Using Applied Conversation Analysis for Professional Development

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Reference Data:

In this study we investigated the application of conversation analysis (CA) practices and principles as a method to analyze teacher acts and as an aid to professional development. We audio- and video-recorded lessons from two of our own classes and transcribed them following CA transcription conventions. Following the analysis of the transcriptions in CA-like data sessions, we imagined and discussed alternative teaching acts. While we found the application of CA-like practices and principles an effective tool for observing our teaching acts and for understanding how we and our students achieve a common understanding, we also noted some of the challenges that could prove problematic for teachers applying CA-like practices to classroom observations. With these challenges in mind, CA-like practices and principles afford teachers the opportunity to pursue professional development collaboratively, especially in data sessions.

　本研究は、conversation analysis (CA) の実践と原則のアプリケーションについて、教師の言動を分析するための方法、および教師の専門的能力の開発向けの補助ツールとして検討するものである。著者は共同で、2つの授業から、音声/ビデオで授業の内容を記録し、CA　トランスクリプション方法に従って、その記録内容を書き起こした。この結果として、CAデータセッションで分析されたトランスクリプトより、選択肢として検討が可能な教育方法を考察よび説明する。CAのような実践と原則を用いたアプリケーションは、教育方法の観察、および教師と学生が相互的理解に達する方法を理解するうえで、客観的で有効的なツールであると説明する一方で、教師が CA を授業に適用する上で生じる可能性のある問題といった課題についても注記する。このような注意点を考慮し、CAのような実践と原則は、教師の専門的能力開発を共同で研究する教師によって、活用できるものであると考察する。

AS LANGUAGE teachers we should strive to better understand our teaching and to improve the quality of the learning opportunities our teaching acts create for students (see Crabbe, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Classroom observation is one way for teachers to conduct professional development (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Wajnryb, 1992), and affords teachers the opportunity to better understand their teaching. Nonetheless, it is difficult for teachers to describe the teaching act with any consistency. Unfortunately, observations are also laden with subjective personal (Fanselow, 1976, 1987) and cultural biases (Canagarajah, 1999). Fanselow (1976) developed FOCUS (foci for observing communications used in settings) as an observation framework to empirically explore and discuss the teaching act using technical language (Bailey, et al., 2001), but there are other methods of observing and

analyzing teaching acts. Although in a strict usage of conversation analysis (CA), one does not ask *How can I improve my teaching?* (ten Have, 2007), applying CA-like practices and principles to classroom discourse (see Antaki, 2011) could offer another avenue for exploring the teaching act and in the process facilitate professional development. In this research, we applied CA-like practices and principles to conduct peer observations and imagine, using the language of Fanselow (1987), alternatives to how we teach. The paper concludes with our impressions of using these practices and principles to conduct professional development, highlighting CA's strengths and noting its shortcomings.

Applying Conversation Analysis

CA is done in three steps: collecting, transcribing, and analyzing talk-in-interaction (ten Have, 2007; Wong & Waring, 2010). After the data are collected, a transcription must be made. By using CA transcription conventions, researchers can record in fine detail how talk-in-interaction unfolds (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Analyzing the data entails viewing and reviewing data in CA data sessions. CA data sessions are conducted from an emic perspective (Firth & Wagner, 1997); that is, researchers attempt to understand the talk-in-interaction from the point of view of the speakers. With that said, we want to stress that our methodology and purpose stands outside the framework of *pure* CA. Instead we applied insights and methodology from CA to investigate *our* teaching acts for the purpose of professional development.

Method
Participants

This study encompassed two classes. Both classes met once a week for 1 hour. Class 1 consisted of two female learners, aged 13 and 14, with Robert as their teacher, and Class 2 consisted of six female learners, ages ranging from 50 to mid-60s, with Seth as their teacher.

Materials and Apparatus

Digital video cameras recorded only the teachers while audio recorders recorded both teachers and students. All participants voluntarily consented to the recordings.

Procedures

The research was conducted over 6 weeks. In the beginning, the research project was explained to each class. Soon after, the classes were video and audio recorded. The recordings were then viewed and transcribed in accordance with CA transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004). Then we examined the transcripts in two 2-hour data sessions which were not recorded. During each data session, we analyzed and discussed the data from each class, ending each session with a discussion of how our observations could lead to alternatives in our teaching acts. The process is described below to give an accurate picture of how we analyzed our teaching acts as a tool for professional development.

