

Business English as a Lingua Franca: Repair, Preference, and Turn Taking

Alan Simpson
Asahi Kasei Amidas

Reference Data:

Simpson, A. (2014). Business English as a lingua franca: Repair, preference, and turn taking. In N. Sonda & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2013 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

In this paper I describe how repair, preference organisation, and turn-taking techniques were used by Indian and Japanese speakers in a Business English as a lingua franca (BELF) context in Japan. Conversation analysis is used to show examples of how trouble sources, such as word choice, pronunciation, question formation, and non-straightforward questions, were resolved. These examples show the importance of developing pedagogical activities to support students' communicative abilities in English as a lingua franca (ELF) contexts.

この論文ではビジネス英語という共通語 (BELF) を通し、インド人と日本人によってどのように修正、選好選択、そして会話技術が行われたかを紹介している。会話分析では、単語選択、発音、質問形成、および非直接的な質問などトラブルとなりえるものの解決法の例が挙げられている。これらの例は英語という共通語 (ELF) で、学生のコミュニケーション能力をサポートするために教育的な活動が重要であるということを示している。

ERRORS AND imperfections appear in everyday conversations and institutional interactions. Repair is the mechanism used to overcome these trouble sources and misunderstandings. Second language acquisition researchers have ascertained that language learners need to use the repair system to maintain a smooth conversation (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Nakamura, 2008; Scarcella, 1988).

Smooth conversation is also supported by actions that are natural, expected, and occur without delay. These actions are called preferred actions. These preferred actions, along with dispreferred actions, form the basis of preference organization. Dispreferred actions are often prefaced with delay and mitigation, then expanded with qualifications and accounts (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987). "Across a variety of situations, conversants orient to their disagreeing with one another as uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult, risking threat, insult, or offence" (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 77). Therefore, dispreferred responses allow speakers to negotiate meaning while maintaining polite and comfortable discussions.

Taking the floor is another important interaction skill. Speakers need to have the awareness to be able to recognize opportunities to initiate a turn and express themselves and their ideas at relevant points in the discussion. However, if the second speaker does not have the ability to project or anticipate the completion of the first speaker's turn, he or she risks interrupting at an inappropriate point or not being able to take a turn. Knowing how to anticipate turn



completion units (TCUs) allows the second speaker to make response tokens like *uh-huh*, *mm-hmm*, and *yeah* at the right moments, thereby facilitating the back-and-forth flow of natural conversation.

The aim of this paper is to look at the Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) interactions between Indian and Japanese nonnative English speakers, to reveal the causes of possible misunderstandings and what strategies were used to get around these problems. The strategies included various kinds of repair, preference organisation to answer non-straightforward questions, and turn-taking techniques. Finally, I will examine the research outcomes and discuss their implications for ELF teaching and then suggest some pedagogical activities to improve students' skills and functionality in these areas.

Background

The research location was a Japanese pharmaceutical company. Their customer was Spanish but the customer hired an Indian pharmaceutical industry auditing specialist, or a professional inspector, to inspect the Japanese company's manufacturing practices. Auditing is most commonly known in the financial industry, but is also used to assess the quality standards of production line manufacturing and food, drug, and medical device safety standards. The auditor hired a Japanese translator to translate between English and Japanese. There were 18 Japanese members of staff, including the plant manager, the quality assurance and control managers, production and manufacturing managers, and sales and other technical support staff. All of the staff members had a function in the audit although they do not all feature in the analysed extracts. The translator played an important role because "interactional competencies and discourse management are crucial as the interpreter often acts as a gatekeeper" (Wadensjo, 1998, p. 67). Many of the extracts

feature the translator and serve as good examples of interactional competence for students. The researcher is employed as an in-house corporate English teacher for members of staff in this pharmaceutical company and other affiliated companies with similar BELF requirements. Therefore, the future aim is to develop syllabi based on authentic BELF usage.

The specific interactions occurred during a 2-day audit, involving a 4-hour tour of the plant and inspection of the documented manufacturing processes. Twelve hours of recordings were made, however, only 8 hours were transcribed (using the transcription conventions in the Appendix), as the rest was unusable due to background noise or nonverbal interaction or because the recorder was not close enough. Conversation analysis (CA) methodologies are used to reveal the characteristics of the interactions.

Repair

There are four basic types of repair: self-initiated self-repair, self-initiated other-repair, other-initiated self-repair and other-initiated other-repair, where initiation refers to who highlighted the trouble source and repair refers to who repaired the trouble source. In ordinary conversation, self-repair is the most common type, because the person speaking has the first opportunity to repair the trouble source and other-repair is delayed or mitigated (Wong & Waring, 2010).

