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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether a class addressing language learner passivity in conversations with native speakers will lead students to take a more active role. The thesis aims to determine if earlier research by Long and Holmen showing that language learners are passive in conversation with native speakers of English. It also aims to determine if a 4-week course of awareness activities and communicative practice can make language learners less passive in conversations with native speakers. It is concluded that language learners are more passive in conversation with native speakers of English and that a four week course designed to alleviate the problem is effective. (Contains 48 references.) (KFT)

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TRAINING LANGUAGE LEARNERS TO
BE ACTIVE IN CONVERSATION

by

CALEB PRICHARD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether a class addressing language learner (LL) passivity in conversations with native speakers (NSs) will lead the students to take a more active role. Research by Long (1981) and Holmen (1985) has shown that LLs are passive in conversation with NSs of English. These studies have suggested that in NS-LL conversation LLs rarely ask questions or initiate topic moves. Furthermore, according to Long, topics in NS-LL conversation are dealt with quickly and “superficially” because LLs seldom respond to NS statements and often answer NS questions as minimally as possible. A secondary purpose of this research is to help confirm if these claims are accurate.

Statement of the problem

If LLs are passive in conversation, this seriously harms their chances of developing interpersonal relationships with NSs and also may lead to cultural stereotypes (Scollon & Scollon, 1979; Gumperz & Roberts, 1980). Passive LLs may appear uninterested in others, boring, and less fluent than they really are.

LLs who do not ask questions in conversation may seem uninterested in others. Since most people like talking about themselves, it is doubtful that NSs

particularly enjoy asking question after question to LLs. In a pilot study of this research where NSs and LLs were paired in conversation, one NS got so tired of asking questions to the LL that she demanded the LL to ask her questions! Indeed, it is a common complaint of host families that their exchange students “do not talk.” This may lead the host family to assume that their student is not interested in them, especially when the exchange student fails to ask questions to the host family.

LLs who do not comment after NS statements and respond to NS questions in a minimal fashion are also not likely to seem interesting to NSs. Because they do not talk much, passive LLs might not let others have the opportunity to get to know them. Moreover, responding in a minimal fashion often leads the NS to change topics quickly, which ensures a superficial conversation.

Lastly, LLs who do not initiate topic moves might never get a chance to discuss topics that they enjoy or are able to talk about. When LLs are ‘stuck’ discussing a conversation topic which they find difficult or boring, they may appear less fluent and more passive than they really are. This could lead the NS to quickly change the topic or even end the conversation. These superficial conversations can be boring for LLs, too. One ESL student once said she used to be excited to have conversations with Americans when she first got to the US. But she now expressed her frustration because all her conversations had been the same ever since, with NSs asking the same predictable questions over and over. Apparently, it never occurred to her that *she* could change this pattern by elaborating after answering the

questions, asking questions herself, or changing the topic to a subject of interest to her.

Being passive may lead to misconceptions about a LL's personality. Passive LLs may seem shy, boring, or self-centered to others when perhaps they are actually quite outspoken, interesting, and friendly. Passivity in conversation can also lead to stereotypes about a LL's ethnic group. For example, because Japanese often appear passive in conversation with Americans, many people think that all Japanese are shy.

Teaching students to be active

Recognizing that LLs tend to be passive, many language teachers try to help their students take greater control in the classroom. One method teachers use is to simply follow approaches aligned with the communicative method. For example, communicative teachers try to ask referential questions instead of display questions. Referential questions are questions that the teacher does not know the answer to. Display questions, questions that the teacher *does* know the answer to (such as typical comprehension questions), have been shown to yield shorter answers from LLs (Brock, 1986). By asking referential questions, communicative teachers hope to give students more control of the content in class. To help students feel more comfortable in communicating, teachers also try to pay attention to meaning rather than form. As will be discussed in the literature review, even low-proficiency LLs will become active when discussing a topic of interest.

