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This paper is a synopsis of preliminary findings derived from ongoing research related to the teaching of spoken English to young adult learners in the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Saitama University. Although the research cycle is in its early stages, it is hoped that the data garnered from the investigation described below will provide evidence to suggest that focusing on learners' interlanguage as a means to promote conversational development is a useful strategy in helping develop conversational awareness and communication skills.

Background

The original research was inspired by observations of learners in communication classes I had taught in a variety of contexts over the years, who seemed able to engage in communication about a set topic, but who could not carry the dialogue over into a more conversational register, either by providing signs that they were actively engaged with what their interlocutor was saying through appropriate backchannel responses, or could not, or may have thought it inappropriate in a classroom setting, to allow the kind of topic drift that engagement in a natural conversation would generate. Dialogues were often formulaic with a general tendency for interactions to be in a question/answer format with no topic development.

After a period of trial and error, and with the assistance of student feedback, I began to formulate a teaching methodology that centred on an active listening strategy with guidance on how to respond to an interlocutor real time and not falling back on sets of prepared questions. Part of this process also involved reassuring learners that if a conversation does not go well in any particular instance, it might not necessarily be their fault in terms of a lack of linguistic ability, but that rather, that native speakers of any language can have difficulty conversing if they have no common points of interest with the speaker with whom they are talking and that this might be something that they will experience from time to time in class due to the random assignment of students into groups and pairs. In essence, my basic stance was to assume that students had the basic interlinguistic skills to interact in a normal question/answer dialogue, but that they lacked the skills and experience to pull topics out of the dialogue they created and to follow through into a more conversational register, the characteristics of which involve listening, responding and following up on what is heard.

My second assumption was that if I were to give students more control over the discourse and converse about topics which had meaning to their own lives, then they would hopefully come up against vocabulary

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and expressions in the process of interaction that would be normal to their ideolectic patterns of speech and that they would either have to negotiate the meaning of in L2, or set aside to learn for the future; with the guiding advice that they don't know what they don't know until they actually try to use the language in practice.

Essentially, the class was structured around students being given a starting topic likely to be relevant to their lives such as 'a happy childhood memory', 'a funny embarrassing moment', 'a recurring dream' or 'a first love' etc., and then asked to follow any topic that came up within the course of the interaction, regardless of where it led. The only condition was that they use English as the primary mode of communication for the negotiation of meaning. That is to say, using what they know to discover what they didn't. However, this strategy was not without its problems, not least of which was how to provide students with a means to measure and monitor any progress they might make over the course of the semester, as well as how such progress could be assessed.

The solution to this problem, inspired initially by Kindt, (2000, in Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 289) and Lynch (2001: ibid), was to ask students to record their conversations on a Walkman so they had a means to see how their conversation looked as it had unfolded. This was originally conceived as a process by which pairs of students would make a first recording at the beginning of the semester, transcribe it by themselves, then work with the teacher over the subsequent weeks to see what elements of the discourse they produced could be improved in terms of topic development, appropriate responses in the form of backchannels and follow-up questions etc. Students would then make a second recording towards the end of term which they would also transcribe by themselves and compare to what extent they had been able to integrate conversational features into their discourse compared to the first recording transcript. It would also provide a means by which they could be assessed on a number of variables such as the extent to which they had integrated elements of discourse strategies into their conversations, such as back-channeling and follow-up questions that would have been discussed and practiced in conversational development tasks over the course of the semester.

Preliminary runs of this procedure in communication classes in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 academic years suggested that it held promise for further development as an alternative teaching strategy to the traditional task based activities or grammar based lessons I was used to teaching such as asking for directions or situational transactions. However, in the present academic year (2008/09), I decided to vary the process by having students make the recordings of their conversations at the beginning and towards the last weeks of the semester, the same as had been done in previous year's classes, but to transcribe all the dialogues myself and not return them to the students until both recording phases had been completed and the dialogues fully transcribed.

Given the practicalities of transcribing large amounts of spoken text as well as ethical considerations concerning the use of data obtained from students for research purposes, recordings were made only from students who had volunteered to take part in the research process. While the core teaching strategy of fostering conversational awareness would still be undertaken for the whole class, students making the recordings would not be using their own transcript data. Instead, transcripts of a recording made in a previous class from

students who had given permission to use the data for teaching purposes would be presented as it represented the kind of interaction that characterizes a great deal of typical student exchanges which never go beyond a question/answer format. It was hoped that this would provide an opportunity for students to objectively assess and discuss an example of student interaction that would stimulate awareness of the teaching goals of the class, and provoke an interest in the process of how to formulate more natural discourse.

