A Case Study on Collaborative Dialogue in a Speech Presentation Class

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to observe how dialogues are constructed in a foreign language classroom and to investigate the factors that affect the construction of dialogues. In the present study, transcribed data in a speech presentation class instructed by a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) and an assistant language teacher (ALT) at a senior high school were qualitatively analyzed using a classroom discourse analytic method. Each speech presentation made by the 21 students consisted of two parts: a “Show and Tell” speech and a question-and-answer session about the speech. In the present analysis, we focused on the question-and-answer sessions. Collaborative dialogues observed in the sessions were categorized into three types: collaborative dialogue for form construction, meaning construction, and content construction. In particular, the students were involved in meaning and content construction, while the teachers were involved in form construction. The construction of collaborative dialogues was found in the scenes of the question-and-answer sessions where the students initiated and actively asked authentic questions.

1. Literature Review

Recently, conversation analysis (CA) or classroom discourse analysis has been receiving attention. Studies using these methods of analysis deal with the issues of language acquisition and language use in a socially situated context. Hall (2007) states that recent research on classroom interaction using CA has focused on repair and correction in order to facilitate language learning. She claims that there are two bodies of research in which correction and repair have been focused on as components of instructional practice in language classrooms. According to her, “The first has its theoretical roots in the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996), which asserts that negotiated interaction facilitates learners’ target language acquisition by helping to draw their attention to gaps in their knowledge of linguistic forms” (Hall, 2007, p. 515). On the other hand, the second “has its roots in discourse analytic studies of naturally occurring first-language-classroom interaction” (p. 515). As findings from the latter research, Hall refers to a teacher-led sequence, initiation-response-feedback—what is called IRF—a method that is ubiquitous in language classroom interaction. She claims that CA-based analyses of classroom interaction should be
interpreted not only in terms of CA repair with communication problem solving, but also in terms of instructional correction, which is part of the IRF structure. Markee and Kasper (2004) also refer to an unequal power speech exchange system in teacher-fronted classroom talk, "in which teachers have privileged rights to assign topics and turns to learners and also evaluate the quality of students’ contributions to the emerging interaction through other-initiated, second-position repairs" (p. 492)—that is, "initiation-response-evaluation or question-answer-comment sequences" (p. 492). Following the above viewpoints, classroom talk will be analyzed and interpreted in the light of the social and cultural classroom context.

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, negotiation of meaning has been focused on in order to examine the interaction hypothesis. The hypothesis is founded on the premise that negotiation of meaning offers learners opportunities for modified output in order to solve some communicative problems. The relationship between negotiation of meaning (e.g., corrective feedback) and modified output has been examined through quantitative analyses. Therefore, the conception of negotiation of meaning has been limited to the range of formulations such as recasts, clarification requests, confirmation checks, or comprehension checks. However, some recent studies have been offering new perspectives on negotiation of meaning through qualitative CA as well as quantitative analysis. Two studies will be considered at this point. Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier (2001) report that information gap activity triggered more repair negotiation than conversational activity, while the conversation activity provided learners with more opportunities to produce more complex utterances and a context for their use of discourse strategies or pragmatic knowledge. Their analyses offered us a new perspective on negotiation of meaning, because the results of some studies suggested that controlled tasks would promote more language acquisition as they could provide opportunities for more repair negotiations. Foster and Ohta (2005) investigated negotiation of meaning from both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. They examined how often learners initiate negotiation of meaning, how much modified output they produce, and what interactional processes occur in order to solve communication problems. Quantitative analysis showed that communication problems were infrequently signaled through negotiation of meaning and that the large majority of modifications were not related to the negotiation of meaning. On the other hand, qualitative analysis revealed interactional processes related to assistance, self-correction, and encouragements to continue. Foster and Ohta suggest that interactional processes are very important for language development. It can be said that the two studies show common attempts to reconceptualize negotiation of meaning in a broader sense through qualitative analysis. The importance of negotiation of meaning for language acquisition can be viewed not only in terms of opportunities for modified output but also in terms of opportunities for interaction maintenance or dialogue construction.