Though these methods seem to be successful in the classroom, some language teachers feel it is necessary to address the issue more directly. Some teacher resource books have lessons where the goal is to try to help LLs realize the importance of being active in conversation outside of class. For example, some activities aim to teach LLs ways to initiate topic moves and hold the floor.

In creating a short course aiming to lead LLs to be more active in conversation for this study, it was not only necessary to consult TESOL resource books but also to create several new activities. One purpose of this research is to tie together these new activities with those previously published as one source of strategies that language teachers can consult if they would like to help their students become more active in conversation (see Appendix A). Although many resource books and journal articles feature activities aiming to improve students' communicative competence, I have yet to find a source which directly addresses the issue of students' passivity.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

As will be discussed later, some researchers have used other characteristics or measures to describe passivity. Similarly to Long (1981) and Holmen (1985), in this paper being passive refers to the following:

- (1) speakers who seldom make topic moves
- (2) speakers who rarely ask questions
- (3) speakers who comment on few statements by their partner

(4) speakers who respond to questions in a minimal fashion.

Training LLs to be active means getting LLs to initiate more topic moves, ask more questions, and continue topics after an NS comment or question.

It is noteworthy to add that the issue being discussed is not NS dominance, which Zuengler (1989, 1991, 1993) has seemed to confuse with LL passivity. From Zuengler's own research, it seems that NSs do everything they can to *not* dominate the conversation. As noted above, NSs ask many questions in order to get LLs to participate. Zuengler (1989) also shows that NSs do not interrupt LLs much. This seems to be the case because LL contributions are sometimes so rare that NSs value their every word. Thus, in this study, the focus will be on LL passivity, not NS dominance.

In this research, *conversation* refers to face-to-face communication in social situations between two people. It does not refer to transactional communication such as speech acts (requests or apologies) or 'survival' English used to accomplish something (shopping or renting an apartment). Here, it refers to interactional language used to 'get to know someone' or 'maintain a personal relationship.'

'Language learner' is used as opposed to 'nonnative speaker' in this study because this study is not trying to claim that fluent nonnative speakers are passive in conversation. Even though 'language learner' implies a learner of any language, in this study it is generally used to refer to limited-proficiency adult ESL or EFL students. However, it would not be surprising if language learners, including

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American LLs, would have some of the same passive characteristics when having conversation with NSs of other languages.

Lastly, the term ‘American’ refers to speakers of standard American English. The term is used because it is recognized that there are differences between varieties of English and that the research done so far may not apply to other ethnic groups in America or other varieties of English. Thus in the literature review, Athabaskans, a semi-nomadic language group of Native Americans, are contrasted with ‘Americans’ as if they are two different groups, though Athabaskans are Americans themselves.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

One purpose of this study is to try to help confirm whether LLs are indeed passive in conversation with NSs. The main purpose, however, is to determine whether the training, which includes awareness activities, structured practice, and communicative activities addressing LL passivity, could help students become more active in conversation. After the data were collected, it became apparent that it would also be beneficial to analyze the conversations to see what the NSs did *during* the conversations that encouraged active participation from the LLs. This last objective is not reflected in the research questions, hypotheses, or the pre and posttests, but is discussed in Chapter V. The two main research questions are as follows:

1. Are language learners passive in conversation with native speakers?

2. Can a course addressing language learner passivity lead the learners to be more active in conversation?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses predicted that, one, the LLs would be passive in conversation with NSs and, two, the training would lead them to be more active.

The measures will all be discussed in chapter III.

