Turn taking in learner conversation

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Abstract

One of the goals of foreign/ second language learning is to move the learners towards more advanced levels of fluency in the target language. But fluency is not merely the ability to produce grammatically correct utterances at a rate of speech similar to native speakers. Fluency consists in part of the concept of 'confluency' (McCarthy, 2010) which refers to the production of utterances in a way that aligns, in terms of timing and content, with the utterances of other participants, utterances both prior to the current utterance and subsequent to it. Learners must orient to a naturalistic system of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). This paper outlines the underlying systematics of turn-taking, with reference to the literature and then goes on to examine turn taking in the language of a Japanese ESL university student, in student to student interaction, referring to video data made over the course of an academic year.

The data shows that in the initial stages although the learner was able to take a turn more or less promptly, the turn onset was usually characterized by non-lexical utterances followed by extended pausing. The turn, thus begun, was continued with repeated pauses and L1 utterances and was often minimalized in terms of content. Perturbations in the turn-taking system were common and impeded progressivity. After extensive practice of spontaneous interactions over the course of a year the speaker's conversation was again recorded and analyzed. Although the student's utterances were still replete with lexical and grammatical infelicities, onset pausing was reduced, as were L1 utterances. There was increased orientation towards turn transition matters by such means as use of L2 discourse markers and three part lists. The overall result was of more progressivity in turns and fewer perturbations to the turn-taking system.

The basic use of language in daily life is in mundane social interaction. That is, two or more persons spend some amount of time speaking to each other, such interaction generally referred to by the word *conversation*. Although the word *conversation* itself is unproblematic in lay terms, the study of conversation as an academic discipline, generally termed Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA) has revealed that this apparently mundane and unprestigious activity is actually incredibly nuanced and multi-faceted and that even the shortest instances of this spontaneous multi-party talk can contain a multitude of analyzable practices and features. Examples of the kinds of things that CA research has uncovered in analysis of daily conversational exchanges is the existence of preference and dispreference in sequence organization (E.g. Pomerantz, 1984), the widespread occurrence of repair in which participants deal with trouble sources in speaking, hearing and understanding (Schegloff,

Jefferson, & Sacks, H., 1977) and perhaps the most basic point of multi-person spoken interaction, a system for organizing turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

The fact that participants in spoken interaction speak one at a time and in sequence would seem to be such a banal observation that it hardly merits serious investigation. However, a brief consideration of what actually has to happen, and what does, in large measure, happen at turn boundaries reveals the invisible rules that underlie the phenomenon of turn transition. For successful turn transition, the current speaker must reach the end of his or her turn and do so in a way that is recognizable to the subsequent speaker. That is, the turn must reach a point that is hearably complete in order for the subsequent speaker to begin taking their turn. The ways in which a speaker can reach such an end point where transition becomes relevant, the transition relevance place (TRP, see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), are multiple and interrelated. The speaker can use prosody to signal that a TRP is upcoming. The utterance can also signal its completeness by reaching the end of a recognizable grammatical structure, but this is not an absolute requirement. For example, '*I'm not sure whether he's coming or*' is a grammatically incomplete utterance. Combined with normal sentential prosody, this utterance is generally unlikely to be either designed to end here or to be followed by the immediate onset of the next speaker's turn without some indication by this subsequent speaker alluding to the incompleteness of the prior turn.

Pragmatic understanding can be utilized by speaker and listener to achieve successful turn transition even in cases where grammatical completeness is not achieved. In the case of the utterance '*I'm not sure whether he's coming or*' it may be clear to the interactants that the utterance has achieved its illocutionary goal, in this case making it clear that the speaker is unsure about a person's attendance at some specified location or event. The utterance could be concluded with 'or not' or 'even whether he's been invited' or 'if he even knows there is a party' and so on. These utterances and others like them would complete the utterance in grammatical terms, but may not be germane to the thrust of the utterance, which may be to simply communicate an epistemic minus state.