Data Session 1

The transcripts provided a considerable amount of information. Some of the things that caught our attention were as follows: (a) Robert's fast-paced speech with only a few micro-pauses separating a series of questions, and (b) his use of the word OK.

Extract 1. Robert's fast-paced questions

R is Robert, the teacher. S1 is one of the students.

```
08    R     OK. (2.0) Who do you go to school with?
09          ((Robert breaks eye contact, takes
10          something out of bag))

11    S1    My friends.
12    R     Did you do anything special ((Robert
13          glances at camera and rubs nose)) at
14          school? >Did you do anything special?<
15          >Do you understand that?< >Did you do
16          anything special?< >Nanka tokubetsu koto
17          shimashita?< ((teacher again looks into
18          bag)) ( . ) Did you do anything special
19          at school?
20    S1    ((Shakes head no))
```

Robert's Fast-Paced Questions

At line 12, Robert glances at the camera and starts speaking at a faster pace. (Note the "quick speech" inward-facing indents [> <] in the transcript at line 14.) Throughout the transcripts, Robert allowed for little silence, repeating questions or asking them in a different way when student replies were not immediate. Here CA practices provide a valuable professional development moment. While we did not judge the manner in which the questions were asked, a couple of questions arose:

1. Should Robert become more comfortable with silence? If so, what strategies can he use?

2. Could Robert try giving his students more time to think before repeating a question or offering a translation as he did in line 16?

The Use of OK

During the data session, Robert said he felt that he overused OK and wondered how his lesson would be different if he used OK less. Seth noted that the absence of OK could make the conversation sound less authentic. Compare Extract 2 with Figure 1.

Extract 2. Robert's Use of OK

R is Robert, the teacher. S is one of the students.

```
01    R     What did you do last week?
02    S     I went to school
03    R     OK. OK. Um (.) where (.) where do you go
04          to school?
05    S     Misono school.
06    R     OK. (2.0) Who do you go to school with?
07    S     My friends.
```

```
01    R     What did you do last week?
02    S     I went to school.
03    R     Where did you go to school?
04    S     Misono school.
05    R     Who did you go to school with?
06    S     My friends.
```

Figure 1. Extract 2 Without OK and Other Small Words

Robert imagined different classroom alternatives by asking questions like "What if I said OK less?" or "What if I said OK more?" OK is identified as a receipt marker (Beach, 1995) and as a change of topic marker (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Instead of OK, Robert could try using response tokens (e.g., *Really?* or *Oh*) or formulations like repeating (Nakamura, 2010), as illustrated in Figure 2.

```
01  S   I went to school.
02  R   Oh. Um (.) where (.) do you go to school?
03  S   Misono school.
04  R   Misono school? (2.0) Who do you go to
05      school with?
06  S   My friends.
```

Figure 2. Extract 2 Without OK but with Alternatives

Data Session 2

Eight-Second Response Time

Extract 3 shows how Seth gave his students more time to respond to questions and complete tasks than Robert did. Seth's students received an average of 8 seconds to respond to instructions. To help students overcome their confusion, Seth showed them an illustration of the target word and waited 6 seconds before asking *What's the first one?* at lines 23-25. Seth also used gestures and illustrations during moments of silence (e.g., lines 28-30). Despite Seth's use of gestures, illustrations, and allowing for silence, the students were still unable to understand (line 33).

Extract 3. Seth Using Gestures and Illustrations

Se is Seth, the teacher. S1 is one student. S? is an unknown student. Ss are more than one student.

```
20  Se  (2.0) °Yes.° (.) But look at the picture
21      (.) look at the picture. (1.8) Picture
22      and: ((Seth is holding the handout,
23      pointing to the illustrations)) (6.0)
24      ((Seth puts handout on table and looks at
25      it)) So: uh: (.) What's the first one?
26      (2.0) ((Seth is holding up handout with
27      both hands)) Thi what's this one? (6.0)
28      ((Seth is holding up handout and moving
29      it from right to left to show the
30      students))
31  Se  °((inaudible))° ((Seth is pointing left
32      hand in direction of students))
33  S?  Uh.
```

Only when Seth told the students the answer (*listen to music*) at lines 66-67 and again at lines 72-73 in Extract 4 were the students able to complete the task. Seth's allowing for more silence (e.g., lines 23-27 in Extract 3) than Robert seems to have given his students more opportunities to employ repair initiators to let Seth know that they were having problems with the prior talk. Seth wondered, however, if it would have been better had he given his students less time and given the answer much earlier.

