Analyzing a student conversation: Glass half full or glass half empty?

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Abstract

This paper takes a short sample of student spoken interaction and analyses it in detail to identify some of the features of the talk which may be at variance with what would be recognized as more proficient and fluent interaction. The goal is to identify points of interactional practice that can be judged as areas for consciousness raising and explicit instruction by the teacher. Several of the points raised in the analysis are suggested to stem from a complex set of influences including transfer of lexical, grammatical, and interactional practices from the L1. There also may be a habituation to classroom discourse when speaking in the L2 which is then used unconsciously as a template for non-institutional mundane social interactions. Recognition of the special nature of learner interactions alongside an understanding of the possible causes of this kind of speaking can, it is suggested, inform focused and empirically based teaching that develops learners' interactional competence.

The competence versus performance duality posited by Chomsky (1965) is based indirectly on a notion of native speaker intuition. That is, when a native speaker of a language hears an utterance in that language, they can make an immediate judgment of its acceptability in grammatical terms. Deviations from the norm in terms of syntax and morphology are immediately accessible to any L1 speaker, even if that person cannot account for the precise reason that they deem it infelicitous. The fact that quotidian spoken interaction is often filled with such deviations from the idealized norm was dismissed by Chomsky as being a non-linguistically important manifestation of performance. Speakers under pressure of real-time constraints, localized lapses of memory, fatigue, distraction, or the like often do not meet the standards required for the written form of the language. It is the competence of the individuals mental linguistic state that is of interest to the linguist. The data observed in actual performance can be dismissed as mere noise and "cannot constitute the actual subject matter of linguistics, if this is to be a serious discipline" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4).

Despite this dismissal of spoken language data as not a fit source of data for investigation, some researchers turned their attention to just such data, and uncovered orderliness and systematicity in interaction, as succinctly outlined by Gumperz (1996),

> It is by now generally accepted that discourse and conversation have their own forms of organization, distinguishing them from mere strings of sentences or clauses, forms that need to be analyzed in their own terms. (p. 374)

The investigations in the field that came to be known as conversation analysis (CA) uncovered systematic ways in which participants in interaction manage the unfolding of the interaction on a moment-by-moment basis. Underlying structure was found in such areas as the organization of turn-taking, (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), the processes by which interactants repair the regular occurrence of troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding, (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), the function of discourse management words such as 'oh' (Heritage, 1984), 'well'

(Heritage, 2015) and the features of preferred and dispreferred response turns (Pomerantz, 1984).

Conversation analysis has a central concern with studying mundane interaction to uncover the ways in which interactants jointly manage and coordinate their speaking (and other paralinguistic aspects) in order to achieve specific social goals. Thus, the CA approach goes beyond narrow concerns of how interactants utilize the lexical and grammatical resources of a language to create stand-alone propositional utterances that merely describe some state of affairs that the speaker wishes to communicate. There are several underlying principles that inform the CA approach to data. For current purposes some of these will be listed here:

1. mundane interactions are a valuable source of data
2. data derived from spontaneous interactions is preferable to data concocted from the researcher's intuitions
3. data needs to be analyzed at a high level of detail
4. a principle of 'unmotivated looking' will yield interesting insights that might be overlooked in a motivated analysis.

Following on from the elevation of mundane talk to a respectable and valuable source of linguistic data, researchers using CA methodology "recognized that CA could be used to inform practice", O'Reilly, Kiyimba, Nina Lester & Musket (2020, p. 621). That is, researchers could examine talk that took place in institutional settings such as medical consultations, courtrooms and classrooms and deliver robust findings that could inform practice in those settings. The purely descriptive focus of CA is here expanded, and the analysis becomes a resource to be exploited for practical purposes.