- 1a. In the pretest, the NSs will ask a great majority of questions.
- 1b. In the pretest, the NSs will initiate the majority of topic moves.
- 1c. In the pretest, the NSs will comment after an LL statement more often than the LLs will respond to NS comments.
- 1d. In the pretest, the NSs will elaborate when answering a question a greater percentage of the time than the LLs.
- 1e. In the pretest, the NSs will have more words per content turn than the LLs.
- 2a. In the posttest, the LLs will ask significantly more questions than they did in the pretest.
- 2b. In the posttest, the LLs will initiate significantly more topic moves than they did in the pretest.
- 2c. In the posttest, the LLs will comment after an NS statement significantly more often than they did in the pretest.
- 2d. In the posttest, the LLs will elaborate after answering an NS question a significantly greater percentage of the time than they did in the pretest.

2e. In the posttest, the LLs will have significantly more words per content turn than they did in the pretest.

Method

In order to answer research question number one, twenty-six conversations between NSs and LLs were organized. After recording and transcribing the data, the transcriptions were analyzed to determine whether the first set of hypotheses was supported. After instruction and practice with skills that would lead the LLs to be active in conversation, the subjects had another conversation with different partners. Again the transcripts were analyzed for features of active LL participation to determine whether the LL subjects had become more active.

SUMMARY

This study seeks to determine if a course addressing LL passivity will lead LLs to be more active in conversation with NSs. In Chapter II the literature addressing the areas relevant to LL conversational participation will be reviewed. These areas include conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, and teaching activities aiming to improve LLs' conversational competence. The third chapter will describe in detail the methods used and the subjects involved in this study. In Chapter IV, the results of the study will be provided. The final chapter discusses the results in further detail, including the implications for ESL teaching. The limitations of the study and suggestions for further research will also be discussed there.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

There has been some research that suggests that language learners (LLs) are often passive with native speakers (NSs) in conversation (Long 1981; Holmen 1985; Zuengler 1989, 1991). However, these studies have yet to yield conclusive results. Zuengler, in particular, has discussed possible variables that may affect how passive LLs are. If LLs are passive, this poses problems for LLs in their attempt to form relationships with NSs. Researchers have looked at the frustrations that build up after interethnic conversation (Scollon and Scollon, 1979; Gumperz and Roberts, 1980). These frustrations could be caused by sociolinguistic and educational factors that lead LLs to be passive in conversation with NSs. Language educators have not set out to solve the problem of passivity directly, but many of their attempts to improve LLs' overall communicative competence could help lead students to be more active in conversation. This chapter will look at previous research showing that LLs are passive, variables affecting their passivity, why being passive is a problem, the possible causes, and potential solutions.

ARE LANGUAGE LEARNERS PASSIVE?

Many linguists and ESL Professionals are aware that language learners are often passive in conversation although there have been few empirical studies that have shown that this is indeed the case.

In his research on foreigner talk, Long (1981, 1982, 1983) noticed that NSs handled a great majority of the topic moves in NS-LL conversation. Long also found that NSs used questions much more frequently in conversation with LLs than with other NSs. In Long's research (1981), statements made up 83 percent of the t-units, or "pause-bounded phrasal units" (Maynard, 1989, p. 163), in the NS-NS discourse. Meanwhile in NS-LL conversations, questions accounted for 63 percent of the t-units. Long claims that this was the case because pauses did not elicit comments or questions from the language learners, as they would in NS-NS conversation. Therefore, the NSs used questions because they are recognized as turn-yielding forms that demand a response. Long also found that the topics discussed in the data were dealt with superficially with few continuations. As a result, the NSs abruptly changed topics by asking more questions.

Holmen's research (1985) helps confirm Long's claims that LLs are passive in conversation with NSs. She looked at twenty conversations between Danish high school students and NSs of English of the same age group. Although the LLs were "fairly advanced," she found that they had a very minor effect on the overall course of the conversation in terms of introducing topics, continuing topics, and asking questions.

