Is More Interactivity Possible in the Classroom?

Lei Ding*

*: Lei Ding: *Wuxi Teacher's College, China, wxdinglei@yahoo.cn*

Abstract: In this paper, the author analyzes two episodes of an English class based on three main principles of conversation analysis (CA): adjacency pairs, turn taking, and repair, then comes to an important issue in conversational classroom, that is, to ask more referential questions than display ones so as to promote more syntactically complex and connected student answers. It is equally essential to engage interactive activities in the classroom to enhance students' communicative competence.

Keywords: conversation analysis, adjacency pairs, turn taking, referential question, repair, interactive

Introduction

The term conversation analysis has been used to describe work that is informed by a broad range of disciplinary perspectives, including pragmatics, speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, the ethnography of communication, variation analysis, communication theory, and social psychology (Schiffrin, 1991). However, Markee (2000) restricts the use of this term to describe only the kind of work that has been carried out within an ethnomethodological tradition, which is what he calls the analysis of conversational data (ACD).

He defines CA as a form of ACD that accounts for the **sequential structure** of talk-in-interaction in terms of interlocutors' real-time orientation to the preferential practices that underlie, for participants and consequently also for analysts, the conversational behaviors of **turn-taking** and **repair** in different speech exchange systems. Since turn-taking assumes an important role in classroom teaching, this paper will focus on how teachers initiate their turn

in a traditional fronted classroom, which is likely to facilitate students' communicative competence and actual use of English.

Literature Review

According to Psathas (1995), conversation analysis (CA) studies the organization and order of social action in interaction. One principal aim of CA is to characterize the organization of the interaction by abstracting from exemplars of specimens of interaction and to uncover the emic logic underlying the organization. Another principal aim of CA is to trace the development of inter-subjectivity in an action sequence. This doesn't mean that CA provides access to participants' cognitive or psychological states. Rather, it means that analysts trace how participants analyze and interpret each other's actions and develop a shared understanding of the progress of the interaction (Seedhouse, 2004). Thus, CA practitioners aim 'to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus on how sequences of action are generated' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p.14)

Types of Interactional Organization

Adjacency Pairs

From a CA perspective, talk-in-interaction is organized in terms of *sequences*, of which the most basic example is the adjacency pair (Schegloff, 1972, 1979; Schegloff & Snacks, 1973). Adjacency pairs, as Heritage (1984b) puts it, are 'the basic building-blocks of intersubjectivity' (p.256). Adjacency pair sequences involve sequences that:

(1) are physically adjacent to each other;

(2) are produced by two different speakers;

(3) are constructed in terms of first and second pair parts;

(4) are constructed in such a way that Speaker 1's first pair part makes it conditionally relevant for speaker 2 to respond with an appropriate second pair part (Markee, 2000).

In traditional classrooms the prototypical mode of teacher-student interaction consists of recurring initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequences (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, 1992). The same three-part conversational object is what Mehan (1979) calls Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequences and McHoul (1978) Question-Answer-Comment (QAC). Teachers usually have three options. According to Markee (1995), the first option is called an A strategy, that is QAC, the second is called a Counter-Question(CQ) strategy that employs a Referential (R) question format, the third is called a Counter-Question (CQ) strategy that employs a Display (D) question format.

Turn Taking

Crookes (1990) provided what he called a 'common' definition of a turn as 'one or more streams of speech bounded by speech of another, usually an interlocutor' (p.185). In CA terminology, turns are constructed out of smaller turn constructional units (TCUS), which may consist of sentential, clausal, phrasal, or lexical objects (Sacks et al. 1974). Therefore, Markee (2004) defines a turn as a spate of talk that is collaboratively constructed by speakers out of one or more TCUs, whose projectability allows possible next and current speakers to identify when current speaker's turn might hearably be coming to an end. In this essay, since I focus on the turn-taking practices in traditional (language) classrooms, I now show McHoul's (1978) work on the turn- taking practices that constitute traditional content classrooms. It provides an important point of departure for understanding the turn-taking practices of traditional (language) classrooms.

To begin with, there are two units in these turn-taking practices of traditional language classroom as explained below.

Teacher's turn at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit:

1. If the teacher's turn is so constructed as to involve the use of a 'current-speaker-selects-next' technique, then the right and obligation to speak is given to a single student;

2. If the teacher's turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current-speaker-selects-next' technique, then current speaker (the teacher) must continue.

Student's turn at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit:

1. If the student's turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a 'current-speaker-selects-next' technique, then the right and obligation to speak is given to the teacher.