In reality, speakers rely on prosody, grammatical and pragmatic resources to various and differing degrees to indicate turn ending in each instance. Other resources such as gesture, gaze direction and onset of other action such as taking a drink, a mouthful of food and the like may also be deployed. Thus, signaling turn closure can be seen as a multi-component and purposeful action rather than a simple case of 'current speaker falls silent.'

Once a turn has reached its designed end, and that end is recognized by the other(s) in the interaction, it becomes relevant that a next turn is begun in short order. Precision timing in next speaker turn onset is designed to achieve the ideal of 'no gap, no overlap.' Stivers et al. (2009) reported that across a wide variety of languages there is remarkable similarity in the amount of time taken to produce the next turn, with average variations being measured in milliseconds. In the study conducted by Stivers et al. (2009) Danish was the language with the longest mean response time in the sample and Japanese the shortest, and even in the case of Danish, the mode response time was still only 100 milliseconds, prompting the authors to observe:

> All of the languages show on average a small positive offset in response time, i.e., responses tend to be neither in overlap nor delayed by more than a half-second. The factors that predict whether a response will be faster or slower within each language are identical across the languages. These results offer systematic cross-linguistic support for the view that turn-taking in informal conversation is universally organized so as to minimize gap and overlap, and that consequently, there is a universal semiotics of delayed response. (Stivers et al. 2009, p. 10591)

It seems that the ideal of next turn onset with 'no gap, no overlap' is oriented to by speakers of many (possibly all) languages, anecdotal accounts of long silences or a tendency to overlap notwithstanding. However, Stivers et al. point out that certain sequences may prompt longer than usual pauses between a turn and its response:

> Research on questions in English conversation has shown that speakers display inhibition in producing responses that in some way fail to conform with the terms of the question or with the questioner's agenda: thus, responses are often delayed by up to 1 s if, for example, they do not answer the question (e.g., I don't know or I can't remember) [ ] or if they give a response that runs against the bias of the question (e.g., A: Is that your car? B: No) (Stivers et al. 2009, p. 10588)

So, although the ideal turn transition is 'no gap, no overlap' there exist contingencies where gaps are normative, such gaps, even though they may seem subjectively long to the interactants, still only seem to reach a maximum duration of one second, a metric proposed by Jefferson (1988). Stivers et al. propose that such contingencies are probably universal and that the basic organization of turns to minimize the occurrence of overlapping talk or gaps between turns is likewise a universal, with only minor variation across languages as to what subjectively counts as a noticeably long pause between turns.

After the first speaker has signaled by prosody, grammatical, pragmatic cues, or any combination thereof, that a turn ending is imminent, the subsequent speaker, aware of the temporal constraints that apply to producing a next turn, then begins that turn. In addition to orienting to the time taken to produce the next turn, the speaker of that turn must also attend to the content of his or her turn. It is presupposed that the turn currently being produced is in some way connected to the prior turn, that it refers to it in some way, and has been shaped by this prior turn. McCarthy (2010) stresses the importance of turn opening items, stating 'turn openers characteristically link and provide continuity with the immediately previous talk and can be seen as creating smooth transitions and flow. (2010, p. 5-7). In support of this, McCarthy cites corpus data that demonstrates the most of the most frequent turn openers are identifiably uttered in response to some previous talk. (In order (most frequent first) the top 10 are: *yeah, mm, oh, and, I, no, [laughs], well, yes, but.* McCarthy 2010, p. 7.) Thus, not only do next speakers tend to begin their utterance in a very tightly controlled way with regards

to timing, they also tend to begin their utterance in a fairly pro forma way with regard to content.

Thus far I have referred to interactants as the first speaker and the next or subsequent speaker. In an interaction where there are two participants (i.e. a dyad), the subsequent speaker is easy to ascertain. However, not all interactions are dyads. Spoken interactions may consist of more than two speakers, but not a very large number (See Cook, 1989, p. 51), with any number above three having the possibility (and perhaps the tendency) to subdivide into smaller groups and continue their interactions independently. In the case of more than two interactants, the identity of the next speaker is not as straightforward as appears to be the case in dyadic interactions. In addition to the timing of the next turn (ideally no gap, no overlap) and the turn initial content of this next turn (ideally some reference to or receipt of the prior turn), the question of exactly who should take the next turn is also a central consideration for turn transition.

The processes by which speaker transition is controlled are set out in detail in a seminal and widely referenced paper by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). The rules are summarized by Sidnell (2010, p. 43).

Rule 1. (applies initially at the first TRP of any turn. C = current speaker, N= next speaker)

a If C selects N in current turn, the C must stop speaking and N must speak next, transition occurring at the first possible completion after N-selection.

b If C does not select N, then any (other) party may self-select, first speaker gaining rights to the next turn.

c If C does not select N, an no other party self-selects under option (b), then C may (but need not) continue (i,e, claim the rights to a further TCU).

Rule 2 — applies to all subsequent TRPs.

When rule 1 (c) has been applied by C, then at the next TRP Rules a (a) — (c) apply, and recursively at the next TRP until speaker change is effected.

To put this in concrete terms, there exists a hierarchy of turn allocation. If the current speaker has reached the end of his or her turn (a transition relevant point or TRP) and then nominates the next speaker directly, then that speaker should start talking. This would be exemplified most clearly by a question using an address term. E.g. *Jim, what kind of movies do you like?* In this case Jim would be required to provide the second pair part to the question/answer adjacency pair, that is, answer the question that was addressed to him. Such nomination can be done explicitly using an address term (i.e. a name) or it can be done implicitly using gaze, gesture or pragmatic cues. In whichever case, the current speaker has selected

the next speaker and expects that person, and no other, to take the next turn. If the selected person does not take the expected turn but either remains silent or some non-selected person takes the turn, repair may be in order or the intervening non-nominated speaker's contribution may be treated as an insertion sequence, (see below) after which the nominated speaker will take a turn.

If the next speaker is not explicitly nominated by the current speaker, the next speaker can self-select. It is understood that the person to speak first in this situation gains the right to take a turn, and any other participants should yield to this speaker.

If no next speaker is forthcoming, then the speaker who has just finished a turn that was designed by him or her as completed can self-select and therefore gain the right to a further turn. Thus, what was designed by the current speaker as a complete turn may be supplemented by that speaker with a further turn. What looks in retrospect like one bloc of speaking by one speaker may actually contain more than one turn. The internal boundaries of this series of turns may or may not be visible. Once the current speaker reaches another possible completion point, the whole process resets.

What emerges from this overview is the complex set of practices that are involved in turn-taking in daily mundane spoken interaction. Like many of the other pragmatic features of language (e.g. discourse marking, backchanneling, repair etc.) turn taking was not much attended to historically in linguistics, which focused mainly on lexical-semantic and morpho-syntactic issues. It is also perhaps worthwhile to note that these pragmatic aspects of language are, or seem to be, below the metacognitive horizon of even educated native speakers of a language and may be regarded as being hidden in plain sight. (See for example Lindsay & O'Connell, (1995) on systematic omission of discourse markers and hesitation phenomena from transcription, or Watts, (1989) for use of discourse markers during talk critical of discourse marker usage.) It would seem to be the case that many of the pragmatic aspects of language, the machinery of how interactants actually engage with one another, is not open to introspection. This may in some measure account for the relative absence of explicit reference to turn-taking in L2 instruction. It is to turn taking in the speaking of L2 leaners that I will now turn.

