

Using CA for Effective Communicative Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In this brief, reflective analysis, the author conducts an exploratory conversation analysis action-research project to better understand the dynamics of her own classroom. She attempts to answer the simple question of how effective she is in promoting a communicative learning environment in her Japanese university classroom. Her findings include increased understanding of her own limitations in encouraging student output, as well as surprise at how readily students engaged in repair practices.

INTRODUCTION

In a global society, teaching communicative English skills is one of the important roles for English teachers. According to the Japanese Ministry of Education's 2010 Course of Study, it states that in high schools, basically, English classes should be taught in English starting from April, 2013 (MEXT, 2010). As we can see from the course of study, the trend in language teaching in Japan is to emphasize the teaching of communicative English.

There seems to be many controversial issues regarding this course of study. However, as teachers in Japan, first of all, we need to know the strategies of conducting communicative courses in order to teach communicative English. According to Nation and Newton (2009), well-balanced language course should consist of the *four strands* roughly equally. The four strands are 1) meaning-focused input, 2) meaning-focused output, 3) deliberate attention to language items and 4) developing fluency. To lead a well-balanced language course, teachers need to know the strategies for employing the above strands. Among these strands, when focusing on speaking lessons, meaning-focused output and developing fluency seem to be important.

At the same time, another important factor seems to be that teachers need to know how they control the communication in their lessons. By paying close attention to the utterances

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between students and the teacher, teachers can begin to develop strategies to improve their instruction.

The purpose of the paper is to examine the interaction between my students and myself and reflect on how I could create and improve communicative learning opportunities for the students. In order to better uncover what transpired from the interactions, a CA (conversational analysis) approach was used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nation and Newton (2009) make the argument that teachers need to design their language course to consist of the *four strands*. Especially in my classroom, I try to put priority on two of the strands, meaning-focused output and developing fluency. This is because the goal for my students is to improve their speaking competency and to win in speech contests. Nation and Newton (2009) describe learning through meaning-focused output as, “learning through speaking and writing where learner’s attention is on conveying ideas and messages to another person”(p.1). Learning through fluency is experimenting with “known language items and features over four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; that is, becoming fluent with what is already known” (Nation and Newton, 2009, p.2).

When using these strands, teachers try to limit unfamiliar words. However, there are instances when students need to make up for gaps in their productive knowledge because teachers provide pushed-output activities, or opportunities to produce the language. While going through this process, students face difficulties in making up for gaps and also face opportunities for repair practices. Wong and Waring (2010) describe repair as “not symptomatic of a disfluent or incompetent speaker but an important component of one’s interactional competence” (p.211). Also, as teachers, we sometimes face situations where students stop talking and the whole classroom becomes silent. Folse (2006) reminds us that, “if the students were so quiet in class, other issues may have been involved, but the silence was not due to the students’ laziness, stupidity, or stubbornness” (p.186). In actual lessons, there is a question whether all teachers are aware that repair is an important component of interactional competence or not.

As described in Folse (2006) many English classes in Japan consist of learning grammar and vocabulary. In fact, though they learn and know the vocabulary, the students do not know how to use the vocabulary. It seems that they need more opportunities to learn how to use the words they are learning. In the Japanese educational system, students are learning

much—the problem is how to *use* what they are learning. By providing opportunities of using English language, it seems that students will improve their language skills in a communicative way.

METHODS

Context and participants

The data for this study was collected during one 50-minute session of a class which met once a week. The class size ranged from ten to fifteen. Ten students participated in the session where data was collected. The class was a group of students ranging from freshman to juniors at a university in Tokyo. The students majored in English or international exchange. The goal for the students in this class was to improve their English skills and to participate in English speech contests and to win prizes in the contests. The students generally wrote three speeches during the school year, each about eight minutes long. The normal course procedure included brainstorming, researching, writing, reading, memorizing, and finally delivering speeches.

