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Published online: 05 Nov 2019.

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'No chance to speak': developing a pedagogical response to turn-taking problems

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ABSTRACT

Of the major aspects of language use, perhaps the least frequently taught and the least understood by teachers is the system of turn-taking Wong and Waring [2010. *Conversation Analysis and Second Language Pedagogy: A Guide for ESL/EFL Teachers*. New York: Routledge]. For second language learners, this may be an important contributing factor to the experience of being unable to detect and seize opportunities to speak in multi-party talk, and more generally to the low participation rates of some learners to group discussions involving native speakers. However, pedagogical interventions are hampered by the lack of commercially available turn-taking resources. To address this issue, the authors initiated an 18-month action research project with the aim of developing relevant tasks and materials and exploring the reactions of learners to such unfamiliar content. Both teachers and learners recorded their reflections, and these responses were used to refine the activities and inform the creation of new ones. Among the challenges faced were the lack of learner awareness of turn-taking as an issue, the unconventional nature of relevant tasks, and the necessary focus on contingent possibilities rather than firm rules. The findings discuss the navigation of such issues, indicating both the teachability of turn-taking and general student receptiveness to turn-taking-focused tasks as being a worthwhile use of class time.

Introduction

Numerous studies have drawn attention to the low oral participation rates of many non-native speakers (NNS) of English in group discussions alongside native speakers (NS), particularly in tertiary study contexts (e.g. Andrade 2006; Nakane 2007; Tompson and Tompson, 1996). This is attributed to a complex interplay of both speaker-based factors such as anxiety, disengagement, and difficulties in articulating ideas (see especially the overview by Shao and Gao 2016; also Nakane 2007), and contextual factors such as how NNSs are positioned by other interactants (Leki 2001). Much of the recent work in this area has adopted a *willingness to communicate* (WTC) framework (e.g. Cao 2014; Shao and Gao 2016), which places central importance on the individual's fluctuating cognitive and emotional states and consequent intention to contribute to a discussion at a given moment. While also concerned with non-participation, the present study has a rather different orientation. Specifically, it is concerned with cases in which an NNS is willing and ready to speak but unable to locate a space to do so within the flow of multi-party talk. Scattered across the literature are a number of learner self-reports suggesting that this may be an issue of widespread relevance. For instance, Morita

(2000, 298) provides the following interview extract from a Japanese Masters-level student studying in Canada:

> It is still very difficult for me to speak up in class because I don't know when to get in the discussion! Students here are allowed to speak up freely and it is okay to interrupt others' speech, but I'm not used to doing that because we don't do that very much in my home country. So I don't know how to interrupt and join the discussion. But if you don't interrupt, you sometimes don't get any chance to speak up.

Similar problems in identifying speaking opportunities are echoed elsewhere in the literature, occurring in both academic (Lee 2009) and workplace/social (Cui 2014) contexts and arousing substantial feelings of discontent and anxiety. Morita's (2004) text is peppered with terms such as *ignored*, *marginalized*, *silenced*, *isolated* and *voiceless*, while Cui (2014) reports the anguish felt by Mei, a Chinese office worker in Australia, after being unable to identify an appropriate entry point into a casual conversation:

> failing to be part of the conversation had … left Mei with an intensely negative feeling about herself: After seven years, my circle of friends are mostly Chinese, I'm still not able to participate in such talks. I was behaving like a little fool standing there. (2014, 204)

In such cases, a key underlying problem appears to be non-mastery of the system of *turn-taking* in English. More specifically, during interactions with two or more native English speakers, Morita's and Cui's informants apparently experienced difficulties in anticipating forthcoming opportunities to speak and in seizing those opportunities.[1] The present paper reports on an action research project aimed at addressing such issues through teaching turn-taking skills in intermediate ESL classes, using the nascent pedagogical approach of treating insights from *Conversation Analysis* (CA) as appropriate syllabus content (e.g. Barraja-Rohan 2011; Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm 2006; Wong and Waring 2010), sometimes labelled CA for language teaching (CA-for-LT) (van Compernolle 2011). The following sections very briefly outline some of the ideas underpinning the CA view of turn-taking, before considering the potential difficulties in acquiring turn-taking skills in a second language, and the position of turn-taking in current teaching practice.