Extract 4. Seth's Students Complete the Task

Se is Seth, the teacher. S4 and S5 are individual students.

```
65   Se    Ah I I'll give you I'll give you uh: hint.
66         The first one (0.8) i:s (0.3) listen to
67         music. Right? (1.5) ((Teacher writes
68         "listen to music" on the board)) Listen
69         (2.0) to (2.5) music.
70   Ss    ((Students talking to each other about
71         the handout))
72   Se    °Listen to music.° Th that's the first
73         one, right. (21.0)
74         ((Students are working on the activity,
75         and talking to each other while the
76         teacher is looking down at the handout))
77   Se    ((Seth looks at his wristwatch)) Alright
78         let's uh let's (.) what about the next
79         one? Right here. ((Seth is pointing to an
80         illustration on the handout)) (1.0) What
81         is this one? ((Pointing to the
82         illustration in a circular motion)) (0.8)
83   S4    C clea[n
84   Se          [Clean (5.5) ((Students are trying
85         to complete the task))
86   S5    C clean house.
87   Se    YEAh. Clean the hou clean house. Yeah.
```

Giving Students Hints

Another trait noticed was that Seth gave students hints to help them accomplish a task. In Extract 5 at line 456, Seth's student indicated that she was having trouble completing the task.

Seth responded by offering a hint at line 457 (B$\underline{u}$ b$\underline{u}$). At line 458, the student signaled her confusion with a *repair initiator* (Huh?), and Seth responded by repeating his hint again at line 459. The student responded with another repair initiator (Bu?), and after a moment of silence she indicated that she understood the hint (Ahh: read a book). At line 461, Seth indicated to the student that she had given the correct answer (Good). Unlike the sequence in Extract 4, Seth's giving hints in Extract 5 proved successful. One alternative Seth could explore is giving fewer hints before the goal of a teaching act is mutually understood by both him and his students.

Extract 5. Seth Gives Student Hints

Se is Seth, the teacher. S1 is one student.

```
455  Se    So we got we got rea:d and newspaper, read
455        comics, rea[d a novel, read
456  S1               [re::do eto eto
457  Se    >I'll give you a hint< (.) Bu bu
458  S1    Huh?
459  Se    Bu bu.
460  S1    Bu? Hh(1.5) Ahh: read a book.
461  Se    Good.
```

Discussion

During the reflective process, we gained considerable information about our teaching. We made many observations, but we would like to comment on three here: (a) how to help students get on the same page; (b) how to use transcripts to imagine teaching alternatives; and (c) how professional development happens at CA data sessions.

How to Get Students on the Same Page: Exploring Intersubjectivity

To be on the same page means that both the speaker and listeners understand each other. In terms of teaching acts, when the purpose of a task is shared by teacher and students then *intersubjectivity* is co-achieved (Ellis, 2003). For the most part, teacher talk in the language classroom is not *monologic*. Although many of our extracts include mostly teacher talk, that did not mean that students were passively listening. Instead, teachers and students, through linguistic and paralinguistic means, collaboratively overcame breakdowns in understanding, thus reaching a point of mutual understanding in terms of what a teaching act's goal was. Before students could complete a classroom task, both teacher and student(s) needed a shared understanding of what the task was and how to complete it. Finally, Robert's and Seth's students were capable of indicating when they were not on the same page as their teacher. When this happened, Robert would repeat a question or translate while Seth used body gestures, illustrations, and gave hints. The process of reflecting on our preferred classroom communication strategies led us to consider potentially more successful alternatives to use in future lessons.