Holmen states that the NS-LL discourse resembled more of an interview than a conversation, with the LLs accepting the role of answering NS questions. In virtually all of the conversations, the NSs chose the topic and the discussion was dominated with NS questions about the LLs' life and opinions. Although the students' responses were relevant, they rarely changed the topic or asked the NSs questions. While *each* NS asked between 100 and 150 questions in the twenty-minute conversations, the twenty LLs *together* asked just 68 (50 of these were asked by three of the twenty LLs). This happened despite the fact that the subjects were told to have a balanced conversation with both parties asking questions. After the LLs answered a question, the NSs often commented on it and changed the subject with another question.

Zuengler (1989, 1991, 1993), however, questioned whether it is accurate to say that LLs are always passive in conversation. She set up dyads between NS students and intermediate and advanced LLs of English. In one conversation the students were to have a conversation about food. In the second, the students were paired with NSs who were studying the same major field. In fifteen of the dyads in the second conversation, the LL was judged to have more content knowledge; in another fifteen, the NS had more knowledge; in the last 15, the interlocutors had about the same content knowledge. In one study, Zuengler (1991) counted interactional features in the conversations such as pause fillers, back channels, topic moves, the number of words, and several measures of negotiation (1991). In another study, Zuengler (1989) also looked at questions and interruptions.

Zuengler found that content knowledge had a big effect on who dominated the conversation. In the 1991 study, when the NS and LL had equal content knowledge in their field of study, the NS contributed more in terms of number of words (11,592 to 9,487). The same trend existed in the conversation about food (35,321 to 31,954). When the NSs had more content knowledge, the NSs dominated (14,393 to 8,395 words). However, when the LLs were judged the expert, they contributed slightly more than the NSs (11,101 to 9,508 words). Zuengler also found that NSs asked significantly more questions when the subjects had equal content knowledge and slightly more questions when they had more or less knowledge (1989). Thus, Zuengler's research suggests that NSs are generally more active, but that this may not be the case if the LLs have more content knowledge of the topic being discussed.

The number of words may not be the best way to determine who dominates the conversation, however, because NSs often try to involve LLs by asking questions in order to get them to speak as much as possible. Thus, even when the LL talks a lot, it is usually the NS who directs the conversation. For example, though their words per turn were balanced in the conversation about food, the NSs initiated a vast majority of the topic moves (182 to 82). Even if LLs contribute to the conversation when discussing something that they are experts in, they may never get this chance if they do not learn to select or change the topic to their area of expertise.

Other measures that Zuengler (1991) used are also questionable in measuring if LLs are passive. As mentioned above, interruptions may indicate who dominates the conversation, but it is not being assumed that NSs dominate LLs. Zunegler's research (1989), in fact, shows that NSs did not interrupt LLs very often. This could be because the NSs tried to involve the LLs as much as possible. Back channels also may not be a sign of LL activity, because they are a sign that the interlocutor wants the speaker to continue talking (McCarthy, 1991). Fillers can be used to hold the floor, but LLs use them more often than NSs because it often takes them a few moments to put their thoughts into words (Yamada, 1989).

Nevertheless, Young and Milanovic (1992) point out that there are several ways to analyze conversational participation. Back channels and negotiating for meaning do indeed show that a LL is actively listening and ensuring that communication takes place. However, this is not the type of active participation that previous researchers were looking at when they claimed that LLs are passive in conversation.

Variables to consider

Despite its limitations, Zuengler's research is important because it brings up a variable, content knowledge, into the picture. Researchers have discussed other variables such as ethnicity, status, and second language proficiency. Furthermore, accommodation theories point out that it is not just speakers'

personal and linguistic characteristics that account for the variables, but also their perception of their interlocutor's characteristics (Takahashi, 1989).

Because some ethnic groups have been noted to be more passive in communicating in English than others, it can be claimed that ethnicity is a big factor. For example, many language teachers and researchers have noticed that the Japanese take fewer turns in group activities and class discussions than other students (Sato, 1990). Some research shows that Japanese also participate less in conversation. Duff (1986), for example, paired Japanese and Chinese ESL students together and found that the Chinese dominated approximately 66 percent of the words and also took twice as many words per turn. Yamamoto (1991) found that Japanese ESL students took 6.21 words per turn in free conversation with NSs, while non-Japanese ESL students took 16.61 words per turn. Why certain ethnicities seem to participate less actively in conversation seems to depend on several sociolinguistic factors that will be considered later.

