Change-of-State Tokens in L2 Interactions

Christopher SULLIVAN

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper describes an analysis of the interactions between three different pairs of second-language (L2) speakers of English. The analysis was both informed by and performed using the Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology developed by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff. CA was chosen as the method of investigation as it allows the conscientious researcher to "uncover the tacit reasoning procedures and sociolinguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interaction" (Hutchby & Woofit 2009: 12). For a more comprehensive introduction to CA, the interested reader is referred to Schegloff (2008), or Hutchby and Woofit (2009).

Gardner and Wagner note that "CA projects may seem to start on loose ground", as data are often collected and transcribed before any specific research hypotheses or questions are formed (2005: 5). Indeed, the investigation that led to this paper was also planned and performed with no prior hypotheses in mind. Although the author was originally interested in examining the use of minimal response tokens such as "yeah" and "mm hmm" among low-level L2 speakers, he devised no preceding theories regarding the patterns of response token use he expected to find. Such a "directionless" analysis of data may seem by some to be a serious departure from the scientific research method. This type of analysis is defended by CA practitioners (see Schegloff 1993) who argue that any patterns that emerge from an atheoretical examination of data are worthy objects of study in their own right. As Gardner and Wagner observe, "CA work is based on the assumption that

[whatever] phenomenon studied will be found widely or even generally within the community of speakers, as practices of talk must be shared if conversationalists are to obtain intersubjectivity" (2005: 5).

Consequently, as the analysis progressed, and an unexpected pattern of behavior began to emerge, the author decided to shift his focus of inquiry. Although numerous examples of the different types of response tokens were identified, an even larger number of change-of-state (COS) tokens were discovered in the data. Furthermore, these COS tokens were frequently accompanied by a physical movement on the part of the utterer. Accordingly, the author decided to change the focus of his examination to these COS tokens and their accompanying movements.

2.　LITERATURE REVIEW

Betz and Golato describe how in the CA methodology, tokens such as *oh* are typically associated with a speaker's change of state (2008: 59). They explain that the sequential position of the token, as well as its phonetic realization, determine what kind of status change it signals. "When placed as a response to an unelicited informing," they write, "*oh* marks the speaker's change from an uninformed to a now informed coparticipant" (*ibid*.). Betz and Golato explain that (for L1 speakers) this new "informed" state arises as a result of recalling prior information, as "participants engage each other in projects of remembering, and through such joint construction, they establish what is relevant to remember, and how it should be remembered" (*ibid*.). Many COS tokens in turn-initial positions were discovered in the data for this study, however, these COS tokens were uttered in the context of an L2 interaction. A first research question for this paper was therefore raised: what do these COS tokens signify?

Accompanying the majority of the COS tokens were two specific sets of movements. While uttering a COS token, the speakers would often: tilt their head and/or torso backwards or to the side; raise their eyebrows and widen their eyes; or perform both sets of movements in

tandem. Stivers (2008) argues that head movements such as nodding provide social affiliation. She claims that vocalized response tokens only demonstrate that the utterer has aligned to the structure of the interaction, and that social alignment is achieved through the use of nodding. However, Stiver's data was taken from L1 interactions, and so again, a second research question for this paper emerged. What is the significance of the physical movements in the L2 interactions analyzed in this study?

In the introduction to their anthology "Second Language Conversations", Gardner and Wagner summarize the main findings of the articles within. The most important finding, they assert, is that second language conversations are normal conversations (2005: 15). They support this claim by asserting that while "second language speakers may not be highly proficient in the language, they are not 'interactional dopes'...they are able to engage in quite exquisite activities in the interaction.. and they do this from the very beginning of their language careers" (*ibid*.). The COS tokens and accompanying movements identified in the data for this study should therefore not be considered inadvertent, coincidental, or random. They are deliberate behaviors on the part of the interactants, produced in order to co-construct a "practical social accomplishment" (Hutchby & Woofit 2009: 12) and are therefore worth further examination.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study follows the traditional CA approach of recording, transcribing, and then analyzing naturally occurring interactions (conversations) between participants. Where CA departs from similar analytical methods is the focus on "naturally occurring" interactions, which Hutchby and Woofit define as being "situated as far as possible in the ordinary unfolding of people's lives, as opposed to being prearranged, set up in laboratories, or otherwise experimentally designed" (2009: 12).

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were twelve female first-year university students in a remedial speaking class at a Japanese university. The class was taught by the author of this paper.

At the beginning of the year, all first-year students at the university were administered the Michigan Placement Test in order to stream them into different strata of classes. Students scoring below a cut-off on the test were offered a place in the remedial speaking class. The remedial class was offered as an elective class, and enrollment was not mandatory (however, students scoring above the cut-off were not allowed to enroll). The participants in this study would therefore be considered fairly "low-level" speakers of English.

3.2 PROCEDURE

As part of the speaking class syllabus, students had to submit a five-minute taped conversation each week as a homework assignment. At the beginning of the year, the twelve students were sorted into six permanent pairs, and each week these pairs would record a conversation onto a ten-minute long (five minutes in length per side) audio cassette tape, and submit their tape for grading. The students were instructed that their conversations were to be unscripted, however any choice of topics was allowed. The students soon became used to the exercise, and afterwards were easily able to produce "naturally occurring" interactions described by Hutchby and Woofit in Section 2 above. The students in this remedial speaking class were therefore asked to participate in this study precisely because they were accustomed to engaging in authentic interactions while being recorded.

The study commenced approximately halfway through the semester. Classes were ended early each week, and one pair was asked to stay behind so that a ten-minute interaction could be videotaped. The same unscripted format was retained. Due to time constraints, only three of the interactions were transcribed. After an initial examination of the transcriptions, the author decided to focus his investigation on

the COS tokens and accompanying movements described in Section 2.

4. RESULTS

Table 4.1 below summarizes the different numbers of COS tokens and forms identified in the first transcribed interaction. Items in the "previous utterance" column refer to different speech acts: see Schegloff (2008) for a more detailed description of these acts.

Table 4.1   Change-of-State Token Numbers and Forms for Interaction 1

PREVIOUS UTTERANCE	# OF COS TOKENS	COS TOKEN FORMS
Telling	5	ah / ah↑::: / ahh / ah::: / ah?
Assessment	1	ah:::
Total	6	

Six different COS tokens were noted in total. Of the six, five were produced in response to a *telling*, while one was produced in response to an *assessment*. All of the tokens were produced in a turn-initial position, and were followed by further talk on the part of the utterer. Furthermore, all of the tokens took a variation of the form of "ah". In Interaction 1, there were two examples of a COS token accompanied by a backwards, and then forwards tilting of the head, as illustrated by Extract 1 below:

Extract 1:
72 Shi: [hhh] (0.5) ahh (2.8) what-today is (1.5) what (.) period finish?
          (3.1 second lapse)
73 Shi: class.
          (2.2 second lapse)
74 Shi: (makes counting gesture with fingers) four-fourth, period, finish?=
75 Tsu: = yes (1.3) un (2.1) les-un, school (2.3) late (0.5) un, go to, basketball club. TELLING

76 → Shi: <u>ah?</u> today? ((slight tilting back of head))

    In Line 72, Shiori begins a new topic by asking Tsumugi what her last class of the day is. Tsumugi does not respond, and in Line 73, after a 3.1 second lapse, Shiori clarifies her question by adding the word "class". Again, Tsumugi remains silent, after which Shiori provides additional clarification in Line 74. Tsumugi finally responds to this attempt in Line 75, however her response is marked by pauses, and does not specifically answer the question. Instead of stating which class is her last, Tsumugi tells Shiori that she has to go to her basketball club at a "late" time (presumably after all classes have finished for the day). Shiori responds in Line 76 with the COS token "ah?" while tilting her head back, and then continues by uttering "today?" demonstrating that she now understands that Tsumugi has a basketball club meeting that day. The tilting of the head in Line 76 is illustrated in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below.

    The tilting is evidenced in the two photos by the positioning of Shiori's face in reference to the white line. Figure 4.1 shows the neutral posture Shiori maintains while uttering Lines 72–74. In Figure 4.2, she tilts her head back slightly and utters the "ah?" COS token from Line 76. Afterwards she returns to a neutral posture. Although this tilting is not
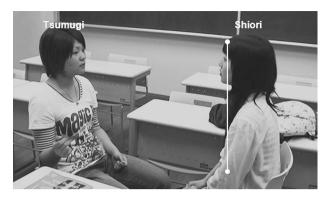

Figure 4.1

Figure   4.2

extreme, it is still pronounced enough upon examination of the videotape. Aside from the tilting accompanying the two COS tokens, no similar tilting movements are evidenced in the rest of the tape.

Interestingly, although all of the COS tokens in the transcript were variations of the utterance "ah", not all of the "ah" utterances were COS tokens. Other examples of "ah" as an *acknowledger*, or *weak acknowledger* (see Gardner 1998) were found, such as the "ah" in Line 15 below:

Extract 2:

13   Shi: (0.2) ah, today is class, Spanish class?＝
14   Tsu: ＝yes::
15 → Shi: <u>ah::</u>
16   Tsu: (0.3) how are you. ha [haha] ((gestures towards Shiori))

The COS token numbers and forms for the second transcribed interaction are presented in Table 4.2 below.

Fifteen COS tokens were identified in Interaction 2. Of these, the majority were again produced in response to a prior *telling*, with two in response to *assessments*, two in response to a *clarification*, one to an *assertion*, and one to an unclassifiable prior act. Again, all the tokens

Table 4.2 Change-of-State Token Numbers and Forms for Interaction 2

PREVIOUS UTTERANCE	# OF COS TOKENS	COS TOKEN FORMS
Telling	9	oh / uh / oh / oOOHhh / un↑ / EH? /oh:? / uhn / un
Assessment	2	oh↑hh / oh::
Clarification	2	AHH / oh
Assertion	1	oh
Other	1	ah?
Total	15	

were turn-initial, with the majority followed by further speech. Much variation was noted, with different versions of *ah*, *uh*, *eh*, and the canonical English *oh* being produced.

Interaction 2 was notable because all fifteen of the COS tokens were also accompanied by either a head tilt, or a widening of the eyes. A typical example is illustrated in Extract 3:

Extract 3:

10　Erika:　oh ((tilts back, then straightens head)) (0.2) how did (.) umm, how do you (.) do (.) how did you do?

11　Chie:　uh?

12　Erika:　with friends? umm? talking?

13　Chie:　 call CLARIFICATION ((mimes talking on a telephone))

14 → Erika:　call, **AHH** ((tilts head back, then nods back and forth)) (0.2) how long time.

15　Chie:　long. ah::: three hours＝ TELLING ((holds up three fingers))

16 → Erika:　 ＝**uh** ((tilts back head slightly, opens eyes wide)) (.) wow＝

Extract 3 begins with Line 10, in which Erika attempts to ask Chie how long she spoke to her friends the night before. Chie misunderstands and performs a *next-turn repair initiator* (see Schegloff

2008) in Line 11, to which Erika offers clarification in Line 12. However, in her clarification, Erika appears to misunderstand that Chie spoke with Chie's friends in person, and so Chie repairs the misconception by offering further clarification in Line 13. In Line 14 Erika responds with the COS token "AHH", performs a pronounced head tilt with a nod, then repairs her own unsuccessful attempt from Line 10 to ask how long Chie and her friends spoke. Chie explains in Line 15 that she and her friends spoke for three hours, to which Erika responds in Line 16 with another COS token, a head tilt, and a widening of her eyes. The set of movements
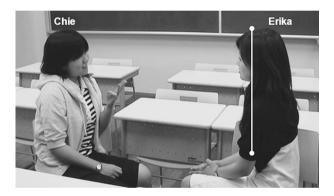

Figure 4.3

Figure 4.4

from Lines 15–16 can be seen in Figures 4.3 and 4.4 below.

In Figure 4.3 Chie holds up three fingers while explaining that she spoke for three hours (Line 15). Erika has returned to a neutral posture from the tilting performed in Line 14. In Figure 4.4 Erika utters the COS token "uh" from Line 16, tilts her head back again, and widens her eyes (marked by the arrowed-line).

Another interesting pattern of behavior appears in Extract 4:

Extract 4:

71   Chie: =ok ok (0.2) how are you?
72   Erika: | I'm sleepy and bad. | TELLING
73 → Chie: <u>oh: ?</u> why.
               ((tilts torso backwards then straightens))
74   Erika: | I made report? | TELLING
75 → Chie: <u>uhn.</u>
               ((tilts torso backwards then straightens))
76   Erika: | yesterday, last night. | TELLING
77 → Chie: <u>hmmm::?</u>=
               ((tilts torso backwards then straightens))
78   Erika: | =and: (.) next class | TELLING
79 → Chie: <u>un.</u>
               ((tilts torso backwards then straightens))

In Extract 4, Lines 73, 75, and 79 all contain a COS token (underlined in a bold, unbroken line) and a backwards torso movement produced by Chie in response to a *telling* from Erika. Line 77 however, contains the same backwards torso movement, but produced in tandem with an *acknowledging* response token (underlined in a bold, broken line) and not a COS token. No other instances of either backwards head or torso movement, or eye-widening were found in the rest of the transcript.

Table 4.3 presents the COS token numbers and forms for the third and final interaction:

Table 4.3   Change-of-State Token Numbers and Forms for Interaction 3

PREVIOUS UTTERANCE	# OF COS TOKENS	COS TOKEN FORMS
Telling	3	ah×3
Other	1	ah::
Total	4	

Only four COS tokens were noted in Interaction 3. Similarly to the other two interactions, the majority of COS tokens were produced in response to a *telling*. All four were variants of "ah", and all four were accompanied by a head tilt. Interestingly enough, all four were also produced by the same person: Yuko (participants in the other two interactions shared COS production roughly equally).

Two of the four COS tokens were turn-medial. The first was produced after a request for clarification:

Extract 5:
29   Yu: (1.2) nut-nuts, ((possible mispronunciation of "not"))
             ⌐fo-fork⌐ TELLING ((repeats scooping gesture))
30 → Yuko: fork? (.) a̲h̲ [not (nuts?)] yeah yeah yeah yeah °ok ok I (???)
             I know°.

Yu is attempting to describe how she wants to eat pie with a spoon and not a fork. The utterance "nut-nuts" in Line 29 is a possible mispronunciation of the word "not", as in "not use a fork". Yuko asks for clarification in Line 30 by repeating the word "fork" and then after a pause, produces the COS token "ah" along with the possible understanding that Yu means "not" and not "nut", and finishes with a series of acknowledgment tokens.

The second turn-medial COS token was produced after a *continuing* response token:

Extract 6:

94   Yu: but (.) black or (1.2) wh-white wh-＝
                            ((gestures with hands))

95   Yuko: ＝black or [white?]

96   Yu: [black] or white or [(???)]

97   Yuko: [white?] ah clotheses, two [clotheses.]
                                      ((holds up two fingers))

98   Yu: [two-] many color＝

99   Yuko: yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah＝

100 Yu: ＝umm, bu- | boring?＝ | TELLING

101 → Yuko: ＝<u>yeah.</u> (.) <u>ah</u> ((tilts head and torso to the side)) both eh＝
             ((gestures with hands))

In Extract 6, Yu is explaining to Yuko that she wants to go shopping, but that she does not want to buy black and white clothes, because the two colors seem boring together. Yu finishes this explanation in Line 100 with the utterance "boring". Yuko responds by producing the *continuing* response token "yeah" (underlined with the bold, broken line) which latches on to Yu's utterance of "boring". The latch shows that Yuko's response token is premature: she pauses and then changes it to the COS token "ah" (underlined with the bold, solid line) as well as a head tilt. Yuko's initial use of a *continuer* shows that she expected Yu to extend the *telling*: her use of a COS token after the pause shows that she has reprocessed Yu's previous utterance of "boring", and now understands Yu's opinion of the two colors together.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the data described above revealed seven major findings. Firstly, the majority of the COS tokens were produced in the turn-initial position, and were followed by further talk on the part of the utterer. This result is in accord with the prototypical COS token definitions as outlined by Betz and Golato (2008) and Heritage (2002, in Betz and Golato 2008).

