

Becoming a good conversationalist: Pragmatic development of JFL learners

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Introduction

To become interactionally competent (Young & Miller, 2004) in a foreign language, learners need much more than the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. They need to know how to use various linguistic resources in order to co-construct their intended meanings with their interlocutors in a given activity in which they are engaged.

To be able to co-construct their intended meanings with their interlocutors in a given activity, learners first need to have knowledge about the activity itself. Each activity we engage in, whether it is a debate, greeting, or small talk, has its own discernible form. In each culture, these activities derive from their own motivations, and to a large extent, have conventionalized ways in which they are done. This knowledge of different activities, which is shared by most native speakers of the language, includes the goals of the activity, role of the participants, and possible topics of talk. It also includes the organizational patterns, the ways in which talk unfolds, and the linguistic resources that are typical of that activity. The rhetorical organization of the activity is a very important aspect that informs the learner what is possible as his/her next move, and what kind of responses s/he can anticipate from the interlocutor. Having the knowledge of an inventory of linguistic resources that are conventionally used for each move in the activity helps the learners to understand the interlocutor's message without trying to decode it word by word, and to come up with the next move without constructing an entirely new sentence of their own on the spot. Grammar and vocabulary are only part of the linguistic resources that learners may draw upon to interact in a communicatively competent manner; other essential resources include a wide range of pragmatic phenomena such as speech acts, listener responses, and routines.

Thus, it follows that we should make activities, not grammar points, the focus of instruction. By making available the pertinent information about each activity to the learners, language teachers can help learners become more competent in interacting in different settings. In this paper, I report on the preliminary results of my study on pragmatic development of small talk conversation by university level Japanese as Foreign Language (JFL) learners. The participants of this study are JFL learners who were enrolled in a four skills, second semester JFL class at a public university. They were asked to engage in an activity that involved a kind of small talk that often occurs during first time encounters where two people get to know each other by exchanging various information about themselves. The analysis will center on the learners' ability to actively engage in this type of small talk conversation and contribute to a natural, comfortable, and involved conversation.

Small talk: Getting to know each other

Small talk has received a great deal of attention in recent years for its relational functions. Studies have shown its pervasiveness and the various functions that it serves as well as analysis of its linguistic realizations (Coupland, 2000; Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson, 1992; Drew & Chilton, 2000; Holmes, 2000; Kuiper & Flindall, 2000; McCarthy, 2000, 2003). The value of open-ended conversation as opposed to transactional tasks has been well recognized in second language literature, where it is seen as a site where learners learn to display their stances and manage their membership categories and identities (Kasper, 2004; van Lier, 2000; van Lier & Matsuo, 2000).

The particular activity in this study, that of getting to know each other, was selected because of its obvious importance as a social activity, as it is an entry point for a language learner into the target community. It is also selected because its basic conversational organization and pragmatic resources are applicable beyond the first-time encounter to other situations where information and stances are exchanged, as we continue to learn about our family, friends, and acquaintances throughout our lives. The activity of meeting and getting to know someone often involves a disclosure of personal information in the form of a question and answer sequence (Svennevig, 1999). The conversation often progresses by one participant asking a question, and the other participant answering the question, then the first speaker provides a listener response and possibly assessment in the form of an evaluative comment. After this initial three-turn sequence takes its course, the next move is open to both interlocutors. For example, A asks where B is from, B answers where he is from, and A gives a listener response. The next move may come from B in the form of a return question, or A might ask a follow-up question that is related to the first question. An expansion turn might come from either speaker. In an involved conversation, which I define here as a conversation where interlocutors show their willingness to engage in the conversation and show interest in each other and the topic at hand by actively participating in the conversation, this slot after the initial three-turn sequence often starts another three-turn sequence often in the form of a follow-up question, a new topic initiation, or an expansion turn. Thus, knowing what to do after the first three-turn sequence is vital for learners to continue the conversation, which is the first step of involved conversation. In the activity of getting to know each other, in addition to these conversational moves, there are other important pragmatic resources that have a direct effect of showing interest and empathy, e.g., *n desu*, listener responses and comments. They help maintain a conversational tone, and help display the speaker's stances toward the interlocutor and the talk itself.

Conversational competence

Here, I introduce the notion of "conversational competence" which I define loosely as the ability to actively co-construct an involved small talk conversation with an interlocutor. For my study involving elementary Japanese classes, conversational competence refers to the ability to make use of eight conversational resources that are indispensable to a successful small talk conversation, namely, discourse marker *n desu* listener responses, evaluative comments, return

questions,¹ expansions, follow-up questions, new topic initiation, and repair strategies. The idea of using multiple features for the assessment of learners' interactional skills was suggested by Riggenbach (1998), who labeled eight micro skills in ESL learners' conversational data as necessary elements in the successful conversation in English. The resources cited above as constitutive of JFL learners' "conversational competence" also came largely from the learners' conversational data; and the importance of some of these resources is well documented by research (e.g., Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki, & Tao, 1996; Fox, Hayashi, & Jasperson, 1996; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Hayashi, 1994; Hosoda, 2000; Iwai, 2000; McCarthy, 2003; McGloin, 1983; Mori, 2006; Schegloff, 1982; Yoshimi, 2001a, 2001b). I claim that the effective use of these resources is indispensable in co-constructing an involved conversation in Japanese. I will now discuss the ways in which the eight conversational resources identified above contribute to an interlocutor's participation in an "involved conversation".

