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Interactional Competence in Second Language Acquisition

John CAMPBELL-LARSEN¹

Abstract

This paper investigates the concept of Interactional Competence (IC) and its application to second/foreign language teaching. The first section charts the development of some theoretical approaches to the study of language from early distinctions between competence and performance, through the development of the notion of communicative competence and the emergence of the concept of interactional competence. The second section investigates some of the ways in which IC has been described in the literature and seeks to link the theory of IC to the particular situation of formal/institutionalized second/foreign language instruction. The third section gives a brief outline of some published studies into IC and its development in language learners. The fourth section details some examples of IC development in research conducted by the author in Japanese university ESL classes, illustrating micro-practices with detailed transcripts derived from video tapes of classroom talk.

Introduction

It would seem to be a commonsensical view that teaching of a language as a second or foreign language would rely to some extent on the insights of linguists to inform first theory and thence practice, rather than relying on the intuitions of native or proficient second language speakers to systematize an approach to teaching the language at hand. However, not all linguistic thinking, theorizing and research is relevant or even helpful to the language teacher. A case in point is the influence of generative grammar.

In 1965 Chomsky wrote that spoken language is too disordered to be of use to researchers investigating the nature of language. With respect to the goals of generative grammarians, this may well be the case, but the dismissal of spoken

¹ Lecturer, School of International Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University

language as a chaotic and ‘degenerate’ (Chomsky, 1965, p.31) form of language is echoed beyond the abstract formalisms of generative grammar, and finds tacit expression more widely in the world of language teaching. There is a continuing preference in much English language education in Japan for written tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL, grammar centered textbooks, the proliferation of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses with a heavy focus on literacy skills, extensive reading programs and the like.

It would be fair to say that the written form of the language is (or has been) privileged over the spoken form in most teaching contexts in Japan (and elsewhere) and that language learning is heavily influenced by the agendas of more abstract linguistic theoreticians, this agenda being outlined by Lyons (1969, p.98)

Linguistic theory, at the present time at least, is not, and cannot, be concerned with the production and understanding of utterances in their actual situations of use...but with the structure of sentences considered in abstraction from the situations in which actual utterances occur.

Although this was written more than forty years ago, explicitly referring to linguistic theory not second language (L2) learning, and since then there has purportedly been a revolution in language teaching, establishing ‘communicative language teaching’ as the default teaching methodology, the attitudes outlined by Lyons still find expression, however tacitly, in much English teaching and testing culture in the Japanese context and probably elsewhere as well.

Changing views of language: Competencies

Chomsky (1965) sought to describe an idealized and abstracted version of language and drew a sharp distinction between the tacit knowledge of a language that speakers possess, which he termed competence, and the actual, real world language in use, which he termed performance. This distinction was challenged by Hymes (1972) who introduced the term *communicative competence* to account for aspects of language beyond lexical and grammatical knowledge that speakers deploy in order to participate in normal communication.

...a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by

others.”

(Hymes 1972, p.277)

Canale and Swain (1980) sought to describe communicative competence in more specific terms and give a finer grained accounting of language as it is actually used. They proposed three separate competencies that combine to produce communicative competence;

- 1) Grammatical Competence: The ability to apply the rules of the language to produce meaningful sentences.
- 2) Sociolinguistic Competence: The ability to use language appropriately in a given social/cultural context.
- 3) Strategic Competence: The ability to use communication strategies, for example in resolving misunderstandings or ambiguities.

Canale (1983) refined this list by adding Discourse Competence to the list, that is, the ability to create coherence and cohesion within and across turns.

Interactional Competence

A further aspect of the competence matrix is referred to as interactional competence, (IC) although the term is open to a variety of definitions. Young (2011, p. 426) states that, ‘The term has been used by different scholars with different shades of meaning in several different areas of second language learning, teaching and testing.’

Despite the variety of definitions, there are certain elements that seem to be central to any account of interactional competence. One element centers on the non-monologic nature of IC, asserting that ‘it is characterized by a focus on the co-construction of discursive practices by all participants involved rather than on a single person.’ (Young, 2000, p.5.) This is echoed by Kasper and Wagner (2011, p.118) who state; ‘interactional competence cannot be reduced to an individual, intrapsychological property. Nor can it be separated from "performance”.’