One of the seemingly obvious venues for CA is in the field of second/foreign language learning. An influential paper by Canale and Swain (1980) explicitly stated that merely acquiring vocabulary and grammatical rules was insufficient to the task of enabling learners to communicate in the target language. Communicative competence is a multi-faceted skill comprised of numerous elements, not just the ability to produce sentence-level utterances that mirror the lexical-grammatical abilities of native speakers. Much attention has been given in recent years to the interactional aspect of second/foreign language learning (See for example, Hall, Hellerman & Doehler, 2011; thi Nguyen & Kaspar 2009; Wong & Waring, 2020). One bifurcation of the analytic program is the bare description of how L2 learners go about the business of making themselves understood in interaction, versus the more application-based analysis that seeks to identify areas for focused action in institutional L2 settings. This could be viewed as a 'glass half full' versus a 'glass half empty' approach. The glass half full approach describes how even speakers with very restricted linguistic resources can still engage successfully in interactions, as illustrated outside of language learning contexts by Goodwin (2004.) The glass half empty approach looks at the L2 interactions of learners with a view to noticing aspects of interactional procedure that are absent (or at least not present where we would expect to find them), or aspects of the interaction that are not finely calibrated to the interactional procedures of the target language, or interactional practices that do different jobs to the ones that the speaker thinks they are doing. That is, the teacher can use CA methodology to analyze student talk and identify areas for focused instruction. (See Campbell-Larsen, 2019a for an example of this approach.)

A second bifurcation of the analytic program is deciding on what kind of data to analyze. The language classroom is a place where, ideally, language teaching and learning takes place and as such, the kinds of speaking that take place in classrooms ideally follows the institutional learning agenda. Language use that is not in service of a clear and mutually recognizable learning goal is deemed, either overtly or tacitly, as illegitimate, and subject to possible sanction. Thus, there is a data pool based on learners engaging in recognizable learning or testing activities such as group work, oral proficiency interviews or teacher/student learning-based interactions. What is not included here is the students engaging in mundane social talk that is participant-initiated and serves the locally relevant interactional agendas of the interactants rather than the institution, i.e., conversation in the daily, social, and non-institutional meaning of the word. Seedhouse (1996, 2004) suggests that conversation in this meaning cannot take place in the language classroom or at least as part of a language lesson as it is normally understood. However, Campbell-Larsen (2021) outlines how a psychological space for free conversation in the classroom can be carefully constructed over time, resulting in students being able to engage in mundane social interaction in class time. As mentioned by Campbell-Larsen (ibid), this approach takes time and is challenging for students and teachers alike, but with repeated and extensive opportunity to engage in free conversation in the classroom, mundane social talk can take place. The data analyzed in this paper is based on just such 'free talk'.

The data

The data in this analysis were collected in a free conversation section of an elective English communication class taught at a university in Japan. The two female participants are 20-year-old students enrolled as full-time students at the university. They are both native Japanese speakers and are majoring in non-English subjects. They have completed at least six years of formal English education at the junior and senior high school level. As if often the case with Japanese students who have studied English in a solely institutional setting, there is a perceivable mismatch between passive and active knowledge of English. Written test scores indicate a level that could be described as intermediate, but spoken interactions often fall short of this kind of declarative performance.

Although they are non-English majors, all students in the first and second years of the undergraduate programs are required to take English classes. In addition to these compulsory courses, the students in this class (N= 12) are enrolled in an elective ‘Advanced English’ course. This class meets twice a week for the two 15-week semesters of the academic year. The data were collected approximately one month into the first semester. This was done to ensure that the students had some familiarity with their classmates and that they also had some familiarity with the practice of using class time for free conversation. (See Campbell-Larsen, 2021 for details of this aspect of class activity.)

The students self-selected their speaking partners and initiated conversation. After a few minutes had elapsed, allowing conversations to move beyond procedural matters such as group organization and greetings, the teacher moved among the class with a hand-held video camera and recorded five-minute segments of ongoing conversations. Other conversations continued while recording was ongoing.

Data overview

The conversation opens with standard greetings. This was despite the fact that the participants had been conversing before the teacher approached and started recording. It seems that the onset of recording triggered a reset to a greeting sequence. In response to the ‘How are you?’ greeting by M, Y states that she is sleepy and hungry. The participants develop this thread into talk on sleeping routines. After this there is a topic disjunct and the talk switches to last weekend’s activities. A sequence of short questions and short answers establishes details of M’s part-time job. After this sequence Y is nominated by M to relate her own weekend activities. She informs M that she returned to her hometown for her mother’s birthday. A short digression is made on the topic of the weather before the talk returns to the topic of M’s part-time job.