Discourse marker n desu

This discourse marker often creates a conversational tone when used in small talk (Yoshimi, 2001b). It helps to show the speaker's willingness to engage in the conversation. If one uses the *-masu* form rather than the plain form accompanied by *n desu*, where this discourse marker is appropriate, the utterance will sound dry, business-like and uninviting.

Listener responses

Listener responses have been studied in both Japanese and English, as well as other languages, as an important pragmatic resource (Clancy et al., 1996; Ikeda, 2001; Kawate-Mierzejewska, 1999; LoCastro, 1987; McCarthy, 2003; Miller, 1995; Mori, 2006; Schegloff, 1982; Strauss & Kawanishi, 1996). Listener responses allow speakers to signal the interlocutor that they are paying attention, and to show their stance to what is being said. They are often used as continuers (Schegloff, 1982) in the middle of utterances to signal to the speaker to go on, and as the listener's assessment of the information s/he received (Goodwin, 1986; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, 1992) to display his or her stance to the interlocutor's turn. In Japanese, listener responses are used very frequently, often after short phrases or in the middle of the phrases (Clancy et al., 1996) to provide support for the interaction itself as well as the content of what is being said. Some examples of listener responses are *aa soodesuka* (oh I see), *aa soo na n desu ka* (oh is that right?), *hee* (Ohhh.), and *huun* (I see...).

Evaluative comments

Evaluative comments are often used after the interlocutor answers the question or makes a statement. Such comments as *ii desu ne* (that's nice), *taihen desu ne* (that's too bad, that must be tough), *sugoi!* (wow!) show the speaker's interest in and support for the interlocutor's turns, and facilitate an involved conversation (Strauss & Kawanishi, 1996).

Return questions

Return questions like *Yamada san wa?*(How about you, Yamada?), and *Sochira wa?* (How about you?) allow the speaker to show interest in the interlocutor; such questions also reverse the conversational role of the participants so that the one who asked the questions can now have a chance to talk about him/herself. It is also a useful resource when one runs out of things to say about oneself.

Follow-up questions

Follow-up questions are questions related to the ongoing exchange, and they have the vital function of moving the conversation forward, and showing interest in the interlocutor's answers.

Expansions

Speakers use expansion turns to expand on the ongoing topic, either by expanding on one's own turn, providing further explanation, or by expanding on the interlocutor's turn.

New topic initiation

Either interlocutor can initiate a new topic when the ongoing topic is dropped or exhausted. Interlocutors may ask a question about a new topic or make a statement that is not directly related to the previous topic.

Repair strategies

Repair strategies are essential in any conversation including conversations among native speakers (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), but especially so for a learner who frequently encounters communication problems due to his/her lack of linguistic knowledge. Repair strategies for beginning learners not only help them navigate through interaction with native speakers, but also have another function of showing to the native speaker that the learner is making his or her best effort trying to have a meaningful conversation.

The conversational resources listed here are part of the talk of getting to know each other on a small scale, and other small talk conversation where information and each other's stances are exchanged on a larger scale. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the available resources, but these were selected for this study as the most basic resources that may be teachable at the beginning level. The appropriate and strategic, on-line use of these target items is essential in engaging in friendly and comfortable conversational small talk in Japanese.

Previous study

In a previous study (Iwai, 2005), I investigated the pragmatic development of JFL learners after a semester of instruction, which included the pragmatics of small talk. The participants were second semester Japanese students in a conversation focused curriculum. This class met three times a week and used a textbook that is organized by interactional practice with heavy emphasis on pragmatics as well as grammar and lexical items. Each lesson in this textbook covers various related interactional practices, such as small talk with classmates about family, or asking and giving directions. Pragmatics of spoken Japanese is heavily emphasized in this curriculum. The activity that the learners engaged in for the study was a first time encounter with a Japanese exchange student. Each student was paired with a different Japanese student at the beginning, middle and the end of the semester to get to know each other. Their conversations were videotaped and analyzed qualitatively.

Instruction

During the semester, students were instructed in the use of the eight pragmatic resources in conversational small talk, but they did not receive specific instruction on their use in the first time encounter setting. The topics covered in the course were: talk about family, things that get your attention (e.g., someone's cell phone or clothing) and things you like (e.g., movies and food). The instruction was done through: a) awareness raising through discussions about what constitutes various speech events in the students' native culture, including various conversational moves and linguistic resources; b) explicit explanation about the use of pragmatic resources; c) communicative practice; and d) feedback. Besides the feedback given regularly in the classroom, there was one individual feedback session after the second taping, where students were asked to comment on their own performance and the instructor gave feedback on what they did well and what they could improve upon.

Overall results

The group in the previous study all improved in some areas of conversational competence, and their improvement in the use of different target items greatly improved the quality of the conversation in terms of their involvement as measured by their ability to stay on the topic longer by the use of conversational moves, as well as their ability to show their stances through the use of listener responses. The use of listener response increased partly as a result of the fact that students asked more questions creating a slot for their responses, but there was not much improvement in the use of *n desu* or comments. Next, I will give some examples of the improvements in the talk of the students of this group.

Group 1 (Very low proficiency)

One group of students had a very lopsided interaction at the beginning of the semester, because they used a lot of English and only answered questions. At the end of the semester, they used more listener responses and follow-up and expansion turns which made their conversation more

engaged. Their language remained rudimentary at the end of the semester in terms of grammar and vocabulary, but the improvement in the use of pragmatic resources and conversational moves contributed to a more balanced and engaged interaction.

Group 2 (Started with some competence)

Some learners started out with some competence in some areas but none in other areas of conversational competence. For example, Student 15 who answered questions and elaborated on the answers without asking any questions at the beginning of the semester, ended up asking more questions, making the conversation more balanced and more involved. Another student, Student 9, was able to ask initial questions and expand on her own turns, but lacked proper listener responses and follow-up questions at the beginning. Even though she asked and answered questions, her lack of appropriate listener responses and follow-up questions made her participation sound abrupt and choppy. At the end of the semester, she improved on these two areas and her conversation became much more natural and she seemed more involved.

Present study

The present study investigates the improvements in the pragmatic competence of the students who did not receive specific instruction on the target items described above.

Participants

The participants were ten second semester Japanese language students in the regular four skills track at the same university. The four skills track courses meet four times a week, one class meeting per week more than the conversational track courses due to their coverage of Chinese characters. Though the course is designed to give students instruction on all four skills of the language, the constraints imposed by the grammar-based textbook bear heavily on the day to day instruction of this course. The textbook is organized by grammatical items to teach in each lesson, and though there is a section on "situation" and "conversation", it does not give a full and accurate explanation of pragmatics. Moreover, the grammatical items introduced in the lesson often have nothing to do with the situation-based conversational practice, making it difficult to make a coherent lesson plan incorporating the grammar in conversation.

Instruction

The instructor for this class was a senior member of the instructional faculty with more than thirty years of experience. The department uses the textbook called "Situational Functional Japanese" from Tsukuba University and all sections of the same course are required to use the same final exam. The second semester course covered six lessons from Lesson 6 to 11. The instructor usually covered one grammatical structure from the lesson each day. The instructor regularly assigned reading regarding a grammar point, structure drills for that grammar point, and an exercise handout for oral practice before a class meeting. In class, the instructor

answered students' questions about the grammatical point in question, and had the students do pair work using a handout. In general, the pair work involved one student asking a question using the grammar point, and the other student answering the question. The instructor encouraged the students to expand and follow up if there were interesting answers. According to the instructor, students usually ended up doing Q and A and did not follow up most of the time. However, according to the instructor, he did not require them to expand, because he felt that it was sufficient if the students could do questions and answers (personal communication).

In the middle of the semester, the instructor introduced a conversational exchange practice in which students asked each other about their weekend activities and so on. The instructor encouraged them to say one more sentence after the answer, such as asking another question or a reference to themselves e.g., "as for me, ..." (*boku wa...*). The instructor did this conversational practice about twice a month, but did not teach them to use *n desu* for the conversational exchange. The handout included listener responses, *soodesu ne*, *a soodesu ka*, and comments such as, *a ii desu ne*, *yokatta desu ne*. Repair strategies were also introduced in the textbook.

Data collection

The data collection was done basically in the same way as the previous study. Students had three conversational exchanges with a native speaker, but did not receive the individual feedback session that the conversation group received.

Results

General comparison. Generally, the students in this group produced more fully formed sentences than the students in the conversational curriculum, where many used more fragments. They ended most of their sentences in *desu/deshita* or *masu/mashita*. Though there was no systematic assessment of learner proficiency, many of the students in this group had demonstrated, through their participation in the conversation sessions, better control of grammar and vocabulary than those in the previous study. Many students in this group understood the interlocutors' utterances and were able to answer the interlocutors' questions, while many in the previous study had more trouble understanding similar utterances owing to their lack of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, evidenced by the targets of their repairs. In speaking, the students in the previous study tended to speak in fragments while students in the present study spoke using the *desu/masu* forms (instead of the plain forms with *n desu*). The preliminary analysis of the data shows three categories of students in terms of their performance.

Group 1: Good interaction in both sessions. The first group of students had relatively interactive conversations in both sessions.

Five of the students (S2, S3, S7, S8, S11) were interactive from the beginning of the semester. Although the degree in which they participated varied, these students initiated questions, responded with some form of listener responses, and contributed to expanding the topics enough to have relatively involved conversations. At the end of the semester, most of these students

improved in proficiency, in varied degrees, reducing their English turns and repair turns. All students had increased use of at least one of the categories of conversational competence such as appropriate listener responses, new topic initiations, expansions and follow-up questions at the end of the semester. Sometimes an increase in one category was paired with a decrease in another category, e.g., an increase in follow-up questions led to a decrease in expansion moves. Next, I will give one example from this category of students.

Student 2. Student 2 was able to use appropriate listener responses from the start. She used *aa soodesuka* 3 times, *aa* once, *nn* once, and 5 repetitions in the initial conversation with the Japanese exchange student. At the end of the semester, uses of *aa soodesuka* increased to five while *aa* and *nn* disappeared (1 each to 0), and repetitions decreased to two. She had about the same numbers of new topic initiations, her expansions decreased from 10 to 5, while follow-up questions increased from 2 to 4. Her final conversation was better in the sense that she asked more questions giving the interlocutor more chance to talk about herself. The biggest difference between the beginning and the end of the semester for this student was her use of English; English turns decreased from 7 to 0, especially English repair from 4 to 0. Repair itself decreased from 5 to 1. She had fairly good interactions in both sessions talking about hometown, school and hobbies, though she had many English turns in the beginning of the semester. Her interaction at the end of the semester was better in terms of her proficiency, as shown in decreased use of English, but there was one thing that broke the flow of the conversation at the end of the semester. When the Japanese student said she watches movies, the student asked, "*eiga wa dochira: uh dore ga ichiban suki desu ka?*" (As for movies, uh which one do you like best?). To this, the Japanese student seemed to be a little perplexed and took a long time to reply, "*soodesu nee: nnnnn nan da roo (1) soo da naa. A! nandakke. Lilo to sko- Lilo to nandakke stitch?*" (Let's see... nnnnn what is it I wonder (1) Let's see... Oh, what is it? Lilo and sko- Liko and what is it? Stitch?). The use of the sentence, "*dore ga ichiban suki desu ka?*" (Which one do you like best?) does not seem to fit in this case, when they are chatting about a broad category like movies. The question "*dore ga ichiban suki desu ka?*" (Which one do you like best?) asks which one likes best of all the members of a category, as in "which movie do you like?" of all the movies that exist, which is a very specific question. "*Donna eiga ga suki na n desu ka?*" (What kind of movies do you like?) or "*saikin nanika mimashita ka?*" (Have you seen anything lately?) would have been more appropriate. I return to this point below.

Group 2: Improved in proficiency but... The second group of students improved in terms of proficiency, but this did not contribute significantly to a more involved interaction. These students started out with limited comprehension and participation at the beginning of the semester, but did much better at the end of the semester in terms of producing longer sentences and understanding their interlocutors' utterances. However, their increased proficiency did not always lead to a more involved conversation. Some of them changed topics abruptly without asking follow-up questions regarding the ongoing topic, only expanded by adding a word to a list of things, responded with only minimal responses such as *nn* or nodding, could not capitalize on opportunities to develop the topic, or asked questions that were out of place, resulting in an awkward conversation. Here, I will give one example from this group of students.

Student 4. Student 4 had a relatively good use of listener responses: 5 *aa soodesuka* in the beginning of the semester as well as 6 others including repetitions and *nn*. He introduced a new topic 7 times but expanded on the ongoing topic only 3 times and asked no follow-up questions. He often shifted to a new topic as soon as the Japanese student answered his question, or after he answered her question without expanding on his answers. This led to a very choppy interview-like interaction. At the end of the semester, his use of *aa soodesu ka* increased, partly as a result of the increased number of questions he asked. His new topic initiation increased from 7 to 13, and his expansion increased from 3 to 5, and follow up question 0 to 1. These numbers suggest that he did somewhat better, but there was something very strange about his interaction. In both sessions, he asked questions that seem to be out of place and unrelated to the previous topic, which completely interfered with the flow of the conversation. The following transcript is from his conversation at the end of the semester.