Merrill Swain directs our attention to the notion of "collaborative dialogue." She states that it "is dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge" (Swain, 2000, p. 97) and it is "where
language use and language learning can co-occur” (Swain, 2000, p. 97). Swain claims that interaction in second language learning should be considered from the perspective of sociocultural theory, and that language learning should be occurring in the dialogues of participants. Swain and Lapkin (1998) examined how eighth-grade students in a French class learned through collaborative dialogue. They reported that language-related episodes (LREs), which are “defined as any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others” (p. 326), correlated with the posttest scores. Swain and Lapkin claim that collaborative dialogue should serve as both a communicative tool and a cognitive tool, and that it should aid L2 learning.

In the present study, classroom talk will be analyzed and interpreted using classroom discourse analytic methods. Utterances in classrooms are situated in a social and cultural classroom context. Who says to whom is as important as what is said. By qualitatively analyzing and interpreting some classroom discourse transcript data, we will understand how classroom interactions are constructed in a foreign language classroom.

2. Research Procedure

The class observed for the study was an English class of Oral Communication at a senior high school in Tokyo. It consisted of 21 first-year students, half of the homeroom class, and was instructed by an experienced Japanese female teacher of English (JTE) and a young male assistant language teacher from New Zealand (ALT) in a team-teaching style. The students individually presented a “Show and Tell” speech in front of the class and were evaluated by the two teachers. Each speech presentation was followed by a brief question-and-answer session about the speech. Two class hours were assigned for “Show and Tell” for all the 21 students.

The English class was visited twice, on October 11 and November 1, 2007. Two voice recorders were set on the teacher’s desk in front of the classroom and on a desk at the back. The researcher took field notes of anything she noticed during the class. Classroom discourse data were prepared by transcribing the voice recordings and consulting the field notes and students’ manuscripts for their presentation. We obtained 21 speech discourses (SDs). In this paper, a speech discourse is defined as a sequence of utterance events that occur during each student’s speech presentation and question-and-answer session. In the analysis, we focus on the question-and-answer sessions.

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1 Classification into three sections from the perspective of participation structure

All the 21 SDs were divided into three parts from the perspective of the structure of participation in the question-and-answer sessions (Table 1).
Each SD was numbered in the order of the speech presentation. SDs from 1 to 4 were placed in section 1 because their question-and-answer sessions were led by the ALT and JTE. Each presenter was asked a question about his or her speech by the ALT and JTE. However, before the fifth presenter’s speech, the JTE urged the students in the audience to ask a question, announcing that those who did so would get points. Her declaration changed the participation structure in the class completely. Many students began to raise their hand and ask questions actively, and the speech presenter answered each of them. Thereafter, the question-and-answer sessions became longer and more complex. Thus, SDs from 5 to 13 were placed in section 2. Another change in the participation structure was triggered by an announcement made by the JTE due to the time schedule: “Only two people can ask a question,” made right before the fourteenth presenter’s question-and-answer session. The number of students who raised their hand decreased abruptly after the announcement of the limitation on participation. Therefore, in order to complete the sessions, the ALT had to ask a question when nobody asked one. Hence, SDs from 14 to 21 were placed in section 3.

### 3.2 Characteristics of the questions

We will now examine the characteristics of the forms and meanings of the questions. Examples are shown in Table 2. Owing to space limitations, only a part of the questions asked by the students are illustrated, although all of the questions by the ALT and JTE are shown in the table. As we can see, the ALT chose questions that were simple in terms of form and meaning, so that the students could answer them easily. Such superficial questions did not require the students to think because the range of choices for answers was limited. The ALT also used similar questions, asking for the name twice (SDs 3 and 6); the number, twice (SDs 1 and 17); and the player’s position, three times (SDs 4, 18, and 19). The JTE also tended to ask simple questions about facts. However, as compared to the ALT, she used various forms of questions to instruct her students. Moreover, she did not use the same form of question more than once. She also chose a question with a more complicated form but a simple meaning: “Could you tell me the name of the

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Table 1. **Numbers of Questions Asked by ALT, JTE, and Students in Each Section**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1</th>
<th>Section 2</th>
<th>Section 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>JTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes. SD= Speech Discourse; ST= Students*
rabbit?” (SD 9) instead of saying “What’s the name of the rabbit?” It can be said that her questions were instructional as well as interactional. In contrast to the teachers, the students tended to ask more complex questions in terms of form and meaning, using subordinates (SDs 5 and 10) or asking feelings (SDs 5, 7, and 10) or reasons (SDs 11 and 17). The students also asked questions that they really wanted to ask or that were familiar to them, such as “how much?” (SDs 11, 16, and 20) or “where did you get it?” (SDs 9, 11, 15, and 21). Later in the paper, the characteristics of the questions will be further discussed in relation to the construction of collaborative dialogue.

Table 2. Examples of Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>How many gloves do you have, now?</td>
<td>fact (how many)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is the name of your favorite song?</td>
<td>fact (name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What position do you play (in soccer)?</td>
<td>fact (position)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,18,19</td>
<td>What is your cat’s name?</td>
<td>fact (name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Did you play the instrument or you sing? Did you sing?</td>
<td>fact (Yes-No)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you want to study art after high school?</td>
<td>feeling (Yes-No)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>How much did you spend looking for the four-leaf clover?</td>
<td>fact (how much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>How many members do you have in your swimming team?</td>
<td>fact (how many)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTE</td>
<td>Who is the best tennis player in your family?</td>
<td>fact (who)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What instrument do you play?</td>
<td>fact (what)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Where do you keep this ball in your house?</td>
<td>fact (where)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Did you sell many cookies?</td>
<td>fact (Yes-No)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Which prize did you get?</td>
<td>fact (which)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Could you tell me what the name of the rabbit is?</td>
<td>fact (name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>How often do you play basketball?</td>
<td>fact (how often)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Why do you start kendo?</td>
<td>reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Does it make you わ изменить...change...it Does it make you change you...?</td>
<td>effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Why do you want to go to the swimming club?</td>
<td>reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11,16,20</td>
<td>Where did you (buy, find, get) it?</td>
<td>fact (where)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,11,15,21</td>
<td>How much was it?</td>
<td>fact (how much)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Collaborative dialogue for form construction and meaning or content construction

We observed differences between the discourses in the scenes where the teachers led the question-and-answer sessions and those in the scenes where the students did. In the former, there was little collaboration for constructing dialogues. Further, the question-and-answer sequences were completed only between the questioner and the respondent, as we can see from Excerpts 1 and 3. Thus, the sequences resemble the IRF structure mentioned previously. On the other hand, in section 2, other students and the teachers collaborated in dialogue construction (Excerpt 2). Further, compared to the SDs in sections 1 or 3, those in section 2 were clearly longer and more complex.

It should also be noted that the students first composed an English sentence in their mind and
then articulated it (turn 1 in Excerpt 3). It was observed that four students uttered a sentence twice when they asked a question. The first utterance was made in a lower voice and the second one, in a louder voice. The first utterance was probably an attempt to compose what they wanted to say in English, while the second one was meant to convey it to the interlocutor. This implies what Swain (2000) claimed about language being "a cognitive activity and a social activity" (p. 97).

(All names are fictitious.)

Excerpt 1: SD 1 from Section 1
1. JTE: Where do you keep this ball in your house?
2. Akira: In my house, あ in my room.
3. JTE: In your room. Thank you.
4. ALT: What position do you play in soccer?
5. Akira: My position is midfield.
6. ALT: Midfield. O.K.

Excerpt 2: SD 10 from Section 2
1. Questioner 1 (?): How do you have えっと How do you have... sketchbooks?
2. ALT: How many.
3. Questioner 1 (?): あ、How many do you have... (interrupted by Saori)
5. ALT & JTE: Oh, thirteen.
(Classmates are saying to each other, “Thirteen,” “Thirty”...)
6. Saori: Thirteen! (confirmed and clearly)
7. Saori: Do you have any question?
8. Question 2 (m): How many did you draw pictures?
9. Saori: How many. (says to herself) 30枚...(thirty pages) Thirteen かける ... 
10. ALT & JTE: Times
11. Saori: Thirteen times thirty.
(ALT is calculating, saying "Thirteen times thirty." Other students are also calculating.)
12. ALT: Three hundred ninety? Three hundred ninety?
13. Saori: (gives up calculating) A lot of... a lot of (Class laughs)
14. ALT: Do you want to study art after high school?
15. Saori: Yes.
16. ALT: Good.
17. Questioner 3 (m): When you paint the pictures, what is the most interesting?
18. Saori: ん... (mmm.)
19. JTE: んー、ちょっと難しい質問ですけど... (Um... a little bit difficult question...)
20. Saori: The picture, I think, show how I glad, I glad, なんだろう I’m happy. えへへ... (ha-ha.)
(giggling and worrying about making herself understood)
21. Class: わかる、わかる (We understand what you mean...)
22. Saori: わかる？ (Am I making myself clear?)
23. JTE: わかる、わかる (Yes, Yes, ...)
24. ALT: Yeah...
25. Saori: Do you have any question? (gets no response) Thank you. (goes back to her own desk)