The turn-taking system

The nature of turn-taking remains greatly under-appreciated in the language teaching profession. In their seminal paper, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) demonstrated that, far from simply waiting for the current speaker to finish, speakers draw upon a number of resources to project and coordinate turns at talk, enabling gaps, interruptions and concurrent talk to be minimized. This section very brief describes some of the relevant issues (for recent overviews, see Clayman 2013; Hayashi 2013).

A crucial understanding is that turns are composed of units (*turn constructional units* or TCUs), and that it is at the end of these units that turn transition principally occurs. Important to emphasize, however, is that the completion of a TCU does not equate to the end of the turn – multiple units may be strung together – but when turn transition does occur, this is where it overwhelmingly occurs, at a *transition relevant place* (TRP). The nature of TCUs remains a matter of some conjecture, with a debate over whether interactants respond mostly to the completion of syntax, intonational contours or communicative actions (see, for example, Deruiter, Mitterer, and Enfield 2006; Ford and Thompson 1996; Oreström 1983). In any case, there appears to be high correspondence between the occurrence of all three types of completion (Ford and Thompson 1996), and each type of completion enables listeners to have a sense of when the possible end of a turn is approaching. For instance, upon hearing the sentence stem *He put*, the listener can anticipate that the utterance will probably not be complete until the speaker has at least mentioned a something (e.g. *the pen*) and a somewhere (e.g. *in his bag*). This holds similarly for intonation contours and action completion. A TRP is thus *projected* before the actual end of a TCU.

At the end of a TCU, speakers have at their disposal a number of resources to signal whether they intend to continue or finish (for an overview, see Wong and Waring 2010). One of the most important

is thought to be the final pitch movement, with certain patterns associated with speaker turn continuation (e.g. level intonation) and others widely associated with turn ending (e.g. high falling or rising pitch). Among other resources, to signal completion speakers may *trail off* (use decreasing pitch and volume), and to signal continuation they may make an audible in-breath or they may *latch* the next TCU to the end of the current TCU (producing it before the ordinary beat of silence between TCUs); various aspects of posture, gaze and movement are also associated with endings and continuations (e.g. Li 2014).

For the hearer, a number of resources are also available to take the floor for the next turn, such as *turn-entry devices* (e.g. *well*, *uhm* and *yeah*), audible in-breath, clearing the throat and parting the lips (Schegloff 1996), and gestures such as pointing (Mondada 2007).

Teaching and learning turn-taking skills in a second language

Importantly, there is reason to believe that learner difficulties with turn-taking are not merely the result of slow reaction times arising from cognitive processing demands. Rather, there appear to be limitations on what turn-taking skills, procedures and knowledge can usefully be transferred from the L1. Perhaps most intriguingly, this appears to be the case for projection, which cross-linguistically may be afforded by differing constellations of linguistic and interactional features. For instance, Tanaka (1999, 221) argues that compared to English, Japanese grammar (particularly SOV structure) 'can sometimes render the progress of a turn more difficult to anticipate'; if so, given the fact that Japanese speakers do achieve precision timing, it could be that they make greater use of some other projectability-enabling resource, such as intonation, gesture, postural movement or gaze.

There are a number of other cross-linguistic variations that may be relevant. For instance, although orientations to prosodic features may be broadly similar, there are differences in what counts as a relevant prosodic cue. As an example, the pitch-final movements that are taken to indicate turn completion in standard varieties of English are not observed in Mandarin, as 'a result of the interplay of lexical tones and intonation contours' (Li 2014, 108). There may also be differences in the brief length of time made available to take the floor during a TRP. For instance, Stivers et al. (2009, 10590) cite possible differences 'in the overall tempo of social life' which may account for slight differences in what counts as a delayed response, while others have argued that there are different cultural expectations of the acceptability of noticeable pauses occurring between turns (e.g. Nakane 2007; Tannen 1981, 2012). To these complexities may be added the influence of more general socio-cultural factors, such as the roles of power and gender in relation to interrupting, floor-taking and floor-holding rights (Tannen 1981; Woods 1989; Zimmerman and West 1975), and differing expectations about how turns are allocated in institutional contexts (e.g. whether the teacher typically nominates or students self-select) (Poole 2005).