Figure 1 shows the types of repairs and how common they were for the auditor, translator, and members of staff.

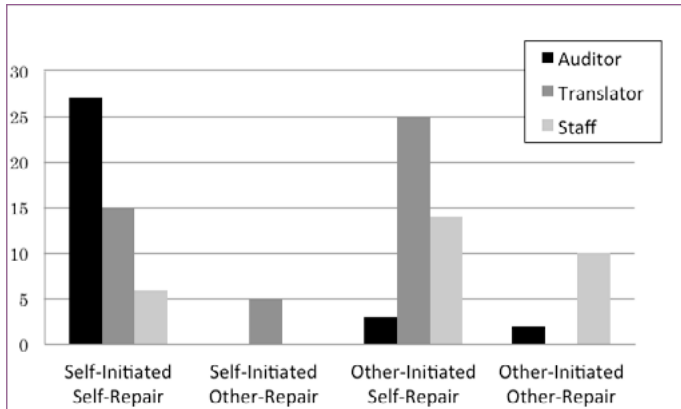


Figure 1. The number and types of repair by the auditor, translator, and members of staff during the 2-day audit.

Self-Initiated Self-Repair

The following four extracts show the auditor (A) and translator (T) using four different kinds of self-initiated self-repair.

Deletion

Extract 1

24. A: So eh, we'll try to, stick with the, eh, but
 25. it will depend on the (xxx), it may change.

Insertion

Extract 2

362. A: Ok, but they, have they done validation or
 363. not?

Abandonment

Extract 3

402. T: According to the production flow, uh, eh, we
 403. finished the production process til the end.

Replacement

Extract 4

65. A: Do they have any release certificate?
 66. T: Yes, we have, eh, we use a sheet.

In Extract 1, the auditor *deleted* the problem. In Extract 2, he *inserted* the word *have*. The translator in Extract 3 *abandoned* what she was saying, and in Extract 4, the translator *replaced* her word choice. These are examples of the four basic self-initiated self-repair techniques (Wong & Waring, 2010).

Self-Initiated Other-Repair

Self-initiated other-repair was not common and it was only the translator who initiated repair of the following format.

Extract 5

118. T: "Two major", one is the eh, raw material
 119: warehouse, this is o:ne-
 120. T: and the other-
 121. A: and the other is process validation

The translator was not sure about what the second major observation was so she left her sentence unfinished and the cut-off represented that she, the current speaker, selected the next speaker, who repaired the problem.

Other-Initiated Self-Repair

When the second speaker could not understand and asked for clarification, the first speaker helped to clarify the trouble source. There were four other-initiated self-repair techniques that were used for negotiating meaning.

Asking a question but not focusing on the trouble source

Extract 6

208. T: Could you repeat that again? He missed the
209. question.

In Extract 6, the translator asked a polite repair question, but did not identify the specific problem.

Repeating the problem

Extract 7

33. A: Do they have a product call system?
34. S2: Call system?
35. A: Code, coding, do you have any product code?
36. Is it on-
37. A: Numbering, numbering?
38. S2: Ahh, coding, ah, eh, eto supplier lot no.
39. T: Yes we have a coding system

In Extract 7 the trouble source was easily identified so the auditor chose another word choice to get around the problem. S2 is staff member 2.

Repeating the problem and asking a follow-up question

Extract 8

98. A: Have you done the hold time study for the
99. intermediate? ((drug))
100. T: ((Japanese))
101. S2: Whole time (...) study?
102. ((S2 writes whole study, then hole study,
103. various people say hol))
104. S8: Whole study, whole
105. A: Hol, hol, H, H. No, no, I will write.
106. ((A gets up and goes to the white board and
107. writes HOLD study.))
108. ((People say ah, Hold study))
109. A: Hold, hold
110. S3: (xxx)
111. T: Ahh, could you word, say it in a different
112. way?
113. A: It's like stability

In Extract 8 the trouble source was initially repeated. However, this did not solve the problem. So the auditor wrote the word on the whiteboard, and then at line 111 a follow-up question had to be used to solve the problem. This extract identified two problems, a pronunciation misunderstanding and then a word choice or lexical problem. It was not an efficient solution to the trouble source and in lines 105-107, the auditor showed signs of frustration.

Checking meaning

The final technique involves checking understanding. This often takes the form: You mean + checking comprehension.

Extract 9

361. A: Then your regulatory affairs is here or
 362. where? (1.0) Regulatory Affairs Department.
 363. T: You mean the Company's Regulatory Affairs
 364. Department?
 365. A: Who deals with Drug Master File?
 366. Authorities?