Excerpt 3: SD 18 from Section 3
1. Questioner 1 (m): How many shoes do you have? (says to himself in a lower voice)
   How many shoes do you have? (repeats in a louder voice)
2. Minoru: I have about... three soccer shoes.
3. ALT: What position do you play?
4. Minoru: えー 1... あー forward... (says “Thank you” and returns to his desk)

Collaborative dialogues were categorized into three types: collaborative dialogue for form
construction, meaning construction, and content construction. The term collaborative dialogue is used in a narrow sense in this paper. In the question-and-answer sessions in the classroom, a dialogue was constructed not only between the questioner and the respondent, but also involved the other people in the classroom. The others listened to a questioner and tried to share the meaning of his or her question. Then, they observed the respondent closely in order to make sure that he or she understood the question. When they felt that the respondent did not understand the question, they tried to help him or her understand it, and then, when they saw that the person understood the question, they attempted to help the respondent find his or her answer. In this manner, other people were involved as the third party in the collaboration for the construction of the dialogue between the questioner and the respondent. In the present study, collaborative dialogue for form construction is defined as verbal collaboration for composing a sentence in the form of the target language. Meaning construction is defined as the sharing of the semantic meaning of utterances among the class. Content construction is defined as construction for organizing one's thought or what one should say.

Collaborative dialogues were frequently observed in section 2, where the students led the question-and-answer sessions. Table 3 shows the frequency in each section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Section 1</th>
<th>Section 2</th>
<th>Section 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (in SD 5, 7, 10, 10, 12, 13, 14)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (in SD 5, 6, 10, 10, 11, 12, 13)</td>
<td>2 (in SD15, 21)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (in SD 10, 10, 13)</td>
<td>2 (in SD17, 20)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, we will consider collaborative dialogue for form construction. The teachers encouraged and assisted the students with form construction for the phrases or sentences that they wanted to express. This type of collaborative construction was usually observed in the scenes where the students tried to compose a question in English (turn 2 in Excerpt 2, turn 4 in Excerpt 4, and turn 2 in Excerpt 5), except for the scenes of turns 9 to 11 in Excerpt 2, which was where the respondent (presenter) happened to articulate the process of thinking in a form of private speech, and received corrective feedback from the teachers. As for form-constructing collaborative dialogues, the students were willing to accept assistance or support from the teachers and tried to produce correct forms in English (turns 3 and 11 in Excerpt 2, turn 5 in Excerpt 4, and turn 3 in Excerpt 5), although the students still produced incorrect sentences in the cases of excerpts 2 and 5. Most of the assistance for form construction was provided by the teachers. The assistance for form was infrequently given by the students in public, although some students were heard whispering among themselves.

Excerpt 4: SD 5 from Section 2

3. Questioner 2 (in): なんて聞いたらいいかわからないけど、はい。えっとー(I don't know how to ask... but... Yes/ Oh...) How/fast/is/your record? (says each word slowly) あってますか？(Is this correct?)
4. JTE: あてるる、あてるる。 (O.K. That's correct.)
5. Questioner 2 (m): How fast is your record? (repeats the question)

Excerpt 5: SD 10 from Section 2
1. Questioner 1 (f): How do you have えっと… How do you have … sketchbooks?
2. ALT: "How many"
3. Questioner 1 (f): あ、How many do you have…

Next, we will see examples of collaborative dialogues for meaning and content construction. Excerpt 6 shows that Mami did not understand the meaning of the question (turn 10). Therefore, another student attempted to repeat it, placing stress on “on the Internet” (turn 11). However, when the students saw that Mami failed to understand it (turn 12), one of the students decided to say it in Japanese. Further, the scenes of turns 4 to 6 and turns 20 to 24 in Excerpt 2 show that the teachers and students in the class tried to share the meaning of the answer very actively. These are examples of collaborative dialogue for meaning construction. It can be said that collaborative dialogue for meaning construction was conducted by using negotiation of meaning in a broader sense, including clarification requests, confirmation checks, repetition, or encouragement.