Data analysis: Identifying areas for instruction and practice

In the ‘glass half full’ ethnomethodological approach to analyzing the methods by which the participants interact, there is the basic fact that interaction between M and Y occurs. The two speakers engage with each other in what is recognizably a co-constructed, locally managed, and affiliative interaction. From this standpoint we may say that the interaction has been successful. But from the 'glass half empty' standpoint there are several aspects of this interaction that may usefully serve as a basis for explicit teaching or at least consciousness raising in future classes. After all, the explicit job of the teacher in the language classroom is to engage in purposeful activity which enables the learners to be more proficient language users. A close analysis of this interaction may indicate possible areas that could be addressed in future instruction. Some of these are noted in the following.

Discourse organization

One of the noticeable aspects of this interaction is the reliance on the question-and-answer adjacency pair as the underlying structure for extended exchanges. For example, in the sequence dealing with M's weekend activity, the conversation unfolds over multiple turns that consist of unelaborated questions and what may be termed minimized answers.

Excerpt 1

Part time job (Transcript lines 46 – 76) Simplified.

Y: What did you do last weekend?
M: Part time job.
Y: Oh. What job?
M: Convenience store
Y: Where?
M: Near my home.
Y: Circle K?

M: No, seven eleven.
Y: What time?
M: Four hours.
Y: Morning, night?
M: Lunch. Afternoon. How about you?

This kind of Q&A sequence is to be found in many of my data collections. It is fair to say that this kind of sparse and unelaborated interactional architecture is not typical of most mundane L1 social interactions and tends more towards what could be termed an interview genre where the information is served up in penny packets and the questioner seems to shoulder a disproportionate amount of responsibility for maintaining progressivity.

Repetition in the second slot

When speakers engage in interaction it is not unheard of for them to repeat each other's words. The reasons for repetition of the previous speaker's words are varied and complex. In this conversation there are several examples of a speaker signaling "receipt through repetition" (Greer, Bussinguer, Butterfield, & Mischinger, 2009). The verbatim repetition of the previous speaker's final words is observed repeatedly in this interaction.

Excerpt 2.

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09. M:  I (1.9) am oversleep.
10. Y:  Oversleep?
11. M:  Today.
12. Y:  Today
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Excerpt 3.

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25. Y:  >yeah yeah yeah< Yes, yes.
26. M:  A:to One
27. Y:  One
28. M:  About one.
29. Y:  A:::h about one o:::h
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Excerpt 4.

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41. Y:  Yes, today izu (.) firsto
42. M:  Ah. Firsto period
43. Y:  Periodo yes yes I'm very sleepy
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Excerpt 5

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53. Y:  Eh:: where? where?
54.         (1.9)
55. M:  Near (.) my home.
56. Y:  My home? (1.0)ºmyº near
57. M:  Near.
58. Y:  Near eh? Seven Eleven?
59. M:  No circle K?
60. Y:  Circle K? Circle K Circle K ah ah ah:::
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Excerpt 6.

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62. Y:  Ok ok oh eh::: (3.6) oh eh what time. (.) uh::
63.     (2.5)
64. M:  Four ah four hours
65. Y:  Four hours?
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In some cases, the repetition can be readily analyzed for its function in the discourse. For example, in excerpt 4 there is self-initiated other-repair. Y is trying to express that she had first period class today. After uttering the word 'first', which is vowel marked, with the marking possibly serving a nuanced interactional function (See Carroll 2005), the interlocutor M supplies the word 'period'. That this was the sought for word (or at least an appropriate term) is confirmed by Y in line 43 with a repetition of the word. This instance of repetition as a confirmation of the success of the repair is an entirely normal phenomenon.

By contrast the repetition in excerpt 5 is much harder to account for. In response to an enquiry as to the location of the convenience store, M states it is 'near my home'. This response is receipted by Y with a verbatim repetition. What is interesting here is that Y does not subject the original utterance to the deictic shifts that would seem to be appropriate. That is, M's utterance 'near my home' is not altered to 'near your home'. The absence of deictic manipulations here suggest that this receipt is a claim of understanding rather than a demonstration. (Sacks, II, 1992, p. 141). The other examples above indicate that Y uses repetition as a receipt strategy on multiple occurrences. What is suggested here that it is not the occurrence but rather the recurrence of the practice that is unusual. A quick demonstration of this can be carried out by a version of the so-called 'breaching experiment' in which a participant consistently and purposefully repeats the final word of the previous speaker's turn. The conversation quickly becomes fraught, and the repetition strategy is subject to comment.

L1 use

One feature of learner talk that manifests itself repeatedly in Japanese learners' English conversation is the use of L1, especially in management functions such as repair, backchanneling and discourse marking (Campbell-Larsen 2019). What counts as an L1 utterance is not a clear-cut issue. The L1 may contain loanwords from the L2 and the use of these words in L2 conversation may be conscious, semi-conscious or unconscious. An example of this complexity can be found in the question and answer sequence concerning M's part-time job.

Excerpt 7

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51. Y:  Oh? eh what whato what job?
52. M:  Conbini (.) ence store
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M is explaining that she works in a convenience store. In Japanese these types of stores are referred to with the loanword term adapted for Japanese phonotactics konbeeniensu stoa. This is expression is often shortened in daily conversation to *konbeeni*. In M's utterance in line 50 it seems that the first part of the answer is delivered in L1. That is, M produces the word *konbeeni*. (The utterance is transcribed in the transcript as Conbini, as the first part of an L2 utterance, but it could also be transcribed as Konbeeni meaning a completed L1 utterance.) It is hard to say if this was intended to be a stand-alone response or not, but it is followed with a micropause and then the rest of the utterance is supplied in the L2 ¬– "ence store". Thus, on one reading a completed utterance (Conbini or Konbeeni) is then subject *post facto* to repair. In another reading a partial utterance is subject to not just mid-utterance, but actually mid-word repair. Ambiguity about which language one is actually speaking is not a regular feature of daily interaction.

A clearer example of L1 use occurs in the Q&A sequence dealing with M's working hours.

Excerpt 8

```
62. Y:  Ok ok oh eh::: (3.6) oh eh what time. (.) uh::
63.     (2.5)
64. M:  Four ah four hours
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65. Y:  Four hours?
66. M:  ºKanaº
67. Y:  Morning? (4.5) Night?
68. M:  (1.8) Lunch lunch[ jyanai]=
69. Y:                   [he he he ]
70. M:  =Good afternoon [jya shi]=
71. Y:                  [he he. ]
72. M: =[Afternoon]
73. Y:  [Afternoon] afternoon afternoon (.)ah twelve
```

In this sequence the participants have to work jointly to achieve intersubjectivity, which is accomplished after some amount of effort. From the glass half full perspective the speakers have deployed a range of interactional resources to accomplish the interactional task at hand. From the glass half empty view, there are several aspects of this sequence that may serve as a basis for focused instruction. In contrast to the ambiguous utterance in excerpt 7, line 52, in this sequence there are more overt uses of the L1. In line 62 Y's question, 'what time' seems to be interpreted by M as a request for the duration of her shift at the convenience store. After supplying an answer to this question (four hours), Y once again receipts by repetition, this time with rising intonation. In line 66 M says quietly 'kana'. This is a Japanese expression that functions to lessen the epistemic commitment to a statement. In this case it can be roughly glossed as, 'Four hours, was it?' Y pursues the topic of working time with a further question in line 67. It is not clear if this is an expansion of the topic by Y after learning how long the shift lasted, or whether it is a re-phrase of the original question which, contrary to M's interpretation as a request for shift duration, was actually intended to enquire about the time of day that the work took place. M now interprets Y's question (Morning? Night?) as a request for the time of day that she worked. She (M) replies with the word 'lunch' but swiftly initiates repair with the L1 expression 'jyanai' which is a negator utterance in Japanese, often used in self-initiated self-repair by students, translatable in this case as 'no, not lunch'.

M then attempts to reformulate her answer to indicate that she worked in the afternoon, but instead of uttering this, she produces what is recognizably a fixed greeting expression, 'Good afternoon'. Realizing the pragmatic inappropriateness of the greeting in this sequential environment, M again initiates repair, this time with a partial L1 repair utterance, 'jya shi' in line 70, in overlap with Y's laughter in line 69 which may have been prompted by the production of 'good afternoon'. The answer is now repaired to merely 'afternoon' and this is receipted with multiple repetitions of the word by Y. Thus, in a very short space of time M twice initiates the repair of an English utterance with L1 repair expressions.

Repair

Detailed transcriptions of native speaker data (in any language) will reveal that any interaction is suffused with instances of repair. Clearly, trouble sources (speaking, hearing and understanding) abound in mundane spoken interaction and these troubles and their repairs do not indicate any shortfall in language ability. However, the nature and frequency of repair may be seen to differ between those who are proficient (either native speakers or accomplished learners) and those who are still in a more fundamental learning stage. The following excerpt details the dense repair work that is more typical of earlier stage learner talk than the talk of more proficient speakers/

Excerpt 9

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09. M:  Did you (.) give (.) present to (.) your mother?
10. Y:  Yes. Uh I (.)I (.)give (.)I gave
11. M:  = I gave (.)
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12. Y:  I gave flower
13. M:  O:::::h
14. Y:  Flower
15.     (4.9) (( Y gestures giving action))
16. Y:  Flower
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The sequence opens with a direct question from M enquiring if Y gave her mother a birthday present. The question unfolds in a rather broken fashion with several inter-turn pauses. The question is understood, and Y follows a normative procedure for answering. That is, she recognizes the point at which turn transition is relevant and takes the nominated turn in a timely manner, matching the answer type to that which was adumbrated by the question form, which was phrased as a negative/positive binary enquiry. In addition, Y seems to recognize that the answer should not be minimized to the mere expression of 'yes' or 'no' and seeks to provide further details, these details not being specifically asked for in M's question form. An answer of 'yes' only would very probably have prompted a follow up question asking what was given as a gift. From the glass half full perspective there is a lot of detail here of finely calibrated and jointly achieved 'confluency' (McCarthy, 2010).

However, in trying to expand on her response Y encounters some difficulties and engages in a series of multiple repair attempts. The intended utterance seems to be 'I gave her some flowers. The omission of the recipient of the present is not attended to as a trouble source. Indeed, conversational English would probably allow the utterance 'I gave some flowers'. In addition, the object of the verb is not marked for singular or plural in any way, even though such marking is obligatory in standard English. This also is not attended to as a trouble source. The trouble source that is oriented to is the past tense marking on the verb 'give'. As the speaker tries to work her way through what is a three-word utterance (I gave flower), there are multiple restarts from 'I'. In total Y utters the word 'I' four times. The repair unfolds over several iterations, each time starting with I and each time dealing adding an increment of one word (or word form) further along the three-word chain.

1) I
2) I give
3) I gave
4) I gave flower

The repair here is noteworthy for several reasons. Firstly, what is treated as repairable (tense marking on the verb) and what is not oriented to as a repairable item (lack of number marking on 'flower') may be illustrative of L1 transfer. Japanese uses morphology to mark past tense on verbs, but generally does not have marking of number on nouns. Secondly, the seeming insistence on pursuing correct grammatical form may reflect previous experiences using English in an institutional context where notions of grammatical correctness often take precedence over progressivity. After all, 'I give flower' would be a perfectly comprehensible and interactionally appropriate response to M's conversational question, but if uttered in response to a teacher's display question, would likely be subject to feedback in the F turn of a canonical IRF sequence (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). These kinds of incremental repairs are seen elsewhere in this conversation.

Excerpt 10

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19. Y:  What timeuh did you (1.1)
20.     did you go? to. bedo [went to] bedo
21. M:                       [a::h   ]
22. Y:  =at nighto.(.)tomorrow nighto?
23.     (2.0)
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24. M: yesterday night?=
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Excerpt 11

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46. Yu: Whato (1.1) did you: (1.0) do?
47.     (2.1)
48. Yu: weekend. this (0.9) last weekend? weekend
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Whatever the causes, the repair of these utterances is somewhat overelaborated and once again it is not necessarily the occurrence but the recurrence of this kind of self-initiated self-repair that suggests that repair strategies may be a possible area for focused instruction.

Omissions

When analyzing data, the CA transcriber tries to capture as much detail as possible because, "no order of detail in interaction can be dismissed a priori as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant" (Heritage, 1984, p. 241). CA methodology places focus on accounting for what the participants' actually say or actually do, and there is a strong methodological aversion so speculating over things that cannot be directly observed, such as thoughts or internal motivations. The analytical framework of CA has no remit to discuss what is not present.