Another commonality of definitions of IC is that it is a multi-component concept, best conceived of as a gestalt, not reducible to a finite list of necessary and sufficient elements that must be present for definitive assessments of IC to be made. Consider the large range of elements mentioned by Hall, Hellerman and Pekarek Doehler;

IC, that is the context-specific constellations of expectations and dispositions about our social worlds that we draw on to navigate our way through our

interactions with others, implies the ability to mutually coordinate our actions. It includes knowledge of social-context-specific communicative events or activity types, their typical goals and trajectories of actions by which the goals are realized and the conventional behaviors by which participant roles and role relationships are accomplished. Also included is the ability to deploy and recognize context-specific patterns by which turns are taken, actions are organized and practices are ordered. And it includes the prosodic, linguistic, sequential and nonverbal resources conventionally used for producing and interpreting turns and actions, to construct them so that they are recognizable for others, and to repair problems in maintaining shared understanding of the interactional work we and our interlocutors are accomplishing together.

(2011, p.1-2)

It is clear from this accounting that IC is difficult to define in simple terms, but an understanding of IC is of vital importance if we are to try to fully comprehend what it is that people do when they are involved in interactions and make this understanding accessible to learners so that they can also engage in interactions in the target language. A definition of IC that is coarse grained enough to cover the concept in general, but specific enough to convey some of the comprehensive meaning is hard to formulate. For the purposes of this paper the following working definition will be held to cover the main concepts behind IC:

Interactional competence refers to the ability of speakers to co-construct a turn (or a series of turns) in the here-and-now of the unfolding interaction that balance speaker intent with recipient design.

Interactional competence for second/foreign language learners

The accounts of IC outlined above give some notion of the complexity of the concept and also something of its fundamental nature, namely, that it is not a measurable property of an individual, but rather that it is co-constructed in the here-and-now of the unfolding interaction by all participants. The difficulty in narrowing down what precisely constitutes IC in any given interaction and the fact that it is not measurable as a stand-alone competence of an individual are interesting philosophical aspects of IC. But these aspects are also problematic for teachers and learners in a second/ foreign language-learning environment, which often takes its cues from other educational subjects in viewing the uptake of the ‘stuff’ of teaching by the learner as an essentially individual endeavor, to be assessed on an individual basis. This assessment takes place in a physical and

socio-psychological space, formally constructed as a test environment, which is oriented to as such by the participants. The exam hall with its rows of students working alone and in silence, completing a standardized test and receiving an individualized percentile score, based on supplying answers to teacher designed prompts which can be evaluated as either 'correct' or 'incorrect' is still a powerful source schema in institutional and institutionalized education, its unsuitability to many aspects of language learning and assessment notwithstanding.

To understand IC in the second/foreign language-learning context in a way that is at some level accessible to learners, it may be informative to outline some of the basic assumptions about language and language learning that will help learners understand the background of a course of study designed and implemented with IC in mind. Many learners may come to the classroom with views of language learning based on notions of sentence level grammatical rigor, realized through writing activities and other literacy based views of language acquisition and assessment which may be at odds with a pedagogy that places interaction and interactional competence at the heart of the syllabus. Learners must be made aware of the background to course design as 'Teachers who adopt pedagogic approaches without explaining their reasons for doing so are denying their learners access to valuable information.' (Cotterall, 1995, p.223-224).

The background to the concept of interactional competence as it pertains to second/ foreign language learning is based upon a view of language and language learning that incorporates to some extent the following points:

- Speaking is the primary language skill; reading and writing are, in a sense, secondary language abilities.
- Interaction is the main form of speaking, monologue is not.
- Daily, quotidian conversation is the primary speaking activity; speeches, presentations, interviews and the like are secondary, and very different speaking activities.
- Conversation is unrehearsed, emergent and co-constructed in the here-and-now by the participants.
- Utterances are largely shaped by preceding utterances, both of the speaker and recipient, and/or projected toward future utterances by the speaker or recipient.
- Speakers do not mainly engage in the exchange of neutral propositional statements about an objective, external world.
- Strict adherence to sentence level grammatical correctness that would conform to the rules of written language is not a primary focus of

conversational language.

- The basic unit of language in interaction is not the sentence, but the turn at talk.
- Conversational language is not a disordered and chaotic version of written language: Indeed, written language is in some senses a brittle and narrowly systematized form of spoken language, unsuitable as a model for teaching the spoken language.

These points illustrate an outlook toward language and language teaching which may be starkly at odds with the learners' own concepts of language learning, which is likely to have been informed by previous classroom experiences of institutional language learning and more broadly by their experiences in other academic subjects. It may take some time to re-orient learners towards a learning methodology and outlook which is so at variance with their default views of classroom learning and formalized, individualized assessment.