Despite these evident challenges, the difficulties posed by turn-taking appear to be underappreciated by both teachers and materials developers. Indeed, Wong and Waring (2010, 14) argue that 'of the many aspects of spoken English, turn-taking is perhaps the least tackled in pedagogical materials and classroom instruction.' They further suggest that this is 'mostly because it is the least understood' (14). This reflects the peripheral treatment of turn-taking in most approaches to linguistics, from where language teaching has traditionally turned for insights into language use, and the generally low awareness among teachers of Conversation Analysis (CA), from where the main body of relevant research originates. Indeed an extensive search of published ESL/EFL turn-taking resources revealed just three sets of relevant CA-informed activities: chapters by Wong and Waring (2010) and Carroll (2011), and an earlier intermediate-level textbook (Barraja-Rohan and Pritchard 1997).

Furthermore, textbooks rarely draw attention to other features of turn-taking. Listening, for example, remains dominated by a *comprehension approach*, emphasizing testing with single, correct answers, rather than developing micro-skills such as recognizing turn-taking cues (Field 2012). It may also be the case that teaching materials provide limited opportunities for features of turn-taking to be noticed incidentally, with Gilmore's (2004, 368) analysis of textbook dialogues

revealing overly 'smooth, regular turn-taking' that 'does not accurately reflect the tempo and unpredictable nature of natural conversation'; how textbooks present other aspects of turn-taking, such as turn allocation and turn entry, appears to be under-researched. It has also been argued that, for classroom learning of talk-in-interaction, mere exposure typically proves inadequate and so explicit instruction is required (Betz and Huth 2014).

Also important to consider is the organization of turn-taking that learners are exposed to in second language classroom contexts. Classroom discourse represents a particular variety (or varieties) of institutional discourse, whereby a number of contextual factors play critical roles in shaping interaction (e.g. Markee 2000; Seedhouse 2004; Waring 2009). In particular, classrooms are characterized by asymmetric power relations granting teachers the primary right to nominate the next speaker, to initiate sequences in which turns are pre-allocated, and to interrupt the flow of discourse to make evaluative or procedural comments. As Markee (2000, 97) discusses, in traditional language classrooms 'the length of learners' turns is entirely determined by the teacher', with short turns being favoured. Seedhouse (2004) distinguishes four typical contexts, including *form-and-accuracy* focused phases invoking 'extreme asymmetry' and 'total [teacher] control of who says what and when' (104-105), and *procedural* phases largely consisting of teacher monologues with 'little danger of being interrupted' (133). Although learner management of turns is greater during *fluency-focused* and *task-oriented* phases, it is 'not uncommon for teachers to retain control of the interaction, interrupting students and taking control of the topic' (Walsh 2011, 122).

Overall, then, in terms of preparing second language learners for group discussions and other multi-party talk, in many cases ordinary ESL/EFL classroom experience may be insufficient. This compounds with a lack of teacher and student awareness of turn-taking as a language-learning issue, and a striking lack of teaching materials that explicitly focus on turn-taking.

The objective of the present study was therefore to develop a turn-taking curriculum component, shaped and evaluated through an action research approach. The main research questions were: *Does a focus on turn-taking skills make appropriate curriculum content?* and *To what extent will our students embrace turn-taking-focused instruction?* The latter question acknowledges the unfamiliarity of conceptualizing turn-taking as a syllabus item, and acknowledges that such non-traditional curriculum content may be resisted by students.

Methods

In classroom-based action research, teachers reflect on their situation, identify a problem, enact a change to address this problem, evaluate that change, modify the action, and then reflect further, identifying further problems and new courses of action (McNiff and Whitehead 2006). Following an initial period of reflection and the trialling of existing resources, the main phases of the study were conducted over three semesters, involving two teachers (the authors) and nine groups of students who participated in different ways. We kept detailed reflective journals, analytical notes and meeting minutes on aspects of the reflection-to-action cycle, in which we examined materials, analysed classroom recordings, developed and trialled materials and lesson plans, tested student skills, evaluated student feedback and success, and then evaluated the success of the intervention.

The wider group of learner participants totalled 90 tertiary-level students in New Zealand (NZ), who each participated for one (and in a few cases two) semesters. These were volunteers from the nine classes (from approx. 165 students) being taught by the teacher-researchers at the time of the study, and who consented to being observed as project participants, with corresponding notes recorded. Ages ranged from 18 to 60+, with the majority being 18–25 and six being aged 45 + . The majority (63) were international students; of these, 21 had enrolled at the institution for the first time within a few weeks of their participation, while the remainder had mostly been enrolled for between 6–12 months. The remaining 23 students were permanent residents of NZ; although exact figures are not available, we estimate most had lived in NZ for 2–5 years. Students participated in a wide range of teaching and learning activities and provided oral feedback on their reactions to tasks.

