Maximising Classroom Opportunities to Improve Learner Interaction
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Abstract

This paper describes an action research project to help Japanese learners improve their interaction in English. It was motivated by a perceived weakness in this area and outlines steps taken to use naturally occurring opportunities in an already strongly communicative classroom to encourage further interaction. The project was conducted with the intention of providing more opportunity for the implicit development of interactional competence. However, extra opportunity was insufficient, and an explicit focus using the tools of Conversation Analysis (CA) was added. It was soon clear that this focus, integrated into existing instruction, had a noticeable and rapid effect on communicative performance without requiring changes to the syllabus or individual lessons. This outcome suggests that explicit instruction integrated into the task-based cycle is beneficial, that uptake and intake of explicitly taught features of interaction are possible, and that the tools of CA can be used for L2 learning. Finally, I argue that as learners develop interactional competence, they can engage more effectively in collaborative dialogue, which in turn can also facilitate language acquisition and increase autonomy.

Keywords: spoken interaction, interactional competence, conversation analysis, Japanese, pairwork, implicit/explicit learning, focus on forms
Maximising Classroom Opportunities to Improve Learner Interaction

This paper describes a small classroom action research project intended to help a group of Japanese university students improve their ability to interact in spoken English. It was motivated by the observation that many of the learners had difficulty interacting in the language, and outlines measures taken to encourage yet greater interaction in what was already a strongly communicative classroom. This was done in the hope that it would provide more opportunity for the implicit development of interactional competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007). However, it was apparent that extra time and opportunity alone were not in themselves sufficient, and that an explicit focus on interaction by the instructor was also required. This focus drew on insights into interaction provided by the Conversation Analysis (CA) tradition. It was quickly apparent that such an explicit focus, integrated into existing instruction, had a noticeable effect on the learners’ communicative performance at the cost of a relatively short amount of classroom time, and without requiring any changes to the aims and objectives either of the syllabus or individual lessons. This outcome suggests that a) that language learning can be aided by explicit instruction integrated into the task-based cycle; b) that immediate uptake and subsequent intake of explicitly taught features of interactional competence are possible; and c) that the tools of CA can be usefully exploited for the purposes of language learning. Finally, it is suggested that aiding learners to develop their interactional competence may not only help to improve their ability to participate in spoken interaction in English. It can also help them to engage in collaborative dialogue (Swain, 2000), effecting repair and negotiating meaning, which in turn can contribute to language acquisition increasing learner autonomy both in the classroom and beyond.
Background

The Focus on Interaction

Spoken interaction is, of course, fundamental to human communication. It is “the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about. We send messages, we receive them, we interpret them in a context, we negotiate meanings, and we collaborate to accomplish certain purposes” (Brown, 2001, p.165). Reflecting this, researchers (Kramsch, 1986; Celce-Murcia, 2007) have proposed the concept of ‘interactional competence’ under the wider umbrella of communicative competence alongside the more familiar competence strands, such as discourse, linguistic, socio-cultural, pragmatic, formulaic and strategic competences. For Celce-Murcia, interactional competence consists of three components: actional competence, or “the knowledge of how to perform common speech acts and speech act sets; conversational competence, relating to the turn-taking system; and non-verbal paralinguistic competence, encompassing kinesics, proxemics, haptic behaviour, or touching, non-linguistic utterances with interactional import, silence and pauses” (2007, p.48). The importance of interactional competence is also reflected, for example, in the format of the speaking module of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) main-suite examinations, such as the First Certificate of English (FCE), involving two or three candidates at a time, the tasks of which elicit a variety of interaction patterns and include in their assessment criteria “features such as turn-taking, collaborating, initiating/responding, and exchanging information” (Saville and Hargreaves, 1999, p.46).

