A Qualitative and Quantitative Description of L2 Skills Development in Japanese Learners of English

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Abstract

This paper describes a variety of observable changes in the language use of Japanese learners of English over the course of a 12-month period which included a period of study abroad in an English-speaking country. The analysis will investigate purely quantitative items such as word count, length of turns, pausing and so on. In addition, the analysis will deal with qualitative items such as turn-taking, recipient design, topic management and other interactional aspects of the learner conversations. The analysis will demonstrate that claims can be made about the development of the learners' talk over the course of the study, both in terms of purely quantifiable aspects of the L2 and in the interactional competence of the participants. I will conclude by suggesting that the measurement of L2 development, by such means as standardized written tests, only capture a small section of the overall change in L2 knowledge and skills, and that many aspects of L2 development are largely invisible on such standardized testing instruments.

A fundamental goal of second/foreign language teaching is to bring about some

change in the learner. That is, after a period of instruction, the learner will have new knowledge of the target language and be able to use the target language in ways that were not possible before instruction. Vocabulary which was previously unknown becomes not only known but also usable. Grammar structures which were unknown, opaque, or understood only in general terms will become understandable, more readily accessible in talk and producible in nuanced and appropriate ways. Speaking speed will increase and turns at talk will be subject to less pausing, hesitation, repetition and misspeaking. Pronunciation will align more closely with audio aspects (rhythm, pacing, intonation, phonotactics, et cetera) of the L2 as spoken by native speakers or highly proficient L2 speakers. In addition to these clearly apparent linguistic developments, interactional competence (hereafter IC) will also change and develop. Turns at talk will be taken more readily, be longer and become more recipient designed, both in terms of the responsiveness to the prior turn and projection to the subsequent turn. Language items which serve largely interactional and pragmatic functions in language, such as discourse markers, general extenders, and hedging expressions will be deployed more naturally during spoken interactions. Repair will be carried out in a more nuanced fashion. Trouble sources will usually be resolved in a swift and effective manner, rather than the prolonged rounds of repair attempts, reversion to L1, recruitment of dictionaries, or appeals to a teacher which may be found at more elementary levels of L2 learning. In addition, inadvertent, unconscious use of L1 during L2 speaking will be much reduced or vanish completely. These are just some of the aspects of IC that emerge as proficiency develops.

Some of these changes will be visible on standardized tests and will lead to the allocation of a score. These scores are generally seen to be indicative of general level in the L2. The underlying ethos of these numerical scores is that they are valid in two dimensions. Firstly, they are seen to be fixed. That is the score represents the learner's level at the time of taking the test and is an accurate representation

that is not variable in any significant way across proximal time or in any different contexts. Secondly, the score is seen as the fixed property of an individual – that is, it is ideally static and unvarying across the whole range of possible interactional partners. The institutional demands of reliability in standardized testing seek to exclude any possibility of significant variability in a learner's language use dependent on factors such as interlocutor, number of participants in the interaction, which portion of an interaction is analyzed, and other interactional considerations. Thus, the scores that are assigned based on a such an individualist, context-independent ideology are reliable only in a self-referential way and may miss other aspects of learner competence.

The data

The data were collected at a private university in Japan. All students were native Japanese speakers. They were undergraduate students majoring in English and enrolled in their second year of study in a 'pre-study abroad seminar' and in a 'post study abroad seminar' in their third year. Both seminars were taught by the same instructor and met weekly over the course of 15 weeks in the spring semester. Classes were 90 minutes long. The data from the pre-study abroad seminar (hereafter 'Pre') were collected towards the end of the Spring semester, that is, in late July. Students then departed for study abroad in either Australia, Canada or the United Kingdom in August and entered English language programs as well as other general programs at universities in their destination countries. Students returned to Japan in April the following year and were then enrolled in a post-study abroad seminar for 15 weeks from April to July. The post-study abroad data (hereafter 'Post') were collected in late July, towards the end of the semester.

In every class of both the Pre and Post courses, the students were habituated to a prolonged period of free talk lasting approximately 30 minutes. Students were

free to select partners, choose topics, and have maximum agency in managing the interaction. During these interactions the teacher moved from group to group, but the students were trained to orient to the teacher as an incoming fellow participant with equal rather than superior participation rights. For more on the rationale of the free-talk sessions see Campbell-Larsen (2021) and for the mechanics of participation management in this situation see Campbell-Larsen (2020).

The data were collected as follows; Students organized the groups themselves, either dyads or triads. The classes were quite small with only 12 students, so students were familiar with all of their classmates and groups selection was unproblematic. Pairs and triads were the norm and generally, but not always, students talked with the same interlocuters each week.

