Seeing both the wood and the trees: A micro/ macro description of interactional competence development in L2 English learning

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Abstract

This paper describes the changes that were observed in the interactional behavior of learners of English over a semester in response to a syllabus and teaching methodology that specifically focused on interactional skills development. The students were video recorded engaging in unrehearsed spoken interaction at the beginning and end of a four month English course. The conversations were transcribed and analyzed. The analyses are carried out at both a macro- and micro-level, with overviews of the unfolding of an interaction over several minutes and small-scale analyses of short sequences. The analyses revealed an observable change in the interactional behavior of the participants. The initial recordings were characterized by short turns, sudden topic shifts, reliance on a question-and-answer format, lack of common English discourse markers, among other typical learner practices. The later recordings saw the deployment of more extended turns, stepwise transition of topic, naturalistic use of L2 discourse markers, less reliance on 'current-selects-next' as a turn transition strategy and other interactional competencies. I suggest that the emergence of these more advanced interactional

practices is based on a combination of factors such as frequency of classes, length of course, interactional focus of teaching and extensive opportunity to interact in the target language. The findings allow robust claims to be made about the development of aspects of interactional competence that are both generally observable across the larger discourse and specifically situated in the small-scale practices of the participants.

The overt purpose of any course of formal/institutional language learning is to bring about some change in the learners. What exactly the nature of the desired change may be is open to a wide variety of interpretations. A syllabus may be designed to increase the learners' declarative knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of the target language; to enable the learner to score well on formalized tests that include such activities as listening comprehension sections, multiple choice grammar or vocabulary questions; translation exercises; essay writing on some topic under test conditions; response to spoken questions by an examiner on such tasks as picture descriptions and so on. The underlying ideology of these teaching courses is that declarative knowledge of aspects of the L2 will naturally transfer into the ability of the learner to interact in the target language, although the assumption was questioned several decades ago by Widdowson (1978) who queried the notion that, "It has commonly been supposed that once [linguistic skills] are acquired in reasonable measure the communicative abilities will follow as a more or less automatic consequence." (p.67)

Another aspect of this teaching ideology is that any kind of competence that the learner has is more or less fixed at any given point in time (and thus revealed by the 'snapshot' judgement of a written test or in an oral proficiency interview (OPI)). Not only is the level seen to be fixed, but it is also the individual property of a single learner and not alterable in any significant way by the effect of different

interlocutors. The 'snapshot' approach captures certain small-scale lexical and grammatical phenomena but there is no overall picture that will capture the learners' abilities as they are deployed over multiple turns at talk and for extended interactions, or how a participant engages in co-construction of meaning over multiple turns at talk, which is the fundamental method of conducting interaction. Thus, the small-scale analysis may miss part of the bigger picture, while the large-scale analysis may miss important details of the here-and-now management of the interaction. In this paper I will look at the practices and methods that participants use in mundane conversation at both large-scale and small-scale levels of description and try to ascertain what changes took place over the course of a four-month period of focused interactional instruction.

The Data

The data were collected three times over the course of an academic year. The first recording (labelled Pre-) was made in April in week two of the spring semester. The second recording (labelled Mid-) was made in July in week 15 of the spring semester, which was the last week of the semester. The third recording was made in January, which was the fifteenth and final week of the second semester and of the course. This third data set will not be analyzed here for reasons of space.

The participants were undergraduate students aged 20-22 at a private university in Japan. One participant (Labelled 'A' in the data) was from Hong Kong and was a native speaker of Cantonese and was also proficient in Japanese. The other participant (Labelled 'B' in the data) was a native Japanese speaker. Both participants were non-English undergraduate majors enrolled in a year-long elective English course (two fifteen-week semesters – April to July and then September to January) titled Advanced English. There were 15 students in the class. The class met twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday and each class lasted 90 minutes. The syllabus was designed by the author and focused on development of interactional

skills. All class materials were produced by the teacher and no textbook was used.

In each case of recording the students in the class were instructed to form their own groups of two or three and begin conversation in English. The students were free to select their partners and no instructions were given as to topics, goals, or the like and no handouts or other materials were provided. While the Pre-conversations were ongoing, the teacher approached each group with a hand-held video camera and recorded a five-minute segment of ongoing conversation. While the recordings were taking place, other groups were continuing their own conversations around the classroom. For the Mid- and Final- recordings, students were told to come to a desk near the front and continue an ongoing conversation while the teacher recorded the interaction. After the recordings were made, the videos were transcribed using Jeffersonian transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004) and then analyzed.

It is important to note here that the 'free talk' activity was not a one-off or occasional feature of the class, but a regular feature of every lesson. In each lesson, after taking the registration, making any necessary class announcements, and dealing with any administrative tasks, the students were habituated to initiating conversation with their partners. In the early classes, overt instruction to begin conversation was given, but as the students became habituated to the practice, the teacher would simply finish the administrative duties and then leave the front of the class. For students, this became the time when they would self-initiate conversation. This free talk segment of the class would last from twenty to forty minutes. After conversations had progressed beyond openings, and topics had become established, the teacher would move from group to group. The role of the teacher was configured not as an evaluator, monitor or a linguistic resource, but rather as a fellow, incoming participant who would be included in the ongoing conversation by the pre-present speakers with a 'Previous Action Formulation or PAF (See Campbell-Larsen 2020), thus placing the students in the position of having to manage the

participation framework. For more on the rationale of this free-talk segment of lessons, see Campbell-Larsen (2021).

Data Analyses

In this paper I will give a brief overview of how each conversation unfolded over the five minutes of recording time. The rationale for this is that I am endeavoring to catch the nature of the development of interactional practices over time at varying levels of granularity. There will be reference to fine-grained, case by case analysis of individual occurrences of interactionally relevant language, in line with the 'micro-analytic' focus of conversation analysis (CA) methodology, but also an attempt to capture something of the nature of the discourse at a more coarse-grained level, looking at combinations of practices, the occurrence, co-occurrence, and recurrence of interactionally orderly language across multiple turns by multiple speakers. That is, in addition to items that were absent in the earlier data but present in the later data (and the converse) I will also try to give some view of the density of these practices in a more holistic and inter-related manner, as they emerged over the course of the study.

It is a fundamental premise of (CA) methodology that "no order of detail in interaction can be dismissed a priori as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant" (Heritage, 1984, p. 241). This means that data need to be transcribed to a high degree of detail and because of the richness of the data, short excerpts of a few seconds of duration are the mainstay of CA literature. For example, one of the foundational texts of CA is Sacks, et al. (1974), which lays out the systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation. In the body of the text there are 35 separate transcripts, derived from a wide variety of different conversations. Most of the excerpts are extremely brief, comprising less than 10 lines which represent only a few seconds of multi-party talk. Even the longest transcript (number 14 on page 714), comprises just over 30 lines of dialogue, which represents less than a

minute of interaction. This pattern of multiple short (and usually unrelated) tran-
scripts is entirely adequate for literature that focuses on one aspect of interaction,
such as repair (Schegloff et al., 1977), agreement and disagreement (Pomerantz
1984), discourse marker use (Heritage, 2015) and so on. A similar focus on multi-
ple short excerpts illustrating a particular interactional practice (disagreement) is
found in the longitudinal study by Pekarek Doehler and Pochon Berger (2011). In
this case the authors illustrate the difference in disagreement methods used by two
separate cohorts of students (13-14 years old and 17-18 years old). The authors jus-
tify the validity of comparing the two groups by stating,

> Comparability between the two groups is enhanced by the fact that the
> advanced learners have previously gone through the very same education-
> al system (lower secondary) as the less advanced learners were in at the
> time of the recordings, and that there were no major reforms implemented
> in French L2 teaching in the time since the more advanced learners left
> lower secondary school. (pp. 213–214).

The text provides 14 excerpts, mostly quite short, to illustrate the changes that
emerged in the learners' ability to carry out disagreement sequences in nuanced
and situated ways. This is not to suggest that the findings are in any way invalid,
but to illustrate the kinds of single-focus studies using data from various and some-
times disparate sources that are common in the literature.

In contrast to these studies with a single focus, drawing on data from multiple
often unrelated sources, the paper by Schmidt (1983) focused intensively on a sin-
gle subject (Wes a Japanese immigrant to Hawaii) and the development of his
English communicative competence over several years residence in Hawaii. The
data were collected by Schmidt in a wide variety of interactional settings, with sev-
eral different interlocutors, and analyzed on multiple levels from grammatical pro-
ficiency to strategic and discourse competence. The focus of Schmidt's study is how
immersion in the target language culture affects communicative competence. No

formal instruction of Wes is carried out during the study and the analysis is holistic and large scale.

The tension between what can be captured at the micro-level of analysis and what conversations look like at a more global scale is noted by Eggins and Slade (1997),

> ...the close up focus on small excerpts of talk has been responsible for CA's major discoveries about conversation, CA is limited in its ability to deal comprehensively with complete, sustained interactions. [...] This has meant that the reality of conversations (that many are very long and indefinitely sustainable) has not been addressed. (p.32)

In the following, I will attempt to give some flavor of the interactional practices used by the participants at varying levels of scale and show how practices changed over the course of the study. I will first give a discourse-level overview of each data, and then focus on a more detailed description of certain short sequences.

Data Overview: Descriptions and Analyses

Pre- (April)

The conversation starts with a direct interrogative from A to B asking about where he (B) went last Saturday. B responds that he went nowhere because of his part-time job in a restaurant. A demonstrates epistemic access to this information stating that the food at that restaurant (a well-known chain) is good. A then asks a follow up question asking what role B performs in the restaurant. B informs A that he washes dishes and does some cooking. The Q&A sequence is reversed by B who asks 'and you' to A, implying that the original question regarding Saturday activities is now to be answered by A. Speaker A responds that he also worked in his part-time job adding that his working hours were from nine to five. Another reversal (How about you?) occurs, asking B to provide details of his working hours,

which is supplied with a simple statement of '10 hours' and not elaborated upon. And a further question from A pursues the topic of hours worked and this is also dealt with in a minimized fashion. This sequence closes with a rather ritualistic offer by A to go to eat together at B's restaurant 'next time'. A topic disjunct now occurs when A, drawing on shared knowledge, states that he heard that B would receive a sports car as a gift from his father, prompting some brief talk of getting a driver's license, discussing what make of car (answered in vague terms as 'Japanese') and A's hopes of seeing a picture of it. Following this a further topic disjunct occurs, this time prefaced with the set phrase 'by the way.' The next phase is a short Q&A sequence about today's lunch plans, proposing a trip to a ramen shop together and commenting on the non-attendance of a mutual friend who will be having lunch with his girlfriend. No concrete plans are made, and the talk reverts back to last weekend's activities, this time referring to Sunday. This is dealt with in minimal terms by B who merely states, 'Saturday is same', meaning that he worked in his part time job in a restaurant. In response to this rather minimized response, A self-discloses that he stayed at home and studied on Sunday. The recording ends.

Overview Analysis

The conversation is characterized by an overall question and answer adjacency pair structure. The questions are asked in a minimized way, and the answers are similarly minimized, consisting for the main part in a single propositional statement with no real attempt at expansion. In keeping with the question-and-answer framework of this excerpt, the turn transition system is predominantly 'current selects next'. There are several times when speakership is transferred with 'how about you' or similar expressions. There are several topic disjuncts, usually accompanied by extensive pauses. The disjunctive discourse management phrase 'by the way' is used in one topic disjunct. There are zero instances of common discourse markers such as 'well', 'you know', 'I mean', such markers being important indicators of

fluency (Hasselgreen, 2005). Unlike several of the conversations by other partici-
pants in this class, there were no uses of Japanese during the interaction.