Spoken interaction is also considered fundamental to both first and second language acquisition. In the socio-cognitive tradition, it is thought to facilitate comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981) through interactional modification (Long, 1996), corrective feedback, hypothesis testing, gap-noticing, and pushed output (Swain, 1985). In the socio-cultural tradition, spoken interaction is a form of social apprenticeship, mediated by experts or peers, which is
considered vital to the co-construction of knowledge in the social environment. In this view, language learning is seen as taking place through participation in social activity and it is this social behaviour, of which spoken interaction forms a crucial part, that is central. The development of the linguistic resource is considered a by-product of the experience of engagement in social activity, and rather than being an external repository of language for inputting and internal processing in the brain, the social environment is considered a dynamic context in which dialogic activity is an essential precondition for internal activity (Swain, 2000, p.13). Such collaborative dialogue is thought to be externally demonstrable to an observer/listener in occurrences of Language Related Episodes (LREs), or “any part of a dialogue where students talk about language they are producing, question their language use, or other- or self-correct their language production” (Swain and Lapkin, 2001, p.104).

In today’s communicative classrooms, it is common practice to provide a balance and variety of activities and interaction patterns when planning and delivering ESL lessons. An essential ingredient is small group work, including pair work, the use of which is well established, widely practiced in classrooms worldwide, and has become part of the background of ESL. Many language teachers regularly provide opportunities for group work. On teacher training courses, for example, trainees are often exorted to reduce their Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and increase Student Talking Time (STT). In addition to the socio-cognitive benefits of increased amounts of comprehensible input and negotiation of meaning mentioned above, Long & Porter (1985, p.208-212) list five further pedagogical benefits, namely: a) more opportunities to use language than in a whole-class setting; b) greater quality of language use and variety of roles; c) more individualised instruction; d) a more positive affective climate; and e) greater motivation.
The Japanese Context

Many with experience of interacting in English with Japanese people both within the institutional context of the classroom and outside have noted an interactional “awkwardness, which does not seem wholly attributable to faulty or slow processing of grammar and vocabulary” (Cook, 1989, p.53). Many Japanese learners of English themselves are also often aware of this weakness in their speaking ability. Researchers too have investigated differences between Japanese and English language interaction patterns and their effects on cross-cultural communication. Fox et. al. (1996), for example, identified differences in self-repair between Japanese L1 speakers and English L1 speakers. Nakane (2000) notes in her study of Japanese learners at an Australian university that they can be reluctant to ask for clarification in English when they do not understand. Nakane suggests that this may be out of politeness, of not wishing to impose on a speaker and interrupt them while they are speaking. It may also be a face-saving technique to avoid perceived embarrassment at not having understood the speaker in question.

Such interactional difficulty may have been compounded by Japanese learners’ experiences of English lessons at school. Although today there is greater interest in and use of group and pair work in English classes in Japanese schools than previously, it would be reasonable to assume that many Japanese learners would have been largely deprived of its benefits while at school. In Japan, “small-group interaction is not proposed as a viable activity for a school system which has its own priorities, one of which is to prepare students for written university exams” (Nunn, 2000, p.169). It is possible that this may have not only had a negative influence on their language learning as a whole, but may also have contributed to the interactional ‘awkwardness’ previously mentioned. As a result, the inclusion of pair work in adult classes seems all the more imperative.

The development of interactional competence is therefore somewhat of a priority for Japanese learners. Yet, for many teachers, it may be a challenge to facilitate their Japanese
learners’ acquisition of natural, native-like patterns of interaction. There are few examples of an interactional focus in commercially published materials, particularly those aimed at the international market, which may not take into account the interactional awkwardness characteristic of Japanese learners. Theories of implicit learning would suggest that the development of interactional competence may be better left to take place naturalistically through interactive language use, such as that which occurs in strong-Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) settings, on task-based or content-based courses for example. Brown states that “the best way to learn to interact is through interaction itself” (2001, p.165), and in today’s interactive learner-centred, CLT-classroom, perhaps, the situation could be helped by increasing opportunities for interaction still further.

Procedure

The Learners and the Context

The class was a group of eight adult Japanese learners at a university in Tokyo, in their early twenties. Five were female and three were male. All were placed at an upper-intermediate / lower advanced level in the university’s placement test, corresponding approximately to levels B1 and B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). All were preparing to study at universities in English-speaking countries, some at undergraduate, some at post-graduate level with some on foundation courses. Their course, which consisted of ninety minutes of classroom study per week over a fifteen-week semester, was task-based and delivered exclusively in the target language using a strong-CLT methodology with considerable existing provision for interactive language use. It included four components: General English, preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination, academic study skills and academic writing. As each of the learners was to spend at least a year in a native English-speaking social and educational environment, it was necessary to help prepare them for interaction with native and other non-native speakers both within and beyond a classroom.
context. In the words of one colleague; ‘We need to get them to interact properly or they’ll never get a word in edgeways or nobody will talk to them and they’ll just get ignored.’ However, it is also important to note that the group was small and that every learner was mature in outlook, highly motivated and an independent, if not yet proficient, user of English.

Intervention 1

In order to provide more opportunities for interaction in what was already a highly interactive classroom, it was decided to focus on some of the naturally occurring, institutional stages of the classroom discourse (see Table 1). There were several reasons for this. These stages are common in many classes and therefore there would be no need to change the lesson objectives or syllabus, or reduce the amount of time spent on other learning objectives. Not strictly requiring spoken communication in themselves, the stages also offered the greatest exploitable opportunity for extra interaction, allowing the instructor to make full use of the social situation and the institutional talk that entailed, maximising the ‘possibilities inherent in our variety of institutional discourse (Seedhouse, 1995, p.23).

It was decided, therefore, to adapt each of the following lesson stages, which recur regularly in language classrooms and form a part of its ‘institutional architecture’ (Seedhouse, 2004) to maximise the need for spoken interaction.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Traditional Approaches</th>
<th>Interactional Adaptations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Completing paper-based exercises in pairs</td>
<td>These included written gap-fills, answering questions, matching activities and others. These are ubiquitous in published and unpublished materials, and often completed individually without any spoken interaction.</td>
<td>- by insisting the learners did them orally without writing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- by insisting the learners did them orally without writing.</td>
<td>- by asking the learners to justify their answers if they disagreed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- by making the learners work from one page instead of having one each</td>
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<td>2) Comparing answers to paper-based tasks or exercises in pairs</td>
<td>Such stages are common for example after learners have completed a listening or reading task and before whole-class feedback, or after they have been completed for homework. ‘Can you check your answers in pairs?’ Again, this does not necessarily require spoken interaction if learners simply look at each other’s answers.</td>
<td>- by insisting the learners did not show or look at each others’ answers, thereby creating a communication gap, and asking them to move their chairs and sit face to face.</td>
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<td>3) Checking the answers to paper-based exercises in pairs</td>
<td>This is typically carried out in plenary by the classroom teacher.</td>
<td>- by providing each group the answers to the exercise written on a handout placed face down on the table. One learner was asked to take it and tell the others the answers without showing them the</td>
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Although all course book language learning exercises are presumably designed to be completed individually on paper, by doing them orally in the ways described above, each fit Willis’ (1996, p.53) definition of task, ‘a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome.’ By requiring the exchange of information, the learners would be obliged to interact and communicate in order to complete what is on paper an uncommunicative, mechanical language exercise. This arguably provides a natural, appropriate and motivating context for spoken interaction.

These tasks also lent themselves well to data collection for the teacher. As they were frequently recurring, recordings of interaction could easily be obtained from learners who had become accustomed to the voice recorders on the tables and were therefore less likely to modify their talk. Secondly, the tasks, although cognitively challenging, were not particularly linguistically challenging for these learners to perform since they did not require much complex language to complete. This lighter cognitive load and the lower strain on the linguistic resource was expected to make it easier to discount linguistic factors for any interactional difficulty (Skehan, 1996, p.25). Furthermore, the tasks, which were a natural part of the classroom discourse and which the learners would presumably frequently encounter in the future, were deemed to lead to a realistic, relevant and useful form of institutional talk. The three tasks were introduced in the first two 90-minute sessions of the course and recordings were made of the
learners performing them. These recordings were transcribed in the CA fashion (see appendix for transcription symbols) and supplemented, when the classroom situation allowed, by field notes taken by the teacher, a survey and informal interviews.

**Results 1**

All of the tasks were successfully completed and no learner failed to achieve the task outcomes. This was not surprising given the high levels of motivation, cooperation and collaboration in the group. The learners were also conscientious, and accustomed to pair work from their previous experience of classes at the university.

However, much of the interaction could not be described as natural against the benchmark of native and other non-native speakers amongst whom these learners would soon be living and studying, and interactional awkwardness, as suspected, was well in evidence. Common features of the interaction were their long length; although the tasks were not timed, it was felt intuitively that they took rather longer than was necessary. In addition, the pairs seemed slow to start the tasks and ‘get down to business.’

1. T I’d like you to do exercise two (0.4) in a pair (0.8) ok? (0.6) don’t write anything (.) you don’t need a pen (. ) ju- just discuss
2. it with your partner (0.3) alright?
3. ((both learners looking down at page))
4. L1 aaahhh (3.3) nu- (0.4) number one?
5. (5.2)
6. L2 mmmmmmmmm. ((still looking down at page))

From the time the instruction is given, it is ten seconds before the first learner begins to speak and then her speech is marked by hesitancy. There is a 5.2 second pause before L2, without looking up, responds.
Pauses were noticeable by their length and frequency and sometimes accompanied by nervous giggles. There was frequent hesitancy. Long pauses between turns and a paucity of overlapping talk were also recurring features.

1. L1 number four
2. L2 (1.1) yes (0.8)
3. L1 number five
4. L2 [ahhhh number four
5. (2.2)
6. L1 Yes?

Here again, pauses are noticeable and frequent. Amongst native speakers of English, such pauses and hesitation are usually often used when giving a dispreferred response or before a topic change (Pomerantz, 1984). Neither is true here.

There were also clear non-native like patterns of checking of other understanding, signalling understanding and requesting clarification. Paralinguistic strategies were also observed. Many of the learners used frowns for example, which some confirmed in subsequent semi-structured interviews, to indicate a lack of comprehension.

1. L1 Number one (0.9) is A
2. (1.8) ((L2 frowns))
3. ((L1 looks at L2’s paper))
4. L2 number two is C

Noticeable here is the way L2 does not signal, apart from frowning, that she has agreed with L1 or even that she has received the message. There is a pause before L1 looks at L2’s answers and continues the information gap activity. L1 does not orally check that she has been understood and that it is alright to continue. This avoidance of effecting repair was conspicuous on numerous occasions.

On other occasions, learners nodded. Whether they did this to signal agreement or understanding was not clear. The nods were often silent but sometimes they were accompanied
by a short, guttural ‘un.’ Furthermore, the tasks were not rounded off in a way typical of native-speakers. They seemed to be left hanging.

1. L1 Number ten is C
2. (1.8)
3. ((L1 looks at L2’s paper))
4. L2 ((L2 nods slightly))

In the twenty hours of classroom time, each task was repeated between fifteen and twenty times. Yet, from the beginning to the end of the period there was no discernable improvement in the learners’ interaction. It seemed that simply providing greater opportunity for interaction on the assumption that it would develop implicitly was insufficient. The tasks did not appear to “provide an incentive for structural change towards an interlanguage system with greater complexity” (Skehan, 1996, p.22).

One reason for the performance may have been the cognitive or processing load of the tasks themselves as described by Skehan (1996, p.24). As language learning exercises in their own right, they may have made mental demands on the learners, which in turn may have negatively influenced the quality of their interaction. However, it was felt that there was also a sociocultural factor at work here, which required attention, and could not be addressed by simply allowing more time for interactive pair work. This was confirmed in a post-task informal discussion with the learners. Two of the learners stated that they felt that their interaction was ‘natural’ and ‘normal’, and that as they were all Japanese they felt comfortable despite their apparent awkwardness to the teacher.