For the recording sessions, the selected group would leave the classroom to a nearby indoor space. After seating themselves and making sure the camera was set up in optimal position, the camera was switched on and the teacher left the area, returning after three or so minutes to switch off the camera. In many cases the conversations continued ongoing interactions that had been taking place in the classroom prior to recording. As the students had complete freedom in group member selection the groups were not comprised of the same members in the Pre and Post data. The membership of the two groups selected for this study had very similar membership in the two data sets. Triadic interactions were selected as they have the potential to reveal a wider variety of turn taking practices than dyads. The participants are referred to with alphabetic pseudonyms determined initially in left to right seating in the video data as seen in Table 1 below.

Thus, we can see that participant A from the Pre data group 1 did not appear in the Post data and in the Post data participant G, who had not appeared in the Pre data featured in Post group 2. Apart from these two members, speakers B, C, D, E, and F featured in both Pre and Post data. It must be noted here that some of the recordings were longer than three minutes and that in these cases, for the quantitative

Table 1. *Pre and Post group composition (Left to right on camera)*

Pre	**Participants**		
Pre-Group 1	A	B	C
Pre-Group 2	D	E	F
Post			
Post- Group 1	E	B	C
Post-Group 2	D	G	F

analysis a three-minute segment was selected as representative. For the qualitative analysis, phenomena across the whole recording were considered and referred to where it was thought to be relevant.

Quantitative analysis

Unlike formal written tests, where things like number of words written, and things such as orthographic, grammar, vocabulary errors can be recorded quite accurately, in these kinds of conversational data the picture is a lot less clear. Overlaps, cut offs, partial utterances, inaudible or unclear utterances, background noise obscuring talk and other issues mean that any attempt at word count will of necessity produce rather fuzzy data. With that caveat in place, some attempt at both raw word count will be attempted here to see if any changes occurred in the Pre and Post data.

Written prose is characterized by adherence to fairly strict notions of grammatical and lexical correctness. Spoken language is not so constrained and utterances that would not pass muster in terms of grammar and vocabulary in a written format are found regularly in spontaneous spoken output. As noted by Schegloff et al. (1977) repair is an omnipresent feature of spontaneous spoken interaction, revealing that misspeaking, lapses of memory and other performance phenomena are not limited to language learners but are a regular feature of the speech of even

educated native speakers and L2 speakers who have attained a very high degree of proficiency. Holding learners to a higher standard of grammatical and lexical perfection than that displayed by native speakers in spontaneous spoken interaction runs the risk of stigmatizing learners and causing them to focus on narrow linguistic concerns and, by extension, downplay interactional concerns which may actually be more important in the here-and-now of the interaction they are involved in. For these reasons, in this paper there will be no analysis of the kinds of grammar and vocabulary errors that are the main focus of standardized written tests, as it would be hard to state with certainty that any given phenomenon was due to some deficiency in the L2 proficiency of the speaker rather than some local performance issue.

Word counts

In a comparison of the Pre and Post conversations, it is observed that the total numbers of words spoken was greater in the Post than in the Pre data. The approximate word counts can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. *Word Counts (Total Words Uttered)*

Conversation	Pre 1	Pre 2
Approx. word count	234	239
Conversation	Post 1	Post 2
Approx. word count	393	301

Even with the inherent fuzziness surrounding what counts as a word in such conversational data (e.g. 'gonna', 'aren't', 'she's' and other common contractions are counted as single words due to their prosodic features in the run of speech, although sometimes it is not entirely clear if the utterance was a contraction or

merely a high speed articulation of the non-contracted form), it will be seen that there was a noticeable increase in the perceived number of words spoken over the three minutes of analyzed data. For a rough comparison, data collected by the author of a triadic interaction between three native English speakers engaged in mundane spoken interaction yielded 745 words in total over a three-minute stretch of talk. This seems to indicate that talk was generally faster and smoother in the Post data although still slower than native speaker talk. The data for the individual speakers is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Words uttered per speaker*

Conversation	Speakers		
Pre 1	A	B	C
	67	127	40
Pre 2	D	E	F
	130	49	60
Post 1	E	B	C
	25	185	183
Post 2	D	G	F
	129	95	77

It is clear that in each of the Pre conversations that the amount of speaking is not evenly distributed. In Pre 1 speaker B contributed the majority of the talk, while in Pre 2 it was speaker D who was the main speaker. The contributions of speaker C in Pre 1 and speaker E in Pre 2 were minimal in comparison. In the Post conversations the picture was slightly different. In Post 1, there was a balance in the number of words spoken by B and C, while E's contribution consisted mostly of short back-channel style utterances. This is primarily because the nature of this interaction was telling stories based on the theme of 'best memory from study abroad'. Over the three minutes of analysis, B and C both engaged in narrative sequences. In fact,

this recording was more than three minutes in length, and once C had concluded her narrative, speaker E self-selected to tell her own narrative. Had a different three minutes been selected, including E's narrative, the speakers C and E would have spoken the most and speaker B's contribution would have been minimal. This demonstrates how facets of speaker's abilities may be more maximal or more minimal depending on what data are analyzed.