Excerpt 6: SD 13 from Section 2
7. Questioner 2 (m): Have you ever bought, bought on the Internet?
8. Mami: One more.
9. Questioner 2 (m): Have you ever bought on the Internet? (ALT is whispering “Good question”)
10. Mami: インターネット？どういうこと？ (Internet? What do you mean by that?)
11. Another student (m): Have you ever bought/on the Internet?
   (places stress on “on the Internet” in a louder voice)
12. Mami: へん… (Um…?)
   (In class, one of the students said, “インターネットで買ったことあるかつて” translating the question into Japanese.)

Turn 12 in Excerpt 2, the ALT’s “Three hundred ninety,” was not corrective feedback or assistance for form construction. This was assistance for content construction, although the presenter Saori gave up calculating under the time pressure of communication and completed the question-and-answer sequence in her own words, without accepting the ALT’s assistance directly. In the scenes of turns 20 to 21 in Excerpt 7, the students noticed that Mami understood the question and then tried to help her organize what she should say—that is, content construction—by providing some examples. As we see above, unlike the assistance for form construction, the assistance for content construction was not directly accepted, irrespective of whether it was provided by the students or by the teachers unlike the assistance for form construction. It is possible that the assistance for content construction did not work well directly but peripherally. The student could gradually construct the content of what he or she should say with hints or encouragement from others.

Excerpt 7: SD 13 from Section 2
19. Questioner 4 (f): When do you want to listen to them?
20. Mami: Ｕん… (Um….)
(In class, several students are whispering in Japanese, “どういうときに (When...)?” “悲しいときとか、うれしい時とか、電車に乗ってる時とか... (When you are sad, happy, or when you’re on the train...?)”, “気持ち？ (depends on the mood?)”...) 
21. Mami: あー、えー、どうしよう。どうしよう。Many times?
   (Uh... Um... What shall I say... What shall I say... in embarrassment...) 
22. ALT: All the time? All the time? (JTE is whispering to ALT, “Whenever she feels like listening to...”)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

We can draw several important findings from this study. First, the teachers produced simpler questions than the students did, so that the respondents could answer them easily. It is possible that the teachers wished to let the conversation flow smoothly because of the limitation of the curriculum schedule. In addition, the teachers may have wished to avoid making students “lose their face” (e.g., Aston, 1986; Foster, 1998; Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier, 2001). Moreover, the teachers were probably afraid that the students would feel embarrassed when they could not answer their questions. In particular, this seemed to be true of the ALT, a native speaker of English. This concern may have originated from a large gap between the students and the teachers in form-constructing ability. In this type of social and cultural classroom context, the teachers’ questions were likely to ask what they should ask rather than what they wished to ask. In other words, the teachers’ questions tended to be ritual and instructional. In contrast, the students tended to ask questions that they really wanted to ask, that is, authentic questions. As observed from the data, the questioner lacked the confidence to compose utterance forms in English and would also feel that it is his or her fault if the interlocutor could not understand the question. In contrast, the students did not have to be afraid of losing face among their peers, because the form-constructing ability of the questioner and respondent were equal.

In summary, when the students were given the right to initiate and ask authentic questions, they actively participated in collaborative dialogue for meaning and content construction. The characteristic of teachers’ involvement in collaborative dialogues was collaboration for form construction through corrective feedback, assistance, or encouragement. The students were willing to accept assistance for form construction when they put what they wanted to say in English forms. With regard to meaning construction, the students actively collaborated by using English and Japanese. As for content construction, the teachers and students showed equal participation, and it functioned not as direct assistance but peripheral assistance. This is only a case study. However, the findings of this study will offer pedagogical implications about the roles of teachers as facilitators in classrooms.

Notes

1) Cazden (1986) defines the notion of participation structure as “the rights and obligations of participants with respect to who can say what, when, and to whom” (p. 437). However,
several terms such as participation structure, participant structure, or participant framework seem to be used in education research. Therefore, in this paper, participation structure is used along with a more general term, the structure of participation. It generally refers to a set of “the rights and responsibilities of the interactions in a speech situation” (O’Connor and Michaels, 1996, p. 69).

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References