Mid- (July)

The talk opens with B asking A about his summer vacation plans. The question is
expanded with a prior topic statement, 'Summer vacation is coming soon'. A's
response is prompt and prefaced with the discourse markers 'Well, actually' before
he goes on to answer in an extended manner, mentioning part-time job, parents
visiting from Hong Kong and a trip to Shizuoka. B picks up on the topic of Shizuoka,
mentioning that it is famous for (a) *unagi* (The Japanese word for eel is used and
not oriented to as a trouble source) and (b) for Mount Fuji. B self-discloses that he
has been to Shizuoka, mentioning that even though he went to Shizuoka, he didn't
see mount Fuji because of the rainy weather. A self-selects to take a turn and, devel-
oping the theme of the famous foodstuff (*unagi*), he self-discloses that he visited
Shizuoka when he was a high school student and paid 3,000 yen to eat *unagi*. B
demonstrates understanding of this by offering the assessment that 3,000 yen is
very expensive. A responds to this by prefacing his next statement with the dis-
course markers 'well, actually' and, whilst not overtly agreeing or disagreeing with
B's slightly critical assessment of the price, offers what may be seen as a subtle
justification for the price by giving an upgraded assessment that the eel was 'abso-
lutely delicious'. B responds to this by stating that he likes eel but has never eaten
eel that costs 3,000 yen. In spite of his positive assessment of the taste, A aligns in
a tacit manner with B's underlying critique of the price by staying that he was real-
ly surprised at the price, prefacing this statement with the discourse marker 'I
mean'. The next sequence of talk is initiated by B who mentions his hometown
Kagawa and states that it is famous for *Udon* noodles. He then askes A if he has
ever eaten *Udon* from Kagawa. A responds in the negative, and then expands on
this answer. The expansion is prefaced with the discourse marker 'I mean' and the

reason for the negated answer to the 'have you ever' question is that he has only ever been to Shizuoka and Osaka. He states his liking for Udon and expresses a hope to visit Kagawa and try the Udon there. The sequence closes with B aligning with A's expressed desire by saying 'let's go to Kagawa someday'.

The next sequence is initiated by B with the topic disjunctive marker 'by the way' indicating that a new departure is imminent. B self-discloses his own summer plans. This picks up on the opening sequence where B asked A about his plans for summer vacation. It is interesting to note that B's self-disclosure is internally generated, rather than by any 'how about you?' type enquiry from A, which was the case in the April recording (and was very common across all of the other April recordings). After detailing his plans to visit his hometown and 'play' with his friends, B adds that he will be visiting a hot spring resort with his friends. B asks A if he knows of the resort and A gives a negative response, prefaced with the discourse marker 'Actually'. The negative response is given in a slightly extended manner avoiding a blunt 'No' only turn. Dealing with A's on record statement of negative epistemic access, B describes the resort and mentions that it has the tallest water slide in Japan. B uses the Japanese word *suberidai* here, but this is not oriented to by either participant as a trouble source and no repair attempt is made on this word. A reacts positively to this news and expresses a hope to visit one day. B then continues his detailing of the merits of the resort by stating that he will do *nanpa* (picking up) because there are many girls at the resort. The mildly inappropriate nature of this talk may be the reasons for a series of pauses before A redirects talk with a 'by the way' topic disjunctive marker. Despite the indication of the onset of a different topic, the next sequence is not entirely different in theme. A mentions that he watched the performance of the Japanese 'girls soccer team' on TV that morning and the participants gave positive evaluation of the team's performance. The recording ends.

Overview analysis

The talk here is much less driven by the Q&A adjacency pair structure that was evident in the April recording. The initial question, rather than being a bald interrogative of the kind that was very frequent across participants in the April recordings, is prefaced by some topic proffering statement. This fits more with the kinds of telling questions which are described by Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (2018, p. 232) as being designed to "initiate extended talk on a given topic." The same strategy is deployed by B when the talk switches to talk of his hometown, mentions its famous food and asks A if he has ever tried it. In addition to these more complex question strategies, the responses to the questions are much more expanded here than in the April recording. The opening question prompts a lengthy reply from A as to his summer vacation plans, including some incidental mention of his part time job, which is not expanded on, some information on the visit of his parents from Hong Kong. The itinerary of a tour with his parents is detailed and the reason for one item on the itinerary (a trip to Hamamatsu) is backgrounded with an explanation, namely, that A's brother is at high school there, so the family will visit. This information is treated as shared information as A introduces it with the marker 'you know'.