In Post 2, although speaker D is the major contributor, the other two speakers, G and F have a roughly equal number of words in their contributions. In blunt terms it seems that in the Pre data, dominant speakers emerged, giving a somewhat unequal participation balance, with some speakers adopting a more passive role. In the Post data it seemed that there was more of an orientation by participants to contributing to the ongoing interaction and achieving some sort of balance in efforts to participate actively.

Turn length

The basic unit of participation is spoken interaction is the turn (Sack et al. 1974). Each turn may be comprised of several turn construction units (TCU). A TCU may be lexical, phrasal, clausal, sentential or multi-sentential. At the completion of a turn, a speaker can either select another participant to take the next turn, leave the space open for another participant to self-select to take a turn, or, if no other person self-selects to speak, the speaker can re-select him or herself and produce another utterance in the here and now of the unfolding interaction.

One of the noticeable features of lower proficiency L2 speaking is the tendency of speakers to contribute rather short turns. By short I mean 1) of limited temporal duration, 2) of limited number of words uttered and 3) of limited number of propositions/amounts of informational content. Of course, even native and proficient L2 speakers of a language often produce short utterances during interaction, especially in turns which are 'backchannel' (Yngve, 1970) or listener responses that

support the current speaker without attempting to take the floor. Indeed, extremely minimized utterances, referred to as 'mentions' by Py, (1986 p. 349), are a feature of normal talk and thus cannot be stigmatized in learners. That being said, if speakers continue to produce minimal turns throughout the interaction, then this may be consequential for the progressivity of the talk. With this in mind I next analyze the longest turns at talk produced by the participants in this study to see if there are any differences in the Pre and Post data. For reasons of space, not every turn will be transcribed but the following excerpts give some idea of the nature of these longer turns in the Pre data.

The longest turn by speaker A occurs at the very beginning of the recording. After stating she wishes to cook by herself, speaker B offers a confirmation check as follows.

Excerpt 1. Cook by myself.

```
01.  B:   Cook yourself?
02.  A:   Yes because (.) every day my mother (1.2) cook
03.       for me (2.1) So I dunno any (1.0) menu (2.9) I
04.       want to be:: (0.8) a good cooker  Hu hu hhhu
05.       How about you?
```

This utterance, from line 02 to line 05, has 24 hearable words and unfolds over 20 seconds. The transcript reveals numerous quite lengthy pauses, giving an impression of difficulty in sustaining speech flow over more than a few words at a time.

In the Pre data, speaker B's longest utterance was the following in which she outlines her plans for her time in Canada.

Excerpt 2: Sightseeing in Canada

```
01.  B:   Okay I'd like to go to:: (1.4) Niagara Fall
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02.  A:   Uh
03.  B:   And (.) s:: some something (0.5)
04.       Canada's famous places (3.4)
05.       So (0.4) uh go go sightseeing sightseeing
06.       sightseeing (.)
07.       Also I'd like to make a lot of friends (1.5)
08.       Korean German I dunno I dunno dunno but
09.       a::h(3.9)yes hh.yes
```

This turn consists of 39 hearable words and unfolds over 65 seconds. Again, there are frequent lengthy pauses and multiple instances of repetition as the speaker proceeds through the turn. The slow speaking rate, frequent pausing, multiple repetitions of words are all things that would indicate less than full L2 fluency.

In the Post data the longer turns were of a different nature, especially in Post 1, where the participants are engaged in the telling of sequential narratives, which naturally privilege the storyteller to take a longer turn, or rather a series of longer turns during the course of the telling, the rights of other participants to pursue their own interactional agendas being curtailed until the telling has reached a recognizable and mutually agreed upon ending. For reasons of space, such a telling will not be reproduced here in full, but the following excerpt gives an impression of the kind of extended turn produced in these data. In this excerpt, speaker C is relating her own narrative of her memorable time in Canada, prompted by speaker B who has just finished her own telling on this theme. C's narrative continues after this excerpt.

Excerpt 3. Bra tree

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01.  B:   How about you?
02.  C:   Uhn Actually I.I uhm (.) I have so mm. so many
03.       memories
04.  B:   Uh
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05.  C:   But huh Uh after this very good hh hh. story
06.  B:   Uhhh
07.  C:   I'm hesitate to speak [this]=
08.  B:                          [>No no [no<]
09.  E:                                  [No]
010. C:   =But u:: hm (0.6) the memory I came up with now
011.      is the bra tree. .hh  It was in the th.
012.      mountain we went to ski together
013.      with. my friends some of my friends and
014.      then (0.4) there are. its very big mountain
015. E:   Uhn
016. C:   And hh. when we going up by the how to say
017.      the lift
018. E:   [uhn]
019. B:   [uhn]
020. C:   There's a tree (.) there lot of bras.
```

This sequence is representative of the kinds of longer turns that could be found in the Post data. C's turn from line 02 to line 20 contains 75 words and unfolds over 41 seconds. There are few unfilled pauses and frequent deployment of non-lexical fillers such as 'uhm' and also laughter and inbreaths that help keep the speech flowing.

The following excerpt is taken From Post 2 data. The participants here are not engaged in sequences of back-to-back narratives as in Post 1 data, with the concomitant lengthy turns, but the following gives an idea of the nature of the talk here.

Excerpt 4. Mosquitoes

