and the omission of copula, articles, prepositions, and inflectional morphology (Long, 1981).

There are a number of examples of foreigner talk by the teacher found in the analysis, particularly with the omission of articles and copula. One major example is in line 104, where the teacher recasts and asks “the boy thinks same father?” This is a very unnatural utterance for a native speaker. The appropriate question here would be “Does the boy think they have the same father?” Like this example, the teacher often dropped articles and used un-inverted question structures to try and make himself more easily understood. This phenomenon may occur when teaching lower level learners but it is something that teachers need to be aware of and avoid. The use of articles and inverted question formation are not found in the student’s L1 and may seem to make comprehension simpler. However, employing recasts with this type of speech may be counterproductive as recasts are useful primarily because they provide a positive model for learners. In communicative classrooms, teachers must create ways for students to attend to form while negotiating meaning. Moreover, teachers need to be aware of the way they speak when providing feedback and how their students will perceive it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to reflect on my own practice to better understand how I provide corrective feedback and how learners perceive it. Reflective practice can provide worthwhile insights and increase awareness which can lead to better practice. From this study, it is apparent that I have been over-relying on recasts as a form of correction. Recasts, which are short and simple, can be effective particularly in spots where learners have already identified a



gap in their linguistic knowledge. On the other hand, recasts are often used ambiguously in conjunction with confirmation checks which make it difficult for learners to notice form. As the literature has shown, using a variety of corrective feedback methods is important. In communicative contexts, prompts such as elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification requests, and repetition can be used to push learner output and further facilitate acquisition. Furthermore, the more explicit and salient the feedback is, the more effective it will be. Finally, one issue that was identified in this data set is that of foreigner talk. Teachers need to be aware of how they speak so they do not provide learners with improper models and further confuse them.

This study was limited in scope and only looked at a very specific interaction. It would be beneficial to examine how my corrective feedback methods varied among different activities as well as in different contexts. Corrective feedback is one of the areas where teachers can have an influence on student development, which makes it an important component of pedagogy in SLA. As this study has shown, there is much to be gained from reflective inquiry and raising one's own awareness in order to improve one's practice.

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Appendix 1

CA transcription symbols

.	(period) Falling intonation.
?	(question mark) Rising intonation.
,	(comma) Continuing intonation.
-	(hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off.
::	(colon(s)) Prolonging of sound.
w <u>o</u> :rd	(colon after underlined letter) Falling intonation on word.
w <u>o</u> :rd	(underlined colon) Rising intonation on word.
<u>word</u>	(underlining)
<u>word</u>	The more underlying, the greater the stress.
WORD	(all caps) Loud speech.
°word°	(degree symbols) Quiet speech.
↑word	(upward arrow) raised pitch.
↓word	(downward arrow) lowered pitch
>>word<<	(more than and less than) Quicker speech.
<<word>>	(less than & more than) Slowed speech.
<	(less than) Talk is jump-started—starting with a rush.
hh	(series of h’s) Aspiration or laughter.
.hh	(h’s preceded by dot) Inhalation.



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[]	(brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.
[]	
=	(equal sign) Latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker.
(2.4)	(number in parentheses) Length of a silence in 10ths of a second
(.)	(period in parentheses) Micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
()	(empty parentheses) Non-transcribable segment of talk.
((gazing toward the ceiling))	(double parentheses) Description of non-speech activity.
(try 1)/(try 2)	(two parentheses separated by a slash) Alternative hearings.
\$word\$	(dollar signs) Smiley voice.
#word#	(number signs) Squeaky voice.

Appendix 2

Data Segment 1

- 1) T: How are you.
- 2) S1: I'm fine.
- 3) T: >Yeah<
- 4) S1: Unn
- 5) T: What did you do. Did you do anything for the three day (.) holiday.
- 6) S1: Ah yes. Uh I went(.5) I went to: Ebis uh with my friend
- 7) T: >Uh huh<
- 8) S1: For lunch
- 9) S2: Mm
- 10) S1: Yes. *Ano* it'su café (.3) eto ah (.5) ca- this is- this café isu *eto*:: T-Thai Thai Thai::
- 11) [foodo]
- 12) S2: f[ood] mmmm
- 13) S1: very: delicious
- 14) ((sounds of agreement by all))
- 15) S1: And uh I went- I went to movie theater. I watchi I watchi is *eto* Kokurikozaka.
- 16) S2: hmm
- 17) T: What is that about.
- 18) S1: *Eto* it is animation. *Ano* (.5) *eto* ghi- it is ghib-ghibili's animation.
- 19) T: >Right right<
- 20) S1: Ah *ano* famous company, hh



