

Applying Conversation Analysis to the Development of Interactional Competence in a Second Language: A Review¹⁾

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ABSTRACT

During the last 15 years, the concept of second language interactional competence (L2IC) has evolved considerably, based on empirical findings from conversation analysis (CA). Another closely related product of applied CA is the development of CA-based materials and activities for teaching, therapy and other interventions designed to improve interactions in various sites, including the improvement of L2IC among learners of second and foreign language. As part of an ongoing project applying CA to L2IC, this paper presents a brief overview of recent literature on applied CA, L2 talk-in-interaction and L2IC, and existing proposals and materials for applying CA to the teaching of L2IC. The paper concludes with some reflections and tentative suggestions.

KEY WORDS

second language (L2)

talk-in-interaction

interactional competence (IC)

conversation analysis (CA)

applied CA

teaching materials

1 Introduction

In learning and using a second or foreign language (L2)²⁾, both personal experiences and research can bring into sharp focus the distinction between, on the one hand, the linguistic resources (e.g., knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, pronunciation and phonology) that one has striven to acquire through classroom-based learning and/or private study, and on the other hand, the challenges in employing these linguistic resources effectively in real-time conversation. This strongly suggests that linguistic competence and interactional competence are, if not completely independent of each other, at least clearly distinguishable. I have been carrying out a long-term project on L2 interactional competence (L2IC), reviewing research literature and carrying out my own empirical conversation analysis (CA) research, with a view to developing CA-based materials and activities to help learners of English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) develop their L2IC. As an interim report on this work, this paper outlines recent developments in approaches to applying CA, focusing particularly on researching, teaching and learning L2IC, and offers some discussions, proposals and existing materials for teaching L2IC.

2 Conversation analysis

2.1 Pure or basic CA

Ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA or CA) evolved as a phenomenological, qualitative and discursive off-shoot of sociology in the 1960s, inspired by Erving Goffman's work on micro-sociology and Harold Garfinkel's work on ethnomethodology. It was established mainly by Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, and further developed and expanded through the decades since then. One key

*Humanities and Social Studies Education

premise of CA is that recordings of naturally occurring interactions, which can be stored, listened to (or watched) repeatedly and simultaneously analysed-and-transcribed in great detail, are the only reliable data for investigating the moment-to-moment contingencies of talk-in-interaction (Stivers & Sidnell, 2013). CA could be described as “analysis of analysis”, in the sense that CA researchers place the highest priority on participants’ own ongoing analyses of the mutual interactive conduct in progress. These members’ analyses (as one aspect of members’ methods) are considered observable only through the interactants’ orientations, as publicly displayed in the interaction itself, and not through interviews, questionnaires, tests and the like. CA also avoids the use of *a priori* theories, models and taxonomies of language and interactional behaviour; instead, it builds data-driven descriptions of how language use and other interactional practices work for the dialogic accomplishment of social actions. This takes place in the specific context of sequential structure, through “unmotivated looking” and inductive case-by-case analysis. CA research has yielded a vast body of findings from a wide range of settings (mundane talk in homes, cars, trains and on the telephone; institutional talk at service-counters and in clinics, offices, meeting-rooms, call-centres, radio & TV studios, and of course, classrooms) in relation to turn-construction, turn-taking, basic sequence structures, larger sequence structures, dealing with interactional trouble through repair, establishing and shifting discursive identities and participation frameworks, displaying epistemic stance, and invoking social categories (Stivers & Sidnell, 2013). CA research which is not applied for the benefit of any interdisciplinary, institutional (e.g., educational) or social cause is sometimes referred to as “pure CA” or “basic CA” (Lester & O’Reilly, 2019).

2.2 Applied CA

Searching and critical discussions have been concerned with whether, and if so how, CA can, should, or should not, be applied for the academic or practical benefit of any inter-disciplinary, institutional (e.g., educational) or social cause. Drew (2005) warned about the challenges of attempting to suggest or prescribe a change in communicative practices at institutions based on CA findings. He specifically referred to medical organisations, but this could potentially apply to almost any kind, including schools and their teachers.

