Turn-taking Timing in English Activity Classes in Japanese Public Elementary Schools*

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本会話分析研究は、英語の“純”初級者がどのようにして英語で“正確なタイミング”の話者交代を成し遂げるのかについて描写する。この研究では全国7小学校における英語活動のクラスでビデオ録画されたデータを分析した。分析の結果、児童は教師によるデモンストレーションを通じて常に普通の英語会話における話者交代のタイミングに接していることがわかった。また、児童達自身が教室相互行為を英語で行う場合にも普通の話者交代のタイミングに志向していることがわかった。本研究は英語での教室会話の重要な役割を示唆する。

Key Words: turn-taking, Japanese elementary schools, English activities, Conversation Analysis, classroom interaction

Introduction

Using the framework of Conversation Analysis (CA), we examine how “true” beginners of a second language (L2) manage turn-taking and start up their talk with “precision timing” in a second language that they are only slightly familiar with.

In 2002, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) introduced a curriculum that offers public elementary schools the option of using a part of the scheduled Period for Integrated Study time for conducting English Activities. To date, the majority of public elementary schools have started conducting

some English Activities. According to the MEXT guidelines, the aim of English Activities is not to teach a foreign language but to develop communicative ability and to deepen international understanding (MEXT, 2001).

When we consider how L2 learners develop communicative abilities, we need to rethink what "communicative competence" means. Although, various models of communicative competence exist (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1995), most of them minimize the fact that communication is jointly constructed by multiple participants in interaction. In contrast, Markee (2000) maximizes the notion of "interactional competence," which describes the competence that participants in interaction deploy in the course of talking in interaction. According to Markee, interactional competence includes *schematic knowledge*, *interactional knowledge*, *systematic knowledge*, and *lexical knowledge*. Furthermore, interactional knowledge can be subdivided into (a) knowledge of how language is used in talk-in-interaction, (b) knowledge of communicative actions, and (c) knowledge of how verbal and non-verbal communicative factors interact. What Markee means by knowledge of talk-in-interaction is the knowledge of turn-taking organization, sequential organization, and repair organization. Thus, as Markee shows in his model, in order to carry out smooth interaction or communication with others, having knowledge of how the turn-taking system in the language works is more fundamental or at least as fundamental as having lexical knowledge of the language in interaction. In addition, face-to-face communication cannot be accomplished even in the classroom unless speakers take turns in some fashion. Therefore, in this study, we explore the practice of turn-taking in L2 classrooms with "true" beginners.

The pioneering work by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) revealed the turn-taking organization underlying ordinary first language (L1) conversation, and laid the foundation for future CA studies. According to the authors, the basic practice of ordinary conversation is

that overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time, and this "one at a time" practice is oriented to by the participants themselves. When participants find themselves talking "more than one at a time" (i.e., overlap), they are likely to stop before finishing. The occurrence of overlaps is not uncommon but the majority of instances of overlap are *terminal overlap* (Jefferson, 1984a), in which a next speaker starts up the talk just as the final sound(s) of a possibly complete utterance are being produced. Moreover, when the participants find themselves talking "less than one at a time" (i.e., silence), they minimize the silence. Silence may occur at a place of transition of speakers. But a single beat of silence, *unmarked next position onset* (Jefferson, 1984a), is considered to be the normal turn-taking time and signifies nothing special for the interaction.

Sacks et al. (1974) note that the turn-taking system has two major parts: a turn constructional component and a turn allocational component. The turn constructional component consists of building blocks from which the parties in a conversation fashion a turn. The building blocks are termed Turn Constructional Units (TCUs). A TCU refers to a minimal unit from which a turn can be formed; it can be lexical, phrasal, clausal, or sentential. These units allow projection and therefore understanding by recipients of the talk about when the turn will be completed; this makes it possible for the next speaker to start at or near a possible completion of the turn with no gap and no overlap. The key features that make it possible for the recipient to project the end of the speaker's TCU are grammar and prosody.

The turn allocation component refers to a resource by which opportunities to participate by talking get distributed among participants in conversation. According to Sacks et al. (1974), there are two ways that turns get distributed: (a) current speaker selects next; or (b) self-selection; and this turn distribution system is ordered: (b) only operates when (a) has not operated.

The turn-taking system Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson describe is based on ordinary L1 conversation. The authors argue that other types

of speech exchange systems (i.e., debates, meetings, ceremonies, press conferences, seminars, therapy sessions, interviews, trials, etc.) are different in how turns are allocated among speakers.

This turn-taking system has been applied to research in L2 classrooms. Markee (2000) lists six characteristics of the turn-taking system of traditional language classrooms that are different from that of ordinary L1 conversation. In traditional language classrooms, (a) there is a substantial pre-allocation of different kinds of turns to teachers and learners, (b) there is a frequent occurrence of choral production of turns (i.e., not one party talking at a time), (c) the teacher often produces long, multi-TCU turns, (d) the learners are often required to produce elaborated, sentence-length turns to display their knowledge of sentence-level grammar, (e) as class time is fixed, the length of speech is specified in advance, and (f) the content of what is being talked about is explicitly determined in a curriculum or a lesson plan. However, as for (f), the class content, there may be significant differences between what teachers planned for a lesson and what actually occurs as the classroom interaction proceeds (Seedhouse, 2004).

Seedhouse (2004) sees a reflexive relationship between the pedagogical focus and the organization of turn-taking. He outlines four types of language classroom contexts: (a) form-and-accuracy contexts; (b) meaning-and-fluency contexts; (c) task-oriented contexts; and (d) procedural contexts. The features of turn-taking in each classroom context Seedhouse lists are as follows. In form-and-accuracy contexts, the teacher has tight control of the turn-taking system. In meaning-and-fluency contexts, in many cases the learners manage the turn-taking but when the teacher is present, the teacher has overall control of the turn-taking. In task-oriented contexts, the nature of the task tends to constrain the organization of turn-taking and the learners develop a turn-taking system that is appropriate to the accomplishment of the task. Finally, in most procedural contexts there is almost no turn-taking at all: the teacher holds the floor. Although Markee (2000) and Seedhouse (2004) provide insight into the overall characteristics of

turn-taking mechanisms in language classrooms, they do not discuss in depth the timing of speaker change.

In the language classroom, student response to teacher initiation is often delayed. Previous research (Markee, 2000; Seedhouse, 2001, 2004) tended to focus on how teachers or other students carry out repair in response to delay due to some problems such as a lack of linguistic knowledge or hearing difficulty. However, if we shift our focus to the students' knowledge of turn-taking, we must take into account the fact that they may not know that they have been selected as next speakers or that it is time for them to start up their talk. If they do have the turn-taking knowledge, how did they acquire the knowledge? By the time children enter elementary schools, they have learned the turn-taking systems in their L1. Learning of the L1 turn-taking system is found with infants as early as six months old. However, the question remains as to how they learn the turn-taking system in the L2.

Regarding turn-taking timing in L2 conversations, Carroll (2000) found that even "novice" level second language speakers are capable of the precision timing involved in "ordinary" conversational speakers' practice of projecting potential turn-completions and launching an appropriate next turn without a noticeable gap. However, the "novice" level second language speakers Carroll examined were "false" beginners who had studied English at school for seven years. Therefore the question remains, what is the case of "true" beginners? Furthermore, while Carroll focused his analysis on student-student equal power interaction among learners, in this study we look at teacher-student unequal power interaction as well as student-student equal power interaction among learners. As Markee (2000) argues, there are important differences between equal and unequal power turn-taking systems. Therefore, the second question is, do participants doing institutional interaction in traditional classrooms with unequal power structure orient to the same no-gap, next turn start-ups as observed in equal power interaction?

For this paper, rather than looking at what facilitates children's projection for starting up their turns, we will illustrate some evidence that children are implicitly trained to take their turns with a normal beat of silence, and that they are indeed capable of starting up their talks with precision timing.

Data

The data for this study are based on seven and a half hours of video and audio tape, recorded in eight English activity classes at seven randomly selected public elementary schools in various parts of Japan. These classes were taught by the regular Japanese schoolteachers (JTs) and also by visiting assistant language teachers (VTs) who speak English as a first language. The details of each class are summarized in Table 1. The video and audio recorded classes are transcribed using Jefferson's transcription system (Jefferson, 1984b), which is the standardized transcription system for Conversation Analysis (See Appendix). Both researchers repeatedly examined the transcripts while viewing the video recordings for the analysis of the classroom data.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the data showed that the students in the classes were constantly exposed to turn-taking with normal transition space through both usual classroom procedural talk and through specific teacher demonstrations. The students themselves displayed their orientation to "no gap" transition when they participated in the classroom interaction. In the following section, we will present instances of (a) teachers' demonstration of the turn-taking timing, (b) students' turns with normal transition space, and (c) students' turns with non-normal transition space (i.e., starting up too late or too early).