Developing Interactional Competence: Some Studies

A traditional view of language learning (and the assessment of that learning) is that formal elements of the language, its vocabulary and grammar gradually accumulate within the head of the learner in a more or less predictable sequence. Simple lexis such as pronouns, verbs for daily activities and nouns of common items, used with canonical sentence structure comes first, followed by more cognitively complex and abstract vocabulary, special terms and less common sentence structures. Whether the taught items have been learned is assessed in test situations that are specifically designed to elicit the required language and structures from the learner. Interactional competence development is not seen to be such a linear process with a clearly identifiable sequence of acquisition, but rather, emergent from the particular exigencies of talk-in-interaction that the learner finds him or herself in. Examples of the kinds of areas where IC has been studied and described are outlined below.

Repair

The validity of the in-the-head-accumulation-of-facts model of language acquisition is questioned by Brouwer and Wagner (2004) who detail the development of IC of a Japanese learner of Danish over a 10-week period. They comment that "Measured by turns at talk [The learner's] progress may not seem striking." (2004, p.44) However, by looking at the kinds of interactional practices deployed by the learner, the later conversations showed a much wider variety of practices. For example, in the earlier conversations the learner used the

expression 'Hva siger dy' (What did you say?) to indicate trouble in understanding. This open class repair initiator 'can be implemented no matter what the trouble source turn is...' (ibid, p.43) That is, the whole turn could be non-comprehensible, or a particular word within the turn could be unknown. The trouble might not even be linguistic in origin. Perhaps the trouble source is some background noise, a too-quiet delivery by the speaker or a moment of inattention by the listener. In any case, the speaker of the initial turn that caused the problem has some work to do to try and figure out the source of the trouble.

Such was the case early in Brouwer and Wagner's study. Later, the learner was seen to be able to deploy a wider and more nuanced range of repair initiating techniques.

In later encounters we see [the learner] locate trouble in a previous turn more specifically by asking *hvad betyder X*. ('what does X mean') as well as by repeating elements which occur deep within the preceding turn. (2004, p.43)

In addition to development of a more extensive range of repair strategies, Brouwer and Wagner noted other developments in the learner's interactional repertoire such as response tokens, appropriately timed laughter and so on. They conclude by stating:

Learning a second language, then, may be described in terms of increasing interactional complexity in language encounters rather than as the acquisition of formal elements. (ibid, p.44)

Disagreement

The development of a wider range of interactional resources is also illustrated in a study by Pekarek Doehler and Ponchon-Berger (2011) that examined the ways in which learners expressed disagreement during talk in interaction. (The learners were German speaking Swiss secondary school students learning French.) The study found that lower level learners relied on a narrower range of practices for expressing disagreement. 'The lower intermediate students [] show exclusive use of turn-initial immediate disagreement accomplished by means of two recurrent linguistic formats...' (2011, p.22)

By contrast, more advanced learners,

...show a diversified set of techniques for doing disagreement. Advanced learners produce both turn-initial and non turn-initial disagreements and

these are immediate as well as distal with regard to the source of the disagreement. [] In their interactions we observe an orientation toward the joint construction of knowledge or the resolution of an argument, which in many cases includes the nuancing of the oppositional stance and contrasts with the binary logic found with the lower-intermediate learners. (2011, p. 233-234.)

Further longitudinal studies are summarized in Young (2011) and include, for example, telephone calls by Japanese speakers to English language bookshops in Hawaii, a Vietnamese ESL student's office hour interactions with his American tutor and use of the Japanese particle 'ne' by an American student studying Japanese in Japan. (See Young, 2011 for references.) These articles give some flavor of the range of practices that can be examined when investigating IC development in L2 learners.

Development of IC in Japanese English L2 university students

The following data are all derived from video recordings made by the author of Japanese university students over a three year period. (2011: N-13, 2012: N-14, 2013: N= 20) Students were non-English majors ranging from 2nd to 4th years enrolled on an elective English course meeting twice a week. In each year the students were videoed in April, July and December, yielding approximately 180 minutes of video. The data was transcribed according to conversation analysis transcription conventions. The students were engaged in a variety of classroom activities, ranging from formal, language learning activities, to 'free' activities, where students exercise autonomy over topic selection and negotiation, group membership and so on.