By paraphrasing in her own words in Extract 9, the translator was able to focus on the specific problem and check her comprehension.

Other-Initiated Other-Repair

The last repair type is other-initiated other-repair, when the other speaker who identifies the problem also corrects it.

Extract 10

37. A: How you come to know the storage conditions
 38. from there?
 39. A: Storage conditions
 40. S8: Storage conditions?
 41. S8: Stability conditions wa? ((does that mean
 42. stability conditions?))
 43. A: Stability, stability

44. S8: Ahh

45. S8: Stability conditions, 60, 40, 75?

In Extract 10, line 40, the member of staff identified that the auditor had made a mistake, and meant *stability conditions*. He gave the auditor the opportunity to self-repair (current speaker selects next) by repeating the mistake as a question, which the auditor did not take, so the current speaker continued and offered his corrected word choice, which the auditor accepted.

Preference Organization

Figure 2 shows that the auditor asked 550 questions. Of these, 332 questions were moving the sequence forward and reformulating questions into a more simplified form. Two hundred questions had preferred answers that matched the question form. This included polar or *wh*-type interrogatives. For example, if it is more natural to give a positive (or negative) answer, then that is the preferred response. Similarly, a *who*-type interrogative projects a person reference, *how* projects manner, and so on. There were also 18 sequences that had some complications: not just trying to understand the question, but giving a dispreferred, non-straightforward answer.

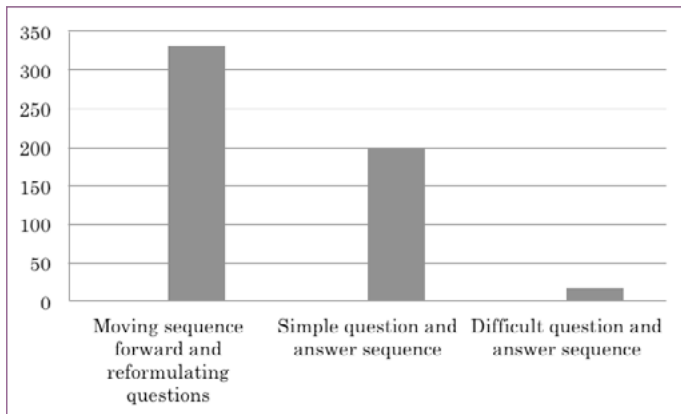


Figure 2. The number and type of questions the auditor asked during the audit.

In Extract 11, the auditor asks who prepares the certificate, and a member of staff answers.

Extract 11

1. A: (5.0) Who prepares Certificate of Analysis?
2. T: Bunse::ki [(xxx) ((Analyze))
3. S2: [COA. "Dare ga tsukurimashita?"=
4. ((Who made it?))
5. S2: =Hai (.) QC Manager "tsukurimasu".
6. ((Yes, the Quality Control Manager makes
7. it))
8. T: QC Manager.

There is some translation, but lines 5-8 match the *who*-type question, and it is a preferred response. Two hundred question-

and-answer sequences were similar to this relatively straightforward response.

However, there were 18 question-and-answer sequences which were not straightforward to resolve because of one or more of the following:

- Pronunciation or word choice problems;
- Translator misunderstanding;
- Unclear auditor requirements;
- A question that was too general, or that only gave two options;
- A complicated answer;
- Turn-taking issues.

Extract 12 shows the use of a dispreferred answer form to answer a question that was difficult to provide a straightforward answer for.

Extract 12

77. A: (14.0) "S::::o" wh:::o does the final
78. certificate (.)of analysis which goes to the
79. customer? (..) Who is signing it?
80. T: (xxx)
81. S8: Eh, kore wa muzukashii na. ((Eh, that's
82. difficult))
83. S8: Case by case
84. T: It depen[ds
85. S8: [B-Based- based on the customer's
85. requirements, in domestic (.) customer, e:h
86. security pharmacist, or QC manager.
87. And (.) for foreign customer, QA Manager

88. signs.
 89. A: (9.0) *S::o*, I understand. (...) Where you do
 90. the weight analysis?

Line 79 shows self-repair after the initial question, so that it was easier for the recipient to make a preferred answer to the second reformulated question. However, line 81 shows hesitation (before *case by case* by the recipient) and the mitigating phrase *it depends* by the translator, followed by the long turn explanation. Then in line 89, the auditor shows his authority by accepting the answer and closing the sequence. This meets the need for information and eventually matches the *wh*-interrogative first pair part. The dispreferred delay, mitigation, and account format allowed the member of staff to give an accurate and expanded answer that satisfied the auditor and enabled him to move on to the next sequence.