```
01.  F:   Is there a lot of small (2.8) mosquitoes hhe he.
02.  D:   Mosquitoes mosquitoes yeah they do but
03.       like the temperature is more than forty degrees
04.       now right?=
05.  F:    [Really?       ]
06.  D:   =[>Not not not< ] forty but thirty-eight or
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07.        something like?
08.        So I, I heard mosquitoes are died because
09.        of the heat
```

D's turn from line 02 to line 09 consists of 35 hearable words and the turn unfolds over 17 seconds. There are no lengthy pauses either filled or unfilled. there are two repetitions ('mosquitoes' in line 2 and 'not' in line 06.) but these seem not to be disfluent repetitions connected to word search or other language processing phenomena, but function in confirming F's try marked utterance of 'mosquitoes' that appeared in line 01 and initiating self-repair in line 06 and also holding the turn while in overlap with speaker F.

The longest turns of the participants (by word count) in the data are shown in table 4. Also shown are the temporal duration of the turns and the duration total of unfilled pauses that occurred within that turn.

Table 4. *Longest Turns: Word Count, Duration and Unfilled Pauses*

Speaker/Data set	Longest Turn (Number of words spoken)	Duration of turn in seconds	Combined duration of intra-turn unfilled pauses
Speaker A (Pre)	24	20	8
Speaker B (Pre)	39	65	12.5
Speaker B (Post)	164	85	4.5
Speaker C (Pre)	14	10	3.4
Speaker C (Post)	209	103	4.1
Speaker D (Pre)	60	36	8.6
Speaker D (Post)	35	17	0
Speaker E (Pre)	9	7	0.4
Speaker E (Post)	53	31	1.1
Speaker F (Pre)	38	29	14.2
Speaker F (Post)	22	17	5.4
Speaker G (Post)	26	18	9.9

As can be seen, the data shows a lot of variation. The longest turns of speakers B and C were very different in the Pre and Post data. This may indicate an increased proficiency and confidence in using the L2, but it may also reflect the two different genres of talk. In the Post data, the talk was the telling of narratives initially based on the prompt of 'what was the best memory of study abroad' and the narrative genre presupposes longer turns at talk than the short turns in quick succession that will be found in mundane interaction. Similarly, in the case of speaker E, the Pre data was three minutes in length and this participant mostly limited her contributions to backchannel utterances and short follow-up questions that prompted the current floor holder to develop their talk further. In the post data, the recording was longer. Of the three minutes of data analyzed, speaker E again mostly contributed short backchannel utterances and follow-up questions in support of the other speakers' narratives. However, outside of the three minutes of talk that were analyzed for the data for B and C, speaker E responded to a narrative by C with a narrative of her own, and the data in table 4 shows this speech act. This underscores the fact that in multi-party talk, although there is a global tendency to ensure roughly balanced participancy, there may be extended periods where one or more speakers take a more passive stance to the ongoing interaction. This does not betoken any lack of proficiency in the L2 and may actually reveal a more nuanced understanding of participatory stances and rights in the ongoing interaction by the seemingly marginal participant. As noted by Nunan, (1987, p. 137) one of the fundamental aspects of genuine conversation is "the right of interlocutors to decide whether to contribute to an interaction or not."

On a similar note, temporal aspects of the data such as intra-turn unfilled pause duration are not easy to analyze. As noted by McCarthy, (2010, p. 3) "Pausing is an extremely complex phenomenon ... Pauses may not necessarily be a sign of communicative failure but may indicate complex planning and boosted cognitive effort." Looking at the data it is clear that there are extensive unfilled pauses in the talk of

the participants, although the amount of unfilled pausing in the Post data seems to be much less in than in the Pre data. But, allowing that pausing can be strategic and nuanced, sifting out what are 'fluent' and 'disfluent' pauses may be a more subjective than objective exercise.

The analysis of the data presented here is of a very limited nature. Other metrics could have been investigated. In addition to raw word count, syllable counts could have given a more nuanced view of speech rate, combined with mean length of runs, that is the number of syllables between two pauses, and other phenomena "from temporal features of speech such as speech rate and frequency of pauses, to prosodic features of speech such as intonation and stress patterns" (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020, p. 43). Other factors such as vocabulary range and type token ratios could have shed light on an expanded vocabulary range across the Pre and Post data. Similarly, the timings of unfilled pauses in Table 4 were rounded to tenths of a second compared to a millisecond granularity of unfilled pauses in the study by Huench and Tracy-Ventura (2017, p. 767).