When focusing on speaking skills, we often discussed the topics in English and brainstormed potential areas for creating a speech within the topic area. In addition, for the preparation for “Question and Answer” session in the actual speech contests, we often practiced asking questions to each other about students’ topics.

Data Collection

The lesson was recorded on a digital voice recorder which was placed on the desk between the students and the teacher. The students were sitting down and the teacher was standing in front of the desks. The resulting data was transcribed and analyzed in order to shed light on a very general research question: how is the activity successful (or not) in promoting communicative interaction between participants, including negotiation and repair? The transcription followed conventional conversation analysis standards (Appendix 2). For the full transcription of the conversation, see Appendix 1.

All the data segments are from a full class discussion among students and the teacher. The freshmen were in the stage of writing their first speech. They were still brainstorming about the topics. Before the discussion, they had been talking about the topics in pairs. This was the first time to discuss with the whole class and the teacher. The details for the students

are as follows: S1: Freshman, S2: Freshman, S3: Junior, S4: Sophomore, S5: Freshman, S6: Freshman.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Data Segment 1

Repair practice self-initiated self-repair (Same-turn repair)

Following the definition by Wong and Waring (2010), same-turn repair refers to an attempt by the speaker of the trouble-source to address the trouble-source within the same turn. In this segment, by focusing on the word “everyone”, we understand that the student attempted to self-initiate, self-repair her utterances.

- 3) S1: My topic is Kabuki.
- 4) T: Kabuki.
- 5) S1: I, I want to, every, everyone to go to Kabukiza and I want to every, everyone to knowu... interesting. **Uu?**

In line 5) S1 was trying to say, “I want everyone to go to Kabukiza”, but we can see that she cannot put “everyone” in the right position. By repeating four times she figures out the right position for “everyone”. S1 repairs her utterance in the same turn.

Data Segment 2

Repair practice self-initiated self-repair (Same-turn repair)

A similar repair can also be seen in segment 2:

- 21) S1: And I get to interested, get to interested, get interested in Kabuki and I,
- 22) I: ::::time to Nihonbuyo in PE Time, PE Taiku lesson PE

Here again S1’s same turn-repair can be seen. S1 is trying to say, “I get interested in” (although the correct grammar should be “I got interested in”) but S1 is trying to figure out where to put “to” in the sentence. Since the above utterances were made by the same student as Data Segment 1 (S1), she seems to have the tendency to repair on her own.

The following are the 3 data segments regarding the use of “Okay” by the teacher.

Data Segment 3

(OK: *Incipient*)

- 1) T: OK, (2.0) right then, let’s start
- 2) We will do it together. What’s your topic?

Data Segment 4

(OK: *Incipient*)

- 38) T: You got interested in that, OK, So how would you (2.0) make that into speech, your speech.

Data Segment 5

(OK: *Incipient*)

- 52) T: OK. But how would do make that attractive to the audience,(2.0) besides,(2.0) besides the movement, meaning of the movements,

In the study of Waring (2008) “Okay” is said to be “one of those interactionally rich items that may take on very different meanings depending on its prosodic packaging and sequential context (e.g., acknowledgement, continuer, incipient, disagreement)” (p. 586). By analyzing the conversation, I found that I use Okay often. In line 1) OK seems to be the incipient case as it shows the start the discussion. Also line 38) seems to be the incipient case to start off the question asking about the speech. Again in line 52) I start with OK before starting a question to the student.

Data Segment 6

(OK: *Acknowledgement*)

- 40) S1: How to, how to enjoy Kabuki or I want everyone to go to Kabukiza and enjoy Kabuki.
- 41) T: OK, So your purpose is to have everyone to go to Kabuki but how would you persuade them how would do tell them it’s interesting

Data Segment 7

(OK: Acknowledgement)

57) S1: Yes and Kabukiza itself

58) T: OK. So, that means that you need to go to Kabukiza, [right]
(all laughter)

The two data segments above seem to express “Okay” as acknowledgement. In Data Segment 7, by listening to S1’s intention of writing about Kabuki as a topic, I asked for further detail. Also in Segment Data 7, line 58 after understanding what S1 wants to write, I make an acknowledgement and gave advice for the next step.

