The Relevance of Turn-Taking to EFL Teaching and Learning: An Awareness Raising and Practice Model

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Abstract: Implementing Conversation Analysis (CA) in L2 teaching is how it provides both teachers and learners with opportunities to work on learners' pragmatic competence which builds on an important aspect of language competence in general. Among all aspects of CA, turn-taking is central to the approach as this aspect informs an organizational form of conversations that contribute to a more understanding of interactants' turn-taking management, motivation, and, more importantly, pragmatic element within their conduct. This study explores the relevance of CA concept of taking-turn to L2 teaching and learning in a specific English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Indonesia and provides a practical model as a suggestion to the implementation of this concept or analysis for teachers in the particular context. As the result, the relevance of the turn-taking concept in L2 teaching lies on the aspects of turn construction, turn allocation, the interactants' overlaps, intonation contours, sentence stresses, softener talks, back-channels, pauses and silences. As for the suggested model, it covers (1) introducing the CA convention to the learners, (2) raising the learners' awareness of the turn constructions and allocations in naturally occurring English talks, and (3) giving learners opportunity to act out turn-taking situation and evaluate their performance.

Keywords: conversation analysis, turn-taking, English as a foreign language, pragmatic competence

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Introduction

Conversation Analysis (CA), as one of the approaches in discourse study, has showed its usefulness, relevance and contribution to second or foreign language teaching (Wong, 2002; Richard and Seedhouse, 2005; Seedhouse, 2004). The main argument for implementing CA in L2 teaching is how CA provides both teachers and learners with opportunities to work on learners' pragmatic competence (Kasper, 1992) which builds on an important aspect of language competence in general (Bachman, 1990: Hall, 1995). Among all aspects of CA, turn-taking, this is viewed as how and when interactants claim, hold, and release the floor to speak during interaction (Sacks, 2004), is central to the approach. This aspect informs an organizational form of conversations that contribute to a more understanding of interactants' turn-taking management, motivation, and, more importantly, pragmatic element within their conduct. It is why this aspect is central to CA. With regard to L2 teaching, gaining such understanding through turn-taking analysis has been claimed relevant to promoting meaningful learning in L2 teaching context (McHoul, 1978; Wong, 2002; Seedhouse 2005; Wong and Waring, 2010). Attempting to lend support to this, this present paper explores the relevance of CA concept of taking-turn to L2 teaching and learning in a specific English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Indonesian and provides a practical model as a suggestion to the implementation of this concept or analysis for teachers in the particular context.

Teaching and Learning Context

This section provides the description of a particular context to help readers make sense of the relevance of the turn-taking concept to L2 teaching and the practical model which serve as the major content of this paper. The teaching context being discussed in this paper is within the framework of English for general purposes (EGP) in an EFL country, Indonesia. The learners are the first-year university students, aged from 19-22, who have to take an EGP course as one of the required course for the Bachelor Art (BA) degree in English linguistics and literature. Prior to their undergraduate study, these learners had been learning English in formal setting during their secondary school for about six years. Due to this background and the fact that they have aimed for English as their major, most of their proficiency ranges from intermediate to pre-advance although they are still in the first year.

The EGP course aims to enhance the learners' four language skills in using English for some common daily situations other than academic ones. It is taught in four 100-minute meetings a week. In this four-meeting-a-week framework, the learners have the opportunity to learn and practice their reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. Most of the teachers in this

context employ communicative language teaching (CLT) approach to implement their teaching practice in the classrooms. In this regard, the teaching activities are designed to aim for communicative competence and the learners are expected to be able to use English in a real-life context at the end of the course.

The Relevance of Turn-Taking Analysis to L2 Teaching

As noted previously, some studies have acknowledged the relevance of CA to L2 teaching. Button and Lee (1987) suggest that CA's capability in revealing the 'social organization of natural language-in-use' appears to be the major reason for its implications to L2 teaching and learning. In this case, CA is able to capture the authentic or real-life aspect of communication which is undoubtedly significant to be learned by L2 learners so as to improve their pragmatic competence as an effective communicator (Bachman, 1990). This particular competence becomes more and more important for EFL teaching and learning due to the fact that the learners have limited access and exposure to English. Their main access and source of exposure are from formal setting or instruction. However, Kasper (1992) points out that these particular types of access and source are quite problematic in a way that they do not provide learners with authentic or real-life based materials. Rather, they are developed based on the perception of L2 teachers which might not have sufficient knowledge of how natural conversations should take place. As a result, it is likely to be hard for the learners to develop their pragmatic competence while learning English in the classroom. As it seems to be the common problem faced by both teachers and learners in the EFL context, CA can be an alternative to address or even solve the issue. In response to the specific context being discussed in this paper, CA-based teaching is also proposed since developing the pragmatic competence is also a huge challenge despite the employment of CLT that supposedly promotes the teaching of pragmatics.