Spoken Narrative

The ability to relate stories, tell anecdotes and engage in narrative is a key human social activity. Narrative, along with jokes and the social prestige associated with language proficiency are among the list of universal human traits identified by Donald E. Brown. (See Pinker 2002: 435-439) It is clear that narrative is a central part of spoken communication and social action. Burns (2001, p.126) reports, " In Slade's research 'story telling genres' accounted for 43.4 percent of casual conversation that occurred in workplace coffee breaks a figure that reflects the importance placed on sharing personal experiences in everyday social life." Set against this, however, we must bear in mind McCarthy's cautionary comment; "Expecting a learner to tell a decent story in their L2 is a tall order, and indeed it is; not everyone is an accomplished storyteller in their first

language.” (1991, p.138)

Spoken narrative is not a simple list of events, arranged in order, but has structure and coherence. The canonical narrative structure is that described by Labov (1972), consisting of an abstract in which the teller signals that a story is to be told and thus makes a bid for extended speakership rights, followed by an orientation in which the teller reveals the world of the narrative, its setting, characters and so on. This is followed by a complicating action, which is then followed by a resolution. The whole process is brought to an end by a coda, which links the narrative to the present time and place and signals the end of the telling in the here and now. Evaluation of the story is woven throughout the narrative to signal to the listeners the stance towards the events related in the narrative that the teller expects them to take.

However, in the videos of student conversations made by the author, spoken narratives were a very rare occurrence, especially in the early recordings and were often very brief accounts of recent events, with a final concluding evaluating sentence to signal the end of the narrative. The following narrative stems from a mention of an animated TV series set in Tokyo that prompts speaker T to relate his experience of a trip to Tokyo and the massive earthquake he experienced there.

Excerpt 1

01. Y: Yes I yes yes I know I know.
 02. T: I like: (inaudible) Tokyo
 03. Y: Ah::
 04. T: I went to (0.2) eh, spring vacation (.) I went to Tokyo
 05. Y: Yeah.
 06. T: I I take earthquake
 07. Y: You take earthquake (.)what happened eh eh?
 08. T: Every train stop. (Inaudible)
 09. Y: You you have very (.) very tired.
 10. T: Yeah
 11. Y: The earthquake opened er the earthquake often occurred
 12. T: Occurred occurred Ueno Dobustuen
 13. Y: Ueno Dobustuen
 14. T: Yes
 15. Y: What magnitude
 16. T: Magnitude is kyu
 17. Y: Ah:: nine
 18. T: Nine
 19. Y: Nine

20. T: Oh:: nine ((Recording ends))

This is telling is narrowly factual and clearly does not follow the Labovian narrative structure outlined above. It is typical of many telling sequences that did not develop into recognizable narratives despite the opportunity to do so. (In this case, the teller was referring to a newsworthy event that he had personal experience of that the listener did not have first-hand knowledge of, but was aware of and would therefore be a prime candidate for a narrative episode by the norms of English language interactions.)

Now, consider the following narrative episode.

Excerpt 2

01. E: So today I wanna talk about my (.) train experience
 02. T: °Yes °
 03. E: And when I sit do::wn the train seat (.) and
 04. E: listening music I was a nice feeling ((Hums))
 05. E: and (0.2) well (0.2) the station (.) leave the station
 06. E: when a: a girl sit down my nearby seat
 07. E: and a little bit fat girl huhhu
 08. E: and she was so:: eh:: drinker en (.) ah::
 09. E: I was worried abouteh::: drinker (.) drinker people
 10. E: >on the train<
 11. E: and she (2.2) ent well she throw up (0.9) >on the train<
 12. T: Oh really?=
 13. E: =Yeah and my: (0.8) ssan. my boots in dirty
 14. T: Really? Oh [it's shit]
 15. E: [She] Yeah
 16. T: Oh::: it's [dirty] bitch
 17. E: [I] yeah I was like what the fuck =
 18. T: =Ah yeah=
 19. E: Yeah [and.]
 20. T: [I think so]
 21. E: And °yes° and the girl
 22. T: Yeah
 23. E: Not eh clean the train she hhhn
 24. ((gestures wavy motion))
 25. E: er (1.09) out of the train
 26. T: so you was like what the fuck

27. E: >Yeah< [what the fuck]=
 28. T: [Ah Ok Ok]
 29. E: =what the hell
 30. T: Ah Ok [Ok]
 31. E: [I think] yeah
 32. T: I understand
 33. E: It was my dirty experience
 34. T: Oh really?
 35. E: Yeah
 36. T: That's too bad

This narrative, recorded near the end of the year, (these are different speakers to excerpt 1) is clearly a lot more developed than the proto-narrative in that earlier excerpt, and conforms more closely to the Labovian narrative structure. In addition the Labovian narrative there are a number of items that indicate a range of interactional skills. At line 07 the teller, E, is in the process of introducing the antagonist in her story. Up until this time no indication has been made by E as to the nature of the story or the negative assessment of the girl's actions. By introducing the girl as 'little bit fat girl' followed by a short laugh token, E is indicating a negative assessment of the girl, before any action unfolds that will lead the listener to negatively assess the girl. However, this critical assessment is hedged ('a little bit') and is followed by laughter. So, in this small part of the setup of the action of the narrative the teller has prepared the listener to assess the girl in negative terms, but also sought to downplay the negative assessment by hedging, thus establishing her (E's) social awareness of the possible inappropriacy of referring to a woman's body shape in a critical manner.

At line 17 the teller reaches the climax of the story, her reaction to being vomited on by the drunken passenger. This is done by means of the reporting verb 'like' and the use of taboo language. The use of reported speech/thought at this point in the narrative is canonical. "The reported thought is used as one of the devices for evaluating the story and often is used, like reported speech, at a crucial point of the story, its climax..." (Haakana 2007 p.166.) The use of 'like' is a very subtle piece of vocabulary selection, blurring as it does, the distinction between reported speech and reported thought, allowing the speaker to give voice to critical assessments that would probably not be uttered in the there-and-then of the story world, but uttering it aloud in the here-and-now of the telling.

"By portraying their criticisms as only thoughts the narrators can also give a certain kind of picture of the narrated situation: the antagonists behaved 'badly' (unprofessionally, stupidly, etc.) but the narrators did not start

criticizing the antagonist. Thereby they can also depict themselves in a certain light, for instance, as reasonable persons who did not want to get into an argument. (Haakana, 2007, p.167.)

The use of taboo language (by both participants) also serves an interactional purpose, in this case confirming both interactants' negative and critical assessment of the drunken girl's actions in convergent talk as described by Holt (2007, p.78) "... the participants collaborate to expand the joke whilst at the same time escalating an impropriety, thus creating a sequence of heightened intimacy." In addition, the fact that it is not clear whether the taboo language assessment was speech or thought leaves open the possibility that the taboo language was entirely internal and therefore not sanctionable in the way that spoken profanity is; our thoughts are entirely our own and we are free to think whatever we like.

In this excerpt, not only is the story told in a way which is recognizable to the listener as 'doing telling a story' by recourse to canonical spoken narrative structuring, the unfolding of the story has elements of intersubjectivity, treating the listener as a co-participant in the building of the story. The turns show an orientation towards balancing speaker intent (relating the events of the story) with recipient design such as signaling intimacy, convergence of assessments, attending to matters of face and social propriety and so on.

Topic management

One fundamental way in which much classroom talk differs from other kinds of talk is in the treatment of topic. Many classroom speaking activities are mono-topical, with the topic being selected by a non-participant (the teacher), who has the right to nominate, change and terminate topics. These rights are usually not held to apply to learners engaged in teacher-directed speaking activities. This is very different from talk-in-interaction as it takes place outside the classroom, where topics are proffered, taken up or rejected, changed, changed back, closed, developed or abandoned by any and all participants, working in tandem with the other participants to pursue their own topics whilst conceding that others all have the right to pursue their own topics in turn. Participants must negotiate a course between these two potentially conflicting trajectories. The management of topic, then, is a key venue for the deployment of interactional competencies, balancing speaker intent with recipient design.

In the early videos made by the author, a recurrent pattern was for one participant to assume the role of topic management, and to proffer topics by asking stand-alone questions. The other participants aligned unquestioningly to the proffered topics and the tacit roles were adhered to throughout the interaction.

The process is illustrated in the following transcript.

Excerpt 3

01. R: Did you:: get up (.) today >uh< when
 02. A: [What time]
 03. R: [What time] What time get got up today?

(Lines omitted)

08. R: Do you have boyfriend?
 09. C: Yes I have [Hahaha]
 10. R: [Hahaha]
 11. R: How how long?
 12. C: How long about fou::r years

(Lines omitted)

21. R: What what are you doi::ng what will you:: be doing in
 22. R: Golden week
 23. (2.0)
 24. A I might(0.3) go to Aquarium

(Lines omitted)

47. R: =What kind of job (.) what °do you° will you:: have part
 48. R: time job
 49. C: Uh::I want to(.) some(.) café (6.0) I (1.6)don't don't
 50. C: decide a (1.0) uh?

(Lines omitted)

60. R: Kimaru Ha ha ha .hh ah:: Have you ever:: been to: Suzuka
 61. R: circuito
 62. A: °I don't have°

(Lines omitted)

79. R: do you like eff one?

80. (0.8)

81. A: I not see (0.9) itu on tee vee

In these cases, speaker R continually proffers topics to the other speakers by asking direct questions, questions that are not connected to previous turns in any coherent way. The other speakers answer these questions in a compliant manner and do not seek to proffer topics of their own at any point or challenge the role of speaker R as topic manager in any way.

Now consider the following excerpt, recorded several months later, in which speaker Y comes to the end of a narrative detailing a train journey that was delayed because of an accident at a level crossing. (Speaker A is the same speaker as speaker A in excerpt 3.)

