Learners' Interactional Competence in EFL Classroom Speaking Activities: Adjacency Pair Organization in Topic Management

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Abstract
This paper focuses on conversation excerpts from four different EFL class speaking activities in Japan. Conversation analysis is applied to the excerpts to uncover similar interactional practices across the different language learning contexts, with a special focus on how students utilized their adjacency pair organization as a resource to manage topics in their interactions with one another. Through this lens, we hope to develop a better understanding of students' developing interactional competence and offer consideration of approaches to further help improve students' communicative and interactional competence.

Introduction

This paper aims to understand how Japanese students of English display their *interactional competence* (IC) in routine speaking activities in classes. Toward this goal, we recorded our students' conversations and analyzed how they continued their conversations, with a specific focus on topic management. This conversation practice, informed by communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques, is different from typical language learning settings in Japanese schools. Many emphasize teaching non-communicative English in the form of rote repetition and

memorization via vocabulary or grammar drills (Toyoda, Yashima, & Aubrey, 2021, p. 190). By shifting the focus of their classrooms towards communicative activities, we hope to expand our students' L2 interactional capabilities. Even though each of us use a different approach in our various school contexts, we all recognize the importance of developing our students' IC and the usefulness of conversation analysis to inform us in this endeavor.

Communicative Language Teaching, Interactional Competence, and Conversation Analysis

Communicative language teaching (CLT) aims to develop communicative competence, including grammatical competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence (Celce-Murcia, 2008; following Canale & Swain, 1980). Brown (2007) gives his definition of CLT as "an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task-based activities, and communication for the real world, meaningful purposes" (p. 378). According to Wong and Waring (2021), "CLT is an approach to the teaching of a second or foreign language that emphasizes communication as both the goal and means of learning a language. Within this approach, learners regularly work in pairs and groups, authentic materials and tasks are used, and skills are integrated from the beginning" (p. 7). While most classrooms in the Japanese EFL context seem to focus either on their students' *linguistic competence* (e.g., a student's grammar or vocabulary knowledge) or their *formulaic competence* (e.g., a student's knowledge of set lexical frames or idioms), interactional competence (IC) is often neglected in such EFL classrooms. This is problematic because IC is the "hands-on" feature of language, which facilitates interpersonal interaction leading to successful socially situated communication in one's target language (Celce-Murcia, 2008, pp. 45-49). We believe that more should be done to help develop EFL students' IC to improve their overall communicative competence as a result.

While the full breadth and history of IC is beyond the scope of this paper, it is generally accepted that as a theory, IC builds upon the seminal work of Dell Hymes in the 1970s in his attempt to break away from the more formalist understandings of language that were predominant at the time (Pekarek Doehler, 2019, p. 26). Regarding the practical features of IC, Nguyen (2019) stated that "interactional competence (IC) is the ability to achieve actions locally, contingently, and collaboratively with others in contextual social interaction" (p. 60). In other words, it is the capability to achieve actions through practices such as turn-taking or dealing with problems of understanding in actual social interaction. This means it is possible to see how the speakers display their abilities to organize conversation through analyzing their conversations. *Conversation Analysis* (CA) has its roots in sociology. However, it has become an essential tool adopted by many Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers who are proponents of a more socially-oriented approach to language learning dynamics and its practices (Pekarek Doehler, 2019, pp. 27-28). The teachers-as-researchers of this paper, too, have discovered CA to be an effective tool for understanding the interactional practices that make up their students' interactive competence as they are displayed publicly in talk, such as in their turn-taking, sequencing, overall structure, and repair practices (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 14). We hope that readers of this paper

who work in similar teaching contexts will be able to consider such CA-SLA approaches for their own classrooms and to understand and improve their own students' interactional practices.

Topic Management

Topic management is a part of 'big-package' sequencing practices to organize a conversation. Sacks (1995) offered the view that by continuing the topic at hand, a speaker is able to contribute to a conversation in a way that is likely to be accepted and preserves the existence of a 'now' for both parties through orientation towards the current topic (p. 538). Topic maintenance is a highly desirable interactional practice for EFL students because it enables speakers to display their value for and understanding of the conversation they are presently engaged with. Additionally, topic management is relatively easy to teach due to the relatively simple "interactional maneuvering" (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 167).

In detail, there are various practices of topic management, such as topic initiation, topic pursuit, topic maintenance, topic shift, and topic termination (Wong & Waring, 2021, pp. 187-188). They all work together in enabling participants to carry out the conversation. We chose to focus on topic management practices because, as Wong & Waring (2021) said, "[f]or the language teacher, understanding the complexities of topic management is an important component of one's pedagogical repertoire" (p. 187). By analyzing how students manage topics, we hope to identify areas that need further development, and learners may also notice their improvements through instructor feedback.

Wong & Waring (2021) note a few different topic maintenance techniques speakers can utilize, including topicalizers (e.g., inviting focus with an "oh really?"), acknowledgment tokens (such as mhm), substitutions (e.g., tying one's utterance to a previous utterance), and deletion (e.g., a speaker recasting a previous utterance as a "me too" statement for themselves) (p. 167). Speakers can also sustain a conversation with techniques such as offering response tokens, including invitations of continuation or assessment (Wong & Waring, 2021, pp. 94-101) and topic pursuit strategies such as announcing news or reclaiming a topic to bring attention back to oneself (Wong & Waring, 2021, pp. 164-166).

Topic shifts are another part of topic management. Topic shifts either change the focus within an already established topic or shift from one topic toward a new one (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 167). They are important tools for keeping a conversation going. If a speaker wishes to avoid a topic or move into a new one, they will need to employ topic shifts.

Adjacency Pair Organization

After viewing students' recorded classroom activities designed to practice or assess speaking skills, we observed that their topic management was largely achieved through adjacency pairs, which are the basic practice of sequencing by different speakers. It is important to examine how learners organize adjacency pairs because, as Wong & Waring (2021) note, "[f]or the second language teacher, understanding these basic tools of building conversations is an important component of one's pedagogical repertoire" (p. 108).

An adjacency pair consists of a *first pair-part* and a *second pair-part*, but can be expanded to include *pre-expansions* (e.g., asking an initial question before an intended question); *insert expansions* (e.g., inserting intermediate utterances for clarification), or *post-expansions* (e.g., an utterance that is still tied to a base adjacency pair) (Wong & Waring, 2021, pp. 80-86). Such expansions can be minor, such as this *sequence-closing third* highlighted by Wong & Waring (2021, p. 86):

```
[Schegloff, 2007, p. 283 - modified]
01   Ava:    Where's he going.
02   Bee:    To Wa:shington.
03   Ava: →  Oh.
```

In this excerpt, the authors' analysis indicates that the simple utterance of "Oh" indicates an implied closure to the ongoing topic. Competent speakers of a language can navigate such simple language functions almost effortlessly. In contrast, less competent speakers, without training, might have trouble adapting to even the simplest of conventions in their L2 since IC cannot be transferred but rather must be calibrated and re-adapted as their L2 IC evolves through practice (Pekarek Doehler, 2019, p. 30). As such, even minor utterances or interactional gestures that seem relatively unimportant at first glance can potentially yield rich insight into a learner's L2 development.

Background

The data were video recordings of pair interactions by students learning English as a foreign language in Japan. While these excerpts are from various grade levels, they share a similar goal: to enhance the learners' communicative competence using communication strategies and timed conversations. The students were taught openers and closers prior to completing their assigned tasks. Teachers in the first and second excerpts encouraged follow-up questions, shadowing (repetition), and rejoinders. In the third excerpt, the teacher instructed students to use openers and closers. These approaches were informed by CLT (see review above).

Students were discouraged from using their first language (L1) during the conversation. The time set by the teachers varied; the first and second excerpts aimed for a three-minute conversation, the third excerpt set a 40-second talk time, and the fourth excerpt set a one-minute goal.

The first conversation took place at a private language school in Japan. The participants, Mio and Kay (pseudonyms), were sixth-grade students, and the video was recorded during one of their speaking tests in July 2021. The topics were pre-selected, and students were given a few minutes to practice before the test.

The second conversation was recorded in a Japanese public school in February 2021. The participants, Tom and Rio (pseudonyms), were seventh-grade students, and the video was part of their three-minute speaking test, whose topic was movies. The goal for the year is for the students to be able to speak English naturally in pairs for three or more minutes. They have been doing small talk activities at the beginning of every class to meet the goal.

The third conversation is a 40-second timed small talk of two tenth-grade students. It was taken on June 10th, 2021. Like the second excerpt, the theme of this small talk was movies. The teacher demonstrated a model conversation with a student in which the teacher asked what movie title they like and what genre of movie they like. They were given 40 seconds to talk, prompted by a timer. The students changed partners four times, talking about the same topic. The excerpt features Yuki and Mako (pseudonyms) in their fourth pairing in this activity.

The fourth and final conversation focuses on two eleventh-grade students, Rin and Koki (pseudonyms), in an activity to practice the grammar point "be doing" in small talk. The participants were second-year senior high-school students. Their major was physical education (P.E.), and they took English as a minor subject. They knew each other well since they were classmates in other classes, too. The class utilized form-focused instruction, which Long (1991) refers to as a pedagogical approach that draws students' attention to linguistic elements arising incidentally in communicative language lessons (pp. 45-46).

Analysis

Conversation Openings

Opening and closing organize a conversation and are composed of two or more turns (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 11). The data show that students can initiate conversations with routine phrases. However, these phrases do not reflect the actual situations, and they often have issues when transitioning from opening to the first topic.

The greeting sequence *hello-hello* can be seen in Excerpts 1 through 3. The exchange of greetings forms an adjacency pair and is usually found in the first turns of daily conversations. Interestingly, students use the same greeting format across different school contexts, grade levels, and activity types. This may suggest a lack of varied greeting formats among students.