Within this wider group of participants, 17 students from four classes in the first two semesters volunteered to keep reflective diaries and participate in additional audio and video recordings of classroom activities; these included native seven speakers of Mandarin, three of Cantonese, two of Thai, and one each of Khmer, French, Arabic, Tagalog and Farsi. The reflective journals were printed booklets with a one-page space per activity for reflective comments, using the following prompts:

- What turn taking activity did you do today?
- Please write down any thoughts or feelings you have about the group turn taking activity.
- Any suggestions about how we could improve this activity?

Each class experienced a somewhat different range of activities, with the numbers as follows (Table 1).

No student recorded an entry for every activity trialled, with the number of entries recorded varying from five to 11. There was also considerable variation in the lengths of entries, with some filling the page and some being as short as two or three sentences. Most commonly, entries were 40–50 words.

The teacher reflective journals were maintained over three semesters and were loosely organized around the following prompts:

- What I did
- How it went
- What I noticed
- Ideas for improvement

Although these were initially intended to be collected after each turn-taking focused lesson, the practicalities of managing busy teaching schedules meant that these were often not completed. Entries tended to be made when something particularly notable occurred or was noticed, with 23 made over the three semesters.

The planned role of the teacher journals was to a large extent supplanted by meetings between the two teacher-researchers, which occurred formally every one or two weeks, along with more frequent briefer discussions. Notes from the formal meetings were recorded. These meetings served multiple functions, including discussions of the relevant literature, brainstorming and designing activities and lesson planning, sharing reflections, and so on.

The project also involved a number of other sources of material to inform the planning of the teaching interventions. These included several recordings and analyses of student discussions, informal tests, and examining the turn-taking presented in student textbooks and other sources. Each such source of data informed our pedagogical decision-marking through the iterative process of formulating a pedagogical response, evaluating its success, and further reflection.

In addressing the research questions posed in this paper, we focus on the qualitative data drawn mainly from the formal meeting notes and from the student and teacher reflective journals. In coding the data, we examined the teacher and learner perspectives both in terms of their orientation and their contribution to the cycles of action. We began firstly by grouping reflections chronologically and by activity. These were then coded separately for evaluative comments (positive, neutral,

Table 1. Participants.

Class	Participating students	Number of activities trialled
1 (Semester 1)	5 (C, M, M, M, Th)	15
2 (Semester 1)	4 (Fr, K, M, Th)	11
3 (Semester 2)	5 (A, Fa, M, M, Ta)	15
4 (Semester 2)	3 (C, C, M)	9

(A = Arabic, C = Cantonese, Fa = Farsi, Fr = French, K = Khmer, M = Mandarin, Ta = Tagalog, Th = Thai)

negative) and for suggestions/critiques. With reference to the chronological arrangement, we then traced evidence of any action that arose in response to a particular reflection.

Findings

This section focuses initially on observations about the relevant student needs and gaps in what text-books were addressing and then outlines our response through designing pedagogical activities. Focus then turns to the reactions of the students and ourselves to individual tasks, and reflections on the overall intervention. Although the findings are presented here in a linear fashion, these processes happened largely iteratively and concurrently.

Needs analysis

As indicated in the literature review, turn-taking involves the operation of a number of complex systems including intonation and syntax, and other specific practices such as the use of turn entry devices and turn nomination. Based on key concepts from the CA literature, a reasonably comprehensive syllabus might include the following elements[2]:

Consciousness-raising: awareness of turn-taking as a 'thing' and as a potential source of difficulty

Identifying and signalling turn completion: phonological cues, grammatical and action completion, body language

Taking the floor: turn entry devices, non-verbal starts, overlap
Holding the floor: projecting multi-unit turns, rush throughs

Orchestrating the floor: awareness of *last as next bias*, practice in nominating and holding the floor, body language

However, such issues are seldom if ever addressed in published teaching materials. A wide, ongoing search for relevant teaching materials proved almost entirely fruitless. This accorded both with our own impressions as practitioners and with the conclusions of other researchers (Barraja-Rohan 2011; Wong and Waring 2010). Thus to the extent that existing published resources do educate learners about turn-taking, this would be only implicitly through the practices encoded in listening texts.