Turn taking in the language classroom

Nascent language learners cannot initiate and progress through turns with the same speed and automaticity as native speakers of that language. Learner-speakers may encounter difficulties with recall of vocabulary, or lack of vocabulary, issues of word order or morphology, pronunciation and so on. While they deal with these issues, the progressivity of the turn at hand is compromised. Even native speakers of a language and highly proficient speakers of a language as an L2 will encounter difficulties as they progress through turns, and will deal with these difficulties by the process known as repair. (See Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977.) Proficiency in carrying out repair is one of the competencies noted by Canale and Swain (1980) referring to the issues surrounding repair as *strategic competence.*

Although difficulty with vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation and so on are highly

noticeable aspects of less proficient learners' interlanguage, issues surrounding turn-taking also contribute to a sense of disfluency and impeded progressivity in learner talk. Behavior that occurs at turn boundaries is a different issue to the kinds of behavior that occurs within turns, or as McCarthy (2010) puts it: 'What happens at turn boundaries may reveal a great deal about how fluency is constructed interactively, aside from the degree of flow that is (or is not) achieved by the single speaker within their turn.' (p. 5). With this in mind, I will now examine classroom data of student/student spoken interactions and focus on turn structure and turn boundary behaviors to uncover the way that transition occurs in learner talk and investigate any systematic behaviors that seem to be at variance with the talk of native/proficient speakers.

The data: Pre

The data is derived from video taped interactions carried out in elective English language classes at a university in Japan. All of the speakers are L1 Japanese speakers aged 19-21. The recordings took place in English language classes and were recorded by the author on a hand-held video camera. The files were subsequently transcribed using Conversation Analysis transcription conventions. The recordings were five minute segments of already ongoing conversations. The students had been given the instruction to engage in conversation with classmates. No direction was given by the teacher as to topic, group membership, and so on. No task, textbook or handout was utilized. The students were habituated to this free talk segment in every lesson.

The first data set (termed *Pre*) is taken from a video where learners displayed lower levels of L2 proficiency in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. This conversation was recorded at the beginning of the course, (April) that is, prior to any instruction on fluency and prior to any habituation to conducting participant-oriented and administered interactions in the L2. The conversation features two male speakers who have only met briefly in previous classes and thus have low levels of intimacy. The speakers produced approximately 31 turns each over the course of the five minutes of the recording. This total is approximate because some utterances were not audible and some utterances are classed as backchannel turns, that is, an utterance either lexical or non-lexical, which shows understanding, engagement, agreement and so on but is relatively short and does not seem to be a bid by the speaker to hold the floor. The concept of 'turn' as used here has an element of subjectivity, with something like an answer to a question being an unambiguous example of a turn, whereas affiliative laughter at a TRP is a more marginal example of a turn. The transcript of this conversation runs to 108 lines. Most utterances are short.

One noticeable feature of the conversation is the frequent and lengthy pauses, both filled and unfilled, that occur during the interaction as shown in excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1 AEIII Pre

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01. B: What kind of music do you like?
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02. (1.1)
03. A: oh I like e:::toh Backnumber etoh I bess
04. (2.0)
05. eh: watagashii
06. B: Ah yeah watagashi's very nice music
07. yahh::(.)love song
08. A: Love song oh Okay okay Ehhtoh I
09. Etoh Nichiyoubi e::toh I had
10. (2.0)
11. B: Drama

In line 01 B produces an unelaborated question. This style of question, in it's form and in its topic, is very common in learner interactions, and should pose minimal difficulty in answering. However, A's response is not immediately forthcoming but delivered after more than a second of silence. The turn then starts with the particle *oh*. This particle has a variety of functions in English, for example as a 'change of state token' (see Heritage, 1994) or as a response to a question that indicates that a question is 'problematic in terms of its relevance, presuppositions, or context' (Heritage, 1998, p. 291). The function of *oh* in this instance is hard to discern and it may be being used as a placeholder to signal that a turn will be forthcoming. B's turn then proceeds with an aligning response 'I like' in line 03, which is hearably incomplete, the speaker then lapses into L1 using a discourse marker *etoh* with sound stretch seemingly to hold the floor while the rest of the turn is organized. Following the answer *Backnumber* (a Japanese pop group), there is a further L1 marker before an expansion where the speaker indicates which particular song he likes best (*I bess*). After signaling with these utterances that he will add extra content to his turn, there is a prolonged silence in line 04. This is ended when he provides the title of the song that he likes best, i.e. *Watagashi*. Given that this information is presumably within his epistemic domain and that the word is an L1 word, the cause of the pause at line 04 is not clear.

So, to sum up, the turn taken here is delayed, its onset is marked with Oh, its progressivity is interrupted by both L1 marking and an extensive pause. In isolation, these aspects are not necessarily limited to L2 speakers with emergent proficiency (apart from different language utterances such as markers, which are not a feature of L1 speaking). However, their frequency of occurrence does set this kind of talk apart from fluent interactions by native/highly proficient L2 speakers of a language. In the case of speaker A above, there are several recurrent features of his turn structure. Of the 30 or so turns taken by this speaker in this recording, approximately half begin with some kind of non-lexical marker such as *Ah*, *Oh*, *Uhm*, or a combination of these, often prolonged with flat intonation different in prosody from English non-lexical utterances. A further five turns started with the L1 marker *etoh* uttered at a variety of different speeds from prolonged and prominent to extremely fast and barely audible. Generally, turns begin fairly promptly after transition relevance points, thus showing this speaker's orientation to the ideal of 'no gap, no overlap' in turn taking. However, the first

utterance is generally a non-lexical sound such as *ah, uh, oh, uhm* or the like, often prolonged, or the L1 utterance *etoh*. These turn openers are often followed immediately with a pause, often of a very prolonged duration. The turn proper then begins but it is often a multi-word utterance which is not a hearably complete Turn Construction Unit (TCU) followed by a further pause or use of L1 marker. The following excerpts illustrate the practice.

Excerpt 2 AEIII Pre 0:39

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01. A: Uh: eh::(4.1) Do you like
02.    (.) best singer?
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Excerpt 3 AEIII Pre 1:08

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01. B: ...is a Girls [band]
02. A:               [Uh::]=
03. A: =>Okay okay<
04. B: Yah
05. A: E::to(.)eh I know e::h
06.    shyoujyou ess
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(*Syoujyou Ess* is the name of a pop group)

Excerpt 4 AEIII Pre 1:45

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01. B: My favorite song is ah(1.9)
02.    uhmm(.)>shyunkan senchimentaru<=
03. A: = Ou uh uh (5.0) I don't listen
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Excerpt 5 AEIII Pre 2:39

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01. B: But I don't like sports
02. A: he hehh. OK oh:: I like
03.    eh::: basketball uh:::(.)I
04.    (3.0)I join circ. basketball circle
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The majority of A's contributions to this conversation have some of these elements of disfluency. The grammatical and lexical infelicities of his talk are not fatal to the conversation, that is, no instances of complete incomprehensibility are displayed by the interlocutor. Indeed, many of the ill formed utterances are not oriented to as trouble sources. For example, in excerpt 4 above, after B names his favorite song (*shyunkan senchimentaru*, or 'sentimental moment') A replies in line 03 'Oh, I don't listen'. We can interpret this as an attempt to express the idea that would more normally be expressed in English as 'Oh, I've never heard

that song' or perhaps 'I've never heard of it.' In any case, this utterance is not treated as a trouble source by B and is simply receipted with an agreement token 'ahh' accompanied with nodding. (Not shown in excerpt 4.)

The major trouble source in this conversation occurs shortly after this excerpt where the two speakers seem to be in some uncertainty as to whose turn it is. The following excerpt details this phase of talk.

Excerpt 6 AEIII Pre 2:02

```
01. B: ° uh ahh next next ?
02. A: ouhh Next next eh::toh
03.    (7.1)
04. A: ehto nan yaro?
05. B: Okay okay by the way by the way
06.    what's your hobby?
07. A: What's (.) eh (.) do you
08.    like sports?
09. B: Ah Ah Ah sport I like sports
10. A: I like
11. B: Ah:: I played ah table table
12.    tennis in Juni or High school
13. A: High School
14. A: >Oh oh oh oh<
15. B: So table tennis is very (.) uh
16.    table tennis (.)good atoh (3.0)
17. A: Uhmwh table tennis:=
18. B: =But I don't like sports
19. A: Uh hu huhhh
20. B: ah
21. A: Mwhaa I like uh:: basketball(.)
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In line 01, speaker B is prompting speaker A *sotto voce* to ask a question or produce some other utterance to maintain progressivity. This is receipted by speaker A with a repetition of B's utterance in line 02, followed by a Japanese marker (*etoh*) and then an extremely lengthy pause in line 03. Unable to produce a next turn in English, A produces meta-talk in Japanese in line 04, *eto nan yaro (erm what should I say?)*. B, sensing A's difficulty in maintaining progressivity then seeks to withdraw the previous prompt for A to speak (made in line 01) uttering *Okay* twice in quick succession. B, apparently abandoning his project to have A take a turn, proceeds to produce a turn himself, signaling the disjunct with the marker 'by the way' and then proceeds to ask his own question about A's hobby. However, A disattends to this question and proceeds to take a next turn in line 07 that is also a question, not an answer to B's

question from lines 05 and 06. This sequence of question followed by a question is in violation of the normal structure of adjacency pairs, where a question is typically followed by an answer, or an account for why no answer is forthcoming. The case where a question is followed by another question may be part of a practice known as an insertion sequence, as in excerpt 7 below. (Schegloff, 2007, p. 97.) In this case the question in line 01 is followed by a silence. Lines 4 and 5 constitute a Q&A adjacency pair to establish the identity of the person mentioned in the original question. Once this has been resolved the second pair part to the original question is given in line 6.

Excerpt 7. Insertion sequence (Schegloff, 2007)

```
1.  Bet: Was last night the first time you
2.       met missiz Kelly?
3.       (1.0)
4.  Mar: Met whom?
5.  Bet: Missiz Kelly.
6.  Mar: Yes.
```

Thus a question followed by a question is not an entirely aberrant interactional phenomenon.

However, in excerpt 6, the question posed in line 07 and 08 (*What's, eh, do you like sports?*) does not seem to be an insertion sequence. Rather, it seems to be a result of the confusion that occurred in lines 01- 04. That is, the question in line 07 and 08 is a delayed utterance made in response to B's urging A to take a turn in line 01. A's hesitation and confusion in responding to B's urging was oriented to by B who, in order to maintain some kind of progressivity, decided to re-take the initiative in the face of A's stated inability to take the floor and ask a question. A, still trying to respond to B's initial urging *(next next)*, completely disattends to B's question in lines 05 and 06 and produces the long awaited turn prompted in line 01 in lines 07 and 08, despite B's signaling his understanding that such a turn will not be forthcoming by asking his (B's)own question. B then gets the interaction back on track by abandoning pursuit of an answer to his own question (*what's your hobby?*) and treating A's question in lines 07-08 as a first pair part of a Q&A adjacency pair, not the dispreferred second pair part of the Q&A adjacency pair that was launched by B in lines 05 and 06. B orients to this new understanding of the sequence structure by providing his answer (with some perturbation) to A's question in line 10 and following (*I played table tennis in junior high school*).

In this sequence we can see that the progressivity of the interaction is compromised not because of shortcomings of vocabulary or grammar on the part of either interactant, but due to a misalignment of the turn taking system. The perturbation that occurred in excerpt 6 in lines 01 to 06 is finally resolved, mainly through the efforts of speaker B who appears to take the role of turn manager, firstly by urging A to produce a turn after a long sequence of turns initiated by B, secondly by stepping in when A cannot, or seemingly cannot, produce a turn and thirdly by quickly orienting to the new sequence structure after A's mistimed question is

finally launched in lines 07-08. The trouble source here is not primarily comprised of the traditional stuff of language learning, i.e. lexis, grammar or pronunciation. Rather, the trouble source concerns perturbations to the system of turn-taking.

Post teaching data

Following a two-semester course, focusing on pragmatics and spoken interaction, the students were videotaped again, approximately 10 months after the fist recording sessions. (This data is termed *Final.*) Many of the speakers displayed much more sophisticated interactional competence, using discourse markers, English style backchannels and other pragmatic features of the language. However, several learners, especially those with poor attendance records and a tendency to use the undirected speaking time to engage in L1 interactions showed much more limited progress and still displayed extreme difficulty in sustaining spontaneous interactions. Even in these cases, change could be observed in some areas of turn taking and turn construction. In the case of speaker A from the excerpts above, turn progressivity was still a major issue, but some elements of his turn taking system had become more sophisticated.

In the *Final* recordings made in January speaker A's interlocutor was a different person from the B in the Pre recordings. He produced approximately 15 turns over the five minutes of the recording. The first thing to observe is the absence (apart from one marginal instance) of L1 markers such as *etoh* which were such a prominent feature of his speaking in the *Pre* recordings. In addition, the turn onsets were not preceded by the kind of non-lexical utterances that characterized the turns in the *Pre* data and several turns showed an orientation towards maintaining progressivity through giving expanded replies to questions, occasionally using English discourse markers and other interactionally relevant practiuces. The following excerpts illustrate some of these turns

Excerpt 8 AEIII Final 00:20

```
01. B: I 'll go to Miyazaki (1.0)
02.    surfing with my friends
03. A: Yeah
04. B: >How about you?<
05.    (2.9)
06. A: Yeah >I mean< its I don't ss.
07.    surfing yeah so eh these
08.    this Spring vacation is ehm
09.    sea(2.4)seas cold?
```

In excerpt 8 speaker B has informed speaker A of his spring vacation plans to go surfing in Miyazaki, a popular resort city in Kyushu. A receipts this news telling in line 03 (*Yeah*) and then B seeks to nominate A to take a turn talking about his (A's) own spring vacation plans.

This strategy of *'how about you'* as a stand-alone utterance to transfer speakership is common in learner talk. Although on the face of it, this can be described as 'other nomination', speakers may actually use it as a 'self deselection' device. The orientation here may be not so much turn-taking as turn-giving.

After a lengthy pause at line 05 speaker A seems to receipt B's question with an acknowledgement, but does not align with B's proposed trajectory of talking about his (A's) own plans. Instead, he prefaces his upcoming comments with the discourse marker 'I mean' (such markers being entirely absent from his, and indeed all of his classmates', talk in the Pre recordings.) The turn beginning in line 06 demonstrates rather than merely claims understanding of B's initial informing. That is, A shows that he considers the possibility that surfing in February or March (the period of the vacation) will be a cold experience. He supports his view with the disclaimer that he does not surf. Thus, despite the prolonged pause between the end of B's turn in line 04 and the onset of A's turn in line 06, and despite the apparent misalignment between B's proposed trajectory in line 04 and A's turn in line 06, there seem to be grounds for saying that A has demonstrated some subtle interactional competence. The refusal to align with B seems to be purposeful. A demonstrates understanding of B's proposed vacation activity and asserts his lack of knowledge about surfing to support his inquiry into sea temperature, prefacing this pursuit of his own agenda and dismissal of A's agenda with a pragmatic marker 'I mean', which may not be used entirely appropriately here, but its very presence (and lack of any L1 marker) indicates some orientation to interactional concerns.

A further example shows that despite extensive intra-turn pausing A is working hard to maintain progressivity and manage the system of turn-taking.

Excerpt 9 AEIII Final 1:12