The point of this is to show that any empirical, quantitative analysis of the kind of free conversation data presented here is inevitably going to be fuzzy, partial and open to a variety of different interpretations. Only weak claims can be made about any change in the participants L2 proficiency over the period of the study based on this kind of data. It seems from the data presented above, the participants generally talked more and more quickly in the Post data than the Pre. Further analysis of quantitative data may yield a more fine-grained picture of some of the ways in which the participants' L2 changed over the course of the study.

Qualitative analysis

Assessing the language abilities of learners is a complex and multi-faceted task. Institutional convenience often means that standardized written tests that produce

results in terms of individuated, numerical scores tend to be the default assessment tool. Such tests may completely ignore speaking. If speaking is involved, assessments may take the form of oral proficiency interviews (OPI), picture description exercises or even reading printed matter out loud. The OPI has a distinct interactional architecture, in terms of talk being narrowly aligned with an institutional interactional agenda, turn-taking being largely the remit of the interviewer(s), and turn-taking defaulting to 'current selects next' as is normal for the interview genre. Topic management is also asymmetrical and tightly constrained and there is also perhaps a tacit alignment by the parties with the notion that accuracy trumps progressivity. (See Johnson (2008) for a deeper critique of the OPI format.) Other oral assessment methods such as picture descriptions, and recitals of memorized content may also tilt towards narrow notions of accuracy, and, if monologic in nature, disattend to the kinds of interactional skills that learners will need if they are to engage in spontaneous spoken interactions in the L2. Such interactions are the "the primordial site of human sociality and social life" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 101) and lie at the heart of the question 'Do you speak English/French/Japanese?' The neglect of this facet of L2 attainment is an all-too-common feature of language assessments.

For speakers of an L2, it is of course, necessary for them to have some L2 lexical and grammatical resources to draw on to enable them to engage in spoken interaction. Even if these resources are quite sparse, it is still possible, in the author's experience, for L2 learners to be able to engage effectively in interaction. (See also Goodwin (2004) for an account of the interactional abilities of a person with severe aphasia.) This aspect of language is covered by the blanket term interactional competence, (IC) and the following section will examine the aspects of the learners' IC development.

Interactional competence refers to a complex and interrelated series of practices that participants in interaction deploy in the here and now of that ongoing interaction. The linguistic and behavioral scope of the varied components of IC is

outlined by Pekarek Doehler and Ponchon-Berger (2015),

> Engaging in social interactions presupposes not only the availability of a set of linguistic resources, nor simply the ability to perform speech acts in a contextually appropriate way. It also requires the ability to recipient-design one's actions so that they are recognizable and acceptable as such to others, to order them in identifiable ways, to anticipate next actions, to indicate the fitting of such next actions to preceding actions, to monitor the actions of others, and, more generally, to continuously adapt one's conduct to the local circumstantial details of the ongoing courses of action. (p.233)

It is the interrelatedness of one participant's speech and actions to the speech and actions of the other participant(s), – in both in the moment-by-moment unfolding of an interaction and across a more extended stretch of discourse activity – that renders qualitative analysis an appropriate method for the kind of interactional data examined in this paper.

Turn-taking

In a seminal paper (Sacks et al. 1974) the methods by which participants manage turn-taking in spoken interaction were distilled to a 'simplest systematics'. Participants in interaction can come to the end of a turn and then explicitly nominate the next speaker to take a next turn. Alternatively, a speaker may reach the end of their turn and not select any other to speak, instead relying on some other participant to self-select to take a turn, the first person to speak gaining the right to take that next turn. A third option arises when no other participant self-selects to take a turn and the person whose turn was designedly complete, alters course and self-selects to take a further turn. In the Pre data of this study, we can see a reliance on the 'current selects next' method as the default turn transition strategy

of the speakers. In Pre 1 the participants talk 'round the circle' during the initial phase of the recording, with each participant answering the indexed question of 'what will you do during study abroad?' and upon completion of the answer to that question, nominating the next speaker with the formulation 'How about you?' The sequence continues until all participants have answered the question.

Excerpt 5. Study abroad

```
01.  A:   Yes because every day (.) my mother (0.8) cook
02.       for me (1.9) So I don't know (0.4) any (0.2)
          menu
03.       (1.1) I want to be a good cooker. Hhh. Ha
04.       How about you?
05.  C:   Eh. I want to join the cheering club
06.       in Canada (0.5)yes::=
07.  B:   =yes [okay.    ]
08.  C:        [how 'bout] you?
09.  B:   Okay. I'd like to go to Niagara Fall
```

Speaker A completes her telling and then nominates speaker C in line 04. After a very brief account of her plans for activities in Canada, C nominates speaker B with the same 'current selects next' method ('how 'bout you?') in line 08. This practice is also seen in Pre 2.

Excerpt 6. Weekend activities (simplified)

```
01.  E:   Six or seven pee em
02.  D:   Yeah
03.  E:   How about you?
04.  F:   Eh? I will (.) I will go to see a musical
     (10 lines omitted)
015. F:   She she (....) I I have only girl friends
016.      just girl friends so=
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017. E:   =What a cute
018. F:   How 'bout you?
019. D:   Ah. I will join event of cooking
```

In this excerpt, speaker E concludes her telling of her weekend activities and then nominates speaker F by means of the canonical turn transition formulation 'how about you?' in line 03. F complies with the nomination and recounts her weekend activities. She is subject to some mild teasing about whether the friend she mentioned is male or female and quickly moves to state that the friend was female and that she only has female friends. Perhaps to head off any further queries on this potentially embarrassing matter she nominates D as the next speaker with 'how 'bout you? in line 18. The 'how (a)bout you?' turn transition practice is found here and also regularly in other data collected by the author in many different classroom settings. See Campbell-Larsen (2019) for a more detailed analysis of this practice in learner talk. It may be the case that speaker C in excerpt 5 and speaker F in excerpt 6 are using the 'how about you?' formulation not so much to select the next speaker, but to *self-deselect* themselves from having to continue further. This may be seen as a fundamental aspect of some learner talk where turns at talk are not seen as valuable and sought-after resources (Sacks et al 1974), but as unwanted impositions, with a potential for face-loss – such face loss being either potential social embarrassment as in excerpt 6, or potential linguistic embarrassment in language classroom speaking when being called on by name to answer a teacher's question with the knowledge that the response will be subject to evaluation in terms of both factual and linguistic accuracy and perhaps public, on-record correction. Habituation to the classroom mode of teacher-selects-next, referred to as a display question style (See Long & Sato 1983) may wash over into other types of speaking and result in the kinds of turns noted here.

Questions and answers

As was noted above, the turn-taking system in the Pre data featured 'How about you?' as a prominent turn transition mechanism. In addition to this direct practice, there was also a tendency for talk to be based around extended question-and-answer adjacency pair sequences referred to as 'serial questioning' by Hauser (2008). In Pre 1, the conversation reaches a topic closing juncture when all participants converge on an assessment of minus thirty degrees Celsius as being very cold. A new sequence is initiated when one participant comments (using 'by the way') on the suntanned arms of another. This prompts a sequence of questions and answers regarding the cause of the tanning, whether protective measures against UV were taken, and how long the person has been playing tennis. Each question is asked in a minimized fashion and the answer is similarly minimized.

Excerpt 7. Tennis practice

```
01.  A:   What did you do?
02.  B    [I.   ]
0.3  A:   [salon]salon?
04.  B:   Salon no.no I played tennis. I I'm wearing a
05.       UnderArmour so. I'm wearing closes
06.       (.)
07.  B:   I can't (.) I can't
08.  C:   Protect?
09.  B:   Protect protect yes protect my skin from UV
010. A:   Eh. Did you not wear (.)
011. C:   Gloves
012. B:   Ah gloves no no no no I have to(?hold?)
013.      the racquet
014. C:   I see
015. B:   Yes so
016. C:   From the summer?
017. B:   From no from this winter
018. C:   Winter?
```

The pattern is similar in Pre 2. The sequence of 'how about you?' generated talk on weekend activities closing with a series of questions regarding speaker D's cooking circle. Although D's responses are not minimized, the underlying architecture of the talk is of a question-and-answer format. This is similar to other data collected by the author where Q&A sequences dominate the talk. These follow-up style questions mostly request more detail from the other, trying to flesh out the answer, and may be interpreted as indicating that the answers provided may well be in some way insufficient.

In the Post data, the underlying interactional architecture is more geared toward self-selection to take a turn at talk – although there are still some instances of 'how about you?'. In Post 1, speaker B takes an extended turn while she describes her best memory of studying abroad. In this case her narrative concerns the support she received from a Canadian classmate in a drama class. While she is relating her narrative, she receives backchannel support from the other participants, giving positive assessments of the situation. This listener support is in keeping with the role of listeners as co-narrators as described by Bavelas et al. (2000) and thus demonstrates an aspect of IC awareness. There are two instances of questions from other participants, but these are of a different nature to the follow-up questions from the Pre data. In Post 1 speaker B, while engaged in the orientation phase of her narrative (Labov & Waletzky, 1967), mentions the name of her supportive Canadian classmate. This is subject to a confirmation check by speaker C. A little later C asks a further question regarding this person, enquiring of B is this person is the one whose picture appears on the messaging application on B's phone. B confirms this.

Excerpt 8. Confirming identity

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01.  B:   I cannot forget her (.) her saying or something
02.       like that so
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03.  C:   [Uhn]
04.  E:   [uh]
05.  C:   Is she the picture in your line?
06.  B:   yea yah yah yah yah yah
07.  C:   Ah (Inaudible) I see
```

In this instance, there is little need for the follow-up questions that were a feature of the Pre talk, as B fleshes out her narrative with, it seems, sufficient detail to make the account adequate for her interlocutors. C's question in line 05 is interesting in that it does not seek to fill some gap in the account of B, but rather to seek out a connection between the person named in the story and C's extant understanding of B's friends, thus indexing shared social knowledge between B and C.