Clearly, there was a gap between the learners’ performance and a target performance that required an explicit focus on form (Long, 1996, p.429) to support the opportunity for use. Studies by Bejarano et al. (1997), Lam and Wong (2000), Naughton (2006) and Barraja-Rohan (2011) all report that explicit strategy training had a positive impact on their learners’ interactional competence. In all these studies, time, including dedicated lessons, was made
available for the explicit teaching of interactional form. However, no such time was available in this course. Therefore, it was necessary to find a way of focusing on interaction without reducing the time available for the meeting of existing aims and objectives.

**Intervention 2**

Having only outlined in vague terms the perceived unnaturalness of the learner interactions, it seemed logical that in order to provide an explicit focus on natural English interactive features, specific teachable examples were required. To obtain evidence on what some of these might be, rather than relying on intuition, a decision was made to record and transcribe native speakers performing the same types of tasks assuming they would provide suitable data, a “pedagogic corpus” (Willis & Willis, 1996, p.67) to be analysed for interactional competence. As the interactional awkwardness described above appeared to relate primarily to pauses and turn-taking, which correspond to Celce-Murcia’s conversational and non-verbal paralinguistic competences (2007, p.48), it was decided to analyse the native-speaker transcripts using the tools of CA.

CA is a data-driven tradition in which authentic talk-in-interaction is recorded, meticulously transcribed and analysed for sequential patterns. It reveals how the participants orient themselves to the shared social situation and work together to co-construct the social discourse. According to Hutchby and Wooffit (1988), analysts focus on either the sequential stages of long stretches of conversation of institutional talk, or on discrete interactional devices. As events in language classes, the interaction analysed in this paper can be classed as institutional talk. As CA stresses the importance of using authentic talk-in-interaction as the basis for its analysis, it should be pointed out that the recording of NS colleagues performing tasks may not strictly be CA. Therefore, to provide a distinction, the analysis would be performed using the tools of CA. In addition, to supplement the devices described using the tools of CA, natural and useful functional exponents would also be identified, reflecting Celce-Murcia’s
actional competence (2007, p.48). These could then be explicitly presented to the learners in class to provide them the opportunity to notice the gap between their current and target performance, and subsequently extend and restructure their interlanguage. To this end, native-speaker colleagues were recorded performing identical tasks in pairs and the tools of CA were employed to identify interactional devices and find contrasts with those the learners had produced.

Seven recordings of NS colleagues performing the three types of tasks described above were made. On each occasion, the pairings were different and nine people volunteered overall. In each case, volunteers were asked to imagine that they were learners in the class and given identical instructions. The purpose of the recordings was not divulged to these colleagues until after the last recording had been made. In the hope of generating some doubt or difference of opinion and to provide a level of difficulty to replicate the higher cognitive load faced by the non-native learners, exercises were chosen from materials designed to prepare candidates for the UCLES Cambridge Proficiency Examination (CPE) set at CEFR C2 level.

As expected, there were significant differences in the interaction patterns of the NS. The overall length of time it took to complete the tasks was noticeably lower. The participants were much quicker to begin and there were pre-openers in every task (right, ok then, alright) as illustrated below.

1. L1 Alright.
2. L2 Ye[ah
3. L1 [shall I start?
4. L2 By all means
5. L1 Right number one um (0.4) is A isn’t[ it?
   ]yeah

The tasks were also always concluded with closers (ok, that’s it, done).

1. L1 And number ten I put C.
2. L2 Yeah

3. L1 Okay. That’s I[t.

4. L2 Yep

Pauses were rare and only occurred before a dispreferred response (Pomerantz, 1984) when a participant disagreed with his partner.

1. L1 For number fou::r I thought it was laid

2. L2 (0.5) Mm, actually I wondered that it might be set

In addition, there were split-second transitions between turns and examples of overlap. Also in evidence was the sustained use of continuers (aha, ok, yeah, yep, right, mm) to signal acknowledgement or agreement as well as comprehension checks (ok?, yeah?, alright?) by the speaker to ensure the listener was ready for the next piece of information.