```
01. B: What will you have (0.5)spring
02.    vacation plan
03. A: yeah I spring vacation (.)
04.    plan (2.1) ye. parttime job member
05.    in (.) is eh sportchie
06. B: Oh
07. A: Basketball eh (.) Volleyball eh
08.    (1.0) tennis (1.0)
09.    something like that
10. B: S::: huh hh. hh.
11.    (2.7)
12. A:    You know?
```

In this excerpt B re-asks the question that he asked in line 03 of excerpt 8, this time in a full question form, rather than in an apparent self-de-selection move of *How about you?'* Speaker A receipts this immediately with *yeah* showing his understanding of the need to take a turn

promptly. Although his turn is replete with pauses, again there are no L1 utterances and no non-lexical items used to fill pauses. The structure of A's turn also shows some pragmatic sophistication. He indicates that he will be doing a part time job at a sports club (*sportchie*) and then goes on to provide a three-part list, such lists often being deployed by speakers as a turn structuring device (see Jefferson, 1990). A then further signals turn closure by adding in line 09 the general extender *something like that*, such extenders often serving to trigger speaker change. (See McCarthy, 2010, p. 8.)

Despite these overt signals that A has finished his turn and therefore B should now take a turn, B merely adds a laugh token in line 10 and a silence ensues. This silence 'belongs' to B. Subsequently speaker A, orienting to the need, in his view, for B to produce a turn at talk, offers a further turn closer, the discourse marker *you know* uttered with a closing intonation contour. Thus, A can be seen attending to turn structure and turn transition in a quite sophisticated manner, initially with a three part list, reinforced with a general extender and when these two items fail to prompt the speaker transition, a discourse marker that typically appears in turn-final position is deployed. Again, although there is extensive pausing and a certain amount of grammatical and lexical infelicity, when viewed from the perspective of the turn structure and turn transition, A's utterances are of a different nature to the kinds of turns produced in the *Pre* recording. The turn onsets do not feature the non-lexical utterances that were so characteristic of the *Pre* conversation. Use of L1 markers such as *etoh* is much diminished with only one, marginal example in the *Final* conversation. Not only have L1 markers almost completely disappeared, L2 markers such as *I mean* and *you know* are used in ways that are recognizably similar to native English speaker usage. Such markers were absent from almost all of the *Pre* conversations. In addition, speaker A produced turns that expanded on an answer by giving extra details beyond the minimum required by the terms of the question, thus showing a greater awareness for participants to be active in maintaining progressivity.

Conclusion

Traditionally, much English language teaching in Japan (and elsewhere), has focused on the written form of the language, as noted by Carter '... the spoken language has been downgraded and has come to be regarded as relatively inferior to written manifestations.' (2004, p. 26), a sentiment echoed by Hasselgreen, who, comments '... the written word has traditionally enjoyed a higher academic status. (p. 238). Even when lessons are classified as 'speaking classes' there often persists a focus on narrow concerns of vocabulary and grammar with scant focus on turn taking. In addition, many speaking classes deal with genres of speaking such as presentations or interviews where normal turn taking processes that pertain to mundane conversation are absent (as in the case of presentations) or markedly different (as in the case of interviews). All of this can leave the students ill prepared to engage in spontaneous spoken interactions where status inequalities do not exist or are temporarily or partially suspended, where no clear goal or outcome is sought, where topics can shift and drift and revert and where turns are taken, yielded and allocated in the here-and-now of the unfolding interaction rather than by any pre-decided schema. That is to say, students are ill

prepared to engage in conversation, which is, after all, the basic use of language in all cultures. Conversation has a tendency to be neglected, sidelined, downgraded and even stigmatized as a legitimate goal of language learners, the profusion of 'conversation' classes notwithstanding. Many of these so-called 'conversation classes' are nothing of the sort, with a tendency promote students' production of propositional statements that would pass muster as writing. Indeed, such classes may actually feature quite a lot of writing. Conversation as a genre has its own particularities, and one of the central aspects of conversation is the system of turn-taking and turn (not sentence) construction. That is to say, an orientation to smooth and pragmatically relevant speaker transition is a key point for development of students' interactional competence. Progressivity being pursued by means of the timely production of recipient designed utterances is a skill that seems to bootstrap itself up by a combination of explicit teaching and extensive opportunities to engage in spontaneous spoken interactions in the target language where turn taking mechanisms are hidden in plain sight.

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