However, an analysis that looks at data and notices absences can also be a useful standpoint for teachers trying to identify points for instruction, consciousness raising or explanation. One such area in these data is the lack of common discourse markers (DM). Any extended data of naturally occurring spontaneous interaction by native English speakers will very likely contain multiple instances of common discourse markers (also referred to as pragmatic tokens). These are words like 'well', 'you know', 'I mean', 'like' and so on. These words occur with very high frequency in spoken English (McCarthy, 2010) but in this interaction they are notable for their absence. This is important because these words are not meaningless fillers or mere performance epiphenomena; they carry out important interactional functions. (See for example, Hasselgreen, 2005; Heritage, 2015; Schegloff & Lerner, 2009; Schiffrin, 1987.) The absence of these common words and expressions in these data and other data collected by the author is commonplace and suggests that teaching these items should be part of the instructional agenda.

There are other instances of non-occurrence which are not as clear cut as the lack of high-frequency discourse markers but may nevertheless inform future teaching. For example, in this conversation there are several instances of time reference.

Excerpt 12

24. M: yesterday night?=
25. Y: >yeah yeah yeah< Yes, yes.
26. M: A:to One
27. Y: One
28. M: About one.
29. Y: A:::h about one o:::h

Excerpt 13

37. Y: Today?
38. M: Yes
39. Y: ahh <seven O’clock>

Excerpt 14

72. M: =[Afternoon]
73. Y: [Afternoon] afternoon afternoon (.)ah twelve

Excerpt 15

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89. M:  =Yesterday=
90. Y:  =Atoh night
91. M:  O::::::h
92. Y:  Eight o’clock
93.     About eight O’clock.
94.     (2.9)
95.     Very tired Hh.. Huhhh h
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In these cases, the speakers refer to times in one of two ways, a) exactly, as in excerpts 13 and 14, or b) approximately, as in excerpts 12 and 15. Approximation is a common way of detailing times, prices, quantities and amounts in daily conversation. The speakers here rely on the single approximation strategy of using the word ‘about’. A more complex and multi-component strategy would be to use some hedging expressions, with several exemplar times (in order and to scale) and conclude a three-part list with a general extender so that an utterance can be shaped in the following way:

Excerpt 16 (Constructed)

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A: Oh, I don’t know, like, eight, eight thirty, something
   like that.
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(For more on vague language, approximation and list construction see Cutting 2007; Jefferson, 1990; Overstreet 1999.) It is of course not the case that absence of occurrence necessarily indicates absence from the L2 repertoire of the speaker. The absence of some items may be more indicative of a gap in learners’ abilities than others. For instance, the case of absence of DM mentioned above is, perhaps a more obvious indication of a gap in the L2 abilities than the absence of the complex approximation strategies exemplified in excerpt 16. It may be the case that the participants have this complex L2 approximation resource at their disposal, but opted not to deploy it on these occasions. However, in collecting data from multiple interactions and finding no instances of these kinds of approximation strategies across the board, the case for this being a gap in learner knowledge rather than a non-utilized item in the repertoire of learners is strengthened.

In a similar vein, the occurrence of questions in these data seems to indicate that the participants see questions as essentially stand-alone moves in any interaction. In each case of a question being asked in this interaction, the question is minimized, as can be seen in excerpt 1. In my data of native English speaker interactions, questions are often expanded or elaborated as speakers signal a variety of stances and engage in more subtle interactional practices than simple information transfer. For example, questions can appear in strings of two or three back-to-back questions, often with a 'wh' question followed by a Y/N question, often serving as a topic proffer. (E.g., 'How was your weekend? Did you do anything special?') Alternatively, questions can be followed by exemplar answers to indicate more precisely the sought for information ('What time did you work, like, was it morning or afternoon?') The interactional functions of these types of questions are complex and multi-faceted, (See Campbell-Larsen, 2019b), but once again the complete absence of any other kind of question format in this specific interaction and across numerous other data indicates that this kind of questioning language may be a suitable target for instruction.