Secondly, the majority of the COS tokens were produced in response to a *telling*. This finding is explained by Betz and Golato's observation that a COS token in response to an "informing" marks the speaker's change from an uninformed to a now informed coparticipant (2008: 59).

The third major finding was that the COS tokens took a variation of the form of "ah", "oh", "uh", or "eh". This finding is interesting because of the similarity of these tokens to the canonical English "oh". As these COS tokens were produced by low-level English speakers, it is difficult to tell if they were produced purposefully in imitation of the English canonical "oh", or if they are manifestations of Japanese L1 tokens inserted into the L2 English conversation. If the latter is true, there would appear to be much similarity between the COS token forms in the two languages.

Fourthly, not all of the "ah" and "oh" tokens identified in the transcripts were COS tokens. This finding is also in line with Schegloff's (1982) observation that response tokens are by nature, multifunctional. Betz and Golato explain that "as their semantic meaning is almost entirely dependent on the context in which they are used, response tokens and particles only become accessible and describable as situated interactional phenomena" (2008: 93).

The fifth finding was that five out of the six interactants studied produced COS tokens, and the production of these tokens was frequent and spread throughout the interactions.

These five findings appear to offer a solution to the first of the two research questions outlined in Section 2: what these L2 COS tokens possibly signify. This author believes that these COS tokens are produced not only as an indicator of remembering or realizing the significance of new semantic information (the function Betz and Golato ascribe for L1 interactions), *but also as an indicator of comprehension of L2 lexicogrammatical forms*. By uttering a COS token in response to an L2 *telling*, the hearer appears to be saying "I have now successfully processed the L2 forms you have produced, and was able to realize the

significance of their meanings". This usage would also explain why COS tokens were occasionally produced in response to other speech acts such as *assessments* and *clarifications*.

Extract 7 below illustrates a possible example of this phenomenon:

Extract 7:

45   Shi: (1.4) I, | I want to (0.5) go to (0.2) Korea. | TELLING
46 → Tsu: (1.0) *ah↑::* ((slight tilting back of head)) (0.5) I like (0.5)
              Kankoku nori.
              (Korean dried seaweed)

In Line 45, Shiori states that she wants to go to Korea. The English name for "Korea" is linguistically dissimilar from the Japanese name for Korea, "Kankoku". Without having memorized or acquired the word "Korea" as the English name for the country, it would be impossible to process. In Line 46, Tsumugi responds to Shiori's *telling* with a one-second pause, the COS token "ah↑::", and then her own opinion of Korean dried seaweed ("Kankoku nori"). This author would argue that the pause and COS token in Line 46 are indicative of Tsumugi's processing of the term "Korea" (and possibly the additional weight of the clause "I want to go to ..."). Furthermore, Tsumugi's inability to produce the term "Korean seaweed" in the same line is indicative of her lack of full acquisition of the term "Korea", and that this lack of full acquisition is what caused the need for her one-second "processing" pause at the beginning of the line.

A similar example may be evidenced from the previously shown Extract 6:

Extract 6:

100   Yu: =umm, bu- | boring?= | TELLING
101→Yuko: =yeah. (.) ah ((tilts head and torso to the side)) both eh=
              ((gestures with hands))

In Line 101, Yuko first responds to Yu's *telling* with a *continuer*, then pauses, and produces the COS token "ah". During the pause, she reprocesses the word "boring" from Line 100 to arrive at the actual meaning, and then indicates this new state of correct understanding with the COS token.

Finding six was that the majority of the COS tokens produced in the three interactions were accompanied by either head/torso tilting, or eyebrow raising, or both. The seventh and final finding was that aside from the movements accompanying the COS tokens, only one other instance of backwards movement was found in the rest of the transcriptions, and this movement was accompanied by a response token and prefaced and followed by COS tokens (ref. Extract 4 in Section 4).

These two final two findings appear to offer a solution to the second research question: "What is the significance of the physical movements in the L2 interactions analyzed in this study?". This author would argue that these movements provide the same social affiliation that Stivers (2008) identified for L1 head nodding. The fact that these backwards tilts and eye-opening movements only appear in the context of COS tokens allows the interactants to recognize that these motions also signal a change of state. McCarthy argues that "repeated response tokens (in L1 interactions) in close sequence may also be plausibly interpreted as signaling an enthusiastic or encouraging response" (2003: 40). Indicating a change of state through a combination of COS tokens and exaggerated movements undoubtedly provides another way to express a similarly "enthusiastic or encouraging response". McCarthy (2003: 59) continues by explaining that:

In short, the concept of good listenership seems to require more than acknowledgment and transactional efficiency in keeping the channel open; listeners may be inferred as working at the creation and maintenance of sociability and affective well-being in their responses . . . before attending to their own transactional concerns

and grabbing and expanding the turn.

The concept that L2 interactants are just as concerned with social affiliation as their L1 counterparts again aligns with Gardner and Wagner's main thesis that second language conversations are "normal conversations" created by participants "engaged in everyday meaning creation and activities which mean something to them" (2005: 16).

6.　CONCLUSION

Through an examination of three L2 English interactions, this paper attempted to show how low-level L2 speakers are capable of employing the same interactional strategies as their L1 English speaker equivalents. In particular, this paper attempted to demonstrate that like L1 speakers, L2 interactants use COS tokens to display the transition from an "unknowing" to a "knowing" state. Furthermore, when these COS tokens are used in combination with a set of specific body movements, the two provide not only a transactional function, but a social one as well. However, unlike L1 speakers who use COS tokens primarily to signify the remembrance or realization of semantic information, L2 speakers also use these tokens in order to signify the comprehension of lexicogrammatical forms and structures.

One further avenue of research would be to compare L1 conversations with different strata of low, intermediate, and high L2 conversations, to examine the frequencies of COS token use. If L2 users employ COS tokens to signal the understanding of both semantic and lexicogrammatical information, one could hypothesize that they would appear in a higher frequency in lower-level interactions, where opportunities for lexicogrammatical misunderstandings are higher.

The use of COS tokens may also be related to perceptions of learner identity, fluency, and ability. Encouraging learners to use canonical L2 COS tokens in the classroom may provide a dual benefit: increasing learner motivation by giving them the ability to sound more "fluent"; as well as allowing them to successfully express their own instances of

comprehension in L1-L2 interactions. Further research of the pedagogical aspects of COS token usage is therefore recommended.

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APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

(1.0)	a number in brackets indicates the length of a pause in seconds
(.)	a period in brackets indicates a pause of under 1 second in length
=	an equal sign indicates that the utterance on the following line latches on to the present one with no break
(( ))	double brackets indicate nonlinguistic occurrences
(???)	three question marks in brackets indicates an indecipherable word

hh	a series of "h's" indicates an outbreath
°hh	a series of "h's" preceded by a degree sign (°) indicates an inbreath
huh	a series of "huh's" indicate laughter
ha	a series of "ha's" indicate laughter
italics	speech in italics indicates untranslated Japanese
( )	speech in brackets indicates Japanese translated into English
↑	an upwards arrow indicates rising intonation
<u>underline</u>	underlined speech indicates stress
><	speech in closed angled brackets indicates comparatively fast talk
CAPS	speech in capital letters indicates increased volume
° °	speech surrounded by degree marks indicates lowered volume
-	a hyphen indicates a cut-off syllable
:	a colon equals a stretched syllable
<u>underline</u>	a bold, solid underline indicates a change-of-state token
boxed CAPS	boxed text indicates a speech act, with capital letters indicating the kind of act
→	a right-facing arrow indicates a COS token accompanied by a body movement
<u>underline</u> CAPS	a bold, broken underline indicates a response token, with capital letters indicating the kind of token