1. L1 Number 2 is B. Ok[ay?

2. L2 [Yeah

3. L1 three is D

4. L2 Uhuh

5. L1 four A

6. L2 Uhuh

There was also increased use of ellipsis as the activity progressed. The participants stripped their talk down to the minimum necessary to complete the task. Seedhouse describes this “tendency to minimalisation and indexicality” (1999, p.152) as evidence of the participants’ “perfectly proper” (1999, p.153) orientation to the task.

Using the above findings, it was decided to explicitly teach the following interactive devices the next time the learners had to perform the tasks.

a) Pre-openers and openers

b) Comprehension checks

c) Continuers, or backchannelling

d) Closers
In the classroom, the procedure decided upon was for the teacher to nominate a learner and model the interaction with him/her in a pair. This was done twice. First, by interacting as the learners had done previously, as a bad example; secondly, the way colleagues had done in the recordings and which were considered a target-like good example. It was then elicited from the learners which example they felt was better and why, thereby demonstrating the gap between their current and target interaction patterns. Once the device had been noticed, its use and position in the exchange sequence were discussed. The language used was drilled chorally and individually for pronunciation and retention in the working memory. The sequence was then re-demonstrated before the learners were asked to perform the tasks themselves. This procedure was repeated before every learner performance of the tasks between hours twenty and twenty-five of the course. It was decided not to expose the learners to the NS recordings. This was done in order to avoid reducing the time available for the achievement of the lessons’ specified aims and objectives. The interactional focus was, therefore, fully integrated into existing procedures and did not require a stage of its own.

Results 2

The results were instantly noticeable. Uptake by the learners of all interactional devices was immediate. All of the tasks began with a greatly reduced delay after the instructions had been given and began with pre-openers, as shown below.

1. L1 Ok. Shall I go first?
2. L2 Yes

There was very natural and appropriate use of continuers to signal understanding and agreement.

1. L1 Number 2 is *thirteen*
2. L2 Uhuh
3. L1 Number 3 is *two hundred and eight*
4. L2 Uhuh
Devices were also used to check the listener’s understanding.

1. L1 Number three is not given (0.3) okay?
2. L2 Okay

Agreement was signalled more quickly and disagreement was marked by hesitation.

1. L1 Four is C
2. L2 Ok
3. L1 Five is A
4. L2 uh? (1.1) Not D?
5. L1 No. It says A

Closers were used to conclude the talk naturally.

1. L1 for number ten I chose claim
2. L2 Yes
3. L1 Okay. Finished.

All in all, the teaching of the openings, closings, checking understanding and continuers appeared to be very successful. All of the learners used the patterns consistently and continued to do so throughout the course. They did not require reminding once in the remaining twelve weeks of the course and in the final week these interactional features were still well in evidence. Recordings made towards the end of the course revealed that they had been retained. The observation that learners’ sustained improvement in their interaction was also noted by a substitute teacher taking the class, who commented on how naturally the learners interacted, stating that he had thought that they had focussed explicitly on it. In another survey followed by an informal interview after the course, the learners commented that they had found the devices ‘useful’, ‘natural’ and ‘enjoyable’. One reported that she was surprised to learn of the class’ original untarget-like interaction since, according to her, the taught interactional devices are a usual feature of Japanese L1 interaction. Three stated that they had found the teacher demonstration of the target interaction particularly memorable and that they recalled it when asked to repeat each of the tasks.
Discussion

Such apparent striking success of the focus on interactional devices and the language to realise them in both immediate uptake and with sustained use demonstrated as intake must, of course, be treated with caution. The classroom research is clearly of a very small scale with limited amounts of data. There were only eight subjects, with the same L1, at a similar level, with similar backgrounds, and similar levels of motivation.