As the paper focuses on a specific CA concept of turn-taking, it is deemed necessary to firstly explore the concept of the turn-taking so as to come up with some features that can be transferred L2 teaching in the context being discussed in the paper. Sacks (2004) defines turn-taking as a sequential organization of how the interactants manage the floor to speak during a natural conversation. In terms of the analytical point of view, turn construction and turn allocation are likely to be the primary features which lead to the interpretation of pragmatics of the interactants (Barraja-Rohan, 2011). In addition, these two features also include the interactants' overlaps, intonation contours, sentence stresses, softener talks, back-channels, pauses and silences. Those sub-features are relevant to be taught in the EFL

classrooms as they might vary across cultures (O'Grady and Archibald, 2009) and the learners might rely on the way they manage the turn-taking in their first language when they interact in English (Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006).

A Practical Model of Turn-Taking-Based L2 Teaching

After understanding the relevance of the turn-taking analysis to the EFL teaching, the next common question is how to implement it in the EFL classrooms. With regard to this question, some studies have suggested a teaching method or framework that allows the learners to raise their awareness of the concept and implementation of turn-taking analysis and practice in English and to try out or practice their understanding while using English in the conversation or interaction (Kasper, 2006; Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Wong and Waring, 2010). In other words, the teacher in the context should design tasks or activities that provide the opportunities for the learners to be aware of the concept of turn constructions and allocations in a text and to put them into their own practice.

The first thing that the teacher should do in order to develop CA-based teaching and learning with a particular focus on the turn-taking is to introduce the CA convention to the learners. Of course, the teachers should be thoughtful in introducing it in a way that too technical

terms should be avoided to prevent confusion among the learners. Multimedia can be used to support the explanation of the convention. It will give the learners the most understanding of the convention since they are able to relate the symbols in the convention to the real-talk. In fact, the teacher can design a fill-in the gap task in the listening class in order to familiarize the learners with the convention. The learners are given a sheet which contains a spoken text written using a particular CA convention) with some gaps and have to fill in the gaps while listening to the recording.

After the learners understand the CA conventions, the next stage is to raise the learners' awareness of the turn constructions and allocations in naturally occurring English talks. Wong and Waring (2010) and Barraja-Rohan (2011) argue that this stage is crucial in the CA-based teaching and learning since it provides the learners with an opportunity to notice the different system in the target language as compared to the one in their first language. In this stage, the teacher might want to focus on a particular communicative situation to engage the learners in this teaching methodology. Afterwards, the recording of naturally occurring talks in the chosen situation needs to be obtained. This might be quite challenging for the teacher since he or she cannot rely on the textbook in response to finding the authentic materials (Wong, 2002; Huth, 2005). However, the advance of internet and technology

nowadays, such as *YouTube* and internet TV, makes it easier for the teachers to obtain those authentic materials. With these recordings or materials, the teacher can provide the learners with the script of the recordings (written in CA conventions) and ask them to analyze the turn-taking features in the script. Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm's (2006) study on sequential turn in phone talk can be a good model to follow. In this regard, the teacher can direct the learners' attention to some particular turns in the conversation and analyze either how the interactants are likely to construct or allocate the turns. Further, the learners can also discuss some more specific features, like overlaps, back-channels, pauses, etc. Regardless the focus of the turn-taking feature being aimed in the instruction, the learners' analysis and discussion should result in a pattern or conclusion of how the interactants manage their conversation in relation to the feature itself. This pattern or conclusion, then, is compared to the pattern or conclusion the learners have in their first language. For example, Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) point out the sequential pattern of phone talk in the target language and let the learners in their study to compare it with the one in their first language. This whole activity is likely to facilitate the learners' noticing the different system in both language and raise their awareness of the turn-taking system in the target language, English.

The next stage is the practice or experimental stage. In this stage, the learners are expected to practice similar situation in the recording. Acting out the similar situation allows the learners to apply the particular feature of turn-taking, being analyzed and discussed in the previous stage, during the interaction. This is claimed to contribute positively to the process of acquiring the taking-turn feature (Wong and Waring, 2010; Barraja-Rohan, 2011) as an output owns a learning opportunity to hypothesize both linguistic and pragmatic elements within an utterance (Swain, 1995; Crabbe, 2003). In this regard, the teachers can design a role-play task so as to allow the learners to practice the similar situation. Afterwards, it is suggested that the learners evaluate their role-play performance in relation to the use of the turn-taking feature during the interaction. Barraja-Rohan (2011) reasons that encouraging the learners to self-evaluate their performance positively affects their pragmatic learning. In addition, peer evaluation and talks in reference to the turn-taking feature is also encouraged to do after the practice time. During peer evaluation and talks, the learners are able to get feedback in a more secure way as compared to the teacher's feedback. Another thing is that the more the learners talk about how they use the turn-taking feature in their interaction, the more likely the acquisition takes place.

In conclusion, the CA-based teaching is relevant to the specific context being discussed in this paper. The awareness-

raising and practice model has been proposed to facilitate the learning of turn-taking feature. Raising the learners' awareness of the feature at the first place, and providing the opportunity to practice the feature in the latter stage are deemed to be significant in a sense of help the learners acquire the feature in their language system.

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