Excerpt 4

01. Y: So I'm tired (0.9) >You know wharimean<=
 02. A: =°I think so° (.) So:::
 03. Y: Wha'bout you?=
 04. A: =Do. What e. when did you ari::ve (.) your home
 05. ((The talk continues on the train incident))

In this case the interaction is much more elaborate than the simple question and answer sequences in excerpt 3. The sophisticated interactional practices that are in evidence here are outlined in Campbell-Larsen 2014:

In line 01, Y concludes his telling of the train incident with an upshot assessment ("So I'm tired") this is followed by a chunked figure of speech expression asking A to align with this upshot assessment. ("You know what I mean?"), spoken quickly and placed in a typical turn closing position. Both of these utterances seem to indicate that Y considers the story of the delayed train as now concluded. A responds to this in a sequence appropriate fashion, by agreeing, but her agreement is spoken in a quiet voice, followed by a slightly elongated 'so'. Before she can continue with this turn Y asks in line 03 'What about you?' In this, he further reinforces his stance that the train incident story telling is now closed, and he wants to move on to some talk about A's activities. What precise information he seeks to gather by this other-nomination is not realized as A re-orient back to the train incident story. Her turn in line 04 is latched to Y's question and the initial word is spoken more loudly than the rest of the turn. Although this turns out to be a

false start, and is quickly repaired, it is hearable as the start of a question, a dispreferred second pair part to a first pair part if the first pair part is a question. By these means, A does not align with Y's attempted topic closure and proffer of new topic, but proposes instead that Y elaborates on the train incident. Over a short few turns, the participants engage in a delicate process of: Proposed closure by Y, alignment with the summary assessment of the story, but not the closure itself by A, a proposed new topic by Y which is counter proposed by A, whose counter is then taken up by Y. There are a wide variety of sophisticated interactional practices in evidence in this fragment. (pp. 185-186)

The earlier videos were characterized by relatively straightforward management of topic. Often a single speaker tacitly assumed the role of topic profferer and did so by asking stand alone, unmarked questions that are unrelated to previous talk. In the later videos the students displayed a much wider range of topic management skills that balanced speaker intent with recipient design. (For a fuller discussion of topic management skills in learner English see Campbell-Larsen, 2014.)

Teaching Interactional Competence

In a much-quoted paper, Pomerantz (1984) dealt with a commonplace interactional practice, agreeing or disagreeing with assessments. The paper outlined several ways that English speakers agree or disagree with assessment by other speakers. The data analyzed by Pomerantz revealed that there is a preference for agreement over disagreement in responding to assessments and she outlined several different ways in which interactants go about the business of 'doing' agreeing. One common method (among others) was to agree by upgrading the original assessment with a limit adjective. Pomerantz gives the following examples:

Excerpt 5

- 01 J: T's- tsuh beautiful day out isn't it?
02 L: Yeh it's jus gorgeous ...

Excerpt 6

- 01 B: Isn't he cute
02 A: O::h he::s a::DOrable ((Referring to a neighborhood dog))

(1984, pp. 59-60)

In these fragments the initial assessing adjective is agreed with by the second speaker by means of an assessment upgrade: ‘Beautiful’ is upgraded to ‘gorgeous’ and ‘cute’ to ‘adorable’. This apparently simple agreeing response in fact contains a finely nuanced interactional practice. To unpack the details of what is going on here, and its relevance as a target in the L2 classroom, we need to consider the ways that agreement may be done in other languages.

In Japanese assessments are often agreed with by means of repetition. It is common to hear greetings based on assessments of the weather that proceed in the pattern of the following. (The example is concocted, but represents common practice.)

Excerpt 7

- A: Kyo atsui desune
 (It’s hot today, isn’t it?)
 B: Atsui
 (Hot)

Although the precise grammar and vocabulary may have variations, the repetition of the assessing adjective is canonical. Winter days are assessed as ‘samui’ (cold) and agreed with as ‘samui’. Diners will give an assessment of the food at hand with the word ‘oishii’ (delicious) and others will likewise agree that it is ‘oishii’. Spectators at fireworks festivals will assess and agree with repetitions of the pyrotechnics with serial utterances of ‘kirei’ (beautiful).

Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki and Tao (1996) report that repetition of lexis as a response is used twice as often in Japanese than in English and Greer, Bussinguer, Butterfield and Mischinger (2009) to speculate that it is “...probable that Japanese learners of English (...) will tend to over-rely on this interactional practice (p.8).”