Transcript A (S4=Student 4, CP3=Japanese Conversation Partner 3)

26	S4:	Uh:: ano: (.) boku wa: uh: konpyuu- konpyuutaa uh: o tsukatte to: to: gitaa? O
27	CP3:	Ohhh soo na n desu ka..
28	S4:	Hai soodesu. Uh: ano: (.) kinoo wa nani o shimasu ka?
29	CP3:	((laughs)) kinoo wa nete mashita.
30	S4:	A soodesu ka. uh: uh: senshumatsu wa: nani o shimasu ka?
31	CP3:	Senshumatsu wa:: etto::: nani shiteta ka naa ((giggles)) senshumatsu wa:: aa:: umi ni ikimashita.
32	S4:	Aa soodesu ka.
33	CP3:	Hai. ((giggles)) e nani shite mashita ka?
34	S4:	Uh: ano: Kahala: Mandarin e ikimashita.
35	CP3:	Hee:[::..
36	S4:	[To:: uh diamondo heddo? e ikimashita.
37	CP3:	Hmmm? Nani o shita n desu ka:?
38	S4:	Uh: ano:: ano: dansu:? o shimasu?
39	CP3:	Dansu?
40	S4:	aa.
41	CP3:	Hee:: donna::?
42	S4:	Uh: swing?
43	CP3:	EEE? [Soo na n desu ka::?
44	S4:	[Swing
45	S4:	Hai.
46	CP3:	Hee:::.
47	S4:	Hai. Uh: ano: eiga wa:: uh: nani ga ichiban suki desu ka?
48	CP3:	Eiga wa: lilo to stitchi.
48	S4:	Aa (.) soodesu ka.
50	CP3:	Hai.
51	S4:	Uh:::

52	CP3:	Kawaii desu.
53	S4:	Aa [hai. Soodesu ne. (laughs))
54	CP3:	[(laughs))
55	S4:	Uh: ano: (1) ano: sin city ga ichiban suki desu.
56	CP3:	Aa soodesu ka::.
57	S4:	Uh: ano: kyoo wa nani o shimasu: ka? shimashita ka?
58	CP3:	Kyoo wa: webu peeji o tsukutte imashita/
59	S4:	Uh ((leans over))
60	CP3:	Uebu? Hoomu peeji?
61	S4:	aa.
62	CP3:	O tsukutte imashita.
63	S4:	Aa soodesu ka. uh ano: ashita wa nani o shimasu ka?
64	CP3:	Ashita wa: ashita wa nani o suru n daroo. Ashita wa: dansu no: eeto: happyokai ga arimasu. Pau hana?
65	S4:	Aa
66	CP3:	Ga arimasu.
67	S4:	aa soodesu ka. uh:

26	S4:	Uh::well: I uh: use uh: compu-computer and uh: guitar?
27	CP3:	Ohhh is that right???
28	S4:	Yes it is. Uh: well: (.) what did you do yesterday?
29	CP3:	((laughs)) I was sleeping yesterday.
30	S4:	Oh really. uh: uh: what do you do last weekend?
31	CP3:	Last weekend::: uh:: what did I do, I wonder::: ((giggles)) last week::: uh:: I went to the beach.
32	S4:	Oh, I see.
33	CP3:	Yeah. ((giggles)) um what did you?
34	S4:	Uh: well: I went to Kahala: Mandarin
35	CP3:	Ohhhh[::.
36	S4:	[to:: uh I went to Diamond Head.
37	CP3:	Hmmmm? What did you do?
38	S4:	Uh: um:: um:: I do dancing?
39	CP3:	Dancing?
40	S4:	Yeah.
41	CP3:	Really... what kind of dance?
42	S4:	Uh: swing?
43	CP3:	REALLY? [Is that right?
44	S4:	[Swing
45	S4:	Yeah.
46	CP3:	Wow:::
47	S4:	Yeah. Uh: um: what movie do you like best?

48	CP3:	Movies:: Liko and Stitch.
48	S4:	Oh (.) really.
50	CP3:	Yeah.
51	S4:	Uh:::
52	CP3:	It's cute.
53	S4:	Yeah [yes that's right. (laughs)]
54	CP3:	[[((laughs))]]
55	S4:	Uh: um (1) um: I like Sin City the best.
56	CP3:	Ohh I see.
57	S4:	Uh: um:: what do you do today? What did you do today?
58	CP3:	Today:: I was making a web page.
59	S4:	Uh ((leans over))
60	CP3:	Web? Home page?
61	S4:	Oh.
62	CP3:	I was making.
63	S4:	Oh I see. Uh: um: what are you doing tomorrow?
64	CP3:	Tomorrow: what am I going to do tomorrow? Tomorrow: I will have a dance uh:: presentation. Pau hana?
65	S4:	Oh.
66	CP3:	I have.
67	S4:	Oh I see. uh:

Before this segment, the student and his conversation partner were talking about each other's hobbies. Then, in Line 28, Student 4 abruptly changes the topic and asks what she did yesterday. The Japanese student laughs and answers the question. Since there is no humor in the referential meaning of this question, we can surmise that her laughter was caused by the unexpectedness of this question. S4, then, gives a brief listener response to the Japanese student's answer, and switches to another question, "What did you do last weekend?" Here, the Japanese student's answer shows a great deal of hesitation, with her elongated *etto:::* (well:::), *aa:::* (uh:::), a self-directed question, "*nani o shiteta ka naa*" (What did I do?) and a giggle. From lines 33 to 46, the interaction flows more smoothly as the Japanese student asks S4 a series of questions with appropriate listener responses showing her interest in S4's answers.

After this segment, in line 47, S4 asks which movie she likes best. There are two things that are problematic here. The first problem is the sudden shift of topic to movies, and the second is the specificity of the question, which movie she likes best. More general questions like "*eiga suki desuka?*" (Do you like movies?) or "*yoku eiga miru n desu ka?*" (Do you see movies very often?) might be more appropriate if one were to change the topic to movies. Then, he goes back to "*kyoo nani o shimasu ka?*" (What are you going to do today?) in Line 56 and "*ashita wa nani o shimasu ka?*" (What are you going to do tomorrow?) in Line 62. Again, the topics themselves do not contribute to the flow of the conversation, and the lack of reactions to the Japanese student's answers before moving on to a new topic, make this interaction sound like a very flat interview.

Group 3: Very proficient but... This group contains only one student, Student 10, who was very proficient in many ways, but his high proficiency did not contribute to an involved conversation in either session. Both sessions with two different interlocutors had the quality of a one-sided interview. The overall impression that this student gives is that he is a very competent speaker. This is reflected in his ability to form complex sentences, his fluency, his comprehension, and his ability to handle communication problems. When he had trouble communicating, he did not wait for his interlocutor's help, but handled the problem by asking a question in a well-formed sentence, such as "*eeto* study abroad *wa nihongo de nanto iimasu ka?*" (Uh how do you say "study abroad" in Japanese?) or with a request "*moo ichido onegai shimasu*" (Please say that again). He seemed self-sufficient, and seemed to be taking charge of the interaction by asking question after question. There were some characteristics of his talk that seemed to contribute to a one-sided interaction. When this student asked a question, his gaze was not on the interlocutor. He tilted his head and looked sideways and started a question, then brought his gaze back to the interlocutor toward the end of his question. When his interlocutor answered, he immediately tilted his head and looked toward the side again while he gave his listener response. This gave the impression that he was thinking about what he was going to say next, and the interlocutor waited politely until he came up with the next question. He also used "*a soodesu ne*" ("Oh that's right" or "let's see") instead of "*a soodesu ka*" (is that so?) in his listener response, and this made it sound as if he was thinking about what he was going to say next. His listener response was followed immediately by another question or *eto::* (um::) or *uh::* followed by another question. This seemed to have the effect of discouraging the interlocutor's participation. In fact, when I asked the interlocutors how it went after the interaction, the one in the second session reported that she felt like she could not ask any questions because he would say *eto::* and immediately ask question after question. Another feature of his talk is that he did not engage in the usual biographical questions that come up in the university setting, such as "Where are you from?", "What are you studying here?", or "What year are you?", which dominated the first part of the conversation of most other students. These topics are common topics in first time encounters unless the participants already know something about each other. In the second session, he started out with "*kongakki wa doo desu ka?*" (How is this semester?), "*kimatsu shiken wa ikutsu arimasu ka?*" (How many final exams do you have?), "*kimatsu shaken no ato de nihon e kaerimasu ka?*" (Are you going back to Japan after the finals?), followed by "*natsuyasumi ni nani o shimasu ka?*" (What will you do during summer vacation?). This reference to immediate situations or surroundings that the participants are in is a common starting point of small talk in many first time encounters, and is often followed by a more conventional question and answer sequence where they ask about each other. In the interaction between this student and the Japanese interlocutor, the student did not get to the next part, where the interlocutors get to know each other. The fact that the student asked question after question without getting to know his interlocutor may have contributed to setting an interview-like tone at the beginning of the conversation, reducing the interlocutor's role to a passive interviewee. One other thing to consider in his performance is his lack of use of *n desu* in his questions. The use of *desu/masu* forms, coupled with his high fluency made his questions sound like interview questions.

Grammar in interaction

Finally, there was something that stood out in the performance of the students in the present study that did not occur in the group in the previous study. Students in the four skills track used the grammatical structures they learned in their Japanese class during this interaction with the native speakers. This is actually something that we all want our students to do, to apply what they learned in class to real life interactions. However, the students' use of the grammar items here poses a question as to how grammar should be taught in pedagogical settings such as in a language classroom. I discuss some of the cases where the utterances were grammatical but not appropriate interactionally.²

Comparison

In this group, there was a pervasive use of comparative sentences, such as *dochira no hoo ga ii desu ka?* (Which one is better? –out of two items–) or *dore ga ichiban suki desu ka?* (Which one do you like best? –out of three or more items–), a topic which was taught in Lesson 10, towards the end of this course. Six out of ten students used a variation of this at least once. Some of the comparative sentence patterns were used appropriately, but others were unnatural as discussed above in student 2's use of this grammar point. The patterns that were often used are "*dore ga ichiban suki desu ka?*" (which one do you like best?" and "... to ... to *dochira no hoo ga suki desu ka?*" (which one do you like, ... or ...?). These questions seemed abrupt and broke the flow of the conversation in many cases, partly because they shifted the focus of the topic. In case of student 2, she asked if the Japanese conversation partner watched movies, and after the Japanese conversation partner answered yes, she asked a very specific question, "which movie do you like best?" A more general and less pointed question like "*donna eiga ga suki nan desu ka?*" (What kind of movies do you like?) would have been more appropriate. The following is a transcript of a segment by student 11.

Transcript B: (S11=Student 11, CP1=Japanese conversation partner 1)

32	S11:	Uh: u:m hima no toki: nani o shimasu ka?
33	CP1:	Nnn. Hon o yondari: (.) kaimono ni ittari shimasu.
34	S11:	Aa soodesu ka.
35	CP1:	Hai.
36	S11:	umm: shoppingu to eiga to dochira no hoo ga ii desu ka?
37	CP1:	Nnn. (1) eiga ka na? (.) eiga desu.

32	S11:	uh: u:m when you are free: what do you do?
33	CP1:	nnn. I do things like reading books, and going shopping.
34	S11:	Oh, is that right?
35	CP1:	yes.

36	S11:	umm: which is better shopping or watching movies?
37	CP1:	nnn. (1) movies, maybe? (.) yes, movies.

Preceding this segment, S11 mistook the conversation partner's question "shusshin wa doko desu ka?" (Where are you from?) for "what is your hobby?" and answered she liked movies, but the conversation partner did not say she liked movies herself. Therefore, the question "which do you like better, shopping or movies?" was rather abrupt. The conversation partner responds to this with a hesitation marker *nn* and a one second pause followed by a self-directed question "*eiga ka naa?*" (movies, maybe?). The student could have pursued the topic of shopping by asking a follow-up question, or asked if the Japanese conversation partner liked movies in order to change the topic to movies. These comparison sentence patterns are typically used in the context where there is a pressing need to make a decision, such as selecting restaurant to go to, or in offering someone drinks. They are used in small talk as well, such as music enthusiasts exchanging opinions about their favorite music and musicians, or food lovers comparing notes on different food and restaurants. However, they may sound abrupt and can even be perceived as presumptuous if they were used in the wrong context. This resonates with Mori's (2005) study where she problematizes the textbook presentation of "why questions" in Japanese with *dooshite* (why). She finds that the use of why questions in the model dialogues does not accurately reflect authentic use, leading the speaker to present him/herself in a way that was not intended. This suggests that the instruction of grammar needs to include the knowledge of broader social and sequential context in which a particular grammatical form may be used, and what kind of tone it will create in a given context.

Adverb of frequency yoku (often). An adverb of frequency, *yoku* (often) that was taught in Lesson 7 also came up. S11 used this three times in her interaction at the end of the semester, of which two uses were appropriate, but the third one was out of place in the real interaction. After talking about her job, she abruptly changed the topic and asked, "*yoku toshokan o kimasu ka?*" (Do you often go to the library?), to which the interlocutor answered "*hai*" (Yes), like an interviewee answering a question. This sentence was taught as an example sentence in the handout for the conversational practice they used in class, except that the student made an error in the particle choice "*o*" which should be "*e*". Another student (S1) used this adverb to ask "*yoku eiga o mimasu ka?*" (Do you often see movies?) which is a good question to start a new topic about movies. The interlocutor answered "not really" and asked the student if she saw movies. The student answered "*ie: okani: (.) wa: (.) okani o motte imasen. ((giggle))*" (No, I don't have money.). In this exchange, the student was able to use the pattern that she learned in class but could not develop the topic that she started.

Ni frequency per unit "ikkagetsu ni nankai?" (how many times in a month?). Another grammatical item that was taught during the semester was the frequency per unit expression, such as "*ikkagetsu ni nankai?*" (how many times in a month?). Student 1 used this in her interaction with the native speaker at the end of the semester as in the following segment.

Transcript C: (S1=Student 1, CP3=Japanese conversation partner 3)

27	S1:	Um: shu:mmi: wa nan desu ka?
28	CP3:	Eto shumi wa umi de oyogu koto desu.
29	S1:	(.) Oyogu to wa
30	CP3:	Hai.
31	S1:	Nandesu ka?
32	CP3:	Oyogu wa swimming.
33	S1:	Oh oh oh oh. Swimming. Um: (2) uh: ikkagetsu: (1) ni: (1.5) nan:kai: oyogidesu ka? oyogi shimasu ka?
34	CP3:	Ikkagetsu ni? Ee dono gurai daroo. Nn (.) go rokkai (.) desu ne.
35	S1:	((nods)) (1) Go gurai?
36	CP3:	Uh gokai.