How to Imagine and Explore Alternatives in the Teaching Act

Once the data were collected and analyzed, we used the transcripts and our observations to imagine alternatives. In data session 1, we experimented with new dialogues, imagining how the talk would sound and proceed if something were done or said differently. Robert also wondered what would happen if he gave the students more time to respond to his questions. Would students employ repair initiators? In data session 2, Seth wondered what would happen if he gave his students less time to think. In Seth's case, only when he gave the students the answer to the first problem were they able to complete the task. So, would telling the students the answer sooner rather than later be more effective in helping the students understand the task? The goal in exploring these alternatives was to find ways to help ourselves as teachers better achieve the goals of our teaching acts.

How Professional Development Happens Through CA Data Sessions

While transcription proved the most arduous part of the process, the data sessions were the most productive. Analyzing the transcripts in the data sessions led to considerable opportunities for professional development, as we observed our teaching acts and imagined new possibilities for our lessons. We also discussed and analyzed our teaching collaboratively and enthusiastically, refreshing our desire to improve the quality of learning opportunities that our teaching acts create and expanding our knowledge of how students and teachers intersubjectively co-create meaning. For instance, Robert believed he used OK too much ("too much" is the subjective observation), but did so pointing out that he used OK 6 times in 60 seconds (the empirical observation). This observation caused us to examine turn-by-turn how OK was used, thus providing us with new insight and future alternatives (e.g., using OK less or using other words).

Challenges

CA can be a valuable component of professional development, but there are two issues: the challenge of recording and the time that analysis takes.

Recording Classes as a Challenge

Ethics demand that student permission is necessary before recording any classes. Students then must become acclimatized to the presence of the various recording devices. Robert attempted to acclimatize his students by placing the video camera on the table during several lessons before an actual lesson was recorded. Nevertheless, Robert remarked that the two female learners in his class spoke less in classes when the video camera was present. Additionally, in the extracts there are frequent inaudible entries, meaning it was difficult to record all utterances, gestures, and facial expressions, especially when there are numerous speakers speaking simultaneously.

CA Takes Time

Transcribing the audio and video recordings is an intricate process requiring a considerable investment of time. Some CA experts have said they can transcribe one minute's worth of words and delivery components in approximately 43 minutes, but we found transcribing our respective lessons took considerably more time.

Conclusion

Despite these and other challenges, applying CA-like practices and principles afforded us as teachers the opportunity to pursue professional development collaboratively. We found the analogy of panning for gold to be an accurate description: You will need to move a lot of sediment, which will take a great deal of time and energy, but the nuggets of information you find will be of considerable value.

We believe that CA should not be done alone, since it benefits greatly from the input and advice of fellow CA practitioners (ten Have, 2007). Finally, the CA data sessions are scary experiences because they pull back the curtain that often covers what goes on in the classroom. We often felt a little embarrassed by what we saw and heard, but we tried to focus on how students responded to our actions and how we responded to theirs. By focusing on actions while avoiding subjective descriptions, most of that anxiety dissipated. How teachers and students get on the same page and show they are or are not on the same page both verbally and nonverbally adds to our understanding of the teaching act. When teachers are more aware of how they co-create meaning with their students in the confines of the language classroom, they can begin to imagine alternatives, and are thus better positioned to makes changes and develop as teachers and researchers.

Bio Data

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Appendix

CA Transcription Conventions

The following is reproduced from Greer (2010) with the editor's permission. Detailed explanations of CA transcription conventions can also be found in Jefferson (2004) and Schegloff (2007).

Simultaneous Utterances

`huh [ oh  ] I see`	Left square brackets mark the start of overlapping talk
`     [what ]`	Right square brackets mark the end of an overlap

Intervals Within and Between Utterances

`(0.4)`	Numerals in parentheses mark silence in tenths of a second. A period in parentheses indicates a micro-pause (less than 0.1 second).
`(.)`	

Characteristics of Speech Delivery

`don't`	Underlining indicates marked stress.
`yes?`	Question mark indicates rising intonation.
`yes.`	A period indicates falling intonation.
`so,`	A comma indicates low-rising intonation, suggestion continuation.
`HUH`	Capitals indicate increased loudness.
`°thanks°`	Degree signs indicate decreased volume.
`>I can't<`	Inward-facing indents embed talk that is faster than the surrounding speech.
`go:::d`	One or more colons indicate lengthening of the preceding sound. Each additional colon represents a lengthening of one beat.

Commentary in Transcripts

`((hand clap))`	Double parentheses indicate transcriber's comments, including descriptions of nonverbal behavior