Excerpt 1: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
1    Mio:  hello
2    Kay:  hello::
3          (.)
4    Mio:  >how are you:?<
5    Kay:  i':m sleepy:: and °tired°? (.)
6          ((looks up))
7          [(and you)
8    Mio:  [i'm- >i'm fine.< i: ah-?
```

Excerpt 2: Tom and Rio (7th-grade students, 12-13 years old)
```
1    Tom:  [hello:.
2    Rio:  [hello:. (.) (how's it going.)
3    Tom:  oh (.) I'm okay. how are you doing.
4    Rio:  I'm great.
5    Tom:  oh.=
```

Excerpt 3: Rin and Koki (11th-grade students, 16-17 years old)
```
1    Rin:  hello!
2    Koki: hell[o:
```

```
3     Rin:      [hello Koki
4     Koki: ah: [:
5     Rin:      [how are you.
6     Koki: i'm fi:ne <thank you: > and yo:u: .
7     Rin:  eh: i('m) fine.
8           (1.0)
9     Koki: ((nods once))
```

The greeting sequence *hello-hello* is followed by the *how-are-you* sequence in all excerpts. A variation can be seen in the second excerpt where the students used "how's it going" and "how are you doing" instead of the typical "how are you." This suggests that these students may have the ability to vary their *how-are-you* formats in interaction. Given that the *how-are-you* sequence is commonly used when participants have not established mutual engagement, the fact that the students in our data use it even though they have been in interaction with each other right before the timed conversation suggests that they were orienting to the 'display' nature of the interaction. In other words, they do not treat the conversation as a real conversation but for exhibition. This illustrates what Wagner (1998) referred to as the phenomenon of language learners in classrooms doing being 'guinea pigs.' Another possible reason the students use the *how-are-you* sequences in these timed conversations is that they are accustomed to this manner of greeting. They need to know variations in opening a conversation and be aware of how situations and relationships with the interlocutor affect the choice of words one normally uses during conversation.

It can also be observed that the greeting sequence's structure is complete; however, silence occurs as students try to transition from the greeting into the first topic. In the first excerpt, silence is seen in lines 3 and 5; in the third excerpt, in line 4; and in the last excerpt, in line 8.

Topic Initiation and Responses

Topic initiation is sometimes achieved via a pre-pre (preliminary to preliminary), which is "a device by which one announces an upcoming action without producing that action immediately afterwards" (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 35). This is illustrated in Excerpts 4 and 5.

Excerpt 4: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
5     Kay:  i':m sleepy:: and °tired°? (0.3)
6           ((looks up))
7           [(and you)
8     Mio:  [i'm- >i'm fine.< i: ah-?
9           may i: ask about school?
10          (0.1)
11          ((tries to make eye contact with Kay))
12    Kay:  ye- <okay::>
13          (0.2)
```

Excerpt 5: Tom and Rio (7th-grade students, 12-13 years old)
```
6     Rio:  =let's talk about our favorite movie.
7     Tom:  oh. sure.
8     Rio:  okay:. what is your: favorite movie.
9           (.)
```

In Excerpt 4, the pre-pre projects a potential multi-unit turn by asking a question about school (line 9) while in Excerpt 5, the announcement of the topic of the conversation before starting with the questions occurs in line 6. In both cases, the other students responded to the pre-pre with a preferred answer or alignment. This negotiation seems superfluous since the topic was predetermined. The students seem to employ this adjacency pair to enter into the topic rather than truly negotiating what to talk about. Also, they might be using this method to enter a topic because they have been practicing conversation tasks using these pre-pre formulations. In contrast, the student in Excerpt 5 initiates the topic explicitly with a topic announcement. There are no pre-expansions in the sixth and seventh excerpts.

Excerpt 6: Yuki and Mako (10th-grade, 15-16 years old)
```
1    T:     ↑ha:i three: >two one< go::.
2    Yuki: [↑hello:,
3    Mako: [↑hello:,
4          (0.5)
5    Yuki: i like. (0.5) comedy movies.
6          (1.0)
7    Yuki: how about you.
8          (1.0)
9    Mako: °i like-u (0.5) romance mov[ies.°
10   Yuki:                            [↓o::h.
11         (1.0)
```

In Excerpt 6, the announcement at line 1 is a bit out of place, as there is no transition from the greetings to the main topic. The topics are initiated by directly asking the questions required of the task.

Similarly, it can be seen in the seventh excerpt (lines 10 to 14) that the topic of conversation starts abruptly and unrealistically.

Excerpt 7: Rin and Koki (11th-grade, 16-17 years old)
```
5    Rin:     [how are you.
6    Koki: i'm fi:ne <thank you˸ > and yo:u˸ .
7    Rin:  eh: i('m) fine.
8          (1.0)
9    Koki:            nods once
10   Rin˸  <what were you doing (.) at ten last
11         night.>
12   Koki: ah: i was (3.0) studyi:ng [(2.0) hh.
13         $studying >at ten last
14   Rin:                           [hh.
15         night<$[
16   Rin:        [hh.
17   Rin:  OH::!
18         (4.0)
```

In a natural conversation, people would ask a topic initial elicitor such as "what's new?" (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 155). Since the context and purpose for the question "what were you doing at 10 last night?" are missing, some might interpret it as a sudden topic initiation.

