Raising student awareness of how native English speakers use the discourse strategy of turn taking in conversations

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There are several features of English language conversation that challenge international students. These features can be particularly troublesome for students who elect to study abroad in English speaking universities. However, little research has been done to investigate the problems these students face in classroom interactions with native English speaking classmates. One particular aspect of discourse that has received very little attention is that of how to take turns in a conversation. Therefore, I designed activities highlighting how turn taking strategies are used by native English speakers for my students who will be studying abroad in the near future. How these activities were designed and implemented in the classroom is the subject of this paper, which is a revised version of a paper to be published in the spring edition of Himeji Dokkyo's in-house journal.

　英語での会話には、留学生にとって多くの難題を提起する側面がいくつかある。これらは特に英語圏の大学に留学する学生にとって困難となり得る。しかしながら、こういった学生が英語を母語とするクラスメートとの交流において直面する問題を調査する研究はなされていないに等しい。殆ど注目されてこなかったディスコース（談話）の側面は、どうやって順番に会話を行うのかという点です。このような状況の下、教師/研究者である筆者は、近い将来海外留学することになっている学生のために、英語を母語とする者がどのように交互に会話をするストラテジーを使っているのかに焦点を当てたアクティビティを設計することにした。これらのアクティビティがどのように設計され教室で実践されるのかがこの論文の主旨であり、これは姫路獨協大学の紀要論文春季号で掲載される論文を改訂したものである。

…the theory of language…is that language has meaning only in and through social practices (Gee, 1999, p. 8)

The purpose of this small-scale project was to expose Japanese students to the principles of turn taking as used by native English speakers (NS) in authentic conversations. Turn taking is an important discourse strategy that has many uses, some of which are to build conversations, accomplish specific tasks and interact with other participants. Research into the difficulties experienced by non-native English speaking students (NNS) in their classroom interaction with native speaking (NS) classmates has shown that although they, NNSs, have a theoretical knowledge of what turn taking is, they have little practical experience in using it (Martine 2005, Morita 2004).

The aim of this project was to encourage the students to notice the practical usage of turn taking in the hopes that by bringing this strategy to their attention it will facilitate their ability to use it successfully when they go abroad to study at English speaking universities. The instructional approach consisted of the use of a number of activities that support the *World Link Book 2* (2005) video and activities that I specifically designed to require the students to focus on the turn taking procedures used by three native English speakers in an authentic tape-recorded conversation.

In this paper, the first section will describe research examining the challenges in classrooms abroad faced by NNS students working in small groups consisting of both NNS students and NS students. The second section describes the context and participants of this small-scale project. The third section comprises an in-depth description of the type of activities used with students in two lessons using two types of mediums, a video clip and a tape-recorded discussion. The results section provides an account of the ethnographic results of the survey completed by students regarding the turn taking activities. Finally, the concluding section discusses the further implications of introducing this type of discourse analysis into the foreign language classroom.

Challenges of collaborative group work for NNS students studying abroad.

The use of collaborative group work and discussion groups is becoming standard in university classrooms across the English speaking world (Crowley, 1997; Czerneda, 1996; Eklund & Eklund, 1997; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1997, cited in Leki, 2001). However, very little research has been done on interactions between NS and NNS students in classroom discussions and small group work. In an article considering the academic experiences of L2 learners at a Canadian university, Morita (2004) reports that "…L2 learners' socialization through primarily oral activities such as discussions and presentations has received relatively limited attention" (p. 575). However, more qualitative research is emerging that examines problems faced by NNS learners in the classroom when participating in these types of activities, (Duff, 2001, 2002; Leki, 2001; Morita, 2000; Toohey, 2000, cited in Morita, 2004).

Some recent research has revealed that as well as concerns about language proficiency, subject knowledge, and cultural influences, NNS learners must also negotiate their own participation within the group and forge an identity in

relation to other group members (Martine, 2005; Morita, 2004). Morita (2004) expands on this idea by pointing out that

> …newcomer's socialization into academic discourse is far more complex than their unproblematically appropriating established knowledge and skills. It is likely to involve struggles over access to resources, conflicts and negotiations between differing viewpoints arising from differing degrees of experience and expertise and transformation of a given academic community's practices as well as of the participants' identities. (p. 577)

In order for NNS students to achieve this they must participate in discussions and small group work. However, recent research on NS and NNS interaction in the English-speaking classroom (Martine, 2005) has illustrated that for many NNS students, participation in small group work is constrained by several factors, one of which is a lack of practical experience with the discourse strategy of turn taking. Morita (2000) also found that this was the case with some of participants in her study. One Japanese student commented