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- 21) T: Yeah studio
- 22) S1: Studio. yes yes, but I don't like (.) that movie
- 23) T: Oh really.
- 24) (sounds of agreement by M and N)
- 25) T: Why not.
- 26) S1: *Ano*: story is faster.
- 27) S2: Heh?
- 28) S1: >*Pon pon pon*< And uh
- 29) T: Lots of action?
- 30) S1: Hm?
- 31) T: Lots of action?
- 32) S1: Action? Action?
- 33) T: Yeah.
- 34) S1: [Uh::]
- 35) T: [*Pon pon*] *pon* means action?
- 36) S1: *Pon Pon. Nan to-* Uh no. No[that-]
- 37) T: [Just] the pace-
- 38) S1: Uh yes
- 39) T: Of the show is very fast
- 40) S1: Very fast
- 41) T: Oh::
- 42) S1: *Eto eto eto moto moto wa nan to iu?* I-I don't like Ghibili's studio movie.
- 43) T: You don't?
- 44) S1: I don't like.
- 45) T: Oh hh
- 46) S1: But (.) my friends is like
- 47) T: Right.
- 48) S1: Unn so *eeette*
- 49) (everyone laughs)
- 50) S1: *Shoganai na to iu no wa kanji de. Ano I-* (1.0) I've (.5) *shikatanaku* I go (.) I went.
- 51) T: Didn't have a choice maybe
- 52) S1: Didn't have a choice?
- 53) T: Yeah I had to go.
- 54) S1: *Sono kanji.* Yes that's right. Mm. But *ano* pure- pure story. it is good.
- 55) T: hm?
- 56) S1: You you you are want to that movie. You wan- You want- watching that movie
- 57) T: Do I want to watch that movie.
- 58) S1: *Sou*
- 59) T: No.
- 60) S1: >No *deshou*.<
- 61) S2: Me too.
- 62) S1: >No *deshou*.< Okay I talk- I tell you about that story
- 63) T: Oh okay
- 64) S2: Pleazu



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- 65) S1: Yes *ano* (.5) [*eto*]
 66) S2: [Within] 3 minutes hh hh
 67) (everyone laughs)
 68) S1: Okay. okay
 69) S2: I'm sorry
 70) (more laughter)
 71) S1: It's [situation]
 72) S2: [Starto]
 73) S1: is Showa Showa. So *eto* a man and a girl. a- woman ka. woman. is *eto* (.)
 °junior
 74) *ja naku te*° >high school student<. So we- we- they fall in love but (.5)
 may- ah
 75) *eto* how-however however they- they are- they are- they are fathers same.
 76) (1.0) hh hh
 77) T: But [they]
 78) S1: [If] *ka*- hah?
 79) T: They don't know. their father is same person.
 80) S1: Ah- *eto*:: (1.0) man know. But girl don't know.
 81) S2: °what what to° what thing.
 82) S1: *Eto*: one day a boy went to she's house
 83) T: Her house
 84) S1: Ah her house eh (.) her talk- talk to eh my mo- my father's story (.5) so
ano their
 85) fathers(.) die (2.0) *ano* so her tell you- him- ah *eto* talk- talk to him.
 86) T: She?
 87) S1: Ah her- her talk
 88) S2: She talk
 89) S1: Ah she talk to *ano* father's die de *ano* him *ni*
 90) T: Him means father or boy.
 91) S1: Ah> boy boy<
 92) T: The man? Oh she talked to the man?
 93) S1: *Sou sou* yes
 94) T: Oh oh.
 95) S1: hh hh hh *de* so a boy that know.
 96) T: Knows [same] person?
 97) S1: [knows] (.5) *Sou* yes yes.
 98) T: The man- the father is the same person.
 99) S1: Yes.
 100) T: Hmm
 101) S1: But (.5) true story is not same father.
 102) S2&T: Huh?
 103) S1: hh hh
 104) T: The boy thinks same father?
 105) S1: *Sou* yes
 106) T: Oh:
 107) S1: But t-true not-not same.



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- 108) T: In reality
 109) S1: In reality not same.
 110) T: Uh huh
 111) S1: *Sou ano* (.5) fall in love. () ((clapping hands))
 112) T: What is this. ((mimics N's gesture))
 113) S1: *Ano nan to iu*. Finish finish. Hh hh
 114) T: They fall in love?
 115) S1: *Sou*.
 116) T: Oh
 117) S1: *Tsutawatta?*
 118) T: How did they know not same person.
 119) (1.0)
 120) S1: How do
 121) T: they know their father is not the same person. In reality.
 122) S1: *Eto* (1.5) *eto*:: father's friend has two human- huh?
 123) S2: huh?
 124) T: Two human?
 125) S1: Hh hh father- father has a friend. father had two friends.
 126) T: Okay.
 127) S1: So *eto* one friend is die was die
 128) T: Died
 129) S1: Died
 130) T: One friend died.
 131) S1: One friend died. But one friend live- alive. So *ano* this friend (.5) eh come back
 132) eh Yokohama hh hh. That-that-this story-this story in Yokohama.
 133) T: Uh huh
 134) S1: So *de* one friend come back in Yokohama.
 135) T: Came back to.
 136) S1: Came back to Yokohama.
 137) T: Right
 138) S1: So (.5) he- (.5) he- he sa-say-say *ano* true story- ah he know *ka*- he know true
 139) story
 140) T: Two fathers?
 141) S1: Two fathers. Yes yes.
 142) T: Oh
 143) S1: *Ano*: Boy's father is (.5) *ano* died friend
 144) T: Uh huh
 145) S1: But girl's father *isu* (.) *nan to iu* father. father *ano* [hh hh hh hh]
 146) S2: [Hh hh hh]
 145) T: So the father is only girl's father.
 146) S1: Yes.
 147) T: And the friend that died is boy's father.
 148) S1: Yes yes.
 149) T: And then we have another friend who tells the story.



Accents Asía

- 150) S1: So yes. Great ((claps hands))
151) T: ((turns to M)) Do you understand.
152) S2: Great. ((Claps))
153) (everyone laughs)