Turn Taking

There are a number of ways to project the possible completion of a TCU: grammatical, intonational, pragmatic, and nonverbal (Wong & Waring, 2010). When there is something important to say, waiting until there is a pause can be too late for taking the turn. EFL speakers can benefit from an explicit understanding of how turn allocation is managed in a conversation. When the TCU comes to a possible completion point, speaker transition may become relevant (Sacks, 1974), and a set of rules apply in quick succession:

1. Current speaker selects next;
2. if not 1, next speaker self-selects;
3. if not 2, current speaker continues.

There are several techniques for starting the turn: overlap, turn-entry devices, recycled turn beginnings, and nonverbal gestures. Three types of overlap are considered nonintrusive:

transitional, at the end of the grammatical clause; *recognitional*, recognising the topic; and *progressional*, when there are signs of disfluency (Jefferson, 1983). Being able to overlap requires close monitoring of the emerging turn. Lines 83 and 85 of Extract 12 show that S8 could recognise the grammatical completion at the end of T's turn, and use a *transitional overlap* to start early (Wong & Waring, 2010).

Turn-entry devices, such as *well*, *but*, *and*, *so*, *you know*, and *yeah*, can also be used as markers to start a new turn without actually taking a turn. "Turn-entry devices accomplish the absorption of overlap with prior turns, without impairing an actual turn's beginning" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 74). Recycled turn beginnings involve repeating the part of a turn beginning that gets absorbed in overlap, caused either by the current speaker's continuation, or the next speaker's early start (Wong & Waring, 2010).

Recognitional Overlap

Extract 13 shows that the auditor was able to understand the breakdown in communication, and use *recognitional overlap* at the first possible completion point to start his turn and overlap.

Extract 13

21. T: How, could you e[h, reword o:::r *(put it in
 22. ah)*
 23. A: [Ss, I will explain. No I
 24. will explain

Progressional Overlap

Extract 14 shows a member of staff describing that it is difficult to check the stability of a chemical by forcing it to degrade.

Extract 14

39. A: Ok. (1.0) So have you done (.) the forced
 40. de:gra:dation (.) study for this?
 41. S8: For::ced degra::dation study? (^No we
 42. haven't^)
 43. A: It's important (..) when you do the forced
 44. degradation, you will come to know (.) which
 45. other impurity (.) you can have.
 46. S8: This(product name's)melting point<is about
 47. three hundred eighty degrees Celcius>, it is
 48. ((laughs)) hard to check ((laughs))=
 49. A: =No but eh[m, oxidation, reduction you can
 50. (work out).
 51. S8: [So all, ^now we's-^
 52. S8: <We are> plan::ning now (..) the photo
 53. stability study=
 54. A: Ok.
 55. S8: =and it will star::t (.) at the end of this
 56. week. (3.0) Forced degradation (..) e::h
 57. (..) stability study will be performed next-
 58. A: Next?
 59. S8: Next February.
 60. A: Ok.
 61. S8: Now I am planning.
 62. A: (8.0) So can we see the comment of (xxx)?

The two laughter tokens in line 48 were used to resist the auditor's suggestion as difficult and impractical. Therefore, the

auditor initiates his turn quickly in line 49 to defend his line of reasoning. However, S8 uses the first sign of disfluency as an opportunity to take a turn and use a *progressional overlap* at the first possible completion point. S8 then recycles his turn beginning, into his new turn in line 52. This allows him to control more of the interaction with longer turns, and the auditor's turns are reduced to acknowledgement tokens, until the end of line 62 when the current speaker selects next by decreasing his intonation and pausing. The auditor then takes this opportunity to initiate a new sequence.

Discussion

EFL speakers tend to make considerable effort to prevent misunderstanding through the use of self-repair and other means of clarification, such as reformulation (see Extract 7), repetition (see Extract 8), and co-construction (see Extract 10). Native speakers, on the other hand, tend not to reformulate syntactic problems, but rather paraphrase longer points into easier to understand lexical phrases (Mauranen, 2006). In Extract 8 and many others, the translator and auditor paraphrased to negotiate meaning and therefore showed their high functionality in English. As Kachru (2004) and Graddol (2006) have said, the level of functionality is more important than whether the speaker is native or not. Other problematic features for the Japanese English speakers were based on pronunciation: the sounds /l/, /th/, /d/, /a/, /e/, and /o/, for example, in the words *labels*, *method*, *code*, and *trend*. Furthermore, there were nonstandard lexical word choices to describe things or processes, for example, a *hold test*. Therefore, the specific training of repair techniques and especially clarification questions would be beneficial in BELF classes, from the basic technique of asking for repetition, to focusing on the problematic feature, to paraphrasing skills.