Another variable that may affect NS-LL conversation is status. Hatch (1992) and Richards (1980) have suggested that status is reflected in who speaks when, the length of turn, and who selects topics. As an example, Hatch brings up the now antiquated 'rule' for American children to 'be seen and not heard.' Strevens (1987) adds that "'only speak if you are spoken to' is an unbreakable rule in some" cultures (p. 127). Age, ethnicity, occupation, and gender are related to status in many societies. As far as gender, Gass and Varonis (1986) looked at the interaction between male and female Japanese students in English conversation.

Although they looked at only four mixed sex dyads, they noticed that males tended to contribute more in terms of number of words and leading questions. They also found that males interrupted females more often than females interrupted males. Perhaps Japanese males are also more active than Japanese females in LL-NS conversation in English.

If it is true that LLs are passive in conversation, then what about more advanced NNSs who have become fluent in conversation? If fluent NNSs are more active in conversation, then fluency would be another variable (Zuengler, 1989; Woken, M & Swales, J., 1989). Gaies (1982, as quoted in Zuengler, 1989) suggests that NSs will take control of the conversation if they think the LL cannot actively contribute. Research shows that Japanese contribute less in terms of length of utterance when they feel their interlocutor has a higher proficiency (Takahashi, 1989; Yamamoto, 1991). Takahashi also shows that in NNS-NNS conversation, the speaker with the higher proficiency usually asks more questions.

However, Holmen (1985) observed that less proficient speakers in her study were as active, if not more active than the more advanced LLs. Furthermore, Scarcella (1983) found that fluent Hispanics who had been living in the United States for several years still had a 'discourse accent,' a transfer of interactional characteristics, which inhibited their conversation with NSs in English. Scarcella compared conversations between Hispanics, between Americans, and between the two ethnic groups. She found that there were many abrupt topic shifts in the interethnic conversation. Although Scarcella does not distinguish which group

made the moves, sudden topic moves are also found in NS-LL conversations where the LL is passive. Scarcella suggests that the Hispanic speakers were transferring communicative features, such as turn-taking and turn-giving signals from Spanish. As will be discussed later, when two interlocutors have different interactional features, this often leads one speaker to control the conversation.

Another factor is the variable of personality. Of course, certain people regardless of ethnicity, status, or language ability are more active than others in conversation. Though it could be linked to cultural background, Tannen (1984) claims that some Americans have a high-involvement style while others have a low-involvement style. She states that people with a high-involvement style often change topics suddenly, take the floor quickly, avoid pauses, and prefer personal topics. In analyzing one discourse among her friends, Tannen found that 'high-involvement' speakers tended to lead the conversation. In NS-LL communication, shy LLs will predictably speak less than other LLs.

In all the studies mentioned above, there were some LLs who were more active than others. Holmen (1985) noticed that three of the twenty LLs in her study were much more active than the rest of the students. Similar to the variables of content knowledge and personality is the fact that certain topics generate more interest for some speakers than other topics. In analyzing NNS-NNS conversation, Takahashi (1989) noticed that speakers seemed to be more active when certain topics came up. The variables of topic and personality may cancel out other

variables. For example, a beginning Japanese LL who might normally be shy may become actively involved when a topic of interest is discussed.

Despite all the variables, it still can be claimed that LLs are generally passive in conversation with NSs in terms of who directs the conversation. Existing research suggests that NSs seem to make a vast majority of the topic moves and elicit more information than LLs. NSs usually end up speaking more despite their efforts to involve the LL.

Why being passive is a problem

If certain LLs are passive in conversation, it would seem to harm their attempts to develop personal relationships with NSs. