ABSTRACT

Learners' interactional competence in the Japanese-as-a-second-language classroom:
An analysis of interaction focusing on the organization of participation

by

Mayumi Sano

The purpose of this study is to show how the interactional competence of language learners emerges when they participate in interaction in a Japanese-as-a-second-language classroom in which teacher-initiated action predominates. In the field of second language learning and acquisition, the notions of learner competence and how it can be described have been much discussed. The most influential concept of competence on pedagogical practices of language teaching has been "communicative competence" developed by Hymes (1972). However, some researchers have argued against it, mainly objecting that it doesn't consider the interactive aspects of communication (Mehan, 1979). An alternative notion, interactional competence, has therefore been proposed. Interactional competence treats second language learners' competence from both social and interactional perspectives. Using the methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA), this study aims to describe interactional competence in the Japanese classroom, focusing on "the organization of participation" of how language learners participate in classroom interaction. To that end, four

research questions are presented in the description of Chapters 3 to 6 below.

Chapter 1 reviews how second language learners' competence has been discussed in previous studies. In addition, it introduces the notion of interactional competence and shows that this notion has been endorsed by CA studies. Studies in CA have argued that "turn-taking organization" (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) and "sequence organization" (Schegloff, 2007) are both concepts that are key to understanding the organization of participation. Finally, Chapter 1 will suggest that it is beneficial to apply the notion of interactional competence to second language classroom research.

Chapter 2 explains CA and illustrates why this analytic approach is appropriate for the goals of this study. This chapter also outlines an historical aspect of classroom research and classifies the types of research methodologies presented. The chapter then overviews some of the major analytic methods of classroom research.

Chapter 3 considers the first research question. When learners take turns voluntarily (McHoul (1978) treats such learners' behavior as "violations" of the rules for turn-taking in classrooms), do they accomplish the turn-taking in interactionally appropriate ways? And if so, how does that become possible? The analysis shows that learners take turns in interactionally appropriate ways, and that they start to speak without a gap. That means that the learners who try to be the next speaker show an orientation to taking the next turn by more quickly starting to speak than the others who could potentially be competitors for the next turn. This technique of "starting first" is the basic way in which native speakers routinely take next turns without being selected by the current

speaker in ordinary conversation. In addition, the learners use paralinguistic resources such as rising intonation and higher pitch at the beginning of next turns when they are trying to take next turns.

Chapter 4 addresses the second research question, which is about the teacher's questions that are not accompanied by address words. Specifically, when the teacher's questions are not accompanied by address words, does this give all learners the opportunity to answer, even when the teacher gazes at an individual learner? And if so, then in response to such questions, how do learners compete for the opportunity to answer? And how do learners treat this situation? The analysis shows that the teacher's questions that are not accompanied by address words give all learners the opportunity to answer, even when the teacher gazes at an individual learner. It further shows that when two learners are competing for the opportunity to answer, the second starts to speak at the point where a hitch occurs in the turn-in-progress by the first, and the first orients to keep his/her turn. Such practices are also, almost subconsciously, used by native speakers in ordinary conversation.

Chapter 5 addresses the third research question, focusing on private interactions between a learner nominated by the teacher and another learner, which are carried out to answer the teacher's question, by examining how the private interactions occur in the central course of the lesson and what the learners are actually doing. The analysis shows that the private interactions have been carefully designed, by paying attention to the official sequence, or the IRE sequence, to avoid trespassing into it.

Chapter 6 addresses the fourth research question, focusing on situations in which the learners voluntarily insert new information into the course of an ongoing interaction. To phrase it concretely: In what interactional environment does this situation occur and how do the learners provide new information? The analysis shows that the learners' contributions that are incorporated into the lesson involve providing new information in line with the preceding context at appropriate junctures, i.e., an IRE sequence and its subsequent one, using available resources in the moment.

Chapter 7 comprehensively discusses the results obtained from the analyses of Chapters 3 to 6 in terms of turn-taking in classrooms and IRE sequences as follows.

With respect to turn-taking in classrooms, the following three points suggested. First, while the results of this study bear out McHoul (1978)'s observation that turn-taking in classrooms is different from that in ordinary conversation, they also indicate that Japanese learners sometimes use the same or similar turn-taking strategies that are, almost subconsciously, used by native speakers in ordinary conversation. Second, the learners' turn-taking practices in the classroom are very "interactive" in their own right, in that their turn-taking becomes possible through their monitoring each other's behaviors. For example, the learners who try to be a next speaker show an orientation to taking next turns by more quickly starting to speak compared to the others who could potentially be competitors for the next turn. This indicates that the learners who try to be a next speaker are paying attention to the others' behaviors. Third, the learners in this classroom use their competence that they have already acquired when they participate

in classroom interactions.

With respect to IRE sequences, the findings of this study indicate that the learners demonstrated their competence at participating in interaction in accordance with IRE sequences. This finding provides further support to that of Mehan (1979) and Waring (2009). In addition, this study gives a detailed understanding of how the learners accomplish private interactions, by orienting to the IRE sequence, and how the learners contribute new information in line with the preceding context. These findings indicate that learners interactionally negotiate to participate in interactions in the classroom, deciding how they understand and respond to the others' utterances and actions, referring to the IRE sequences each time.

Finally, this dissertation suggests that our understanding of classroom interactions seen from the viewpoints of interactional competence and the organization of participation can become clues to reconsider how learners participate in classroom activities and how teachers should evaluate learners' participation in Japanese-as-a-second-language classrooms.