It is interesting to note how students used questions to initiate a topic in all excerpts. With questions and answers, it is easier for the students to talk about a predetermined topic and expand it with the use of more (follow-up) questions. Via the question-and-answer adjacency pair organization, the students initiated topics in a structured way since the first pair-part provides the expected scope and format for the second pair-part. In this regard, we note that the students did not show much agency; their answers are almost always preferred and type-conforming. These students could use other methods for topic initiation to further develop interactional competence, such as comments and assessments.

Topic Maintenance

We analyzed how our students tried to talk about topics. In particular, we looked at how our students attempted to pursue topics, used their L1 to prevent lapses, and engaged in self-repair to keep their conversations going.

Methods for continuing the topic

We see some of the topic maintenance methods described by Wong and Waring (2021, see review above) in the data, including reclaiming and assessment. Across our contexts, we found reclaiming, assessment, and repetition (also known pedagogically as a 'shadowing' strategy). In Excerpt 8, we see how students use *reclaiming* and topic shift to maintain the topic.

Excerpt 8: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
14   Mio:   ↑how man-. wha- whe- >where do you go
15          to school.?<
16   Kay:   i go to yamate elementary school:.
17   Mio:   i go to mitake >fushimi elementary
18          school< in ↓mitake town.
19   Kay:   i see::.
20   Mio:   how- ↑how many: (0.3) how many (.)
21          your class.
```

After Kay completes an adjacency pair with her answer to Mio's question (line 16), Mio maintains the topic of their respective elementary schools by *reclaiming* the topic through her school affiliation (lines 17 and 18). This prompts a minimal post-expansion called a *sequence-closing third* (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 86) that ends that part of the conversation. However, Mio's interactional competence is exercised when she initiates a topic shift by inquiring about the number of students in Kay's class (line 17). Thus, she continues the conversation in a potentially fruitful direction that will allow them to compare their respective school-life experiences.

Excerpt 9 displays more ways in which these students were able to maintain the topic of conversation through *assessment*.

Excerpt 9: Tom and Rio (7th-grade students, 12-13 years old)
```
8    Rio:  okay:. what is your: favorite movie.
9          (.)
10   Tom:  oh what? ah:: (0.5) let me see: (1.0)
11         >↑my favorite movie is? (.) minions.<
12   Rio:  okay, MINIONS!
13   TOM:  oh:. ye:s.
14   RIO:  cute!
15         (1.0)
```

     After Tom reveals his favorite movie, Rio maintains the topic in his turn by excitedly repeating part of Rio's question ("favorite movie," line 11). Tom offers a potential *sequence-closing third* (line 13), which Rio complements with his own sequence-closer in the form of a positive offer assessment in praise of the topicalized movie characters (line 14), while still potentially leaving the conversation open to a more positive development of a topic which seems to be of mutual interest to them.

     Excerpt 10 once more shows repetition (a simple 'shadowing' strategy) that Rin uses to maintain the topic at hand while also acting as a sequence closing-third to put the onus of further topic maintenance or change on his speaking partner (line 21). Koki obliges with a slight topic shift in the form of a question (line 22) that refocuses the conversation on Rin's answer (line 23) to his question.

Excerpt 10: Rin and Koki (11th-grade students, 16-17 years old)
```
12   Koki: ah: i was (3.0) studyi:ng [(2.0) hh.
13         $studying >at ten last
14   Rin:                               [hh.
15          night<$[
16   Rin:         [hh.
17   Rin:  OH::!
18         (4.0)
19         pointing at Koki and herself
20   Koki: °(nice, nice) °
21   Rin:  ah,↑nice.
22   Koki: how about you.
23   Rin:  eh I <was-u eh studying-u> at
24         >ten last night<
```

     While common exchanges like these are relatively minor in terms of lexical complexity, they might be interpreted as fair indicators of their speakers' developing discourse competence as they make meaningful efforts to employ their L2 interactional resources in interaction with one another.

Use of the First Language (Japanese)
We also discovered that, in pursuing a topic, the students in our data sometimes utilized their shared L1. There are examples of this L1 use in Excerpts 11 and 12.

In lines 23 and 26 in Excerpt 11, Kay switches to her L1 while producing a word search. Kay finally finds the word she wants in line 29. Mio then switches to their shared L1 to confirm her understanding at line 30. Kay again switches back to their L1 at line 32, and they finally come to an understanding.

Excerpt 11: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
20   Mio: how- ↑how many: (0.3) how many (.)
21        your class.
22        (0.4)
23   Kay: °etto::°, my class et::to
24        ((uhm in japanese))
25        ↓in people i::s
26        ↑nandakke?
27        ((what was that? in japanese))
28        xxxxx eh
29        twenty one class.
30   Mio: °nijuichi kurasu°
31        ((twenty one classes in japanese))
32   Kay: niju ((twenty in japanese)) eh?
33        twenty eh? twenty one class.
34   Mio: [°o::h° (h) tha(h)t's (hh)
35   Kay: [eh? ↑nandakke.
36        ((what was that again? in japanese))
37   Mio: that's oh (h) tha(h)t's ma(h)ny (0.2)
```

In Excerpt 12, in line 17, Yuki also produces a word search (with pauses and restarts) and finally resolves the word search herself by switching to Japanese in line 19 ("majyo"). Despite being instructed not to use Japanese, they used their L1 to prevent a lapse and progress the conversation.

Excerpt 12: Yuki and Mako (10th-grade students, 15-16 years old)
```
17   Yuki: i li:ke (1.0) i li:ke (1.0) eh:::.
18         (1.5)
19   Yuki: >majyo?<
20          witch
21   Mako: ah [majyo.
22             witch
23   Yuki:    [i like witch.
24   Mako: °witch ahh.° i:t's (1.0) horror?
```

In both examples, a speaker had difficulty producing a target word in English. They engaged in a word search and, when unable to find the desired word, switched to their L1. This L1 use allowed them to negotiate meaning, sustain topic development, and avoid a lapse in the conversation. Having a shared L1 made this possible.

Self-Repair During Topic Maintenance

Repair can be started by a speaker who produces a trouble-source themselves (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 314) or by another speaker (e.g., incorrect word, a misspoken utterance, a word that the person cannot remember, or an utterance) (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 312). In our students' conversations, repairs were generally self-initiated. These self-repairs (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 318) helped them maintain their topics and keep the conversation going. The use of self-repair by the students can be seen in Excerpts 13 through 16.

Excerpt 13: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
9    Mio   may i: ask about school?
10         (0.1)
11         ((tries to make eye contact with Kay))
12   Kay:  ye- <okay::>
13         (0.2)
14   Mio:  ↑how man-. wha- whe- >where do you go
15         to school.?<
16   Kay:  i go to yamate elementary school:.
17   Mio:  i go to mitake >fushimi elementary
18         school< in ↓mitake town.
19   Kay:  i see::.
20   Mio:  how- ↑how many: (0.3) how many (.)
21         your class.
```

Excerpt 14: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
40   Mio   what- what- (.) what- do you? ↓school
41         (0.2) >what do
42         you school (ah) what's your favorite<
43         school ↓subject.
44   Kay:  >my favorite school subject is<
45         arts and cra:ft.
```

In Excerpt 13, Mio shows self-repair initiation in lines 14, 20, 40 to 43 as she produces misspoken utterances and tries to repair them by herself. In line 14, Mio cuts some words off and replaces words in the same turn. In Excerpt 13, Mio tries to say "how many" in line 14, then realizes that she first needs to ask about the school as a first topic after the distinctive topic shift in line 9. After Mio asks about the school, Mio asks "how- ↑how many: (0.3) how many (.)" (we believe she meant to ask "how many people in your class") in line 20. In Excerpt 14, Mio wants to remain on the topic; thus, Mio tries to ask a question related to school in lines 40 to 43. These same-turn self-repairs indicate her understanding that she needs to take a turn to talk, even though she does not have the linguistic materials ready to build the turn at the onset. These moments of self-repair also give a valuable glimpse into the student's thinking process as they assemble the turns 'on the fly.' In line 14, Mio's turn shows that she has difficulty selecting what to focus on as the topic, the number of students in Kay's class, what Kay studies (possibly), or where Kay goes to school. On the other hand, in lines 40-43, it appears that her struggle is not with the selection of topics but with the grammatical formation of the question, as the linguistic elements for the question appear bit by bit before the full question is produced.

Excerpt 15: Yuki and Mako (10th-grade students, 15-16 years old)
```
17   Yuki: i li:ke (1.0) i li:ke (1.0) eh:::.
18         (1.5)
19   Yuki: >majyo?<
20          witch
21   Mako: ah [majyo.
22             witch
23   Yuki:    [i like witch.
24   Mako: °witch ahh.° i:t's (1.0) horror?
25         (1.0)
```

When Yuki uses a Japanese word (line 19) in Excerpt 15, Mako shows recognition via an acknowledgment token, "ah" (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 165), but Yuki self-repairs the L1 word with a target-language word, "witch," in line 23. This third-turn self-repair seems to indicate Yuki's orientation to the activity as one that is for English practice.

Students sometimes employ third-position repair to continue the topic, as seen in Excerpt 16.

Excerpt 16: Tom and Rio (7th-grade students, 12-13 years old)
```
16   Rio:  eh: (0.5) what kind of movie is it.
17   Tom:  oh:: (1.0) ↑in the movie:,(2.0)
18         <in the mov-(1.0) vie (1.0)> in the
19         movie:,(1.0)
20   Rio:  for example: it i:s(0.5) ah: action
21         movie.
22         (2.0)
23   Rio:  or: (0.5) ah: >animation movie.<=
24   Tom:  =oh:, okay! ↑IT'S (0.5) it is (1.0)
25         ah: animation movie!
```

After Rio's question (line 16), Tom seems to struggle to produce a response, as seen in his repetition of the same phrase three times, pauses, sound stretches, and sound cut-offs (lines 17-19). Rio's turn in line 20 is a third-position self-repair to modify his question from an open-ended *Wh*-question to a choice question with two simple examples. In other words, Rio is offering a model to help constrain the possible responses for their mutual communicative benefit (Pomerantz, 1998, p. 372). Indeed, with this repair, Tom is able to produce an answer in lines 24-25. Thus this is a self-repair of the first-pair part upon seeing the partner's difficulty to provide a second pair-part. A communication breakdown could have happened without Rio's repair of his question to indicate the type of answer he is looking for.