> It is still very difficult for me to speak up… because I don't know when to get in the discussion! Students here are allowed to speak up freely and it is okay to interrupt others' speech, but I'm not used to doing that because we don't do that very much in my home country…. (p. 298)

In a report of his research at a Canadian university Freeman (1992) notes that some Chinese learners expressed anxiety when asked about their feelings regarding group work participation, and added that they felt very reluctant to break into discussions (p. 93). As Richards and Schmidt (1983) observed, non-participation can have some quite serious consequences and state; "A speaker who doesn't contribute to a conversation arouses negative evaluations … or may make the conversation terminate abruptly" (p.141).

Given that past research has shown that discussions and collaborative group work pose difficulties for international students, it seems prudent to bring turn taking strategies to the attention of students before they depart to participate in a study abroad program. In this way, students will have some exposure to the concept of how and when to take turns, and will be better prepared for the demands of interactions in English with NS classmates in small group work activities in foreign universities.

Context and participants

Some students attending a four-year private university in Western Japan at which I teach are eligible for a special English course. The University Guide book explains that students who have passed the Eiken level 2 test or higher, who also have a TOEIC score of 470 or a TOEFL score of 450 may apply for this program. The applicants are interviewed in Japanese and in English. The course described herein is designed to prepare students to spend their 3rd (junior) year at an English speaking university. These particular participants will go abroad in spring, 2006 for a year.

I designed these classes based on what Nunan and Lamb (1996) described as a series of organic processes. They compare SL teaching to that of cultivating a garden: "…the process of helping students to learn is more like growing a garden than building a brick wall" (p. 44). Thus Nunan and Lamb are likening the language teaching process to that of the gardener who plants seeds in the hopes of them blooming at a later date.

This description fits in nicely with the rationale behind choosing activities based on the noticing hypothesis, defined in general terms by Schmidt (2001) thus: "SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be" (p. 3-4). The noticing hypothesis relates to the results or rather lack of tangible results produced in this project. The very nature of the noticing hypothesis is that activities are designed to direct students' attention to a particular language form or, in this case, a specific discourse feature. Therefore there can be no immediate results. Only when the participants in this project find themselves studying abroad will the results of these activities bear fruit.

The turn taking activities used in this project were piloted with a group of first year students in the special course. Subsequently the adapted activities were used with a group of second year students. There are 12 students in this class; 4 male and 8 female. Their TOEIC scores range from 495-780, thus this class could be described as being at the mid-intermediate level.

The design and implementation of turn taking activities

In general terms, Schmidt (2001) defines the Noticing Hypothesis thus: "SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be" (p3-4).

First lesson

In the first lesson, the students were informed they were about to watch a 2 1/2 minute video clip from a video accompanying *World Link Book 2* (2005). *Turn taking* was elicited from the students and the purpose of the lesson was explained. The purpose of using the video clip from the *World Link Book 2* at this point was to introduce students to the *turn taking stairway* chart (See Appendix 1).

Using a video from a textbook package below students' present language abilities was done deliberately. Using a text in which content and language were relatively easy meant that students could more closely focus on how and when participants in interactions took turns than attending to the content of the conversation. It also gave students the chance to familiarize themselves with how to fill in this particular type of chart which was probably new to most of them.

The students were also informed that they would later listen to an authentic tape-recorded conversation between three native English speakers and complete the same type of chart. Each participant in the video conversation was assigned a letter (for example in Appendix 1, Roberto is A). The names and corresponding letters were written in the right hand corner of the chart for students to refer to

easily (See Appendix 1). The purpose of the activity was for students to write the letter of the person speaking on a *stair* to represent that speaker's turn in the conversation. The aim of using a stairway to represent a conversation was to show visually that a discussion is a collaborative effort. By taking turns native English speakers are building steps that will eventually become a stair way; a solid structure that has the connotation of leading upwards. It was also to show that discourse analysis has practical applications in the classroom. Austin (2001, cited in Massi) elaborates "…it seeks to make visible the pragmatic use of the text: its communicative function and its contribution to human interaction, the 'what-you-want- to-achieve' …, or the 'how-to-do-things with words' perspective" (p. 8).

The students then watched the video clip twice and indicated the various turns that each participant took on the stairway charts. Then in groups of three the students compared their stairway charts to see if they had the same answers. The students found this a very easy task to do and were able to complete the activity correctly.