Turn-taking

In the glass half full approach, it is apparent that turn-taking occurs, and recurs, in a mostly smooth manner. The participants signal that a transition relevance point (TRP) has been reached and the other participant orients to the fact that speaker change is relevant and generally takes the next turn in a more or less smooth manner. However, in my data collections of student talk, one stand- out practice is the reliance on the formulaic expression ‘How about you?’ to signal speaker transition. In this data, the expression is used just once.

Excerpt 17

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77. M:  How about you?
78. Y:  ah.(.)I. I go: I went back home
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In this example, the expression is used at the end of a prolonged Q&A sequence dealing with M's weekend activities that unfolded after Y's question in lines 46 to 48 (See excerpt 11). Despite all of the intervening talk, in line 77 M's question indexes the question that was asked way back in lines 46-48. This kind of interactional structure is found repeatedly in my data, with ‘How about you?’ next-speaker nominations sometimes occurring after a very minimal contribution from the speaker, indicating that, at least in some cases, it is not used so much to select the next speaker but rather to self-deselect oneself as the current speaker. By contrast, in my data of native English speaker interaction, the formulation is largely absent, even across very extended interactions. (See Campbell-Larsen (2019c) for more on ‘How about you?’) The (over)reliance on this formula to bring about speaker transition may be pragmatically inappropriate, placing the burden of maintaining progressivity on the other speaker(s). As such it is a suitable subject for awareness raising in future lessons.

Usage

There are several instances of usage in this interaction where the lexis is subtly different from the norms of native speaker Usage. One example is the use of the word ‘sleepy’ by Y in response to M's ‘How are you?’ greeting/enquiry (line 04, not reproduced here). The word ‘sleepy’ in English is a somewhat marginal word and corpus studies reveal that it is often used with a non-animate referent in expressions like 'sleepy village', or 'sleepy backwater' indicating quiet and rural. This use of the word 'sleepy' by the student here may be a case of L1 transfer. In Japanese a difference is made between, on the one hand, fatigue from exertion, work or concentration and on the other hand, the desire to sleep/ (the words *tsukareta/shindoi* and *nemui/nemutai* respectively). English speakers more likely use the word 'tired', or the upgrade adjective 'exhausted' in both situations. That is, one can be tired after a gym session and also tired late at night. What is always differentiated in Japanese is not usually differentiated in English.

A second point of usage is the use of the word 'many' to describe the number of flowers given as a birthday gift. As noted by Swan (1994, section 233), the quantifying words 'much' and 'many' tend to be used in certain environments in English: a) questions, b) negatives, and c) positive sentences with 'too', 'so' and 'as'. Outside of these types of utterance, in casual daily conversation English speakers tend to use the multi-word formula 'a lot of', or draw on a menu of other fixed expressions like 'loads of, tons of' and the like. The usage in this conversation is typical of the ways that Japanese learners of English talk about large numbers or amounts, and demonstrates a slight difference from the talk of native speakers and proficient L2 users of English.

Now, it might be objected that the usage of words like 'sleepy' and 'many' are not in any way problematic to the achievement of mutual understanding and thus should not to be viewed as targets for teaching, or even that focus on items like these are instances of native-speakerism. These arguments are not without merit, but I take the point of view that as a language learner myself, I am very eager to learn usage points of my L2 or L3 that are analogous to the items referred to here. I also have a moral imperative to make accurate statements about the way vocabulary is used in the target language rather than making one-sided decisions about facts that the students should or should not know. The occurrence in the data of some of the common but subtle points of usage in the L2, especially items that are recurrent in learner talk, is a useful starting point for more focused vocabulary teaching.

This concludes an overview of the data from the glass half empty perspective. There are undoubtedly other aspects of this data that could also inform teaching. It must be stressed here that the purpose is not to stigmatize the learners as deficient communicators. Rather, I seek to highlight some aspects of learner talk that emerge from a meticulous transcription of participants engaging in basic social interactions. The insights thus gained can serve as a robust foundation for future awareness raising and instruction.