The members of staff were also faced with some questions that did not have straightforward answers. Therefore, it is

important that EFL and ELF speakers learn techniques that can give them more thinking time, by using a combination of delay, mitigation, and reason. If problematic questions can be personalized and tailored to the students, it creates a more relevant need to negotiate meaningful interaction. Some applications could include answering ambiguous or non-straightforward questions during a presentation question-and-answer session, or using polite disagreement techniques in a debate class.

In this study, there was a lack of back-channeling or reactive expressions, probably due to the formal context and the role of the translator. Back-channeling (*aizuchi* in Japanese) is actually much more common in Japanese than in English (Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki, & Tao, 1996), so the lack of back-channeling was surprising. However, Clancy et al. also went on to show that reactive expressions in English, such as *really?*, *is that so?*, *yeah*, and *ok*, are more common in English than in Japanese. Therefore, by developing back-channeling and reactive expression techniques in English, teachers could offer students an opportunity to develop their turn-taking skills. However, students must first be made aware of the importance and context of when to proactively take turns. By studying authentic interaction, like Extract 14, or creating and comparing their own scripts featuring overlap, response tokens, and reactive expressions, students could raise their natural interaction awareness. Increasing student exposure to reactive expressions and overlap in English will enable them to take turns more effectively. Furthermore, after students use reactive expressions to improve the flow of the interaction, paraphrasing helps them to check their comprehension and build their vocabulary.

Conclusion

Nonnative English speakers from the global business community use English as a lingua franca to achieve their business goals. In this study of natural interactions in a business situation, a

number of possible teaching points were identified. When there is a misunderstanding, it is important for BELF speakers to clarify the problem efficiently. When asked a difficult question, they need to be able to pause, delay, and then give a justified answer. And finally, they need to learn how to listen actively for possible completion points and use reactive expressions to empower them to take their turns.

Bio Data

Alan Simpson worked as a systems engineer for 5 years before *seeing the light* and becoming an English teacher. He has been enjoying teaching in the private and corporate sector in Japan for 10 years. Currently, he is the English Program Coordinator at Asahi Kasei Amidas and studying an MSc in TESOL at Aston University.

References

- Clancy, P. M., Thompson, S. A., Suzuki, R., & Tao, H. (1996). The conversational use of reactive tokens in English, Japanese, and Mandarin. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26, 355-387.
- Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition* (3rd edition). New York: Routledge.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next*. London: British Council.
- Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (2008). *Conversation analysis* (2nd edition). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jefferson, G. (1983). Notes on some orderliness of overlap and onset. *Tilburg Papers in Language and Literature*, 28, 1-28.
- Kachru, B. (2004). *Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Mauranen, A. (2006). Signaling and preventing misunderstanding in English as a lingua franca communication. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 177, 123-50.

Nakamura, I. (2008). Understanding how teacher and student talk with each other: An exploration of how “repair” displays the co-management of talk-in-interaction. <i>Language Teaching Research</i> , 12, 265-283.	-	Abrupt Cut-off
Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: Some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), <i>Structures of social action: studies in conversation analysis</i> (pp. 57-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.	::	Sound Stretching
Sacks, H. (1974). An analysis of the course of a joke’s telling in conversation. In R. Bauman & J. Sherzer (Eds.), <i>Explorations in the ethnography of speaking</i> (pp. 337-353). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.	(xxx)	Unable to transcribe
Sacks, H. (1987). On the preferences for agreement and contiguity in sequences in conversation. In G. Button & J. R. E. Lee (Eds.), <i>Talk and social organization</i> (pp. 54-69). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.	°°	Quiet
Scarcella, R. (1988). Conversational analysis in L2 acquisition and teaching. <i>Annual Review of Applied Linguistics</i> , 9, 72-91.	()	Unclear word or phrase
Schegloff, E. A. (1987). Recycled turn beginnings: A precise repair mechanism in conversation’s turn-taking organisation. In G. Button & J. R. E. Lee (Eds.), <i>Talk and social organization</i> (pp. 70-85). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.	(())	Comment or non-speech activity
Wadensjö, C. (1998). <i>Interpreting as interaction</i> . New York: Addison Wesley Longman.	>word<	Quicker speech
Wong, J., & Waring, H. Z. (2010). <i>Conversation analysis and second language pedagogy</i> . New York: Routledge.	<word>	Slower speech
	↑	Rising Intonation
	↓	Falling Intonation

Appendix

Transcription Conventions

(2.0)	Pause of about 2 second
(..)	Pause of about 0.5 second
[]	Overlap
[[Speakers start at the same time
= =	Latched utterances
—	Emphasis