Second lesson
In the next lesson the students were to listen to a 5-minute tape-recorded conversation between the teacher and two native English speaking friends. The topic of the conversation was whether it is easier for children to acquire a second or third language than it is for adults. The reason that this topic was chosen was that these particular students had recently encountered this topic in a unit from their textbooks, so students were already familiar with the topic and much of the vocabulary.

Prior to the class, however, it was necessary to isolate a few phrases that would not be known to the students. A vocabulary worksheet was prepared as a pre-listening task for the learners (See Appendix 2). The students were put into pairs and asked to complete the worksheet by matching the phrases on the left with the correct definitions on the right. The learners accomplished this quickly and easily, checking their answers with their peers. An extra activity was then introduced to ensure that students had a clear understanding of the content of the conversation, so that when they listened to it again in order to complete the turn taking noticing activity, they could focus on the participants' turns and not the content of the discussion.

The students were given a worksheet (Appendix 3) with 8 of the 10 phrases from the vocabulary work sheet (Appendix 2) and asked to listen to the authentic conversation and write the letter of the person who speaks each phrase. The goal of this activity was to lower the stress of contending with an authentic conversation and to familiarize the learners with the voices of the speakers so they could easily identify them. The students completed the activity individually and then compared their answers with their peers.

At this point in the lesson the students were given the *stairway* chart for the authentic conversation (Appendix 4). They listened to the conversation again and wrote the letter of the speaker on the appropriate stair to indicate who was taking a turn and when they were taking a turn. Afterwards they compared their charts with their classmates. Despite the preparation activities and the one previous listening of the exchange that they had completed, many students were unable to complete the chart. Consequently, they requested

another listening of the tape. After this third listening, the teacher reviewed her completed chart with the whole class. The students listened to the conversation for a final time to check the answers given to them by the teacher.

Turn taking activity used by the students

As a final activity to round off the second class, the students were put into three groups of four. The teacher explained that three members of the group were to have a three-minute conversation about their personal experiences regarding the difficulties of learning English. The fourth member of the group would be the designated turn taking record keeper. This person would not participate in the discussion; their only task was to record who takes a turn and when they do so on the stair chart (Appendix 5). The teacher stressed that the discussion participants were not allowed to see the chart until the task was completed.

For this activity, a random number of stairs was drawn and no identification symbols were given for the participants. Group members decided amongst themselves how they would be identified. For example; one group identified the participants using the first letter of their given names.

After the discussion task was finished, students were asked to see who took the most turns and who took the least. The aim of this activity was to make the students aware of their own participation in group discussions and to give them the opportunity to consciously apply the strategy of turn taking to a collaborative group activity.

Finally the students spent the last few minutes of class time filling in a simple two statement survey (Appendix 6) asking

them to give their opinions about the helpfulness of these turn taking activities. The students were informed that the survey would be anonymous and they were also told they could choose not to do the survey at all if they were so inclined. The surveys were completed with the teacher out of the room and collected and given to the teacher by a student volunteer.

Survey results

Difficulties involved in collecting qualitative results

One drawback of using the noticing hypothesis, as mentioned previously, is that it is usually much later that the act of noticing or paying specific attention to a structure or strategy will have an effect on a learner's output. As Fotos (cited in Cross, 2002) noted; "there is a gap of indeterminate length between what is noticed and when it appears as output, which makes data collection, analysis and correlation problematic"(p. 5).

This raises the question of how to gauge if the activities were of any use to the students. Schmidt (cited in Cross, 2002) admits that there are hindrances to the noticing hypothesis especially in the area of data analysis. By virtue of being an internal operation, noticing cannot be perceived directly which means the analyst must use a great deal of inference from observing participant behavior in order to arrive at anything resembling results. This being the case, it was decided that the best way to obtain some rudimentary results regarding how the learners themselves felt about the activities, was to use an ethnographic approach (Flowerdew, 2002). A simple survey consisting of two statements (Appendix 6) was given to the students at the end of the second lesson.

Survey results

All 12 of the class participants elected to fill out a survey asking for their opinions of the usefulness of the turn taking activities used with the video clip and the authentic conversation. Statement A asked the students to rate the helpfulness of the activities done with the video clip using a scale from 1-5 where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement (See Appendix 6). Table 1 illustrates student responses.