This prompted an evaluation of the authenticity of the turn-taking features of a sample of listening texts from student textbooks. The analyses revealed substantial shortcomings. Six audio recordings of dialogues were analysed, with detailed transcriptions made using the Jeffersonian system (e.g. Jefferson 2015); a brief, representative example is presented in Supplement 1. Compared to naturally occurring spoken data, a number of inauthentic features were notably recurrent. In particular, turn transitions typically occurred with a gap of between 0.4 and 0.7 seconds; no cases were identified of overlapping talk, rush-throughs or trailing off; and both latching and minimal turns (such as continuers) were seldom found. As in Supplement 1, the texts tended to be formed from a series of tightly structured adjacency pairs (such as question and answer), with the base pairs creating such a strong sense of orderliness that there was little sense of speakers ever competing for the floor. Explicit turn-nomination and common turn entry devices, both of which are particularly relevant to multi-party talk, were seldom found. Features that did occur frequently included various intonation patterns to signal continuation or completion, and the use of in-breath to signal continuation or turn beginning. Overall, our concerns mirrored those of Wong (2002), who suggested that the intuitions of textbook writers had resulted in materials presenting interactional practices that lack authenticity.

Syllabus and materials development

In the first 18-week semester of the project, a draft turn-taking syllabus was developed and thereafter subsequently revised multiple times over the following semesters. Perhaps reflecting the over-

enthusiasm that sometimes accompanies a new project, the initial syllabus had 12 turn-taking units; by the third 18-week semester, the skeleton syllabus was substantially tighter, and had consolidated into 2-3 hours of explicit turn-taking focused instruction or practice, with a further 9–12 hours of fluency-based communicative activities that included turn-taking practice. The topics were those bulleted in the sub-section above (e.g. Consciousness-raising; Identifying and signalling turn completion). Undoubtedly the 2–3 hours of turn-taking instruction and additional incidental practice time reduced the time available for other useful activities, and the value of this trade-off will be considered in what follows.

Our teaching approach was to draw students' attention to relevant features of turn-taking (through consciousness-raising or direct instruction), practice a specific micro-skill (e.g. intonation patterns in turn-completion), and then practice turn-taking in conversation or discussion. Initially the activities drew mainly on those suggested by Wong and Waring (2010) and Carroll (2011), but as the project progressed these were increasingly supplemented with new activities developed through the cycles of action and reflection; some of these have been subsequently published (Ryan and Forrest 2015, 2016) and further examples are presented in Supplement 2.

The reflective cycles targeted our selection and use of activities focusing on how they could be improved and, indeed, which to abandon. In some cases, multiple variations of an activity were trialled in the search for incremental improvements (see, for example, Supplement 2, 'Chipping In'). A crucial part of this process was eliciting feedback from students after each activity was trialled, with participating students asked to record 'any thoughts or feelings' they had about the activity and any suggestions for improvement. As an example, student comments about one activity (focused on overlap) included:

- 'I think it's really important topic. In this way we can share information each other and can judge other what they are saying. They can judge me as well. Also, it's a good way to improve speaking as well.'
- 'It was good because the one who take turn was talking about their opinions to the other one very clearly, so which means the other can help to support their opinion'

And the suggestions for this activity included:

- 'I suggest that we should learn more on this activity, it was very helpful to guess what next the talks were going to happen'
- 'We can do this kind of activity quite often because sometimes some students in a group they don't talk too much. May be they can't understand what to say'

As reflected here, student reactions were nearly always positive. Comments ranged in focus from the relevancy of the specific skill, the design and usefulness of the activity, to the sense of satisfaction and enjoyment produced. Also, well-received was the largely explicit nature of some the teaching (whereby certain phenomena were labelled and discussed as 'things'):

- 'After explain projection of speaker, it helps me to do turn taking.'
- 'To explain why the sentence is finished or unfinished that make me to understand. After learning some rules, it's helpful to understand it.'

However, more helpful were the occasional critical comments that prompted change. For instance, in the first semester of the project, one of the classes repeated a variation on the 'Chipping In' activity (Supplement 2) for 5–10 minutes for six weeks. Of the 20 students in this class, five kept journals, four of whom consistently reported enjoying it as a routine activity, as captured in multiple student journal entries, for instance:

- 'In my feeling I think turn taking activity is good for us because it help to us to increase self-control'
- 'I feel that practice of jumping in take a turn was helpful, and I feel that I improved on it'
- 'This activity seem to be very interesting because it let the student able to recognize how to socialize and express their thought.
- 'It was very helpful for us to improve our English. We will be a good communication. I enjoyed it a lot.'