Teacher Demonstration

The teachers in the data repeatedly exposed students to normal

Table 1: Elementary School English Activities Database

Title of data	Tokyo	Tochigi	Kanagawa	Fukushima	Nagano 3	Nagano 5	Kagoshima	Kochi
Grade	4	6	4	6	3	5	2	all (1–6)
Teacher *1	VT/JT	VT	JT	VT	VT	VT	VT/JT	VP and JTs
Number of classes per year *2	20	20	8+	30	5	6	3	10+
Number of years of English classe	4	3	3	4	1	3	2	1
Number of students in the class	32	19	28	28	30	35	12	29 (all students in the school)
Order of class in the year: early or late *3	Jan. 2004	Jan. 2004	Feb. 2004	Sept. 2004	Feb. 2005	Feb. 2005	Feb. 2005	Feb. 2005
Main language used for instruction	English	English	Japanese	English	English/ Japanese	English/ Japanese	English	English/ Japanese

*1: VT refers to a visiting assistant language teacher who speaks English as a first language. JT refers to a regular Japanese schoolteacher, and VP refers to a Vice Principal (Japanese). The JT is present in the room even when s/he is not teaching the class.

*2: The number of English classes per year usually varies depending on the year in school of the students (grade level).

*3: The school year in Japan begins in April.

turn-taking timing by (a) introducing dialogs through monologs, (b) responding to students' questions with precise timing, and (c) displaying and marking the timing that the students should use for turn-taking through verbal and nonverbal means.

Extract (1) is an example in which a teacher is introducing and modeling dialogs through a monolog.

(1) [Fukushima:3:21–23]

01 VT: do you remember fro:m last week, *senshu*? Are you ↑
"last week"

02 *naninani*?
"so and so"

03 YES, I A:M. Nice to meet you. (1.0) Are you? No I'm not.
04 (1.0) I'm sorry. Okay?

In Extract (1), the teacher is explaining to the students how to do an activity. He utilizes the pitch of his voice, gestures, and facial expressions to mark the change of speakers in the dialog.

Extract (2), below, is an instance of a teacher answering the students' question with precise timing.

(2) [Tokyo:9:18–20]
01 VT: o:ne two: three?
02 All: Where: i:s the mouse.
03 → VT: I:::t's (.) under the magnet.
04 S1 & 2: ((put their cards under the magnet))
05 VT: oh:: goo:::d.

In this extract, although the teacher prolongs "it" as "I:::::::t's" and delays providing the key element of the answer, she starts up her turn with normal transition space. By doing this, the teacher can implicitly show students that even when one does not know the answer to a question, he/she can start the turn to demonstrate the understanding that he/she is selected as a next speaker.

In Extract (3), the teacher asks questions and the students answer in chorus. The teacher indicates to the students the timing for them to start their turns by snapping her fingers. As she speeds up asking the questions, she speeds up the timing of her finger snaps as well.

(3) [Nagano3:4:21–25] (X = teacher's finger snapping sound)
01 VT: How's the weather.
02 Ss: It's sunny.
X X
03 VT: How's the weather.
04 Ss: It's rainy.

X X
05 VT: How's the weather.
06 Ss: It's cloudy.
X X
07 VT: How's the weather.
08 Ss: It's snowy[:.
X X
09 VT: [>How's the weather.<
10 Ss: It's rai[ny.
X X
11 VT: [>How's the weather.<=
12 Ss: =It's clo[udy.
X X
13 VT: [>How's the weather.<=
14 Ss: =It's su[nny.
X X
15 VT: [>How's the weather.<=
16 Ss: =It's snowy.
X X

As the teacher moves her arms and torso in time with her finger snaps, these movements are visually available to the students. The students attend not only to the sound of her finger snaps but also to her bodily movements as indicators for the timing of starting up their turns. This results in the simultaneous occurrence of the teacher's finger snaps and the students' start up of their turns. In Extract (3)', as the same teacher slows down her speech, she slows down the snaps of her fingers and the movements of her body as well.

(3)' [Nagano3:7:03–08]
01 VT: How::
02 Ss: ((laugh))
03 VT: s the::::

04 Ss: ((laugh))
05 VT: w:::::::ea::::::::::::::ther::::::::::::
06 (0.8)
07 Ss: I::::::::::::t's (.) clo::::::::::udy::::::::::::::.
X X
08 VT: >How's the weather.<
09 Ss: >It's sunny.<
10 VT: very goo:::::::d.

As shown in Extract (3) and (3)' the teacher inexplicitly teaches the students that normal transition space is relative to the pace of the talk in which it occurs (Schegloff, lecture, Fall 2000). During the fast speech, the exchange of turns is fast, while in the slow speech the exchange of turns is slow.

Students' Turns with Normal Transition Space

In the data, generally speaking, the students were capable of taking their turns without noticeable gaps. The students were able to project potential turn completion of teachers' or peer students' turns and launched their responses at or near the end of their interlocutor's turns. In the following, we will show two such examples.

In Extract (4), the VT asks a volunteer student, S1, to come up to the front of the class to participate in a language display dialog.

(4) [Tochigi:6:22–27]
01 VT: Hello
02 S1: Hello.
03 VT: What day is this? ((points to the "Monday" card))
04 S1: Monday.
05 VT: Oh thank you.
06 S1: Thank youhh.
07 VT: oh very goo::d.

In the extract above, the focus of the lesson is on the names of the days

of the week and on asking and answering the question, "What day is this?" S1 demonstrates her competence of exchanging turns with precision timing in English not only in her answering of the key question of the lesson but also through the conversational opening, "Hello," and closing, "Thank you."

The students were also capable of exchanging turns with normal transition space when they were doing conversation tasks in English with the other students. Prior to the exchange in Extract (5) below, each student received a card with the name of a famous person on it, which showed who he/she was supposed to pretend to be. The students were instructed to discover the other students' identities by asking the question "Are you so-and-so?" In Extract (5), S1 is trying to find out who S2 is. When they converse, the two students exchange their turns with precision timing. The segment presented in Extract (5) occurs while all the students are running around the classroom asking questions to each other.

(5) [Fukushima:9:17–25]
01 S1: H:i.
02 S2: H:i.
03 S1: Are you Snoopy?
04 S2: No I'm not.
05 S1: Are you (Mickey Mouse)?
06 S2: No I'm not.
07 S1: Are you Pokemon?
08 S2: No I'm not.
09 S1: Are you ( )?
10 S2: No I'm not.
11 S1: Bye b::ye.
12 S2: Bye b::ye.

In Extract (5), as in Extract (4), the students demonstrate their competence of exchanging their turns with precision timing not only in

producing the key phrases of the lesson's focus but also in exchanging openings and closings.

As shown in Extracts (4) and (5), generally speaking, the students in the data were able to exchange their turns with precision timing. However, as we will discuss below, there were occasions in which the students did not start up their turns with normal transition space. In such cases, both teachers and students displayed their orientation to the abnormality.

Students' Turns with "Larger" than Normal Transition Space

Although the students in the data usually exchanged their turns with normal timing, their start-ups of turns were occasionally "delayed." There may be a variety of reasons for the "delay" such as they did not know how to respond to the prior turns or they could not hear the prior turns. Whatever the reason for the delay may be, the focus of this section is not to discover and explain the psychological motivations for the delay but to observe what happens when the transition space becomes "larger" than normal. In many instances in our data, the students and/or teachers displayed their orientation to the "delay" by whispering the relevant next utterances for the selected speaker or by repeating the prior utterances. In Extract (6), S5's response to the VT's question is delayed and one of the other students orients to the delay.

(6) [Tokyo:5:20–6:04]
((S5, "Yuki," was called on to answer the VT's question. Ss are sitting in a circle. The JT is showing a picture card that describes the answer.))

01 JT: Yuki plea:se
02 VT: Where: i:s the do:g?
03 (2.5) ((S5 stands up and slowly walks to the front.))
04 S1: °Under the [chair. *da yo*°
05 JT: [( )
06 S5: [(°eh?°)
07 S1: [°°under the cha[ir°°

08 S5: [under the chair.
09 S1: [°°under the chair°°
10 JT: [((looks at the card to check the answer))
11 VT: Goo:[::::d.
12 JT: [Goo::::d under the chair:.