This brings us to another feature of the talk which is a departure from the April recording. This talk is suffused with common English discourse markers, specifically, 'well', 'actually', 'you know' and 'I mean'. They are correctly placed (e.g., turn initial 'well') and are uttered with appropriate prosody, that is, "by smooth rendition at a pace as fast as, or faster than, their surrounding co- text." (McCarthy, 2010, p. 5).

Altogether, this conversation was of a somewhat different nature to the April conversation. The turn structure was longer and more elaborate than the rather minimized turns that were evident in the April recording, there was more self-disclosure, more self-selection at turn transition points (as opposed to the 'current

selects next' which was the predominant method in the April data). There were some instances of use of Japanese language vocabulary such as *udon*, (noodles) *unag*i (eel), *suberidai* (slide) and *nampa*, (picking up girls) but these were not treated as repairable, and the focus seemed to be on maintaining progressivity rather than attending to matters of correct usage. There were numerous instances of utterances that were, strictly speaking, grammatically incorrect, for example missing articles, incorrect use of singular and plural forms, and so on, but these were not attended to by the speakers in either self-initiated or other-initiated repair.

Detailed Sequence Analysis

In the following section I will tighten the focus of the analysis to give a flavor of the micro-practices used by the participants in their interactions, capturing elements such as pausing, hesitation, restarts, and other performance phenomena that give an indication of the here-and-now unfolding of the interactions. The transcriptions are done following standard Jeffersonian transcription conventions. (Jefferson, 2004.)

Pre-

The rather mechanical question-and-answer structure of the Pre- conversation is illustrated in the following excerpt. Also notice the frequency of pauses, the rather minimized nature of the turns and the occurrence of repairs.

Excerpt1. Part-time job

01. B: I'm tired
02. A: Hmmm. (.) I see.
03.   (6.1)

04. B: uh. And you?

05.   (1.7)

06. A: hh. I go. I went to part time job

07.   on Saturday too. From (2.1)eigh. (.)

08.   from nine o'clock morning to fi:ve thirty

09.   afternoon

10. B: O: really.

11.   (2.8)

12. B: Eight hour?

13. A: Yeah. How about you? How many hours dju?

14. B: U:::h. (2.0) I worked u::h ten times. Ah.

15.   Ten hour

16. A: Ten hours

17. B: Ten hours

18   (1.8)

19. A: How many times a week?

20.   (3.8)

21. B: About(.)thirty hours::

22.   (2.9)

23. A: Hm::::: hm

24.   (3.1)

25. A: So:::

26.   (8.1)

27. B: Come on [Osho]

28. A: [Less go] Okay

29.   Lets go to Osho together next time=

30. B: =Yeah

31.   (0.3)

32. A: And I heard (1.0) next year (1.5)

33.   you get the sports car from your father

In line 01, B concludes his telling of his Saturday activities with an assessment 'I'm
tired'. This is receipted by A with a claim of understanding, 'I see'. Claims of under-
standing versus demonstrations of understanding (See Sacks, II, 1992, p. 141) are
a common way for recipients of talk at lower levels of language proficiency to
respond to assessments. Demonstrations of understanding such as, in this case,
'yeah, you must have been exhausted' or the like clearly require a more fine-tuned
control of language than a more readily available and general set phrase like 'I see'
and its stand-alone nature here may be indicative of a more rudimentary response
repertoire of the speaker. Of course, care must be taken in drawing inferences from
what was not said, but the extended silence after line 02 indicates some issue that
the participants have with maintaining progressivity.

Following the extended silence in line 03, B deploys the turn-transition device
'and you?' in line 04. This is a very common occurrence in all of the Pre-data and
may be illustrative of a limited menu of turn-transition devices available to the par-
ticipants. (See Campbell-Larsen, 2019 for more on 'How about you'.) This particu-
lar use of 'and you?' indexes the question posed earlier relating to weekend activi-
ties and A responds by stating that he also worked in his part-time job. He expands
on this answer by mentioning the start and finish time of his work in lines 07–08.
This is receipted in line 10 in a fairly neutral manner in line 10 by B (Oh really.)
This claim of understanding is followed by another extended pause and then
upgraded to a demonstration of understanding when B states that his understand-
ing is that A worked eight hours. A confirms B's understanding and then resorts
to another 'How about you?' formulation to elicit from B the hours worked in his
(B's) part-time job. In response B misspeaks and says, 'ten times' but this is quick-
ly subject to self-initiated self-repair and B re-formulates his response as 'ten hour'.

This is receipted by A by the near repetition 'Ten hours.' It is unclear whether this is merely a repetition to confirm receipt by A, or whether it is other-initiated other-repair to correct the number agreement that was infelicitous in the original utterance i.e., 'Ten hour' to 'Ten hours'. The confirmation/repair turn is performed by B with the correct number agreement in line 17, followed by another extended pause in line 18. A maintains progressivity and expands on the topic of working hours by asking 'How many times a week?' in line 19. B slightly misinterprets the intent of the question as asked. That is, the question form seems to adumbrate a response of how many times a week B goes to his part-time job, but B provides an answer that references the total number of hours worked per week. (About thirty hours in line 21). A treats this response as non-problematical despite its apparent mismatch to the question as asked. There are two possibilities here. Firstly, A could have had trouble in formulating the question he wanted to ask, mistaking 'times' for 'hours' as B had done in lines 14–15. If this was the case, and B also interpreted the question as asking for total hours worked, then the response is adequate. Alternatively, A's question could have been formed correctly for his own purposes, and although B's response was, in strict terms, not matched, A decided to accept the answer, or at least not initiate any repair on the response. After another round of extended pauses, the sequence on part-time jobs ends with a proforma agreement to eat at B's part-time job restaurant. This kind of ritualistic joint future activity statement is found elsewhere in the Pre- data and seems to occupy a sequence closing slot.

In line 32 A draws on shared knowledge to initiate a new topic- that of B's future receipt of a sports car from his father. In other Pre- data, such abrupt topic disjunctures are common, often prefaced with the set phrase 'By the way'.

This sequence is illustrative of the ways in which participants in this and other Pre- data proceeded through sequences of talk. The basic structure is a question-and-answer format. There are multiple prolonged pauses (both inter- and

intra-turn) as the participants endeavor somewhat laboriously to maintain progressivity. 'How about you' (or some variant) is deployed repeatedly as a stand-alone turn transition device, indicating the default 'current selects next' pattern of turn transition that is found in other Pre- data. The ritualistic promise to participate jointly in some future social activity is found here and also in data from other participants. One aspect of this sequence sets it apart from talk by the other participants is the absence of Japanese pragmatic language. Other participants in Pre-data were prone to use Japanese discourse markers such as '*etoh*' and '*ano*' or Japanese repair initiators such as '*chau*' or '*jyanakutte*' during the talk. The absence of such items may be due to a more advanced interactional competence that has moved beyond utilizing these resources in L2 speaking or it may be due to the fact that speaker A is from Hong Kong and speaks Japanese as a foreign language. As usual, care must be taken when analyzing non-present phenomena, but the absence from this and also from later data featuring these two participants is notable.

Mid-

In the Mid- data there is a difference in the manner in which the participants proceed. One notable sequence of well-functioning interactional management was the section of talk dealing with the cost of eel (*unagi* in Japanese). In the following sequence A has self-disclosed plans for an upcoming trip to Shizuoka prefecture. B responds by detailing what Shizuoka is famous for.

Excerpt 2. Eating eel.

01.   A: So I will drive the car to go to Shizuoka.
02.   B: Well Shizuoka is famous for
03.   unagi and Fuji-san. When I was child u::h
04.   I was been to Shizuoka but I wouldn't I

05.   see Fuji san because ah it's rainy and after (.) day

06.   after.(0.6) You know?

07.   A: Well actually I. when I was high school student I

08.   went to eat (0.3) unagi with my friends and i. it

09.   took me three thousand en

010.   B: Really? Three thousand yen? It's so expensive=

011.   A: =But you know (.) I mean it's (.) it is absolutely

012.   delicious.