However for at least one student, after an initially positive appraisal, repetition brought declining interest and motivation, a view shared by various commentators (e.g. Fanselow 1992). Yui (Thai) recorded in her journal that

> in my opinion, I don't much like this activity … we should change another activity to do such as real group discussion as can keep practicing on listening and turn taking too. After 5 weeks we must change new activity to do.

The activity was immediately dropped and others trialled. This journal entry also expresses an apparent desire to focus more on using turn-taking skills in meaningful interaction rather than isolating micro-skills (in this case detecting turn completion and using turn entry devices). Thus, in the following semester, a greater emphasis was placed on keeping activities fresh by avoiding such routine use of tasks, and on reducing the amount of practice of micro-skills in favour of more general communicative activities with a turn-taking focus.

A further misstep became apparent in the second semester, and relates to an activity similar in design to Activity 3 (Supplement 2). Initially, the activity was framed in a competitive way, with 'winners' achieving a certain amount of talking time and others necessarily achieving little talking time; timing would be recorded by an observer (the 'marks' referred to below). In practice, some of the resulting interactions were clearly problematic with some groups regularly interrupting one another and failing to recognize legitimate speaker rights to the floor, and therefore requiring additional teaching management. As recorded in teacher journal entries, we interpreted this to reflect either a gap in student knowledge or over-exuberance. However, written reflections provided by one participant, Mary (Chinese), proved insightful:

> They are no eye contact, no voice low down, no body language to another people. They like a record who losing their mind. If I wanna have marks, the only thing I can do is interruption which is rude.

> I think it is very bad and useless for your purpose that improve students communication, but he can get marks. They do not care about others. The only thing that wanted is to get marks.

As Mary correctly identified, turn-taking must not be reduced to mere competition for the floor. Rather, it needs to be seen (at least in most circumstances) as a cooperative and coordinated endeavour, in which speakers strive to achieve smooth and harmonious transitions, all the while listening to one another and responding in ways that are appropriate to the sequence of talk. Inadvertently, such activities may have encouraged interruptive behaviour. Also potentially relevant to this case was the sizeable age-gap between Mary (aged 39) and her younger partners (19–24), and it may be that this activity discouraged students from engaging their socio-linguistic competence in deferring to their more senior partner in some uses of English as a lingua-franca. After reflection we decided to retain the task but downplay its competitive element. It appeared to have value in helping equip learners with tools to take the floor, but needed counterbalancing with greater emphasis on developing learner sensitivity to appropriate deployment.

The student reflective journals thus provided important feedback that helped to shape the design and delivery of the teaching interventions. Furthermore, in relation to the second research question, these and the teacher-researcher journals together indicate that nearly all students in our context responded positively to turn-taking activities but particularly to those activities that encourage sensitivity to harmonious transitions between speakers. Student engagement appeared particularly strong among longer term residents of English-speaking societies (a year or more), among whom a number reported previous struggles with turn-taking. Conversely, support appeared weakest

among a minority of the most recently arrived students. It may be that this latter group valued and expected more traditional curriculum content, felt they had more pressing language learning needs, or had yet to face challenges in this domain.

Project evaluation

The most unequivocal finding of this study was that no student reported or demonstrated prior explicit knowledge of the English turn-taking system. No student, it seems, had previously studied or otherwise reflected on turn-taking, and thus two successes of the intervention were that students became conscious of turn-taking as 'a thing', and that they came to recognize that turn-taking represented a relevant skill area. Further, as discussed, there was widespread (though not unanimous) enthusiasm for the types of activity trialled, and as teachers, the project proved highly satisfying both in relation to the day-to-day teaching experience and longer term professional development.

A more fundamental aspect of the evaluation, however, is the research question *Does a focus on turn-taking skills make appropriate curriculum content?* This acknowledges the plausibly-held view that turn-taking may be too abstract to teach explicitly and that relevant skills would be better developed incidentally rather than as a focus of instruction. A conventional quasi-experimental approach to exploring this was effectively ruled out by the multitude of confounding factors relevant to whether or not one contributes to a discussion, largely invalidating between-group comparisons. However, relevant evidence did emerge from students self-reporting success. Of particular note was feedback received from a participant six months and again 12 months after her involvement in the project, suggesting a long-term impact on her learning. This feedback, first received by email and then as a self-recorded video commentary, was unsolicited by us, and (aside perhaps from a wish to stay in touch) appeared to represent the sole purpose of the communication. The participant was a mature, native speaker of Mandarin who had arrived in NZ shortly before her involvement in the project. After completing the course, she had enrolled in a further semester of English, which involved participating in a series of mainstream lectures and group discussions, and at the end of the semester she reported the following:

> "I'm happy to tell you that turn-taking helped me to get high score in [English course name]" And in the nursing program lectures and tutorials that she attended "I can easily to accept and follow class discussion, it's really useful."