Discussion

In this paper, I have concentrated on a rather short interaction and tried to identify some areas of practice that seem ripe for future instruction, or at least some kind of awareness raising activity. The points noted here are not limited to this particular interaction but are found consistently, to greater or lesser extent, in much of my data of speaking by Japanese learners of English. Conversations cannot consist merely of extended strings of minimized questions and similarly minimized answers. Nor can conversations rely on repeated use of 'how about you?' as a turn transition mechanism. Likewise, having the interactional management mechanisms, such as repair, discourse marking and listener receipts (backchannels), consistently carried out in L1 is something that a teacher should address at some point. The unconscious compromising of progressivity for the sake of hypercorrecting a small range of syntactic and morphological points is further aspect of student talk that can be overtly addressed, once it is noticed. The key here is for the teacher to notice these aspects of talk and attempt to address them, if this is possible and allowable in the institutional setting that pertains. It is perhaps informative to speculate a little on the underlying reasons that student interactions are so characteristically shaped across a range of speakers with a range of abilities in the L2.

Sources of difference: Ignorance and transfer

L2 spoken interaction is often unlike L1 speaking and there may be several underlying causes of this. Of course, the most profound source of difference will be the learner's ignorance of vocabulary and grammar. The initial stages of any language learning program will feature spoken interactions of a very basic nature. For CA analysists the ethnomethodologists of these kinds of interactions are interesting (following the 'glass half full' ethos), and there may be valuable insights gained into the communicative practices of these speakers. But for those engaged in language teaching, these rudimentary exchanges are viewed as 'glass half empty' examples of language use and something to be addressed in the teaching program as a priority. Paucity of lexical and grammatical knowledge, along with issues of confidence and fear of error will be the underlying causes of these sparse, broken and extremely simple exchanges. But the lack of lexis and grammar cannot be blamed for all of the ways in which the interactional glass is half empty. L2 interactions may still be of a quite elementary nature even after several years of formal language instruction.

In addition to lack of concrete knowledge on the level of lexis and grammar, it is unproblematic to assume that the speaker's L1 will have some effect on the production of L2 utterances. The existence of identifiable and attributable foreign accents demonstrates an L1 effect on the L2. As noted by Prince (1988, p. 505), "Borrowing has been well documented at many linguistic levels, including phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, and semantic."

In the case of Japanese learners of English there may be word order issues, infelicitous direct translations of L1 words, missing or misused articles, omission of plural forms of nouns and the like. The issue of transfer is quite complex, as discussed by Odlin, (2022). For example, a word used by a learner may be a loanword from the L2 into the L1. Whether the word is used as an L1 word transferred into the L2 or whether it is used as an L2 word in its own right may be an irresolvable question. Whatever the case, L1 influence on L2 speech production, at some level is a reasonable assumption. In addition to the influence of the L1 in terms of grammar and vocabulary, there may be other influences on L2 speaking. As noted by Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006),

> When non-native speakers converse in another language, they frequently tend to behave according to the socio-culturally appropriate norms of their native language rather than those of the target language, often regardless of their level of proficiency. (pp. 55-56)

That is, speakers may transfer over into the L2 things like considerations of hierarchy, and status, (Ellis, 1991), appropriate levels of self-disclosure and topic choice (Iwata, 2010), and other aspects that are not entirely matched to expectations of mundane interactions in the L2. In addition to these general points of transfer, it may be the case that learners are transferring discourse norms from the specific realm of the classroom. By this I mean that their experience of learning English has been in the institutional setting of the classroom in the context of a formally constituted language lesson. This may account for the orientation to a Q&A format and the focus on producing correct sentence-level utterances that tends to prioritize grammaticality over progressivity. If students are primarily habituated to speaking as part of an IRF sequence (and usually in the second 'slot' of that sequence), it may be understandable that this serves as a baseline model for other speaking occasions.

In summary, I suggest that the simple starting point of teachers' reasoning may be that the students struggle to speak because they don't know enough vocabulary and grammar. This is overwhelmingly true only at the very earliest stages of learning. But as learning proceeds, more complex and interactionally competent speaking may not automatically emerge, especially if learners are never given any opportunity to speak beyond that which serves only the institutional agenda. Learners may need to be explicitly instructed in interactional aspects of the target language. Teachers should endeavor to give students opportunities to engage in non-institutional talk and then closely analyze these interactions to observe and understand what is going on. This can mean in an interactional sense as well as locating lexical and grammatical points that can be more finely tuned to the norms of the L2. The kind of analysis carried out in this paper can serve as an example of what sort of things a teacher may look for and provide a robust empirical base for lesson content that widens the repertoire of interactional skills that learners have at hand.

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