2. If the student's turn is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current-speaker-selects-next' technique, then self-selection for next speaker may, but need not, be instituted with the teacher as first starter and transfer occurs at that transition-relevance place.

3. If the student's turn is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current-speaker-selects-next' technique, then current speaker (the student) may, but need not be, continue unless the teacher self-selects.

Repair

From a CA perspective, repair is the principal resource that conversationalists have at their disposal to maintain inter-subjectivity, that is, to construct shared meanings (Schegloff, 1992b). All repairs are likely to be signaled by various markers of incipient repair (pause, silences, sound stretches, cut-offs, and phrases such as 'you know' and 'I mean'). Repair is also dependent on members orienting to the turn-taking procedures that constitute a given speech exchange system. However, repair is also an independent form of conversational organization, whose accomplishment is analyzable in terms of highly distinctive sequential trajectories. More specifically, the organization of repair can be analyzed in terms of:

(a) its position in relation to an initial trouble source;

(b) who initiates repair - either 'self' (i.e., current speaker) or 'other' (i.e., interlocutor) - and who completes it (again analyzed in terms of 'self' or 'other's peaking roles);

(c) whether a repair effort is successful or unsuccessful (Schegloff et al., 1977).

Such an analysis yields four sequential positions in which repairs may occur, that is, first, second, third, and fourth position repairs. In practice, however, only second position repairs (usually self- completed) are attested with any regularity. Other repair types are either extremely rare or non-existent (Markee, 2000).

Regarding the organization of repair in traditional language-oriented classrooms, Kasper (1985) studied the repair patterns between two types of language teaching or learning activities: language-centered and content-centered phases respectively. Kasper argued that, during the language-centered phase, the organization of repair is rather different from that found in ordinary conversation. For example, self-initiated repair is rare. When it occurs, learners do not complete repairs but instead appeal for help from the teacher. During the content-centered phase, Kasper found that participants oriented to different, and indeed more complex, patterns of repair.

Case Analysis

The audiotape was obtained from an English class, and two excerpts (one is from line1 to line79, the other is from line80 to line165) were chosen particularly for this case study. There is a group of international students whose English competency are at approximately low intermediate level. The pedagogical focus of this class is to try to develop learners' vocabulary on expressing different feelings. Specifically, at line 22-23, the teacher wants to make sure whether learners know the adjective used to describe a kind of feeling when people watch a performance. But unfortunately, it seems that learners fail to pick up on the teacher's initial purpose by answering 'they are smiling' which describes their facial expression at line 25. Then he engages in a further question 'so how do they feel with that smiling'. This time learners get across what the teacher asks but he is not satisfied with their answer and shows a little bit impatience by cutting off the learner at line 28 with another question to see whether learners have this word in their lexical repertoire. Finally, at line 32, a learner asserts that the word is 'relaxing'. When the teacher perceives that learners don't have the word which he thinks they should have in their lexical repertoire, he provides the direct answer 'amused' for them and then summarizes the use of this word at line 35.

Another interesting episode is from line 50 to line 59. When the teacher tries to help learners find the word used to describe people's feeling when their facial expression indicates neither happy nor sad. As soon as he is aware that learners have difficulty finding the appropriate word, a necessary conversational detour which is technically known as an insertion sequence (IS) occurs. The purpose of this IS is to provide further information that is conditionally relevant to teacher asking the question at line 50, then one learner says the word "search, research". Perceiving that, the teacher asks a further question and this time learners got the word "wonder" and the teacher ends up this episode by commenting on what learners say and further substantiating another two adjectives 'curious' and 'puzzled' in the last part of his turn.

Yet another striking thing occurs at the end of this episode. At line 78, there is a positive IS initiated by one learner, the purpose of which is to identify the reason why the lady is cross. The teacher supposes an immediate awareness of it and corroborates as true at line 79. It shows that learners are able to take turns without reference to the teacher.

In addition, in the second excerpt, from line 100 to line 126, the talk between the teacher and learners goes on smoothly. The teacher maintains control over the content and directs the classroom talk by reserving the right to ask questions. Learners are thereby sequentially obligated to respond with answers. Furthermore, the teacher can evaluate the quality of learners' talk in the third position. This third turn serves as the launch pad for requests by the teacher that learners do further elaborative work. The teacher and the learners jointly accomplish these elaborations through the vehicle of further QAC sequences.

To summarize, when learners know the answer to a question, they answer it immediately, with minimal discussion with their partners. In contrast, when they don't know the answer to a question, particularly vocabulary-oriented questions, very lengthy sequences ensue as illustrated above.