In Post 2 there is the similar indexing of shared social knowledge to support the current speaker's turn. In response to a 'how about you?' prompt from speaker D, speaker G indicates that she will go on a summer camp with her university sports club.

Excerpt 9. Footsal

```
01.  D:   How 'bout you?
02.  G:   I (.) Eh. I will go the Oita on
03.       the my club's trip.
04.  F:   Oh right
05.  D:   Football football ((inaudible))
06.  G:   Football futsal futsal
```

In this case, D takes a turn in line 05 to indicate that she has knowledge of G's sports club, supplying the confirming word 'football'. G aligns with this in line 06 and offers a mild correction that the club is not actually football, but futsal. A parallel sequence occurs shortly after when speaker F mentions that she also has a club trip during the summer vacation. Before she can continue her turn stating the

destination of the trip, D interjects with the try marked word ‘archery’ to confirm F’s sport. These contributions are of a different nature to the follow-up question type turns that were such a feature of the Pre data.

Turns as valuable resources

There is evidence from the Post data that the participants may be orienting to a more active stance regarding the interaction than was evident in the Pre recordings. As was mentioned previously, Sacks et al. (1974) conceived of turns at talk in terms of an “economy, with turns for something being valued” (p. 696). The inherent value of a turn at talk is further reflected in the systematics for turn-taking which states that in cases where a current speaker does not select the next speaker, then a next speaker may self-select to take a turn. If there are more than two participants, then the question of who speaks at such a transition point is unclear. In this case Sacks et al. state that the “first starter acquires rights to a turn” (p. 704). At such junctures competition to take a turn – based on the underlying ‘value’ of a turn, may be observed. Such self-selection to take a turn is observable in the Post data.

Excerpt 10. Temple stay

```
01.  D:   They will stay at the temple overnight I guess
02.       I’m not sure but (.) so I have to play
03.       with them or cook for dinner
04.  G:   [Do they have]
05.  F:   [Do they stay]
06.       (.)
07.  F:   for (.) sorry (.) they stay for five days?
```

In excerpt 10, speaker D is relating her plans to join a volunteer activity supporting children on a multi-day trip. After completing her turn in line 03, both G and F

self-select to take a turn. They speak in overlap and quickly cut off their speaking to resolve the trouble source. After a micro-pause in line 06, speaker F restarts in the clear and after a brief apology, continues with her question. Not only does the unfolding of this sequence show nuanced methods for resolving the overlap, but it also points to an orientation to be active in taking turns, rather than waiting to be allocated a turn. A similar orientation to active turn taking is found later in the same data.

Excerpt 11. Awajishima

```
01.  F:   Yeah archery club in (.) to: Awajishima
02.  G:   Awajishima
03.  F:   For three days
04.       (2.5)
05.  D:   Ah good. In Summer vacation?=
06.  F:   =Yes
07.  G:   Many clubs
08.  F:   It's [not in August]=
09.  G:   [Goes to      ]Awajishima
010. F:   =It's in September
```

In line 01 speaker F confirms that here sports club camp will be held in Awajishima. D pursues progressivity by asking for confirmation that the camp will be held in the summer vacation. While F and D are working together to create a shared understanding of when the camp will take place, speaker G attempts to add her own commentary, namely that Awajishima is a popular destination for summer camps for a number of different clubs, even though this is partially in overlap with F's clarification of the timing of the camp that is itself a response to D's pursuit of clarification in line 05. Once again, a bid to take a turn, even if it is mistimed and somehow intrusive to an already underway sequence highlights a more competitive attitude to turn taking than the rather mechanical sequences of the Pre data.

Recipient design

During interaction, participants take turns at talk that are both backward looking in that they are responsive to what has gone before, and also forward looking in that they project what will come after. Pekarek Doehler (2019), notes,

> …members have at their disposal alternative methods for getting the same interactional business accomplished. These alternative methods provide for conduct that is adapted to the local circumstances of ongoing interactions, as well as to the precise others participating in these; this is captured by the CA notions of *context sensitivity* and *recipient design* respectively. (p. 30)

The context sensitivity and recipient design resources available to the participants are demonstrated in the talk of speaker C in the Pre and Post data. As was noted in excerpt 5 above, in the Pre data, speaker C was nominated with a 'how about you?' formulation to tell of her plans for overseas study. In response to the nomination to take a turn she produces a single proposition regarding joining a cheering club and then quickly nominates the next speaker. In very narrow terms she has responded to the nomination to speak and speaks according to the indexed question, but adds nothing more. This stands in contrast to the situation in the Post data where she is again nominated to speak by means of a 'how about you?' formulation, as shown in excerpt 3 above. In this case, before telling of her best memory, speaker C engages in a short sequence of meta-discourse, saying that she has numerous stories to tell, praising the quality of the previous speaker's story and expressing hesitation in telling her own story. After receiving a go ahead from the other two participants, she begins the story. This story is mildly salacious and concerns a tree next to a ski-lift in Canada which is festooned with bras thrown by ski-lift users. It turns out that speaker B is also party to this story and B is recruited as a confirmatory co-teller of the story. After B's uplifting and positive story of emotional sup-

port in her English learning endeavors, C's story represents a change of tone and the expressions of hesitation indicate an understanding of this as C fits her story as not merely responding to the nomination to speak, but also an understanding that her story, being told after B's story, is told in light of, and affected by, the prior story.

As C's story comes to a recognizable end, speaker E then self selects to tell her own story.

Excerpt 12. Drinking games

```
01.  C:   It was very funny. He he he.
02.  E:   Oh my goodness. But in the Yu Kay
03.       There were many Europeans. So one of my
04.       Italian friends (1.1) she was hanging over
```

This transition from C to E is notable for several reasons. Firstly, C's assessment in line 01 seems to indicate that the narrative is now complete. This means that the special rights that accrue to story tellers regarding floor-holding and the constraints on other participants not to launch a new interactional project are now ended. Secondly, in contrast with the Pre data, there is no nomination of speaker E to take a next turn by C. Rather, E self-selects to take her turn and launch her own story, again demonstrating the more active participatory stance of the participant. And thirdly, E's story concerns a drinking game that ended with a mildly scandalous result concerning a drunken escapade by another student. Thus, we can see that E's narrative is not exactly aligning with the 'best memory abroad' theme that started the round of narratives. Instead, her story seems reactive to C's 'bra tree' narrative in that it deals with slightly salacious happenings while studying abroad. This seems to reveal a more nuanced context awareness than was found during the Pre data, maintaining the tacit 'impropriety' theme of the previous speaker's narrative instead of the original 'best memory' theme of the first narrative, with

E pursuing her own context-shaped interactional agenda in the here and now of the unfolding interaction.

Discussion

When encountering the talk of an L2 speaker of a language, unless the speaker has achieved the very highest level of proficiency, there are usually several grossly apparent phenomena that reveal the L2 speaker status of the person in question. Pronunciation may be noticeably foreign, even for highly advanced learners. There may be persistent and systematic problems with a certain part of the grammar system such as correct use of articles, plurals and countable/uncountable distinctions in English, correct gender of nouns in German or French, use of particles or honorific forms in Japanese and so on. Lower-level learners may have significant gaps in their vocabulary and only partial grasp of some grammar points, occasioning frequent pausing and repetitions. So apparent are these phenomena to any L1 speaker that it may seem that the main business of L2 teaching and learning is to focus on grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation and assume that if the teaching is effective, the learner will emerge as a competent communicator. Real world experience informs us that this is often not the case, but such is the prominence of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation issues in L2 speaking, that other aspects of communicative competence are often disattended to in the syllabi, the classroom and the language exam.

In the case of the data presented here, there is some quantitative evidence that the participants were speaking more and more quickly in the Post data although the reasons for differences could not solely be accounted for by any notion of 'improvement'. For example, the narrative sequences in Post 1 would naturally generate longer turns that the more mundane exchanges in the Pre data. More concretely, the amount of unfilled pausing in the Post data was much reduced from the

Pre data and may point to some mitigation of perceptions of disfluency. While perhaps not smooth in comparison to L1 speaking, the talk seemed smoother in terms of the amount of pausing in the Post data.

All of the participants reported increased scores on standardized written tests administered by the institution before and after study abroad, with the test scores generally indicating a move from B1 to B2 levels in the CEFR scale. Many students reported some dissatisfaction with the score increase, having the feeling that they thought that their L2 proficiency had improved to a greater extent than was reflected in the numerical score on the tests taken upon return. This dissatisfaction may be based on a background sense of development in the kinds of interactional behaviors analyzed in part here. These developments are typified by greater reliance on self-selection in turn-taking, going beyond turn content that only meets the narrow demands of the prior question, having more awareness of the need for recipient design and having a larger inventory of methods for designing turns appropriately. But these aspects of L2 proficiency are completely invisible on standardized written tests that focus on passive activities like reading and listening, that prioritize narrow views of lexical/grammatical correctness, and largely measure the students' abilities to align with the institutional agenda of the tests rather than their ability to form their own interactional agendas, pursue these agendas effectively, and fit them (or not) to the agendas of their interlocutors on a moment-by-moment basis. This seems to be a serious issue in the teaching and testing of second/foreign languages, underpinned by the fundamental ideological mismatch between the institutional desire to provide objective, reliable, numerical, individuated scores for language attainment and the nature of spoken interaction. This quantification tendency ignores the demonstrable fact that language in its core usage – conversation – is co-constructed, intersubjective, context-dependent, fuzzy, and replete with repairs, abandonments, cut offs, overlaps and all of the other messy stuff that make it look chaotic and grammatically deviant from an etic perspective, but seem

smooth, easily graspable, interesting, socially worthwhile and fundamentally human from the emic perspective of the participants themselves. Language programs that disattend to the IC aspects of language, in both teaching and testing, are deficient in a profound way.

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