Pivots
Pivots are a useful type of stepwise topic shift (see literature review above) and are considered one of the best ways to move from topic to topic (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 173). This is a practical strategy for EFL speakers to help sustain conversation when creating small talk with their peers as it allows them to explore potentially related topics of interest.

In Excerpt 17, we see Tom and Rio shift topics by pivoting from an initial topic to a related topic.

Excerpt 17: Tom and Rio (7th-grade students, 12-13 years old)
```
23   Rio:  or: (0.5) ah: >animation movie.<=
24   Tom:  =oh:, okay! ↑IT'S (0.5) it is (1.0)
25         ah: animation movie!
26   Rio:  okay:!(0.5) eh: what's(1.0)
27         what is your favorite: character.
28   Tom:  oh >↑my favorite character is,(1.0)<
```

Rio is talking about what kind of movie "Minions" is. In line 23, Rio says that it is an "animation movie." Tom acknowledges this in lines 24 and 25. Then at line 26, Rio closes the topic with "okay" and shifts it by pivoting with a new question-answer adjacency pair asking, "what is your favorite character?"

In Excerpt 18, Rin and Koki make use of pivots as well.

Excerpt 18: Rin and Koki (11th-grade students, 16-17 years old)
```
27   Rin:  studying
28         nods and pretends to write
29   Koki: hh. What subject.
30   Rin:  eh it's (0.1)↑English::
31   Koki: ↑$O[H ENGLISH$
32   Rin:   ↑$[OH ENGLISHu$
33            ((opens arms))
34   Koki: I like Engli:sh
35         points to himself
36   Rin:  Oh, hh. $me, too hh.$ eh:
37         What subj.subject
38         points to herself
39   Koki: ah I study: (2.0) d [(1.0) MA::TH
```

Rin and Koki are talking about what subject Rin studied last night. In line 30, Rin says she was studying English. Koki acknowledges this and then, in line 34, shifts the topic by pivoting. Rin acknowledges this and shifts the topic by pivoting also, starting a new question-answer adjacency pair at line 37, asking, "what subject?"

These sections from Excerpts 17 and 18 highlight the students' developing interactional competence. The speakers often keep the conversation going by shifting topics instead of pursuing one topic. In particular, they often use question-answer adjacency pairs to achieve this.

Topic Termination

The students in our data used some of the pre-closing practices often found in conversations among native speakers, with the most predominant being topic shifts and collaborative-implicative practices (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 179).

While the termination of a topic does not necessarily have to coincide with the closing of a conversation, the nature of our timed conversations' time limit often led to the abrupt end of both.

In Excerpt 19, in line 60, Mio initiated a collaborative closure-implicative practice due to the time limit, using the closing pattern "nice talking with you." We later see the same closing pattern in Excerpt 21 in lines 43 and 44.

Excerpt 19: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)
```
56  Kay:  o:h e:tto
57        ((uhm in japanese))
58        me too::
59        (0.2)
60  Mio:  ↑nice talking with you. >see you<
61  Kay:  see: you::
```

A variation can be seen in Excerpt 20. In line 32, Mako provides a token (line 32) after a timer sounds, signaling a termination to the conversation.

Excerpt 20: Yuki and Mako (10th-grade students, 15-16 years old)
```
28    Yuki: comedy?
29          ((timer))
30    Mako: $comedy.$ ((laugh))
31          ((timer))
32          bye
33    T:    oka:y go ho::me.
```

In this instance, the termination is initiated by a timer. There are no pre-closings and the conversation ended abruptly. There is no acknowledgment of the timer, either. There is only "bye" from Mako followed by the teacher directing the students to return to their seats.

Similarly, in Excerpt 21, we see another conversation terminated by the activity structure rather than by the natural flow of the conversation.

Excerpt 21: Rin and Koki (11th-grade students, 16-17 years old)
```
39    Koki: ah I study: (2.0) d [(1.0) MA::TH
40                             ((bell rings))
41    Rin:  $↑ A:::H$ hh.
42          ((raises left hand))
43    Koki: hh. $nice talking with you$
44    Rin:  nice talking with you. too
```

In lines 43 and 44, we see abrupt closings without any pre-closing. Both Rin and Koki hear the bell ring, and it prompts them to close quickly. Both Excerpts 20 and 21 show that this type of timed conversation does not give students sufficient opportunity to practice the kinds of pre-closing procedures that are typically found in naturally occurring conversations. This might be an important pedagogical point for us to consider in future timed conversation activities with our students in order to further develop their IC.