This all stands in contrast to English language assessments and agreements which are done in various ways, but not usually by repetition of the assessing adjective. (Although repetition can be used strategically in sequences such as bringing a topic to a close and other places.) McCarthy (1998) states that “The ability to vary one’s lexis while still saying more or less the same thing pushes the discourse forward and gives out important interactional signals (p.112).” He goes on to give the following example:

- S1: Hi! Freezing cold today!
 S2: (with exact same intonation) Hi! Freezing cold today!

This concocted assessment and response would, in McCarthy's view, be considered "by most people as odd." (ibid). It seems to be the case that in English the practice of agreeing by using an alternative adjective (possibly but not universally a limit adjective) serves the purpose of showing alignment with the original assessment, but phrasing the agreement in terms that belong to the agreeing person, rather than the original assessor. In effect the agreeing speaker is showing that he/she has heard and understood the thrust of the assessment, and also has attended to the particular way in which that assessment was expressed, namely the particular vocabulary selection made by the initial assessor. It would be impossible to upgrade the original assessment if it was not heard or understood so the agreement cannot be merely an empty echo.

In the case of agreement by upgrade, then, the agreement turn is shaped in a very particular way by the preceding turn and, in showing agreement with the assessment in individualized terms, may be said to show that the agreeing interlocutor has arrived at, or can at least claim to have arrived at, his or her own assessment independently of the other speaker, indicating a convergence of individual views rather than merely 'polite' agreement with whatever the other has said. The agreement is phrased in a way that expresses speaker intent (agreement) and shows recipient design (non-repetition to indicate attentiveness to both the nature and from of the assessment).

For the L2 classroom the relevance of this practice is in the vocabulary of limit adjectives. In the author's experience, most learners have an imbalance between non-limit and limit adjectives that they can use and understand. In a test carried out on learners of varying levels in which learners are given a list of 40 adjectives and asked to fill in the matching limit adjective the learners usually know and can use all of the non-limit adjectives, but usually have a very poor ability to upgrade them with the matching limit adjective. Pairs such as 'funny/hilarious, crowded/packed, wet/soaked, angry/ furious are often unknown.

When Japanese learners are taught the vocabulary in question (including the collocation possibilities and rules with 'very' and 'absolutely') and have the interactional practice explained and contrasted with their L1, they are on the road to moving past the oft heard 'I think so too' type agreements and developing one aspect of their interactional competence.

Request structure

Polite requests in English are a common target in the L2 classroom and there is an extensive literature on requests. (See for example, Tanaka, 1988; Wierzbicka, 1985.) In the terms in which IC has been conceived of in this paper, namely the balancing of speaker intent and recipient design, polite requests are an obvious

area for development of IC. A request that only attends to the speaker's intent will likely take the form of an imperative. 'Close the window', 'Photocopy these documents', and so on would not be considered polite in most contexts in English language culture 'which places special emphasis on the rights and on the autonomy of every individual, which abhors interference in other people's affairs...The heavy restrictions on the use of the imperative in English and the wide range of use of interrogative forms in performing acts other than questions, constitute striking linguistic reflexes of this socio-cultural attitude.' (Wierzbicka, 1985, p.150.) Other languages may make use of imperative forms without the same perceptions of lack of politeness that exist in English imperatives.

The avoidance of impressions of impoliteness in making requests is, then, a cognitively salient goal of many learners of English. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that '...there is some evidence that learners perceive more politeness distinctions than do native speakers, suggesting that they may be oversensitive to distinctions of grammatical form (mood, modals, and tense) in different request forms.' (p. 35) This is reinforced in many textbooks where the way of 'doing being polite' in requests is systematized in terms of lexical choice, running through a 'casual' to 'polite' gradient sequence such as:

- Can you...
- Could you...
- Would you...
- Would you mind?

There are of course some grounds for describing a politeness gradient in these terms, but politeness in English requests is more than just a matter of lexical choice. Turn structure can also be a key resource in signaling politeness, showing recipient design, by adding extra elements in the turn beyond some expression of the action that is to be brought about by the request. For example, a request might be mitigated by removing any time pressure for the completion of the request, as in: "If you are free this afternoon, could you sort out those files?" The politeness is only partially realized by the choice of 'could you' over a bare imperative. The recipient of the request is also granted a certain amount of autonomy over when the action is to be carried out, thus somewhat mitigating the loss of autonomy that may accrue as a result of being directed to 'sort out the files' by a superior in a work environment. Removal of time pressure by means of such expressions as 'when you have a minute', 'if you are not busy' and the like is one means by which request turns can be structured. In classroom activities, students can be presented with visual cues as to requests (See for example game 30, 'Do me a favour' in

Hadfield, 1984).