Data Segment 8

(OK: Acknowledgement and Disagreement)

76) T: Oh you disagree?

77) S5: Yeah

78) T: Marriage OK, that’s interesting point-

Here in line 78) ok appears again. S5 wants to write about marriage as a topic for her speech. My use of “OK” in line 78) can be taken as acknowledgement, but also disagreement, as evidenced by my surprise in line 76) that the student disagrees with my statement about marriage. This might be happening because I unconsciously try to accept the students’ opinion first so that they will feel confident in saying their opinion before I say something that is opposed to their opinion (disagreement). This resembles an unequal power relationship (Odakura, 2013), much the way a parent might speak to a child: first acknowledging that the child has shared their thoughts before the parent shares their own, “definitive” reply. The fact that my students are not children, but rather mature adults, causes me discomfort to think that I may have been treating their ideas in a condescending manner, which may be counter-productive to the communicative, collaborative learning environment Kinginger (2002) describes as essential to learning.

Data Segment 9

(Self-initiate, select-next, other initiate)

In this class, I tried to encourage interaction among the students. Since the group

ranged from freshmen to juniors, I encouraged them to help each other. Here we can find examples of freshman helping freshman:

- 5) S1: I, I want to, every, everyone to go to Kabukiza and I want to every, everyone to know... interesting. **Uu?**
- 6) S2: Yeah, I know. Why do you think so. Why **uunnto nannteiuokana ?** Why we, Why we **nannteiuono ?**
- 7) T: What made you think like that, [What, What
- 8) S2: [What is a merit to know Kabuki?

Though I started the discussion about the topic, in line 6), S2 asks questions directly to S1. After that in line 7), before the teacher ends the utterance, in line 8), S2 tries to clarify the teacher's intention because S1 was still wondering what to say. S2 interrupted my speech and took the floor from me. This seems to be dispreferred in classroom discourse (Hale, 2011). However, this is a discussion part in the classroom and the goal is to have the students speak out without fear. From this perspective, I think I have created a safe environment for the students to speak out freely and comfortably in the class. This interruption is also an indication that contrary to my previous finding that "Okay" was used to infantilize the students, they are in fact mature adults who view me as a peer, rather than authority figure.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the analysis was to examine the interaction between my students and myself and reflect on how I can improve and create communicative learning opportunities for the students. Since I had never analyzed the conversation in my class before, I hoped to see things that I was not aware of. I discovered that the students had a strong tendency to self-repair, which was a revelation to me. By analyzing the data, I could also see that the students were making great efforts to share their opinions and even challenge those that they disagreed with, and this was something I only noticed after taking the time to record, transcribe and analyze what was happening in my classroom. I was surprised to see myself using "Okay" so many times in my utterances, perhaps in a way that was inappropriate considering the maturity of my students. It seemed as though I used this expression in a condescending way, as if to show that my opinion was more valuable. As Hale (2011) mentions, "A teacher's feigning ignorance in order to encourage participation is nothing new"(p.7), though I found that I did not do that in this class. It seems that in this discussion, I

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tried to defend my idea to the students, rather than feign ignorance in order to encourage them to communicate more.

In order to conduct communicative language courses, conversation analysis is an effective way to understand both students' and teacher's utterance tendencies. By analyzing the conversation, it gave me a chance to understand my own teaching more objectively. For example, I discovered how much of the conversations my turns occupied, and whether I was successful in creating a safe environment where my students felt safe enough to express themselves using the language they knew. I also found that my talk might have been treating my students not as the adults they are. By being aware of this, it will lead me to implement strategies to improve my teaching and better create communicative language teaching environments.

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APPENDIX 1

Data Segment 1

- 1) T: Right then, let's start
- 2) T: We will do it together. What's your topic?
- 3) S1: My topic is Kabuki.
- 4) T: Kabuki.
- 5) S1: I, I want to, every, everyone to go to Kabukiza and I want to every, everyone to know::... interesting::.. **Uu** ?
- 6) S2: Yeah, I know. Why do you think so. Why **Unto nanteiunokana**. Why we, Why we **Nanteiuno**.
- 7) T: What made you think like that. [What, What=
- 8) S2: [What is a merit to know Kabuki?
- 9) S1: Yes Yes (to be puzzled)
- 10) T: She's asking why you think to tell everyone that Kabuki is interesting
- 11) S1: u-m. (6.0) (all laugh)
- 12) T: What made you think like that? (3.0)
- 13) Because I've heard that you haven't been to Kabuki yet, right?
- 14) So, how did you know about Kabuki and how did you find that interesting
- 15) S1: u-m **Mouichido, Mouikkai**
- 16) T: You want me to repeat again?
- 17) S1: laugh, (**Doukidesuka**) ?
- 18) T: Yes
- 19) S1: u-m my, my job place hh is near Kabukiza
- 20) T: uh
- 21) S1: And I get to interested, get to interested, get to interested in Kabuki and I,
- 22) I::::time to Nihonbuyo in PE Time, PE Taiku lesson PE
- 23) T: Here in this university?
- 24) S1: Yes, this university.
- 25) T: You have that here?
- 26) S3: I think it's new.
- 27) T: For freshman
- 28) S3: Nichibu is new
- 29) S1: Nichibu is
- 30) S3: We didn't have
- 31) T: From freshman this year?

- 32) S1: Yes (all laugh)
- 33) Others: PE class ? PE, PE.
- 34) T: PE lesson everyone does it?
- 35) S3: No, we can choose it.
- 36) T: So, you're taking that
- 37) S1: And, and interested, I got interested in
- 38) T: You got interested in that, OK, So how would you (2.0) make that into speech, your speech.
- 39) T: What's the main topic that you want to tell the audience
- 40) S1: How to, how to enjoy Kabuki or I want everyone to go to Kabukiza and enjoy Kabuki.
- 41) T: OK, So your purpose is to have everyone to go to Kabuki but how would you persuade them how would do tell them it's interesting
- 42) S1: Yes interesting
- 43) T: How, how, HOW
- 44) S1: **Aa::, Ee::Aa::** actors (5.0) (see sophomore's face)
- 45) T: Were you talking about that with her?
- 46) S4: Yes, if we know how to move, to know the moving, so then we can understand Kabuki and so we can enjoy so yeah
- 47) T: So
- 48) S4: She said that it's important to get the meaning of the each movement
- 49) T: fmf
- 50) T: So you want to explain in the in your speech, (5.0) the movement.
- 51) S3: Yes, meaning of movement=
- 52) T: OK But how would do make that attractive to the audience,(2.0) besides,(2.0) besides the movement, meaning of the movements,
- 53) S1: A and clothes, [clothes]
- 54) T: [Costumes]
- 55) S1: Yes costumes and actor and **ki, Kodougu, Oodougu**
- 56) T: equipments
- 57) S1: Yes and Kabukiza itself
- 58) T: OK So, that means that you need to go to Kabukiza, [right]
(all laughter)
- 59) S1: Yes
- 60) T: You have the main topic, but to support your topics I think you have go to Kabukiza because your information is not enough also you need to gather all the