Discussion

We found that the students mostly developed their conversations in question-answer adjacency pairs. Those question-answer pairs tended to shift topics without developing much talk on any particular subject. There were few pre- or post-expansions. It would therefore be beneficial to teach students more topic management strategies. For example, by practicing topic pursuit strategies, students would be better able to pursue topics and not be required to frequently shift to keep the conversation going (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 164). It would also be beneficial for students to emphasize more pre- and post-expansion phrases. If the students incorporated pre-expansion phrases such as "hey," and post-expansion phrases such as "oh I see," it would allow conversations to progress more naturally and improve the students' topic management skills. In all four conversations, the topics were pre-selected by the teacher. The students all started with greetings and some with *how-are-you* sequences. However, since the topics were already known, the students moved into them directly without using topic initial elicitors. Introducing topic initial elicitors such as "what's new?" and "how are things going?" would allow the students to flow into the topic more naturally. Likewise, topic nominations such as itemized news inquiry (e.g., "Did you hear about ~?") and setting talk (e.g., "That's a nice bag") would give them more options. They might then naturally find a topic to talk about as well. Alternatively, if the main topic has been terminated, they can use it to find a new topic to continue talking about. Teachers may also consider giving students a range of topics to choose from, thus necessitating the process of topic nomination and initiation more realistically.

One practice most students seemed able to do was topic maintenance. Students used reclaiming and assessment in Conversations 2, 3, and 4. There was also some form of self-repair in all conversations. In Conversations 1 and 3, students used their L1 to help manage the topic. These various interactional approaches allowed the students to prevent a lapse and move the topic forward. These should be further encouraged and practiced and are a comparatively easy way for the students to manage their conversations. As Wong and Waring (2021) observed, in general, topic maintenance may be the easiest to teach, as speaking topically is the natural and expected pathway that requires less interactional maneuvering and can be accomplished with a limited range of linguistic resources (p. 167).

In all four conversations, stepwise topic shifts were mostly used to move from one aspect of a topic to the next. This was usually done by pivoting–asking and answering questions relevant to their subject matter. Such shifts are likely an efficient method for students in these contexts to create sensible adjacency pairs with one another while staying in a familiar conversational context. What is not present in the data are disjunctive markers (e.g., "anyway," "I tell you what," "by the way," etc.), perhaps due to the short duration of the activity and the fact that only one topic is required of the students. It is worth investigating whether explicitly teaching students such markers, in conjunction with a revision in activity design (e.g., giving students more time to talk about at least two topics), could help them further develop their IC in the context of their classroom conversational activities.

Another possible approach is to introduce a conversational technique suggested by Newton & Nation (2021) following the formula "Q →SA+EI," which suggests that a question (Q) should be followed up with a short answer (SA) and some extra information (EI). In doing so, the goal would be to build more interactional speaking opportunities for our students rather than

simply relying on conveying information (Newton & Nation, 2021, p.151). For example, in Conversation 2 of this paper's collected data, where Rio asks about Tom's favorite movie (line 8) and Tom answers (line 11) "My favorite movie is Minions," it could be beneficial for the development of their conversation if Tom were encouraged to talk about an experience he had with the movie in addition to his short answer. If students were to become used to this approach, we believe they might improve their interactional practice of sharing anecdotes or short stories with one another. This would help our students move from the big-package sequencing of topic management to the more detail-oriented skills required for storytelling sequencing, an important step in socializing our students into their L2 speech community (Wong & Waring, 2021, p. 191).

All four conversations were timed, affecting the students' ability to perform natural topic terminations. Due to the short time frame, there were no topic terminations mid-conversation. In addition, the use of timers to signify the end of a conversation resulted in abrupt ends to conversations, often with no pre-closings. In order to develop this important interactional practice, it might be beneficial to teach students to use pre-closings, such as "OK" or "alright" after the timer goes off. The teacher can give a warning signal that time will soon expire so students should prepare to bring their conversations to a close.

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APPENDIX
The four conversations used as data in this paper.

Conversation 1: Mio and Kay (6th-grade students, 11-12 years old)

```
1    Mio:  hello
2    Kay:  hello::
3          (.)
4    Mio:  >how are you:?<
5    Kay:  i':m sleepy:: and °tired°? (.)
6          ((looks up))
7          [(and you)
8    Mio:  [i'm- >i'm fine.< i: ah-?
9          may i: ask about school?
10         (0.1)
11         ((tries to make eye contact with Kay))
12   Kay:  ye- <okay::>
13         (0.2)
14   Mio:  ↑how man-. wha- whe- >where do you go
15         to school.?<
16   Kay:  i go to yamate elementary school:.
17   Mio:  i go to mitake >fushimi elementary
18         school< in ↓mitake town.
19   Kay:  i see::.
20   Mio:  how- ↑how many: (0.3) how many (.)
21         your class.
22         (0.4)
23   Kay:  °etto::°, my class et::to
24         ((uhm in japanese))
25         ↓in people i::s
26         ↑nandakke?
27         ((what was that? in japanese))
28         xxxxx eh
29         twenty one class.
30   Mio:  °nijuichi kurasu°
31         ((twenty one classes in japanese))
32   Kay:  niju ((twenty in japanese)) eh?
33         twenty eh? twenty one lass.
34   Mio:  [°o::h° (h) tha(h)t's (hh)
35   Kay:  [eh? ↑nandakke.
36         ((what was that again? in japanese))
37   Mio:  that's oh (h) tha(h)t's ma(h)ny (0.2)
38         etto::
39         ((uhm in japanese))
40         what- what- (.) what- do you? ↓school
41         (0.2) >what do
42         you school (ah) what's your favorite<
43         school ↓subject.
44   Kay:  >my favorite school subject is<
45         arts and cra:ft.
46   Mio:  °oh° that's- i see: (0.3) which one
```

```
47          do you like to ↑make or write.
48   Kay:   i like (0.1) draw:.
49   Mio:   ↓°oh° ↑that's nice.
50          (0.3)
51   Kay:   °>etto<°
52          ((uhm in japanese))
53          and you?
54   Mio:   i (0.2) ↑i like draw too.
55          (0.2)
56   Kay:   o:h e:tto
57          ((uhm in japanese))
58          me too::
59          (0.2)
60   Mio:   ↑nice talking with you. >see you<
61   Kay:   see: you::
```