> In group discussion assignments, I felt comfortable to jump [in] or help support other classmates speaking, so I got high score, thank you very much.

The following semester she enrolled in a bachelor of nursing programme and at the end of that semester contacted us again (also unsolicited), sending a selfie-style video recording. There, she reported finding the benefits of the turn-taking intervention to be much more apparent even than before:

> It's much easier to find my way and speak in class because you taught us turn-taking. I really want to thank you so much.

> Actually, it's much more useful for me now in mainstream class, more useful than first semester [in Advanced English].

This endorsement seemed particularly strong, especially given that no further reflections had been sought. Although it is likely to be a particularly positive view rather that a representative one, it suggests that turn-taking activities were useful for at least some students.

Similarly, evidence emerged during classes of some students successfully applying their recently developed turn-taking skills to interactions in their daily lives. For example, one learner, who had attended a local high school and had a wide circle of New Zealand friends, reported consciously deploying his newly-acquired turn-taking knowledge in group interactions with his local friends, thereby suddenly feeling able to orchestrate group discussions, by being able to take the floor

and nominate next speakers at will. Although caution is required in generalizing from such reports, these accounts (supported by those in the previous subsection) do at least attest to students believing that the turn-taking instruction was helpful.

Turning now to the issue of *how* to teach turn-taking, it is insightful to reflect on the development of our own beliefs over the five semesters. Initially, our approach was weighted more heavily towards repeated practice of relevant micro-skills (such as distinguishing transition-relevant intonation patterns), which can be taught in the presentation-practice-production manner. While this remains an important part of the programme, we have somewhat de-emphasized this over time. One reason is the challenge posed by the contingent nature of conversation, where there are useful principles but few certainties. Elsewhere, much of the language content of traditional curricula is either mostly subject to rigid rules (e.g. spelling and grammar), or shoe-horned into appearing so (e.g. comprehension questions that demand a single correct answer). It may be for this reason that a few students seemed sceptical about the value or efficacy of principles that do not function as rules (e.g. TCUs representing *possible* points of transition). Nevertheless, the vast majority did seem comfortable with the contingent nature of turn-taking, which may after all resonate with their reflections on language use.

Also influencing our partial shift away from such activities was a deepening understanding that the real activity of turn-taking typically requires harnessing broad systems of language and interaction. Thus although micro-skills may be usefully introduced, rather than repeatedly practicing and trying to master them in isolation, it seemed more helpful to put awareness to use in motivated, free-flowing discussions when students could employ their knowledge to maintain a harmonious and rhythmic flow of speaker transitions.

As our final reflections on the project (some 18 months after its conclusion), we examined its legacy in terms of our present approach to teaching and how we have subsequently incorporated turn-taking into other programmes. Given competing demands and time constraints in the classroom, we feel the most essential elements for a minimal programme to be:

- Consciousness-raising of turn-taking as a 'thing' and of transitions often occurring without gaps
- The notion of projection, highlighting grammatical, intonational and action completion
- Basic strategies to take the floor (e.g. turn entry devices, in-breath and certain gestures)

Although there appeared to be substantial value from the more comprehensive programme, these three areas now seem to us to provide the minimal turn-taking tools that may help many students participate in group discussions with native speakers.

Discussion

The development of turn-taking skills is of critical importance to many NNS, facilitating their participation in a wide range of group activities, yet remains a highly neglected area in language teaching. The present study aimed to address this shortcoming within our own teaching context, but has highlighted issues and produced materials that we anticipate will have wider currency. The approach taken was that of CA-informed language teaching (e.g. Betz and Huth 2014; Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm 2006; Wong and Waring 2010), in which the 'practical logic' of ordinary talk-in-interaction (Psathas 1995, 3) is a teaching objective.