As far as sequential organization is concerned, the whole episode consists of QAC, CQ (D) (Counter Question turn done as a display question) or CQ(R) (Counter Question turn done as a referential question). More interestingly, the teacher and learners reconstruct more CQ (R) sequences (i.e. line28, 49-51, 57, 67, 75, 87) than CQ (D) sequences which is unusual

in traditional (i.e., teacher-fronted) classrooms when teachers ask far more display (known information) questions than referential (new information) questions (Long& Sato, 1983; Pica&Long, 1986). It is obviously a positive sign because referential questions seem to promote more syntactically complex and connected student answers than do display questions (Brock, 1986).

In terms of turn-taking, overwhelmingly, the teacher uses 'current-speaker- selects-next' technique to invite learners to take next turn in the whole episode. Alternatively, if the teacher's turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of 'current-speaker-selects-next' technique, then current speaker (the teacher) must continue as shown at line 35, 36; 67, 68; 122, 123. Occasionally, several turns displayed in these two excerpts show that learners use a 'first-starter-begins-talking' selection technique at line 41, 78, 98.

What is most striking is that there is almost no repair works. It is only the teacher who performs a self-initiated, self-completed repair at line 47 and another two other-initiated, other-completed repairs at line 154 and line 158. It is consistent with what Seedhouse (2004) states, 'incorrect linguistic forms and interlanguage forms are frequently ignored, unless they lead to a breakdown in communication in meaning- and-fluency contexts.'

Implication and Conclusion

As illustrated above, this talk-in-interaction occurs in the traditional teacher-fronted classroom. It is always the teacher that initiates pedagogical talk with Q turn, and learners contingently respond with A turn, and then the teacher closes these QA sequences with an evaluative C turn. Occasionally, the teacher uses CQ(D) or CQ(R) strategies and interestingly, he asks far more referential(new information) questions than display (known information) questions which is not consistent with what Long , Sato and Pica suggested-Teachers ask far more display questions than referential questions (Long & Sato, 1983; Pica & Long,1986). However, as Brock (1986) notes, referential questions seem to promote more syntactically complex and connected student answers than do display questions. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers ask more referential questions rather than display ones because they tend to encourage learners to aspire beyond their current language levels. Furthermore, it is worth

noting that the teacher always gives positive feedback when learners give right answers. From this perspective, I think he sets an excellent example for us English teachers because this supportive atmosphere is more likely to help learners build up their confidence in speaking English.

In addition, learners typically ask few questions in teacher-fronted lessons and usually produce short sentences which obviously suggests that the unequal power relationships that typify traditional classroom discourse may hamper the process of SLA (Pica, 1987) by giving little space to learners and that non-traditional instruction (e.g., small group-oriented, task-based language teaching) might provide a better environment for language learning (Markee, 2000). Nonetheless, it is almost impossible to change the traditional teacher-centered style over one night, perhaps we can combine teacher-centered language teaching with other communicative activities as mentioned above during which learners are using language to exchange meanings for a real purpose which will enhance their communicative competence. Alternatively, we can invite learners to ask some questions even in teacher-fronted lessons. The point of this idea lies in the fact that it can arouse learners' curiosity to explore something unknown to them rather than always obtain knowledge passively. Learners may feel reluctant to do so at the very beginning, but they will get accustomed to it as long as teachers always provide a safe and non-threatening learning atmosphere to alleviate language anxiety and encourage risk taking in using English. To sum up, the crucial point is that sufficient interactional space is allocated to learners to enable them to contribute new information concerning their immediate classroom speech community while the teacher's role is more that of a mediator as well as a collaborator in the dialogue, thereby encouraging a smooth flow to the conversation and nurturing fluency (Seedhouse, 2004).

As far as repair is concerned, there is evidence that repair is a necessary but not sufficient resource for SLA. To this insight, Markee (2000) adds the following hypothesis: Repair (particularly other-repair) is a necessary but nonetheless an essentially dispreferred conversational activity. But in this (meaning-and-fluency) context, when incorrect linguistic forms and interlanguage forms frequently lead to a breakdown in communication, we'd better employ strategies to conduct repair. Here I recommend some strategies provided by Seedhouse (2004) which avoid bald, unmitigated, direct, overt negative evaluation:(a) repeat

the learner's erroneous utterance with a rising intonation; (b) supply a correct version of the linguistic forms; (c) invite other learners to repair.

The analysis of the two episodes of an English class based on three main principles of CA is likely to give us a better understanding of the role of turning-taking that plays in a traditional teacher-fronted classroom. An important issue to be considered here is to ask more referential questions rather than display questions, which may offer students more opportunities for language production and thus enhance their fluency and effectiveness in communication. It comes to a conclusion that the combination of teacher-centered language teaching and student interaction enhances students' communicative competence. Therefore, it is suggested that with the increasing awareness of teachers' role as a mediator as well as a collaborator in the traditional teacher-fronted classroom, the language teachers should take more efforts to get students more actively involved in a smooth conversation in the classroom and nurture their communicative fluency.

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APPENDIX A: Transcription Conventions

Transcription conventions are abridged and adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984b, pp. ix-xvi)

Identity of speakers

T: teacher

L: unidentified learner

LL: several or all learners simultaneously

L1:   identified learner (Learner 1)

Simultaneous utterances

L1: //yes//

L2: //yeh//   simultaneous, overlapping talk by two speakers

Intervals within and between utterances

(+) (1)   (+) = a pause of between .1 and .5 of a second

                   (1) (2) (3) = pause of one, two or three seconds respectively

Characteristics of speech delivery

?	rising intonation, not necessarily a question
!	strong emphasis, with falling intonation
so,	a comma indicates low-rising intonation suggesting continuation
(hhh)	laughter tokens

Commentary in the transcript

((unintelligible))   indicates a stretch of talk that is unintelligible to the analyst

Other transcript symbols

include[u]s   brackets indicate phonetic transcription

APPENDIX B Transcription

Excerpt 1

1 T: So we've got a bunch of people from different countries. What are they doing, Maria?

2 L: They are watching something.

3 T: Ok.

4 T: They are all watching some kind of performance, yeh? And, (1) what about this guy?

5 What's he doing?

6 L: Smile.

7 T: June?

8 L: This (1) uh, pardon? He is (+)

9 T: What do you think is going on here with these two people?

10 L: Sitting.

11 T: June?

12 L: They are watching, they enjoy. What's going on? They are watch something. They enjoy

13   their watch.

14 T: What's she looking at? I mean this guy is looking over here, he is looking over here, and

15   what about this lady here?

16 L: Same thing, a picture.

17 T: June?

18 L: Oh, they (1) looking at the camera.

19 T: They are looking at the camera, so what we say about them?

20 T: Always people are watching a performance. ((writing on the board)) we don't know what

21   the performance is, so we have to say are some kind of.

22 T: But this lady (1) and this man (1) are looking at the camera, so how can we describe what

23   they are doing (+) // what you've done just before//

24 L: //they//

25 L: They are smiling, they smiling at the camera.

26 T: So how do they feel with that smile?

27 L: They are happy, they are ha,

28 T: Happy is not quite the right word when they smile, what is the word?

29 L: Uh, maybe (1),

30 T: Do you know? Have you heard this word?

31 L: Uh, maybe (+)

32 L: Relaxing.

33 T: Amused.

34 L: ((unintelligible))

35 T: If you find something funny, then we say I am amused by this.

36 T: What's this lady (1) doing now?

37 L: I think she show something, the (1), the (1), the gentleman.

38 T: Showing him?

39 L: No, she, she, showing something.

40 T: Telling him.

41 L: Yes, she's telling him. You know, that's the end, you know, something that you show your

42 eyes.

43 T: And he is looking at the camera, what do you think she's telling him?

44 L: Say the,

45 L: Smile

46 L: Smile (hhh)

47 T: Smile, do you want camera, ok, so these two people (1) have noticed the canema, camera.

48 L: ((unintelligible))

49 T: This lady is amused by it, she is talking to her friend and her husband. He is looking at the

50 camera, what about these two people's faces? They are not smiling, they don't look sad,

51 how do we describe them?

52 L: They are trying understand, they are trying something understand, they are

53 T: Ok, do you remember a couple of weeks ago, we were talking about the word when we

54 ((unintelligible)) into a room, first thing we want to check and look at and find out (1)
55 What's going on? What's the word for that?
56 L: A search, research

57 T: It's a kind of research, what's the feeling you have when you want to know something?

58 L: won, wonder, she wonder.

59 T: Yes, wondering, very good. Wondering or curious, do you remember that? puzzled.

60 L: //Yes//

61 T: The word that man just used about like cross, word puzzled, what's happening? Why is she

62 doing this?

63 L: You know, this lady behind this old lady ((unintelligible)), yes, she wear hat

64 ((unintelligible))

65: T: Is she looking at the camera?

66 L: She looking the front, she look at

67 T: So what do we call that when you make sure ((unintelligible)) look over?

68 T: How would you describe this lady?

69 L: She's craning her neck.

70 T: Straining or craning?

71 L: Craning.

72 T: To say craning (1) her neck

73 L: ((unintelligible)) a bit cross two people in front of talking, so she might be thinking why

74   ((unintelligible))

75 T: She maybe cross, do you know the meaning of that word cross?

76 L: ((unintelligible))

77 T: It's like angry, but, not, not so angry

78 L: Because two people in front talking so she might be thinking why they stop talking

79 T: She's cross with these two people because they talk.

Excerpt 2

80 T: What about these? //eyebrow//

81 L: //((unintelligible))//

82 T: //When we smile normally// when we smile normally, we smile without ((unintelligible))

83 L: //eyebrows stress//

84 T: When our eyebrows go up, that's another feeling, what's the word we just used?

85 L: //Surprised//

86 T: Surprised. That's when your eyebrows go when something happens you are not expecting

87   Why is she surprised?

88 L: She could ((unintelligible)) young lady

89 L: (hhh)

90 L: //That young lady//

91   //((unintelligible))//

92 T: Ok, if she's so surprised, uh, ((unintelligible)) that young lady has put her arm on his leg,

93   why, why she is not looking?

94 L: Because, because he is ((unintelligible)) for something and maybe something wonderful

95   and maybe make him very relaxable, this, this (+)

96 T: Something wonderful, that's a nice word. Something wonderful, something relaxing

97 L: (hhh)

98 L: I've got another idea.

99 T: You've got another idea. Before we come to another idea, tell me about this lady here.

100 L: //she is//

101 //upset//

102 T: Yes, she is upset, good word.

103 L: // she is upset//

104 //((unintelligible))//

105 T: Maybe use this word cross for this lady. Could we use this for this one?

106 L: Yes, cross, the lady.

107 T: Cross. Why she cross?

108 L: Uh, she is angry because that uh (1), happen.

109 L: Why is happen?

110 T: We got these words, uh, cross, upset, angry, if we were to (1) draw thermometer with

111   hundred degrees and zero, where would you put upset, cross and angry?

112 L: Uh (+)

113 T: Which is ((unintelligible)), which at the bottom?

114 L: Uh, //angry//

115 T: So angry is gonna be up here somewhere, isn't it?

116 T: And cross?

117 L: //Middle//

118 T: And middle, yes, yes.

119 T: and, upset

120 T: Ok, where is she on this scale? Is she upset? She cross? She angry?

121 L: // Cross//

122 T: She is cross, she's quite cross.

123 T: Sometimes we say quite, it means cross, cross, means more. So she's quite cross. She's

124   not angry, she's not getting out of the season, wants to ((unintelligible)) anybody. Why is

125   she cross?

126 L: Because a young lady (1) is next to her husband.

127 T: Young woman

128 L: Like a shock

129 L: put her arms, put her eyebrow, and,

130 T: put eyebrow, put arm

131 L: On the, uh,

132 T: Why, why she put on there?

133 L: Maybe she wants take a (2)

134 L: Place.

135 L: No, ((unintelligible)) when she is angry she is upset about something, and she wants go in

136   another side.

137 T: Ok.

138 L: Find some place

139 T: Ok, what was the word you used?

140 L: I think she just feels comfortable.

141 T: Feels comfortable, somebody over there said tired, somebody over here said (1) resting, I

142   think?

143 L: Yes, resting, yes.

144 L: Enjoying

145 L: Because, because

146 T: Do you think she is enjoying? Look at her face!

147 L: //No, no//

148   //((unintelligible))//

149 T: Maybe she, she, I would use the word, she looks fed up, she looks tired, maybe she's a bit

150   angry what's going on, maybe she's better she can do.

151 L: Maybe ((unintelligible))

152 L: She lams, she lams to him,

153 T: She,

154 L: Lams, she lams, yes, no point ((unintelligible)), leans.

155 T: She's leaning, she is leaning or resting.

156 L: She's exhausted.

157 L: //((unintelligible))//

158 L: Exhausted [a:]

159 T: Exhausted, // is a good word//

160 L: //isn't it//

161 T: Exhausted maybe more than tired, she, she just looks tired.

162 L: You know the most important?

163 L: //The most important?//

164   //((unintelligible))//

165 T: what's the feeling you tell us? We'll have a break, we'll have a break in a minute.