- materials and you need to start researching about that
- 61) and ↑maybe I think your main theme is that you want everyone to enjoy and go to Kabukiza ↑ but when you are going to gather the materials at the library or when you actually go to Kabukiza =
- 62) S1: =yes
- 63) T: maybe your main topic might change to something else. Maybe you will find other interesting things.=
- 64) S1: =Ow
- 65) T: I think, But yeah you have main topic and two supporting ideas right now, so what you need to do right now is to go out and research, make a research, OK right
- 65) T: Then any (ST5)chan, how's your speech going right now, what's your topic
- 66) S5: My topic is about marry, marriage
- 67) T: Marry, marriage
- 68) S5: marriage
- 69) T: and what's your main topic.
- 70) S5: u-m I want to rethink about marriage because (5.0)
- 71) T: (laugh)
- 72) S5: (laugh), uu- in general that is the positive image of marriage but (2.0)like on Television, or (3.0)u-m **nannda okaasan**
- 73) T: Wh what. Your topic is about marriage, but what's your opinion about marriage (2.0)
- 74) T: You agree or you disagree or what what =
- 75) S5: = Disagree
- 76) T: Oh you disagree?
- 77) S5: Yeah
- 78) T: Marriage ok,that's interesting point-
- 79) S5: Not completely disagree but I also can't completely agree because often heard that divorce story on TV, so I don't know why people get marry and go to church to chikau ?
- 80) T: You pledge
- 81) S5: you pledge but after that they divorce
- 82) T: So you wonder why
- 83) S5: Yes, I wonder why
- 84) T: OK alright aa::: that's really a broad topic I think so you need to squeeze in well shrink the focus on one thing what's others' opinion about that.(4.0) How do other people think about her topic(6.0) anyone else?(6.0)

- 85) U-m I think that your idea is really interesting (2.0).>> because I'm married<< but if you make really research on that it will be really interesting because many people will think that way too so but I need you to kind of start thinking why-
- 86) Your main topic is that you mostly disagree with marriage right so you need to support your idea (2.0) so you wonder why they have wedding ceremony and when they within a year or something they get divorced or those kind of ideas and also(2.0) what other things about divorce (2.0)any idea about divorce?
- 87)S3: What do you want to tell about to the audience
- 88)S5: Once again ?
- 89)S3: What are the idea that you want to tell to the audience
- 90) T: Also I think when you start you need definition about marriage
- 91)S5: Do you have definition of marriage?
- 92) T: It's difficult though, (3.0)When you find a person you love and you want to live together, I think that's marriage but also like having babies and raising babies and your family gets bigger and(2.0)and(2.0)when I'm with my family,
- 93) I'm really↑ happy so to lead a happy life, one one choice is marrying somebody having families but there are other↑ways besides marrying like nowadays like so:: definition is difficult, you should you'd better check what definition of marriage is present right now the definition might↑be different from long time ago and so start from that and you will have supportive ideas.
- 94) T: How about you?
- 95) S6: About shyness

APPENDIX 2

CA transcription symbols

- . (period) Falling intonation.
- ? (question mark) Rising intonation.
- , (comma) Continuing intonation.
- (hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off.
- :: (colon(s)) Prolonging of sound.
- wo:rd (colon after underlined letter) Falling intonation on word.
- wo:rd (underlined colon) Rising intonation on word.
- word (underlining)
- word The more underlying, the greater the stress.
- WORD (all caps) Loud speech.
- °word° (degree symbols) Quiet speech.
- ↑word (upward arrow) raised pitch.
- ↓word (downward arrow) lowered pitch
- >>word<< (more than and less than) Quicker speech.
- <<word>> (less than & more than) Slowed speech.
- < (less than) Talk is jump-started—starting with a rush.
- hh (series of h's) Aspiration or laughter.
- .hh (h's preceded by dot) Inhalation.
- [] (brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.
- []
- = (equal sign) Latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker.
- (2.4) (number in parentheses) Length of a silence in 10ths of a second
- (.) (period in parentheses) Micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
- () (empty parentheses) Non-transcribable segment of talk.
- ((gazing toward the ceiling)) (double parentheses) Description of non-speech activity.
- (try 1)/(try 2) (two parentheses separated by a slash) Alternative hearings.
- eeto** Japanese utterances (bold letters)