013.   (0.4)

014.   B: Yeahh. (.) I like unagi but I didn't eat it

015.   Uh three thousando unagi=

016.   A: =yeah. (1.8) I mean I (.) I was really surprised

017.   It took me so much money.

018.   B: Oh yeah.

What is noticeable about this short sequence is that B's turn starting in line 01 is a self-selection. That is, at the conclusion of A's extended and detailed telling of his summer vacation plans, B does not wait to be nominated overtly to take the next turn. Rather, he begins his response in a timely fashion i.e., no gap, no overlap (Sacks et al., 1974). The turn is also prefixed with with the discourse marker 'well' (line 02) which is appropriate for the non-straightforward unfolding of the subsequent turn. (Heritage, 2015, Schegloff & Lerner, 2009). He demonstrates an understanding of A's turn by stating that Shizuoka is famous for *unagi* (eel) and for Mount Fuji. The turn continues with a self-disclosure about his own trip to Shizuoka when he was a child. Unfortunately, he could not see Mount Fuji due to the weather. This turn at talk is of a different nature to many of the turns that were observed in the Pre- data. It is a self-selected turn where the turn transition is precision-timed to avoid gap and overlap (Stivers et al. 2009). The speaker uses the discourse

marker 'Well' in typical turn opening position (Heritage, 2015, McCarthy, 2010) and
then proceeds with an expanded turn as he seeks to topicalize some part of A's pre-
ceding turn and engage in unsolicited self-disclosure in pursuit of progressivity.
The turn closes with another discourse marker ('you know') in line 06. This turn,
even though phrased with lexis and grammar that is infelicitous in narrow linguis-
tic terms, is a well-designed turn-at-talk from the perspective of topic development,
timeliness of uptake, readiness to self-select at a transition point, and other prag-
matic elements. The grammatical and lexical infelicities are not oriented to as trou-
ble sources by A and comprehension seems to be good enough for the purposes
at hand i.e., being social and affiliative and maintaining progressivity.

A's response turn starting in line 07 is also well-designed in an interactive
sense. The discourse markers 'well actually' signal that the turn has been taken
(again in a timely manner through self-selection), but also signal that the upcoming
turn is not entirely straightforward or aligned with the previous (Heritage, 2015).
That is, while B chose to focus on Mount Fuji for the content of his turn, A selects
the other option that was mentioned by B – Shizuoka's famous food–eel. A then
proceeds to relate an anecdote of going to eat eel (he uses the Japanese word
unagi) and he reveals that it cost the rather exorbitant amount of three thousand
yen. A's expression 'took me three thousand yen' in line 09 is not correct in a nar-
row linguistic sense, but it is not attended to by either participant as problematic.
In line 10 B offers a clear demonstration of understanding. There is the surprise
token 'really', followed by a repetition of the amount paid. He then offers his assess-
ment of the price as 'really expensive'. This was implied but not stated in A's anec-
dote and B is reacting in a very appropriate manner here, discerning the upshot of
A's story in a sophisticated manner. This is in contrast to the rather anodyne
responses that were found in the Pre- data.

There is a possibility of a face threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987)
here in that B could be implying that A overpaid and might possibly be viewed as

gullible and easily duped. B's assessment of paying three thousand yen for eel as 'so expensive' is not challenged directly by A. Rather, he offers the justification that the eel was 'absolutely' delicious', mitigating somewhat the high cost. B's response to A's upgraded assessment is to align in expressing his fondness for eel, but state that he has no experience of eating eel that cost three thousand yen. This leaves open the possibility that there is such a thing as eel that is so delicious it warrants the three-thousand-yen cost. This avoids the implication that A was overcharged and therefore gullible, successfully navigating a rather tricky path of alignment and avoidance of overt criticism. B's sequence closing assessment here is that he was surprised that it cost so much. This statement is prefaced with the discourse marker 'I mean' which may be performing a summarizing or concluding function here as would be normative with its use in native English speaker talk. Also, as Schiffrin states (1987, p. 309), "I mean instructs the hearer continue attending to the material of prior text in order to hear how it will be modified." In this case, A is instructing B to attend to his prior bare statement that the eel cost three thousand yen and that statement this is now subject to the modification that it was a surprising amount.

A again uses the slightly unusual formulation of 'took me' instead of the more regular 'cost me' indicating that the previous instance in line 09 was not a one-off slip of the tongue misspeaking, but a part of his established lexicon. It is not oriented to as a trouble source by either participant.

The contrast with the Pre- data is notable in several respects. The turns are longer and there is noticeably less inter- and intra-turn pausing. There is less reliance on a Q&A format in that the participants carry out speaker transition with self-selection rather than other-selection, avoiding the 'how about you' cycles of transition that were such a prominent feature of the Pre- data. The talk is suffused with common English discourse markers such as 'well', 'Actually' 'you know' and 'I mean' and they are used in a naturalistic fashion with correct placement, prosody and function.

Conclusions and Discussion

Language learners gradually increase their knowledge of and ability to produce the target language as formal study proceeds, or so it is hoped. L2 words and expressions which were unknown become known. Grammar structures which could be neither understood or produced become familiar and usable. Longer and more complex streams of speech or written texts become accessible to learner understanding. All of these aspects are the central 'stuff' of formal second/foreign language teaching, and they are subject to assessments of various kinds to ascertain the learners' level of progress in their studies. A word or grammar structure can be known, or unknown, producible, or not producible, and formal tests are designed to evaluate the learner's knowledge state and ability to deploy the item correctly. What is more difficult to ascertain is the state of what is termed 'interactional competence' (IC). This refers to a whole spectrum of phenomena (linguistic, sequential, prosodic, non-verbal) by which participants in talk-in-interaction jointly manage the unfolding interaction so that they can construct their participatory contributions "so that they are recognizable for others and to repair problems in maintaining shared understanding of the interactional work we and our interlocutors are accomplishing together." (Hall and Pekarek Doehler 2011, p.2).

The various components of IC are hard to evaluate in standard formalized tests. In some cases, the rubric of the test may actually prevent the test takers from deploying more developed IC practices. The data analyzed in this paper show several changes in IC practices of the participants and it is clear that the later data had a number of elements that could be described as desirable goals for a person engaged in language learning. That is, talk more closely resembled (in an interactional sense) the kind of talk that native speakers (of any language) may produce when engaging in mundane spoken social interaction. The participants produced

turns that were timely, relevant, socio-culturally appropriate in terms of content, length, and level of self-disclosure. It is precisely these kinds of phenomena that are the basis for interactional competence, while at the same time being extremely hard to both teach and evaluate.

The questions that arise from the difficulty in teaching and assessing language learner's IC development are many. At one end of the scale is the amount of work needed to collect the data, transcribe, and then analyze it. Such an administrative task is probably not practical in most institutional language teaching contexts as teachers are unlikely to be able to carry out these kinds of analyses for large classes. In addition, the institutions themselves may be resistant to this kind of teaching and assessment, with more easily testable literacy skills and individuated, quantifiable scores being the familiar way in which language teaching is done, reflecting the bias toward written language that is prevalent in linguistics as described by Linnel (2005). Concomitant to this, students may resist this kind of language focus for reasons of unfamiliarity.

If such an interactional approach to language learning (and assessment) is taken, then the questions are also many. The age and English level of the learners will inevitably have a bearing on the procedures. Very young children or those with the most rudimentary L2 skills will be unlikely to be able to participate in any 'free conversation' activity of the kind that was the basis of the data analyzed here. Further questions concern the class size and composition, the frequency and duration of classes, combined with the teacher knowledge base that is necessary if such an IC-focused class is to be taught and analyzed.

Nonetheless, as I hope to have shown in this paper, when all of the various stakeholders (teachers, students, institutions) are in alignment (or at least not in opposition) a principled and methodical approach to analyzing IC development at several different scales is possible. That is, the analyst can give concrete shape to what the learners may feel about their L2 language proficiency but be unable to

articulate. Interactional competence is one of those aspects of human life and sociality that is hard to define, but intuitively recognizable.

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