27	S1:	um: what is your hobby?
28	CP3:	uh my hobby is swimming.
29	S1:	(.) <i>oyogu</i> is?
30	CP3:	yes.
31	S1:	What is that?
32	CP3:	<i>oyogu</i> is swimming.
33	S1:	Oh oh oh oh. Swimming. Um: (2) uh: in (1) one month (1.5) how many times do you swim?
34	CP3:	In one month? Oh, I wonder how many times. Nn (.) five or six (.) times.
35	S1:	((nods)) (1) about five?
36	CP3:	uh five times.

S1 asked CP3 what her hobby was, to which CP3 replied "swimming" (Line 28). After a short negotiation sequence, S1 understood what *oyogu* (swim) meant and asked how many times a month does she swim. This question was not expected by the native speaker, causing her to give a confirmation question "*ikkagetsu ni?*" (In a month?), followed by a self-directed question, "*ee dono gurai daroo*" (Hmm I wonder how many times...), a hesitation marker *nn* and a short pause, before coming up with an answer. The question is grammatical, but it breaks the flow of the conversation, because it is not within the range of expected moves. The Japanese student's facial expression clearly shows that she was surprised by this question. The student's attempt to use the grammatical item in asking a follow-up question is commended, but it ended up breaking the flow of the conversation.

In this way, the students used the new grammar they learned in class in their interactions with the Japanese conversation partners. Some of the uses were good, but others were problematic in that

they violated the Gricean Maxim of relevance and broke the flow of the conversation. These students learned how to make use of some pragmatic resources in their conversational practice during the semester, however, it seems that the conversation was treated more like a series of question and answer sequences, rather than an activity that has a clear goal and its own organization and linguistic resources. Some of the students struggled to keep the conversation going by asking whatever questions they could think of, and others tried to use the sentences and questions that they were familiar with from the grammar practice they did in class.

Conclusion

The students in this study learned their class material well and applied what they learned in class to the real interaction. Their proficiency went up during the semester: they produced more utterances, and more complex sentences, and they understood the interlocutors' utterances better. Their use of English decreased and they used better repair strategies. Some of the students in this study were able to engage in the conversation fairly well from the beginning, and they did just as well or a little better at the end. Others improved in using some of the eight categories of the conversational resources but their improvement did not always contribute to a more involved conversation because of various reasons: lack of listener responses, lack of follow-up questions, sudden change of topics, and inability to capitalize on opportunities to develop a topic. And finally, the students' effort to use their newly learned grammatical structures in the real conversation backfired in some cases, breaking the flow of the conversation and making a conversational exchange look like a one-sided interview.

This study confirms the claim that students will not become proficient in carrying on a conversation without studying and practicing conversation. In other words, various pragmatic phenomena associated with conversation may be language specific, and even the universal pragmatic knowledge may not readily transfer into a second/foreign language (*Kasper & Rose, 2001a, 2002*). This study also gives teachers a piece of good news, that is, that students will try to apply what they learned in class in a real interaction, as shown in the many grammatical items that the students used in this study. Thus, it follows that students need to be instructed on how to carry on a conversation if their goal is to be able to carry on a conversation. It is essential that language teachers first specify which activity students are going to learn to participate in, so they can clearly define the knowledge students need to learn so as to fully participate in that activity. In this study, I identified eight conversational resources as essential parts of involved conversation. The comprehensive treatment of the activity that includes topical organization, and conversational organization as well as an inventory of linguistic resources, allows the students to navigate more comfortably in the interaction. Practicing the conversation with this knowledge gives them an edge over those students who did not receive this information. The students in the present study did practice small talk conversation with a handout that instructed them regarding the use of some of the resources. However, the treatment of the activity lacked a systematic approach, and the handout did not give sufficient information about the topics and organization of the conversation. Thus, the students in this class learned some of the resources, such as listener responses very well, but did not treat the conversation as a goal-oriented activity that had

a certain form and organization. Most of them were not comfortable engaging in the conversation, and they searched for things to say in order to keep the conversation going. They often ended up asking questions that were out of place, breaking the flow of the conversation. Their effort to use the newly acquired grammatical items often backfired partly because the grammatical items were not taught in context, but as a question and answer sequence that did not include the situations where they would be used naturally. This study suggests that in order to help students become interactionally competent in various activities, a more comprehensive treatment of an activity would be beneficial. We need to inform the students what the goal of the activity is, what their roles are in it, what topics are appropriate, how the conversation usually unfolds in terms of conversational moves, and what linguistic resources are used. This will help students to anticipate how the conversation might unfold, and what kind of topics and conversational moves are appropriate, so that they can co-construct an involved conversation more naturally and comfortably using the appropriate resources.

Notes

1. Return questions here refers to the same question directed back to the interlocutor who asked that question first. Most commonly return questions in Japanese consist of the name of the interlocutor and the particle *wa* uttered with a rising intonation.
2. See Kasper and Rose (2002) for more detail on this point.

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