However, the study points to several indications. Firstly, it provides support to the widely-accepted idea that second language learners can benefit from an explicit focus on forms integrated into the task-based cycle and that relying solely on implicit learning is insufficient (Long, 1996, p.429). It cannot be presumed, at least with monolingual L1 groups lacking native or other non-native interlocutors, that interactional competence will develop by itself, and interlanguage fossilisation be discouraged simply through the provision of classroom time and greater opportunity for interaction. The apparent success of teaching the learners interactional devices and the language to realise them seems to support Lam & Wong’s claim that it is necessary “to support strategy training with linguistic scaffolding” (2000, p.245). In addition to opportunities for use, there needs to be a focus on interactional form. The learners’ lack of interactional development before the intervention would seem to support this idea. In this respect, Naughton’s assertion that ‘the teacher should be responsible for modeling strategic interaction and for providing support to the students so that they can progress toward the autonomous use of such strategies (2006, p.179) would appear to be justified.

Secondly, it suggests that immediate uptake and ultimately intake of explicitly taught interactional devices is possible and that an extended period of restructuring through which target-like use emerges gradually is not always necessary. This would suggest that unlike other discrete areas of communicative competence, such as grammatical competence, there may be a strong crossover potential of interactional devices on the implicit/explicit learning interface. The
teaching and learning of behaviours may involve less need for cognitive processes. The apparent ease and efficiency of the interactional focus can also provide practical benefits. The explicit focus, integrated into each task, took barely two to three minutes of classroom time. The main objectives of the lessons were not altered and no extra stages were added. Given the marked improvement in the learners’ performance, in terms of time efficiency and flexibility, this focus was highly satisfactory. Should a more in-depth coverage of interactional devices be required, learners could also be exposed to the NS recordings and transcripts to promote noticing-the-gap between current and target performance in much the same way as model texts are used to support writing instruction.

Thirdly, the outcome reinforces the claim (Barraja-Rohan, 2011, p.479) that the tools of CA can be of use to second-language learners. In this study, the learners were focused on openings, closings, continuers and checks of comprehension. However, interactional devices do not stop here. CA can also throw light on techniques for interrupting or for repairing communication breakdowns, such as asking for clarification, which as Nakane (2000) notes many Japanese are loathe to do out of politeness or in order to save face. Repair strategies such as these are a crucial part of successful communication and as a result, they are well worth teaching. Japanese learners should be encouraged to regard requesting clarification as acceptable, and indeed desirable behaviour in a wide range of spoken encounters both within the classroom and beyond. It is important to encourage them to do this when listening to their teachers and each other using phrases, such as Sorry. What do you mean? Or Sorry. Could you say that again? Such ability to repair communication, using expressions such as these is of great importance to these learners as they prepare to live and study in the UK.

**Conclusions**

At the outset, the goal of this classroom action research project was to help these Japanese learners improve their interactional competence by using naturally occurring
opportunities in the lesson to encourage more spoken interaction. It was later realised that to supplement these opportunities, an explicit focus on interactional devices was also required. Furthermore, the results suggest that interactional features revealed by the tools of CA are teachable and learnable through explicit instruction. However, this focus on interaction patterns and their exponents does not only appear to aid the development of interaction competence. The tools of CA may also provide learners with the means for greater engagement in LREs (Swain and Lapkin, 2001), negotiating meaning and form, and thereby contributing to language learning as well. The use of such techniques to modify interaction and the frequent inclusion of opportunities to do so in the classroom provide a higher quantity of meaningful exposure and production, widely believed “to lead ultimately to successful classroom second language acquisition” (Doughty & Pica, 1986, p.322). As such, explicitly teaching interactional competence, as opposed to leaving it to develop on its own, is doubly important and should be introduced at the very beginning of language learning. In doing so, the learner will hopefully be equipped to take full advantage of future opportunities to interact, and thereby develop all aspects of communicative competence more effectively.
References


Appendix

Transcription Symbols (adapted from Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998)

(0.5) Time gap in tenths of a second

(.) Pause of less than two-tenths of a second

= ‘latching’ between utterances

[ onset of overlapping talk
[ .hh speaker in-breath

(( )) non-verbal activity

- sharp cut-off of prior word or sound

: stretched preceding sound

() unclear fragment

? rising inflection

> < noticeably quicker talk

**Under**

↑↓ marked falling or rising intonational shift

. stopping fall in tone

→ Specific part of extract referred to in the text