Method and preliminary research findings

The setting

A classroom setting (a seating capacity of forty) with free moving desks and chairs located in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Saitama University.

The participants

Ten Japanese university students (aged between 19-21) majoring in European/American Studies & Liberal Arts enrolled on a single semester 15 week elective General English Communication Class whose average English ability (untested), determined on the basis of previous years classes, to be from the lower to mid-intermediate level.

Procedure

Having explained the general outline of the course and intended research aims in the opening class of term in mid April, an invitation was extended for volunteers who would be willing to have their conversations recorded twice over the semester for transcription, analysis and research. Out of a total of thirty-six students, twelve put their names forward (two of which dropped out of the course mid-term and whose initial recorded transcripts were not included in the study). The volunteers were randomly assigned into pairs by the following procedure:

- o Six students were each given numbers on slips of paper numbered from one to six. The other six students drew a lot from an envelope containing corresponding numbers. So if a student drew the number 4 from the envelope, s/he was paired with the student who already had been assigned the number 4 etc. They would retain this pairing for the recording sessions only, at all other times they were assigned membership of groups with other members of the class through the process described below.

The remainder of the time in the first class was directed towards mixed groups, becoming familiar with other class members by making self-introductions, free conversation and asking students to write me a letter of self-introduction in English giving some background information about themselves, their family, hobbies etc. and also the kind of things that they would like to do in the class. This process served three purposes, the first to gauge the general level of communicative ability the students are capable of producing without directly asking them or testing them. Secondly, to find out their learning goals from the class (essentially a form of

needs analysis), and lastly, to give me a chance to get to know them on an individual basis from the very outset. Writing a response letter of self introductions to model correct forms of surface errors students might have made in their introductory letters is an optional procedure I omitted in this particular instance.

The class in the second week was centred on three set activities:

1. Familiarization with classroom management procedures which included how to form groups. So in a class of thirty six, students would be assigned a number from one to nine and asked to sit together (numbered positions indicated on the blackboard) with students of the same number, resulting in optimum groups of four (or three depending on fluctuations in weekly attendance). This was the method for arranging groups employed in every class with the exception of the two occasions volunteers were paired to make recordings in the second week of May and mid July where they paired up with their assigned partner and the rest of the class were grouped per the usual numbering process into six groups of four instead of the usual nine.

2. Having established the weekly group formation procedures, students were assigned into groups and directed to discuss and list what they knew about common greetings/responses and conversation openers in English. As this was a brainstorming activity, they were allowed to use Japanese if necessary and English where possible to share ideas.

3. After approximately ten minutes discussion time, groups were invited to provide their responses to the whole class which were copied on to the blackboard. A handout was then distributed with a list of common greetings and responses which highlighted the distinction between "What" and "How" greetings. The expressions new to the students, or ones they didn't come up with by themselves are italicized in the list provided in examples 1 & 2 below.

Example 1   Conversational openers (How?)

Possible *How* openers	Possible replies (any combination)
How are you doing? (*Howyedoin*?)	(I'm) fine thank you
How are you? (*How's you?*)	Fine/Fine thanks
How's it going?	Great (thanks)
How's things?	*Not bad* (thanks)
How's tricks?	Okay (thanks)
	So-so
	Busy/tired/sleepy (while the students knew these words they didn't know them as responses to conversational openings)
	I've been better

Example 2   Conversational openers (What?)

Possible '*What*' openers	Possible replies (any combination)
What's up? What have you been doing *these days?* *What have you been up to these days?*	Nothing much *Nothing Special* *Nothing in particular* *I've been (explanation; e.g. really busy etc)*

The homework assignment was for students to familiarize themselves with all of these expressions and choose one with which they could identify and remember.

Data collection

In the third week, which was the second week of May, the volunteers were put with their pre-assigned partners and given a recording Walkman and a 5x5 minute blank cassette tape already inserted. Procedures and instructions for making the recordings were given on a handout.

In order to avoid excessive background noise from the rest of the class, I was fortunate in having a free classroom adjacent to where the actual class was being held and could move the volunteers to make their recordings in a quieter environment. The rest of the class were then grouped randomly into groups of four, which then divided in to two pairs per group. The whole class was then asked to open a conversation with one of the conversation openers in examples 1 or 2, and to let a conversation develop. By not suggesting a starting topic, other than make an opening greeting, I was seeking to free the students from the idea that they would have to stick to a set theme which might otherwise have constrained their topic development and conversation on the whole. I was interested to see exactly what students were capable of producing by themselves after they had made a greeting in an attempt to replicate exactly how a conversation might evolve outside the classroom environment. The volunteer pairs did exactly the same activity, but also recorded their conversations until the tape in the Walkman ran out.

I then collected the tapes and Walkmans with the intention of transcribing the dialogues to give back to the students the week after the next recording phase which was scheduled for week 13 of the semester when the exact same procedures were carried out as described above. In week 14, I returned transcribed versions from the May recordings and those of the previous week along with a questionnaire with space for comments on any differences the students perceived in their conversations when they compared both recordings.

Teaching procedures between the recording periods

In the latter half of the third week's class, after recordings had been made and the volunteers returned to the main class, all the students were presented with a transcript of dialogue from a previous year's class. This particular transcript was given as an awareness raising exercise for the discourse skills that were going to be taught for the rest of the term.

Example 3 (Example dialogue transcript from a previous class recording)

01   A: Where are you from?

02   B: I'm from Tochigi.

03   A: What's your parent's job?

04   B: Salary man.

05   A: How many sisters do you have?

06   B: One sister.

07   A: How many brothers do you have?

08   B: One brother.

09   A: Do you have any hobbies?

10   B: Yes I have. My hobby is soccer.

11   A: What kind of music do you like?

12   B: I like "Bump of Chicken." Where are you from?

13   A: I'm from Fukushima.

14   B: What's your parent's job?

15   A: Father is in hospital. My mother is part time.

16   B: How many brothers and sisters?

17   A: I have one brother and one sister.

18   B: What do you usually do in your spare time?

19   A: I listen to music.

(Author's own data)

After reading through the transcript, students were asked to discuss if they thought there was anything unusual or odd about the way the dialogue unfolded. After a short period the class turned to a teacher-fronted discussion which focused on aspects of the dialogue that would be considered un-natural if it were to be part of a normal informal conversational routine. The main focus of the discussion centred on the fact that there were no follow-up questions that would have allowed the conversation to develop into a more generalized interaction which would also have included various combinations of rejoinders, fillers and comments which are a common characteristic of general informal conversation.   For example, line 09: "*Do you have any hobbies*?" the response in line 10: "*Yes I have. My hobby is soccer*", could be considered a rich source of topic development if the listener had actively listened and responded to the answer rather than concentrating on formulating a new unrelated question (line 11), "*What kind of music do you like?*" Immediate follow-ups that come to mind could be:

- *Do you play for any team?*
- *What position do you play?*
- *How many times a week do you practice/play?*
- *Which team do you support?*
- *Who is your favourite player?*
- *Do you often go to watch live games?*
- Etc.

This kind of non-follow-up as presented in example 3 is, according to McCarthy (1998: 53), characteristic of learner exchanges where the teacher is situated near the learners. Although McCarthy does not specific as to why this is significant, it could be inferred that he is referring to the kind of exchanges learners produce as the teacher tries to manoeuvre themselves into a position where they can monitor students interaction and the students modify their language or "*footing*" (Goffman 1979 in Bannink, 2002: 272), projecting a positive image of active engagement for the benefit of the teacher. Other considerations, might be that while students might be linguistically capable of making a follow-up moves it is the teacher is who assumed to "*have the right to frame interactions*"(Johnstone, 2002: 121), and students might not have had the opportunity to practice this essential function of following up on responses to enable conversational development, especially in classes which are teacher fronted. Ultimately, "*The learner needs to be made aware that follow-up is not just for teachers, and not just for evaluating correct or incorrect performance*" (McCarthy, 1998: 53) and is a feature of conversational exchange important for learners to integrate into their communicative repertoire (ibid: 54).

It is the feature of how follow-up moves are made which I will now briefly discuss with a view to introducing the analytical framework I have used to interpret the data in this study along with a sample extract of the data and some brief comments.

Analysis and data

According to Halliday (1984) & Halliday and Mathiessen, (2004) in Eggins, (2004:144), turns at speaking are the process by which a social relationship is formed between the person speaking and the person who is expected to speak through the process of exchanging of information (ibid). In this analytical framework, there are four speech functions from which all conversational exchanges are said to occur (ibid). These are: *Statement, Question, Offer, Command* (ibid). Depending on which of these speech functions, or 'moves' a speaker chooses to initiate a dialogue, an interlocutor will make a corresponding reply which will be either in the form a *supporting* or *confronting* (ibid) *discretionary* (Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 118) response.

The table below provides examples (constructed) to show how the *initiating* and corresponding *expected* or *discretionary* elements would be formed in an actual exchange.

Table 1   Examples of Halliday's basic speech functions

Initiating speech function	Responding speech function (supporting)	Responding speech function (confronting/discretionary)
Statement *I passed my driving test*	Acknowledgement *That's great*	Contradiction *You're still not getting to borrow the car*
Question *Did you end up going on the date?*	Answer *Yes*	Disclaimer *Don't know what you're talking about*
Offer *Would you like to go to see a movie?*	Acceptance *Sounds nice*	Rejection *Sorry I'm busy*
Command *Wash the dishes*	Compliance *After I've finished my coffee*	Refusal *Do it yourself*

(adapted from Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 118 and Eggins, 2004, 146 from Halliday, 1994)

Elaborating on this description of speech function, Eggins and Slade (1997, in Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 119) have suggested that given the frequency of discretionary responding moves in conversational English, a more precise analysis can be obtained if the discretionary moves are sub-divided into two categories:

I. *Tracking moves* (tr): a responding move that tracks and follows previous moves and also checks and confirms what a previous speaker has said with no confrontational elements in the acts.

II. *Challenging moves* (ch): a responding move that functions to contradict or clarify information with a speech act that challenges what a speaker has said.

Given the informal nature of conversational English, discretionary challenging moves are said to be a common feature of speaker exchanges which serve to sustain and maintain social relationships "*hence the need for linguistic strategies that open out, rather than foreclose, the conversation*"(Eggins and Slade, 1997 in Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 119).

Table 2 serves to provide an overview of the Eggins and Slade model which forms the basis of the analytical tools used to interpret extracts of student data used in this paper. Table 3 presents a summary of transcript conventions used in the analysis and is followed by a sample of one pair of students' dialogue for both May and July recordings with accompanying comments on points in the discourse that are of particular interest.

Table 2 A model for conversational analysis

Initiating moves	Expected responding moves	Discretionary moves
(I:S) statement (I:Q) question (Q:R) rhetorical question (I:O) offer (I:C) command	(R:A) answer (R:K) acknowledging move (R:O) response to offer (R:C) response to command	(tr)　tracking move (confirming, checking and clarifying) (rtr) response to tracking (ch) challenging (disengaging, challenging, countering) (rch) response to challenge

(Eggins and Slade, 1997, adapted from Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 120)

Table 3 Transcription conventions

+ signifies a pause between utterances equivalent to approximately one second
++ signifies a time value of approximately two seconds between utterances
< > any time value longer than two seconds is inserted in brackets. For example a five second pause between words or an exchange would be indicated thus: <0.5>
⌈ A square bracket signifies a point of overlap between speaker's utterances, or an interjection
The ⊘ symbol signifies that the interaction is an adjacency pairing.
Numeric indicators from [1] to [9] represent topics as they are discussed over the whole series of exchanges.

Student transcript extracts 1-4: Pair 1

- S01 = Student 1 (female)
- S02 = Student 2 (female)

  o **Extract 1**, pair 1 (May recording)

01	(I:Q$^\oslash$)	S01:	How are you doing?
02	(R:A$^\oslash$+ I:Q$^\oslash$)	S02:	I'm + er + so-so erm, how + how about you?
03	(R:A$^\oslash$)	S01:	I'm + erm + so hi.
04	(tr$^\oslash$+IQ^1)	S02:	Ha-ha + + How + how do you pass this + Golden
05			week?
06	(R:A^1)	S01:	Golden Week + mmmmm, I didn't do nothing. But
07			+ + nothing　special.
08	(tr^1)	S02:	Uh.
09	(R:A^1)	S01:	But eh, I went to + shoppin⌈g
10	(tr^1)	S02:	⌊Mmm].

11	(R:A^1)	S01:	aaand I went to eat delicious food with my senior,
12			erm, senior boyfriend. And I worked part-time job
13			very hard.
14	(tr^1)	S02:	Ah.
15	(R:A^1)	S01:	That's all.
16	(tr^1)	S02	Mmm. Mmm. Mmm
17	(I:Q^2)	S01	How about you?

Comment on extract 1

Lines 01-03 feature an adjacency pairing which remains incomplete due to S01 temporarily forgetting the reciprocating response. Then from lines 04/05 to 16, the exchange concerns the first topic of the interaction (^{1}) where S01 explains what she did during Golden Week which is characterised as one long answer interspersed with tracking feedback moves from S02. The answer ending abruptly at line 15 when S01 feels that she has explained all that she did during golden week stating "*That's all"*, returning the question of what S02 did during Golden week when she asks "*How about you*?" So from the initiation of topic 1 in line 04, the exchange is drawn out over eight turns with minimum backchannel responses from S02.

During the rest of the interaction, while S02 does make neutral tone backchannel responses they are generally delayed until S01 has completed her utterances. That is to say that there is no backchannel tailed on to the end of any utterance that S01 makes to indicate surprise or interest. And there is no follow-up on the potential sub-topics raised where there could have been a useful interjection to enquire about either the senior boyfriend (taken to mean a senior year male student as opposed to an actual boyfriend which is a common way of referring to a male friend in Japan) or details about what part-time job S01 does. The follow up "*How about you*" leads into topic 2 (^{2}) with, S02 explaining that she belongs to the orchestra circle and the following dialogue illustrated in extract 2 ensues. The lack of follow-up question confirms that the follow-up move may be an area of conversation where students might benefit from practicing awareness raising activities.

- **Extract 2, pair 1** (May recording)

18	(R:A^2)	S02	I am-I am belong to orchestra circle so + this erm,
19			this orchestra concert held in Saitama Culture Hall
20			[erm
21	(tr^2)	S01	[Mm]
22	(R:A^2+ IQ^3)	S02	+ May five + + I + I enjoyed playing <0.7> did you
23			go back hometown?
24	(R:A^3)	S01	I didn't because I seldom go + to + my hometown.
25	(tr^3)	S02	Mmm.

Comment on extract 2

Again there are backchannel responses but little in the way of follow-up questions about S02's involvement in the orchestra circle which could have developed into a set of sub topics asking what instrument S02 plays, how many concerts she plays with her circle, how many times they practice, when did she start to play her particular instrument, does she only play in the orchestra circle, who is her favourite composer etc.

By means of comparison, an extract of pair 1's July recording transcripts are provided below.

- **Extract 3, pair 1** (July recording)

01	$(I:Q^{\varnothing})$	S01:	How are you?
02	$(R:A^{\varnothing}+IQ^{\varnothing})$	S02:	I'm fine. How are you?
03	$(R:A^{\varnothing})$	S01	I'm fine too thank you.
04	$R:K^{\varnothing}+IQ^{1})$	S02:	Thank you + + What did you do last + last night?
05	$(R:A^{1}+I:Q^{2})$	S01:	Last night! I worked+part-time job in the
06			swimming pool. What did you do?
07	$(R:A^{2})$	S02:	I+I studied in library and returned home, write
08			+ wrote report.
09	$(tr^{2}+I:Q^{3})$	S01:	Oh! + What subject?
10	$(R:A^{3})$	S02:	About + German + culture.
11	$(R:K^{3}+IQ^{3})$	S01:	German Culture? Mmmm ↗ + Is it difficult?
12	$(R:A^{3})$	S02:	Yes + I ++ began ++ I+began to write +but+I don't
13			I can't finish. Conclusion, I remained conclusion so +
14			so <0.4>
15	$(R:K^{3})$	S01:	okay
16	$(I:Q^{2})$	S02:	How many reports do you have in July?
17	$(R:A^{2}_{4})$	S01:	July + July. Mmm <0.4> Maybe + one + two + three ++
18			three. And I have + I will have + tests.
19	$(I:S^{4})$	S02:	I have no tests this term.
20	(tr^{4})	S01:	Really?
21			(inaudible) <0.26>
22	$(I:S^{2}_{4})$	S02:	I + I prefer for test + to + report.
23	$(tr + I:Q^{4})$	S01:	Oh Really? You will prepare for test?
24	$(R:A^{2})$	S02:	But + I am not + I am not good at writing reports
25	$(I:S^{4}_{1})$	S01:	<0.3>You will prepare for test but I don't prepare test +
26			prepare FOR test because ++ I have no TIME
27			because I work + I work + part- time job.

Comment on extract 3

The July recordings open with the formulaic adjacency pattern which is reciprocated to completion before S01 briefly mentions what she did the previous evening in response to S02's question which gives rise to the first topic (¹). Again, a possible opportunity to ask about exactly what S01 does at the swimming pool is lost but this is more due to S01's returning the question (line 06) asking about what her partner did the previous evening giving rise to the second topic (²) writing a report. Thereafter both students discuss the issue of writing reports which develops into topic 3 (³) discussing the subject of the report. Then the topic of reports branches into topic 4 talking about tests. When the interaction reaches line 25, convergence occurs with topic 4 ($^4/_1$) which relates back to the original topic 1 (¹). So compared to the May transcripts, the main feature of the interaction is that students are holding topics over the course of the conversation and are relating back to previous topics and utterances. In this regard, there could be said to be considerably more cohesion in the exchanges which are very much more tightly linked in terms of topic development. If the remainder of the exchange is examined below (extract 4) the theme of 'reports' flows very smoothly back to S01's relating to her part-time job (¹) which prompts a new topical framework to develop concerning part-time jobs which then forms a $^{1+4}$ (indicated in the transcript as ¼) topic convergence which allows the conversation to move into topic 5 where there is a negotiation sequence over the precise meaning of the intended word 'lacking' centred on S02's job at a convenience store in lines 37-40.

- **Extract 4, pair 1 (**July recording)

28	(I:Q¼)	S02	Did you reduce <0.4> did you reduce +part-time
29			job? part-time job? + for eh <0.4> test *kikan*
30	(R:A$^4/_1$)	S01	Ah, ah, test *kikan*? Test term? Ah. (both laugh)
31			<0.3> Maybe + I will take a rest but I will say to a
32			swimming teacher "I have a test so I want to take a
33			rest". Okay maybe she will say 'okay' but maybe
34			next day she will call me please come to here to
35			swimming to teach children.
36	(I:S$^4/_5$)	S02	I want to take rest but + I can't because + now +
37			my convenience store people is + lacking
38	(tr^5)	S01	Lacky?
39	(R:A^5)	S02	Lacking, lack
40	(tr^5)	S01	Lack mmm mmm
41	(R:A^5)	S02	I have to work.
42	(I:Q^5)	S01	What time do you start part-time job?

Summary comment (pair 1)

Characteristic of Pair 1 is the fact that they have a much more cohesive structure to their conversation in the July recording compared to May where the interactions build into to much more intricate exchanges which show signs of active listening and following up on the response elements to questions.

Discussion

The purpose of the research project was to examine whether conversation, as characterized as informal dialogue between small groups could be utilized as a resource for language learning by adapting an approach similar to that suggested by Prodromou (1997), who advocates a methodology for teaching the spoken language which takes "*students' interlanguage as a starting point and seek to build on that rather than on language imposed from the outside*" (in Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 101). In this regard, it was considered that while students possessed a generally competent linguistic ability in English, they had little outlet to practice it in a way that would allow them to relate to their own lives without the whole process being geared to a final paper based exam. The overriding approach of the class was therefore to allow students to explore the English they had and to bring their attention to the fact that this knowledge alone could be enough to generate genuine communication no different than when they had a conversation in L1 if they focused their attention on what was being said rather than how it was being said. The research involving making before and after recordings of their interactions was to examine whether or not a "conversation-as-process approach to language instruction" (Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 318) was achievable.

While constrictions of space allows for only a limited extract of actual student data in this instance, a comparison of all students' recordings made in the study suggests that three aspects of students' interactions appear to have developed, namely: topic convergence, elaboration, and negotiation for meaning. These are highlighted and discussed briefly below:

1. Topic convergence

Topic convergence during interactions and referral back to previous topics during discourse was an interesting feature of the interactions where students seemed to be displaying an ability to expand on a topic and also hold the information long enough to be able to refer back to parts of the discourse that had previously been exchanged.

2. Elaboration

Elaboration could take the form of an answer being staged in sequences to accommodate backchannel responses by an interlocutor, though answers could also be in the form of statements elaborating on answers to questions asked during interaction.

3. Negotiation for meaning

Negotiation of meaning is a significant finding in that it shows how students are able to use language in L2 to negotiate meaning for L2 interaction, a valuable skill which was not taught directly and may have arisen

from consistent focus on maintaining L2 with explicit instruction not to rely on electronic dictionaries during conversation activities.

Conclusion

While the research is still in its infancy, there are signs to indicate that students can indeed benefit from a methodology which employs a conversational component into the classroom procedure but variations on the best procedure for using the data as a teaching tool need to be worked out through a process of trial and error in accompaniment with student feedback on what they felt worked best for them. That being said, the preliminary evidence would suggest that, in this particular teaching context, with students at this level, learners have the potential to interact and express themselves with the language skills they already possess if they are given the freedom to do so.

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