Table 1. Student responses to Statement A

Statement A	5	4	3	2	1
Students' Responses	3	6	3	0	0

A majority of the students (9/12) stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the activities, which included the turn taking activities done in conjunction with the video clip, were helpful to them in learning about participation in English conversations. Three students replied that they somewhat agreed with the statement. None of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

The students who chose to comment in the *Because* section of the survey (See Appendix 6) had favorable remarks to contribute. One student pointed out the advantage of using video; "I can see the exchanging their conversation" Another made a similar comment; "It is easy to understand the taking turns because of view."

Overall the results regarding statement A were positive. Most of the students felt these activities were beneficial to their acquisition of English particularly concerning the strategy of turn taking.

Statement B asked the students to rate the helpfulness of the activities related to the authentic tape-recorded conversation again using a scale where 5 equaled strong agreement and 1 equaled strong disagreement. Table 2 illustrates the students' responses.

Table 2. Student responses to Statement B

Statement B	5	4	3	2	1
Students' Responses	5	5	1	1	0

These results show that an overwhelming majority of the students (10/12) agreed or strongly agreed that the activities, including the turn taking activities, were helpful in assisting them in noticing the way native speakers participate in conversations. Several commented on the importance of having the opportunity to listen to a discussion between native English speakers. As one student remarked; "It is also useful to listen to real English conversation, in fact listening to native speakers talk is good practice for listening". While another learner noted that "taking turns in conversation is important".

One particularly interesting comment came from the one student who disagreed that the activities were helpful; "I cannot imagin the situation, how many people? style of conversation? friends or serious matter? It can make me learn English but it is not helpful to learn about that." This student obviously felt that this activity was of no value to him or her perhaps because not enough information about the context and participants in the discussion was given, although a pre-listening activity (Appendix 2) and an initial listening activity

(Appendix 3) were done. This could perhaps be resolved in future by using a videotaped authentic conversation instead of a tape-recorded one, as video includes contextual information as well as non-verbal cues that are beneficial to understanding and partaking in a conversation.

Therefore, almost unanimously, the participants in this survey indicated that they regarded these types of activities to be advantageous to their knowledge of how native speaking English discourse is created.

Further implications

The significance of being conversationally proficient cannot be understated. Richards and Schmidt (1983) note that "…conversational competence is just as important a dimension of second language learning as grammatical competence …because conversational competence is closely related to the presentation of self, that is, communicating an image of ourselves to others" (p.150). Massi (2001) confirms the significance of turn taking in spoken discourse and states; "…attention should be paid to turn-taking so that the symmetry or asymmetry of the interactional exchange can be understood" (p.7).

It is hoped that this project will serve as a springboard to introducing students to the concepts of turn taking and discourse analysis. It is not enough that teachers help their students put together grammatically correct utterances, it is also important that teachers, as Demo (2001, p.3) explains; "…include the study of discourse in the second language classroom …to allow the students themselves to study language…to make them discourse analysts" (p. 3).

As a follow up to these activities, this group of students was asked to informally report to the teacher/researcher through personal communication whether or not these activities had a beneficial effect on their interaction with their native English speaking classmates once they were attending classes abroad. The possibility of interviewing these students on their return to Japan about their classroom experiences is also being investigated.

Future implications of this type of discourse analysis could include using the same type of stairway charts to show learners how native speakers use the discourse strategy of back channeling. In other words, listener response behavior such as *mm-hmm, O.K,* and *yeah* that a listener uses to show they are paying attention to the speaker. Demo (2001) notes that this would be a very easy conversational aspect to bring to students' attention. Time did not permit the teacher/researcher to carry out such activities with her students this year, but plans are in the works to do so in the upcoming academic year.

As well as back channels, other aspects of turn taking could be explored in the foreign language classroom. Assisting students to see the importance of how to interrupt in order to grab a turn, how to elaborate on a turn, how to paraphrase their own or someone else's contribution and how to argue or disagree to support their points of view are all important discourse features of a discussion. It can only benefit the students to be exposed to these salient attributes of classroom interaction.

In conclusion the reasons for designing and using uncomplicated discourse analysis activities, particularly ones that expose students to authentic discourse in the second

language classroom, are numerous. Massi (2001) goes so far as to argue; "that such exposure will help students to develop their comprehension and production skills to ensure success in their academic and professional practices" (p. 4). As Gee points out in the quote at the beginning of this paper, language must be connected to the idea of social communication. Language usage is more than the sum of its grammatical and collocational parts, it is about effectively connecting with others in order to establish yourself as a unique and valuable member of the community, in this case the classroom community.