In relation to general good practice guidelines (such as those of Nation and Macalister 2010), we found it achievable to develop a varied range of teaching activities focusing learner attention on aspects of turn-taking, and possible to provide meaningful and engaging practice. With very few exceptions, the participants appeared highly receptive to explicit instruction and reported satisfying progress.

While measures of validity in educational research typically encompass concepts such as generalizability and replicability, this is problematic for much practitioner research, where the focus is on

building knowledge and solving problems in a local context. Such measures are therefore often better recast as concepts such as *outcome validity* and *catalytic validity* (Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen 2007). Outcome validity is concerned with the extent to which a project effects positive change to the problem being addressed; as mentioned above, there does appear to be success by this measure, with evidence of students developing greater understanding and appreciation of turn-taking, reporting success outside the language classroom, and of the development of substantial curriculum content for wider use. Nevertheless, turn-taking instruction alone is unlikely to be a panacea for low NNS participation in classroom discussions, which may actually result from a complex interplay of various factors, including linguistic and interactional competence, self-confidence, topic knowledge, group membership, and issues of gender and power (Morita 2004). Thus for many, turn-taking skills may represent just one piece of the puzzle.

Another aspect of outcome validity is to consider how the project has reframed for participants and other stakeholders the underlying issues relating to SLL non-participation. For us as teacher-researchers, and for colleagues who have adopted our approach and materials, the project has reframed SLL non-participation as a potential outcome of being ill-equipped to anticipate turn completion and to take the floor. In opposition to the dominant willingness to communicate (WTC) approach, the problem is reframed not as hinging on fixed personality traits and transient psychological states, but as an issue in interactional competence. In so doing, the promotion of SLL participation is not dependent on resolving sometimes intractable issues of personal growth in second language identity, and nor does it depend on teachers allocating turns or orchestrating other highly context-bound behaviour; rather, it brings into focus the acquisition of a set of highly productive interactional tools. Moreover, it suggests that there is a credible pedagogical approach to providing students with these tools.

For the student participants, it was the first time that identifying and seizing turns was cast as a linguistic issue distinguishable from the challenge of processing and responding to prior turns. More importantly, specific problem-solving strategies were taught, thereby equipping students to participate in group discussions where otherwise they may have remained silent, overwhelmed by the fast pace of talk and perhaps exclusive turn-nomination practices. In contrast to placing the onus on teachers to orchestrate group behaviour, or urging greater inclusiveness from native speakers, the present approach appears inherently more practical and liberating for second language learners, who may develop greater control over their ability to initiate and sustain participation in group discussions.

There is, however, a risk in uncritically accepting this shift in perspective, which could over-emphasise the agency of the learner and downplay their social reality. Discussions take place in sociocultural contexts in which power, such as that invested in native-speaker privilege, may operate to marginalize contributions from some non-native speakers. Indeed, there are practices through which both mainstream educators and NS students can ensure equitable participation by NNS (see Morita 2004). The risk, therefore, is in both teachers and students overlooking this and shifting responsibility to an 'interactional skills deficit'. Nevertheless, there is, of course, an essential distinction to be made between attributing responsibility for a situation, and deciding on the most practical and liberating way to address it.

Among the limitations of the study, the interpretation of student feedback needs to be tempered with acknowledgement of the conditions of the project, in which participants may have responded to our enthusiasm and to having their feedback regularly sought. In addition, those students who volunteered as participants may have been more interested in the notion of turn-taking to begin with; not captured may be the thoughts of those for whom the project failed to arouse initial interest. Despite these caveats, the overall strongly positive student feedback did accord with our overall impressions of student engagement, enthusiasm and motivation during turn-taking focused tasks. Also important to acknowledge is that, in relation to specific activities, there were at least two dissenting voices, and one of these was generally (albeit mildly) unenthused about the topic of turn-taking in general. This resonated with our observation that the students most responsive to turn-taking

activities were those with prior experience of participation problems, and could suggest that it would be better received on ESL rather than EFL courses.

Notes

1. This situation is in contrast to group discussions exclusively among NNS with a shared L1 background, in which effective turn management and precision timing are regularly achieved (e.g. Carroll 2000, 2004).
2. Presumably, the scope could be narrowed if the most and least troublesome aspects could be identified for a particular group of students. This was attempted in the wider study but as many of the findings were either (1) tentative and impressionistic or (2) confirmatory of previous studies (e.g. Hauser 2009; Hughes, 2005), they will be set aside for the purposes of this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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