In response to the JT's summons and the VT's question, S5 stands up and slowly walks to the front. By standing up and walking to the front, he shows his understanding that he was selected as a next speaker. After slowly walking to the front of the class where the JT is holding up a large card with the answers on it, he stops and hesitates. As soon as S5 stops walking forward and hesitates, S1, who is sitting in the circle along with the other students, whispers "under the chair" in line 4. The next moment, the JT also whispers something to S5. By whispering something to S5, both S1 and the JT show their orientation to the fact that S5's response is not following normal timing. In line 5, S5 shifts his weight by crossing his legs with a half step forward and finally produces the answer to the VT's question. As demonstrated in Extract (6), when the students' response to the teachers' question was delayed, the other students and/or teachers oriented to the delay and carried out some actions to prevent any further delay.

Students' Turns with "Smaller" than Normal Transition Space

There were also cases in which students who were selected to speak next launched their turns too early, before the prior speakers had reached the possible completion of their turns. In such cases, again, other students and/or teachers displayed their orientation to the abnormal turn-taking timing. In Extract (7) below, S24 starts up his turn before the teacher completes her turn.

(7) [Nagano5:6:19–23]
01 VT: Oh very good. Do you like (0.6) donuts?
02 S23: Yes I do.
03 VT: oka:y. Do you like=

04 S24: =Yes I do.
05 Ss: [((laugh))
06 VT: [cheese? (.) cheese?
07 S24: YES I DO.

Here the teacher is asking each student whether or not they like a particular food. The students are answering the questions with "Yes, I do" or "No, I don't." In line 2, S23 responds to the teacher's questions with normal transition space, as most other students did during this activity. Then in line 3, the teacher looks at and approaches S24, and starts asking a question. As soon as she produces "Do you like," S24 quickly answers, "Yes I do." This results in the other students' laughing. This laughter shows the other students' understanding that S24's answer was provided ridiculously "too early," and that one should not start responding to the prior utterance until near the end or the actual end of the prior speaker's turn.

As shown above, when the students who were selected as the next speaker launched their turns too late or too early, the other students oriented to the abnormality. By showing their orientation to the abnormality in turn-taking timing, the other students displayed their understanding of normal turn-taking timing. Furthermore, in such instances, the active attention to and engagement in classroom interaction by the students other than the student who was selected as a next speaker was observed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper, we discussed how children are exposed to turn-taking timing in the L2 in English Activity classes in Japanese elementary schools. The data demonstrated that "true" beginners of learning English as a second language are oriented to turn-taking with precision timing and that this is the case within equal power structures of student to student interaction as well as the unequal

power structure of teacher to student interaction.

Through actual participation in classroom interactions, the young learners showed their understanding that turn-taking timing is universal, or at least not different between English and Japanese. Thus, classroom interaction in the target language may be essential for exposing young L2 learners to turn-taking timing in conversation, which is necessary for carrying out any kind of verbal interaction. Furthermore, this study has shown that classroom interaction plays an important role not only for the student who is selected to speak next but also for the other students who are observing as the other students "peripherally" participate in the interaction through listening and through whispering the answers.

This paper focused on a description of the simple facts that students and teachers take turns with precision timing in the classroom, and when students fail to take turns in normal timing, the teachers and the other students display their orientation to the abnormality. In our future research, we will investigate whether the students' start up of turns demonstrates their ability to project the end of the prior speakers' turns, and if so, what facilitates their projection: grammar, prosody, or action formation. Preliminary observations of students' reactions during teachers' story telling indicates that the young learners do have projectability and that prosody may be the crucial factor in the projection. However, we need to explore this further through our analyses.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions

[ ]	overlapping talk
=	latched utterances
(0.0)	timed pause (in seconds)
(.)	a short pause
co:lon	extension of the sound or syllable
.	fall in intonation (final)
,	continuing intonation (non-final)
?	rising intonation (final)
CAPITAL	loud talk
underline	emphasis
↑	sharp rise
↓	sharp fall
° °	passage of talk that is quieter than surrounding talk
< >	passage of talk that is slower than surrounding talk
> <	passage of talk that is faster than surrounding talk
hh	audible aspirations
*hh	audible inhalations
(hh)	laughter within a word
(( ))	comment by the transcriber
( )	problematic hearing that the transcriber is not certain about
“ ”	Idiomatic translation of Japanese utterances