Richards (2005) critically deconstructed the underlying assumptions in the “theory → practice” and “discovery → prescription” paradigms of applying social science research, and instead proposed a “description → informed action” paradigm, in which description can embrace discovery, but there is no implied dichotomy between primary research and applied research. Both have the potential to generate unexpected insights (if the rigorous techniques of CA are upheld), leading in turn to raising awareness, directing attention, developing sensitivity and challenging assumptions, contributing to the informed and collaborative transformation of professional practice. In fact, this would fit well with CA’s own principles and characteristics, namely that, “[1] CA is empirically grounded and therefore well placed to generate the sort of discoveries that can inform practice; / [2] its focus on practical accomplishment through interaction establishes a natural link with professional practice; / [3] because its raw materials are publicly observable phenomena, these are available as resources in any subsequent training interventions” (p. 4). Consequently, “CA will become involved in describing not only aspects of professional practice but also the processes of training or development that might be associated with these” (p.6).

Antaki (2011b) observed six main trends in applied CA: (1) Foundational applied CA (re-specifying an intellectual field of study); (2) Social-problem applied CA (a perspective on macro-societal issues); (3) Communicational applied CA (a complementary or alternative analysis of “disordered” talk); (4) Diagnostic applied CA (correlating sequential features of talk with clinical disorders); (5) Institutional applied CA (an illumination of routine institutional work); and (6) Interventionist applied CA (solving pre-existing problems collaboratively). He observed five common themes within type (6): (i) Identifying and attempting to address a problem in the delivery of a recurrent institutional service; (ii) The tendency for the institution’s perspective to be foregrounded rather than the client’s (access & funding, identifiable routines, shared values); (iii) The use of qualitative and quantitative evidence; (iv) The analyst usually

has little or no power to make changes in practice; (v) The need for ethnographic background in building shared understanding with the institution.

The same volume (Antaki, 2011a) contains some impressive reports on interventionist studies and projects in various fields with various approaches. Heritage and Robinson (2011) did not involve any fresh CA work, but applied a well-known CA finding, with positive results, about polar questions and type-conforming responses in a quantitative study in which doctors were trained to phrase their questions differently to encourage patients to mention additional health problems. Kitinger (2011) reported on the use of two research methods as part of building a mutually valued collaboration with child-birth helpline organizations, using thematic analysis to offer prompt feedback on call content, then using CA to thoroughly investigate the interactional aspect of the call data, using the findings to offer individualized suggestions to call-takers on their interactional practices, as well as delivering workshops to groups of call-takers using pre-analysed extracts from her accumulated database of calls. Lamerichs and te Molder (2011) had groups of adolescents autonomously record conversations from their own social lives, then used the analyses and extracts to carry out workshops with these participants with a view to raising awareness about how they talk to each other about health issues. Their workshops came close to training the participants as analysts, and one group decided to put on a play based on one of the extracts in order to spread their newfound awareness among their peers. Wilkinson (2011) reported on an individualized therapeutic programme to help couples in which one partner had aphasia (reduced linguistic resources, but no inherent reduction in potential for skilled interaction). The programme was unique in that (a) it targeted the non-aphasic partner rather than the aphasic partner for advice on interactional practices, and (b) it focused on domestic mundane talk (i.e., the couple's basic quality of life) rather than institutional talk. This serves as a counterexample to Lester and O'Reilly's (2019) apparently strong association of applied CA with institutional talk. This therapeutic programme had also led to a CA-based resource pack for speech and language therapists (Lock, Wilkinson & Bryan, 2001).

Stokoe (2011) has become well known for her Conversation-Analytic Role-Play Method (CARM), which was designed to help municipal mediators who take calls from residents about disputes with their neighbours. The CARM involves: (1) the selection, from her database of actual recorded calls, extract(s) exemplifying a particular interactional problem or a "successful" outcome (e.g., a client agrees to mediation); (2) CA-style transcription of the extract and removal of identifying information; (3) In workshops, the transcript is presented on slides, line-by-line, synchronized with the audio file. Since the workshop participants can hear and see only one line at a time, they can "live through" the moment-to-moment contingencies in the interaction; (4) After hearing one or several turns, workshop participants then discuss any evident interactional trouble, and begin to imagine and suggest possible next turns; (5) The next turn of the conversation is then played, and participants discuss it as a possible solution to the trouble displayed earlier in the call. Interestingly, the workshop participants, despite not being CA specialists, apparently displayed positive rather than negative stances towards the CA-style transcriptions. This may be related to presenting the data the line-by-line, instead of confronting them with an indigestible handout of whole extracts. In any case, it is not so hard to imagine how this could be adapted and implemented for the raising of learners' L2IC in EFL classes.

2.3 (Applied) CA, L2 talk-in-interaction, and L2 teaching and learning

Is non-interventionist CA research on L2 talk-in-interaction "pure CA" or "applied CA"? Is it a form of research on disorderly and/or defective communication? From the methodological, ontological and epistemic viewpoints of ethnomethodology and CA, there is no single generalized answer to either question, since (a) macro-social structures and social categories such as "native-speaker" (NS) / "L1 speaker", "non-native speaker" (NNS) / "L2 speaker" are members' categories for members to use as topics, but cannot be used by the CA researcher as exogenous explanatory resources (interview with Schegloff in Wong & Olsher, 2000); and (b) any talk (whether L1 or L2) that is naturally occurring can potentially be socially consequential, and can therefore constitute suitable data for either "pure CA" or

“applied CA”.

There is now an extensive and continually expanding CA literature on L2 talk-in-interaction, involving many different languages as L2, in many different kinds of setting, covering phenomena such as embedded corrections and participants’ orientations to grammatical correctness in NS-NNS talk (in Finnish; Kurhila, 2001, 2005), participants’ interactional orientations to identities such as “clerk”, “client”, “L1 speaker” and “L2 speaker” (Kurhila, 2004), extended repair sequences (in German as lingua franca L2 & L1; Egbert, Niebecker & Rezzara, 2004) and delay as an interactional resource (in English; Wong, 2004). CA of talk-in-interaction among English learners in Japan has shown how L2 speakers can accomplish native-like precision timing (Carroll, 2000), establish speakership for a turn through what superficially appear to be NNS-like disfluent re-starts (Carroll, 2004), make interactionally positive use of vowel-marking of word-final consonants (Carroll, 2005), co-construct face-work with limited linguistic resources (Hauser, 2005), closely coordinate chain-sequences of self-introductions and stories, and coordinate verbal and nonverbal resources in repair (Brown & Elderton, 2016, 2017). Greer (2018) revealed how participants switch language to use *mot juste* formulations as recalibration repair in Japanese-English bilingual interaction.

With more focus on the relationship between talk-in-interaction and learning a L2 (Kasper, 2006a), many studies on L2 interaction, from a social rather than cognitive viewpoint, have revealed in detail how processes of second language acquisition (SLA) can be situated in social interaction (Mori, 2004; Seo, 2011; Theodórsdóttir, 2011a, 2011b). My own earlier work on teaching and assessing communication strategies (CS) (Brown, 2011), which involved listening to large quantities of recorded interactions, eventually led me to feel dissatisfied with taxonomy-based and overwhelmingly quantitative ways of doing so. Since then, Burch (2014) has shown how CS can be re-specified from a CA perspective.

The notion of social actions in CA may initially appear to be comparable with speech act pragmatics, interlanguage pragmatics and L2 pragmatics, leading to the possible CA-based adaption of L2 pragmatics-based teaching materials (e.g., Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001). However, as Kasper (2006b) argues, a lot of research in those areas has been based on rationalist foundations with problematic assumptions about social structure, meaning, context and use of *a priori* taxonomies. Thus, only a (CA-based) discursive pragmatics can lead to a proper understanding of both the interactional sequential aspects of communication and the relationship between language use (pragmalinguistics) and the socio-cultural aspect of interaction (sociopragmatics). Brown (2017) found that L2 learners reported more noticing of and interest in discourse markers (e.g., “you know”), especially at turn boundaries, than they did towards the target item of request head-act forms, highlighting the need to pay more attention to the details of turn-design, turn-taking and multi-turn sequence structure in relation to social actions. Taking a more CA-based perspective from the outset, Brown and Takeuchi (2019) revealed a range of sequential structures for the joint accomplishment of criticisms in peer-reviews of essays among advanced and experienced learners and users of English.

Finally, research on talk-in-interaction in L2 classrooms suggests the enormous potential range of patterns of interaction that be observed among teachers and learners (see Gardner, 2013 for review), such as diversification of discursive, situated and transportable identities beyond the simple “teacher”-“student” pair (Richards, 2006), the unfolding interaction between learners and a special NS guest (Tateyama & Kasper, 2008), and the consequential nature of self-talk in group activities (Steinbach Kohler & Thorne, 2011).

3 Interactional competence in a second language (L2IC)

3.1 Describing and specifying L2IC

The concept of interactional competence (IC) may appear to be closely related to the notion of communicative competence. However, current CA-based IC is markedly different (see Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Kasper, 2006a; and Pekarek Doehler, 2019, for discussions and reviews). In EMCA, IC is not

construed as a cognitive and relatively static entity stored inside some given individual. Instead:

IC is increasingly understood in terms of members' 'methods' [...] for organizing social interaction, relating to such issues as turn-taking, repairing, opening or closing a conversation, initiating a storytelling or conveying a disagreement [...]. These methods include verbal, prosodic and embodied resources, and ways of sequentially organizing actions and joint activities. Because these methods are shared among members of a given group, they enable members to organize their conduct in mutually recognizable and acceptable ways [...]. Importantly, 'competent' members have at their disposal alternative methods for getting the same interactional business accomplished. These alternative methods provide for conduct that is adapted to the local circumstances of ongoing interactions, as well as to the precise others participating in these; this is captured by the CA notions of *context sensitivity* and *recipient design* respectively [...]. The availability of alternative methods is exactly what L2 speakers often lack [...], which entails limited adaptive abilities on their part. (Pekarek Doehler, 2019, pp. 29–30; citations omitted for brevity)

3.2 Challenges in L2IC: Comparison, longitudinal development and intervention

Brouwer and Wagner (2004) provided an early systematic case study of longitudinal development in L2IC, showing how a pair of Danish and German business colleagues stabilize an interactional routine through telephone calls over a period of only three days. In a cross-sectional CA study of disagreement sequences among L2 French learners in a German-speaking area of Switzerland, Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger (2011) showed how advanced learners demonstrated a greater diversity of interactional practices than did the pre-intermediate ones. Other developmental studies include Hellermann (2011), on other-initiation of repair, Sahlström (2011), which focused on participants' own orientations to their development, Barraja-Rohan (2015), on the story-telling practices of a Japanese learner of English in Australia, Berger and Pekarek Doehler (2018), also on storytelling practices, and Nguyen (2019), on developments in turn-design at the workplace.

4 Applying CA to intervene pedagogically in the raising of learners' L2IC

4.1 CA-for-L2IC: A review of discussions and proposals

Addressing the issue of interactional authenticity in existing textbook dialogues, Nguyen and Ishitobi (2012) focused on ordering sequences at fast-food outlets, comparing English data from actual settings with equivalent dialogues in school English coursebooks in Japan, revealing varying authenticity between coursebooks for the same grade from different publishers. Discussions on CA-for-L2IC cover areas such as acquainting learners with the interactional norms of a host culture (Barraja-Rohan, 2000, 2003) and a proposal for concept-based instruction in interactional practices based on sociocultural theory (Van Compernelle, 2011).

4.2 CA-for-L2IC: A review of existing activities and courses

Barraja-Rohan and Pritchard's (1997) *Beyond Talk* (also employed in a practice study in Barraja-Rohan, 2011) was perhaps the first fully designed course to be based largely on CA findings, though it also incorporated speech act politeness pragmatics. It includes a student's course book, a teacher's book and a series of videos of role-played and naturally occurring Australian English NS-NS interactions. Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) report on a five-week course in German interactional norms (e.g., inviting a friend to a party by telephone) for L1 English speakers that involves raising learners' awareness of the differences in their own interactions, as self-perceived and as revealed through recordings, and of differences between sequences in their L1 and L2, followed by communicative practice and reflections. Based on comparative analyses of interactions, they concluded that "(a) L2 pragmatic knowledge can be explicitly taught by using examples of L2 naturally occurring conversational activities, and (b) working

with CA-based instructional materials has a positive effect in teaching and learning pragmatic aspects of the L2, by enabling learners to anticipate, interpret and produce the relevant next interactional behaviour in L2 based on sequence structures” (p. 75).

Félix-Brasdefer (2006) is an example of a two-lesson hybrid CA-pragmatics unit, focusing on multi-turn invitation-refusals in Spanish for English L1 speakers. Learners examine brief examples of “actions” and examples of role-played conversations in both L1 and L2 by NS, learn some basic CA techniques for identifying key sequences, turn-designs, turn-taking, and actions, carry out their own role-plays, and reflect on their tasks. In the realm of English-for-Specific-Purposes (ESP), Packett (2005) reported on a course in English broadcast interviewing for journalism students in Portugal, focusing on turn-taking and institutionalized epistemic orientation to an absent audience (through insertion sequences), involving awareness-raising using extracts of professional interviews (mainly from the BBC), and combining experiential learning (guided simulated interview) with informed reflection in order to develop the interviewer as reflective practitioner.