Using the example of removal of time pressure, they have to construct request turns which contain an element of recipient design that go beyond some direct expression of the desired action.

Some situations, such as answering a ringing phone, do not lend themselves to removal of time pressure. It would be ludicrous to say 'If you've got time this afternoon, could you answer that phone?' In this case, students came up with the strategy of explaining why the requesting person could not perform the action themselves. 'Can you get that phone? I'm on the other line/ My hands are oily/ I'm just sending this mail.' Other examples of extended request turn structure that the students produced were: Offers of simultaneous carrying out of related tasks, (Can you copy the handouts and I'll set the projector up?), embedding requests into enquiries into the other's current activity, (If you're making a cup of tea, could you make me one too?) and others.

It is difficult to assess how much was taken up by the students as pre-planning the requests is a very different activity to actually 'doing making a request' authentically in real-time, unfolding interaction. In addition, most of the naturally occurring requests in a classroom are between (more or less) intimate (more or less) peers, obviating the need to engage in elaborate structuring of requests. Students making authentic requests of other students in the classroom often resort to L1, or ask very directly, with no apparent threats to face. This being said, the students responded positively to the activity, perhaps reflecting an ongoing concern with issues of politeness and face, and indicating awareness that language in use requires speakers to consider recipient design in constructing turns when making requests and, by logical extension, elsewhere.

Conclusion

The foregoing has outlined some of the historical background to the emergence of IC as a concept and given some flavor of IC as described by scholars. Examples from the literature and the author's own data were referred to in order to illustrate in more concrete terms some kinds of practices that constitute IC and what kinds of processes take place in the development of IC in L2 learners. Finally, the author described some instances of lesson targets that were specifically focused on developing aspects of IC. It is hoped that this continuum, from theoretical to practical, from abstract to concrete, from general to specific has tied together some of the many and varied strands that constitute IC in a coherent manner, fleshing out the working definition given by the author and showing how theoretical concerns can be dealt with in actual situations of usage and classroom practice.

It has not been possible to deal with all issues pertaining to IC development in this paper. For example, it was suggested that the model of assessment from other academic disciplines, namely, individualized percentile scores based on student reactions to instructor elicitation, is not suitable for assessing language learning that takes into account IC development. How the assessment of language learning that includes an awareness of IC is to be conducted is a possible area for future research.

Similarly, Pekarek Doehler and Ponchon-Berger (2011) raise the issue of learners using one strategy for disagreeing in an earlier interaction and several strategies in a later interaction, asking, ‘...how can we exclude the possibility that the latter is simply due to different circumstances of interaction...rather than reflecting interactional development?’ (p.235.)

In other words, if the interactants are speaking naturally, then the absence of a certain practice cannot be taken as proof that the speaker is unable to engage in the practice, but possibly that the speaker saw no need to engage, and consciously decided not to engage in the practice in the particular context at hand. This is a much more problematical issue than learner failure to produce specific language elicited by a teacher or examiner in canonical assessment situations. Such concerns clearly have a bearing on any teaching and learning process implemented with IC development in mind. The precise design of longitudinal studies and the necessary density and volume of assessable talk by which robust claims can be made about IC development are, again, areas for future research.

Bearing these questions in mind, it is suggested here that an ongoing process of awareness raising in learners (and by implication their teachers and the educational institutions where learning takes place) of the centrality of interaction, and the ways in which language is shaped to meet local, context-bound interactional needs can be of benefit in directing learners towards a model of language that is not based on an abstract, idealized, easily testable model but sees co-construction and intersubjectivity as the main goals to be pursued, counter-intuitive though it may seem to learners habituated to institutional rather than social goals of education.

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Appendix: transcription notations

Simultaneous utterances.

I went [with my] friend	Left square brackets mark the start of overlapping talk
[yeah]	Right square brackets mark the end of overlapping talk

Contiguous utterances

=	Equals signs show:
	a) that talk is latched; that is there is no pause between the end of one turn and the start of the next turn
	b) that a turn continues at the next equals sign

on a subsequent line

Pauses

- (0.6) Numerals in parentheses show pauses in tenths of a second
- (.) A period in parentheses indicates a micropause
- (()) Double parentheses indicate transcribers comment

Characteristics of speech delivery

- Weekend Underlining indicates marked stress
- Job? A question mark indicates rising intonation
- Finish. A period indicates falling intonation
- > you know< Inward facing indents indicate talk which is faster than the surrounding talk
- Ni:::ce One or more colons indicates a lengthening of the preceding sound. More colons prolong the stretch.
- °nice° Degree signs indicate speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk
- NEVER Capitals indicate speech that is louder than the Surrounding talk