Conversation 2: Tom and Rio (7th-grade students, 12-13 years old)

```
1    Tom:   [hello:.
2    Rio:   [hello:. (.) (how's it going.)
3    Tom:   oh (.) I'm okay. how are you doing.
4    Rio:   I'm great.
5    Tom:   oh.=
6    Rio:   =let's talk about our favorite movie.
7    Tom:   oh. sure.
8    Rio:   okay:. what is your: favorite movie.
9           (.)
10   Tom:   oh what? ah:: (0.5) let me see: (1.0)
11          >↑my favorite movie is? (.) minions.<
12   Rio:   okay, MINIONS!
13   TOM:   oh:. ye:s.
14   RIO:   cute!
15          (1.0)
16   Rio:   eh: (0.5) what kind of movie is it.
17   Tom:   oh:: (1.0) ↑in the movie:,(2.0)
18          <in the mov-(1.0) vie (1.0)> in the
19          movie:,(1.0)
20   Rio:   for example: it i:s(0.5) ah: action
21          movie.
22          (2.0)
23   Rio:   or: (0.5) ah: >animation movie.<=
24   Tom:   =oh:, okay! ↑IT'S (0.5) it is (1.0)
25          ah: animation movie!
26   Rio:   okay:!(0.5) eh: what's(1.0)
27          what is your favorite: character.
28   Tom:   oh >↑my favorite character is,(1.0)<
29          oh:(0.5) ↑folk,
30   Rio:   $FOLK! $hh.  $okay, $hh. cute.
```

Conversation 3: Yuki and Mako (10th-grade students, 15-16 years old)

```
1     T:    ↑ha:i three: >two one< go::.
2     Yuki: [↑hello:,
3     Mako: [↑hello:,
4           (0.5)
5     Yuki: i like. (0.5) comedy movies.
6           (1.0)
7     Yuki: how about you.
8           (1.0)
9     Mako: °i like-u (0.5) romance mov[ies.°
10    Yuki:                            [↓o::h.
11          (1.0)
12    Yuki: what movie (0.5) do you like.
13    Mako: i like-u. (1.5) ↑peach girl.
14    Yuki: ah $peach girl. me too:.$
15    Mako: momochan.
16          ((main character name))
17    Yuki: i li:ke (1.0) i li:ke (1.0) eh::.
18          (1.5)
19    Yuki: >majyo?<
20             witch
21    Mako: ah [majyo.
22            witch
23    Yuki:    [i like witch.
24    Mako: °witch ahh.° i:t's (1.0) horror?
25          (1.0)
26    Yuki: no °horror.°
27          (1.5)
28    Yuki: comedy?
29          ((timer))
30    Mako: $comedy.$ ((laugh))
31          ((timer))
32          bye
33    T:    oka:y go ho::me
```

Conversation 4: Rin and Koki (eleventh-grade students, 16-17 years old)

```
1     Rin:  hello!
2     Koki: hell[o:
3     Rin:      [hello Koki
4     Koki: ah: [:
5     Rin:      [how are you.
6     Koki: i'm fi:ne <thank you: > and yo:u: .
7     Rin:  eh: i('m) fine.
8           (1.0)
9     Koki:             nods once
10    Rin:  <what were you doing (.) at ten last
11          night.>
12    Koki: ah: i was (3.0) studyi:ng [(2.0) hh.
13          $studying >at ten last
14    Rin:                            [hh.
15           night<$[
```

```
16   Rin:            [hh.
17   Rin:  OH::!
18         (4.0)
19         pointing at Koki and herself
20   Koki: °(nice, nice) °
21   Rin:  ah,↑nice.
22   Koki: how about you.
23   Rin:  eh I <was-u eh studying-u> at
24         >ten last night<
25   Koki: (1.0)
26         °studying?°
27   Rin:  studying
28         nods and pretends to write
29   Koki: hh. What subject.
30   Rin:  eh it's (0.1)↑English::
31   Koki: ↑$O[H ENGLISH$
32   Rin:    ↑$[OH ENGLISHu$
33                     she opens her arms
34   Koki: I like Engli:sh
35         points to himself
36   Rin:  Oh, hh. $me, too hh.$ eh:
37         What subj.subject
38         points to herself
39   Koki: ah I study: (2.0) d [(1.0) MA::TH
40                          ((bell rings))
41   Rin:  $↑ A:::H$ hh.
42                 she raises her left hand
43   Koki: hh. $nice talking with you$
44   Rin:  nice talking with you. too
```