Carroll’s (1999) *Your Turn At Talk* was also one of the earliest CA-based L2 teaching materials. It includes five units on basic adjacency-pair types: greeting-greeting, invitation-response, request-response, assessment-response and news-tellings, with some focus on pre-sequences and preference organization, in a visually friendly and digestible format. Carroll (2010) goes on to explain some features of CA which are particularly relevant to conversation-syllabus design. TESOL and the JALT Pragmatics-SIG have each produced activity-collections including CA-based ones, each of which focuses on a particular interactional practice or action, such as basic turn-taking (Carroll, 2011a), listener’s continuers (Olsher, 2011a), stance-loaded responses (Olsher, 2011b), polar (Y/N) questions and their (dis)preferred responses (Carroll, 2016a), ‘natural’ non-sentential responses (Carroll, 2016b), dis(preferred) turn-shapes (Carroll, 2011b), getting help through troubles-tellings (Carroll, 2012), repair practices (Cervantes, 2012; Greer, 2012), and openings and closings to conversations (Saito, 2012; Wong, 2011a, 2011b). A significant impetus to CA-based ESL/EFL was provided by Wong and Waring’s (2010) introductory CA book for ESL/EFL teachers, with chapters that introduce aspects of CA in some detail, and awareness-raising activities and practical activities at the end of each chapter.

All of the above involve classroom-based teaching, but the settings reported in Carroll (2000, 2004, 2005) are an example of out-of-class conversation assignments, in which learners formed groups of three, carried out some unrecorded free conversations in class, then autonomously video-recorded free conversations in places of their own choice. The interactional data strongly suggest that the conversations were socially consequential for the learners, thus constituting properties of naturally occurring talk, with significant potential for development in IC. Piirainen-Marsh and Lilja (2019) report on a CA-for-L2IC project which combined the recording of real-life service-encounters with classroom-based preparation and reflection.

4.3 CA-for-L2IC: Reflections and suggestions

In my own teaching of English conversation, I have incorporated various CA-inspired materials and activities. My learners have studied extracts from my own database, recorded their own conversations in and outside the classroom, transcribed and analysed them and then carried out reflection activities. I have also used *Beyond Talk* and *Your Turn At Talk*, with some success. In future practice and research, I plan to design and implement: (a) variations of CARM, with the crucial aim of learners “living through” and appreciating the turn-by-turn contingencies of spontaneous talk-in-interaction; (b) direct practical training activities focusing on specific interactional practices and social actions, with kinetic elements as in the TESOL and JALT publications mentioned above; and (c) a more developed system for field-recordings, incorporating some points from Carroll (2000, 2004, 2005) and others.

If pedagogical activities for L2IC are to be carried out institutionally, then as Richards (2005) has pointed out, CA can be involved not only in the teaching object but also in almost every aspect of the teaching and learning process, including teacher-fronted presentation of linguistic resources and

interactional practices, class-level discussions of interactional issues, pair work and group work, and out-of-class field tasks. This would require a thorough understanding of the potential complexity and changeability of patterns of interaction in the classroom and in sites of field-work assignments, taking into consideration the development potential of “conversations-for-learning” (Kasper & Kim, 2015), as well as potential issues such as students resisting academic identity in group work (Benwell & Stokoe, 2005), and the interactional workings of off-task talk (Markee, 2005).

5 Concluding remarks

The wide range of issues related to CA-for-L2IC mentioned in this paper has restricted the depth in which these themes could be explored, but also illustrates the importance of grasping the potential range of issues which can come into play in managing projects for CA-for-L2IC. Future studies will focus in more depth on themes selected from among these, especially in terms of gathering learners’ interactional data from both classroom activities and out-of-class conversation assignments, in order to analyse interactional-developmental processes among individual learners and communities of learners.

Notes

- 1) All of this work has been supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grants, Number 26370659 and Number 18K00824.
- 2) In this paper, the term “second language” (L2) is used with intended ambiguity to cover interchangeably: the fluency or proficiency-level sense (lower fluency and/or proficiency than one’s L1), the chronological sense (onset of learning L2 was after that of L1) and the current frequency-of-use sense (currently used less frequently than one’s L1). In the case of English as L2, it also covers both “English as a foreign language” (EFL) and “English as a second language” (ESL) .

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