Linda Martine is from Canada and has a Master's degree in TEFL/TESL from the University of Birmingham in the U.K. She has taught at various types of educational establishments, including language schools and elementary schools. For the past two years she has been teaching at Himeji Dokkyo University in Hyogo prefecture. Her research interests include discourse analysis, English for Academic Purposes, and extensive reading.

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Appendix 1


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FINISH

Roberto=A
Takeshi=B
Claudia=C
Tara=D
Sun-hee=E
Mike=F
All=X

START
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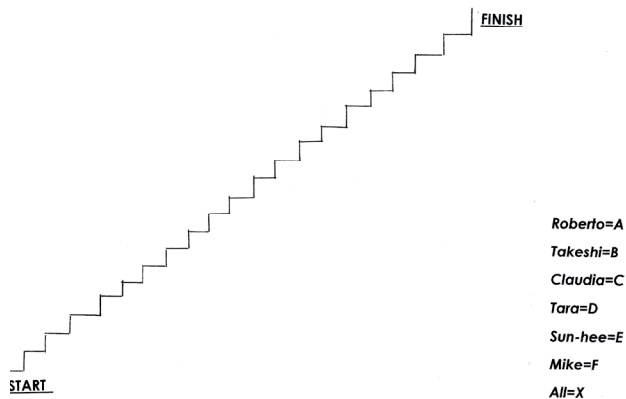
Appendix 2

Vocabulary: matching phrases to meanings (taped conversation)

|	
1. 1st language acquisition___	a. patterns or ideas made up of false information
2. bilingual___	b. to program something early
3. preconceived patterns___	c. the age after 12 years old.
4. critical period___	d. a specific time when you have a chance to do something.
5. pre-adolescent___	e. method of language teaching which uses grammar and translation only.
6. feral children___	f. important period of time
7. pre-wired___	g. the age between 1-12
8. window of opportunity___	h. able to speak two languages
9. grammar translation___	i. wild children, like animals
10. post-adolescent___	j. learning your mother tongue

Appendix 3

Write the speaker's letter next to the phrases they use:

A=Canadian woman

B=American man

C=Irish woman

1. Bilingual 1st language acquisition_____

2. Preconceived patterns_____

3. Critical period_____

4. Pre-adolescent and post adolescent_____

5. Feral children_____

6. Pre-wired_____

7. Window of opportunity_____

8. Grammar translation_____

Appendix 5

START

Appendix 4

FINISH

A=Canadian woman

B=American man

C=Irish woman

START
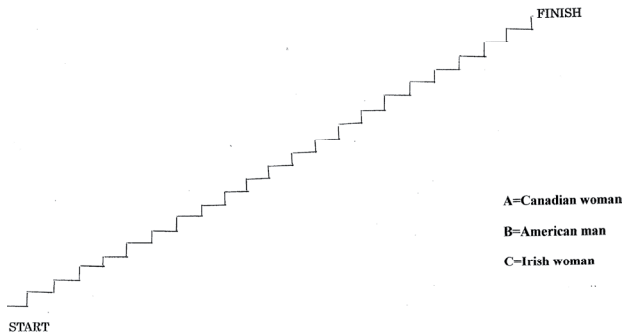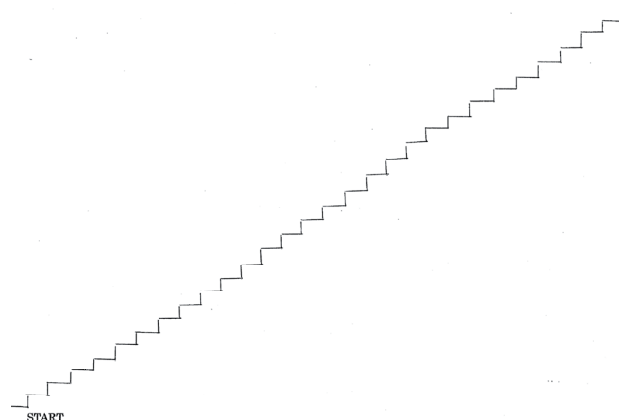
Appendix 6

Please fill in the following boxes indicating your opinions about these activities:

5 = strongly agree

4= agree

3= somewhat agree

2= disagree

1= strongly disagree

Statement A

I think that video activities like this are helpful to learn about participating in English conversations:

5   4   3   2   1

Because:

Statement B

I think tape recorded activities like these are helpful to learn about participating in English conversations

5   4   3   2   1

Because: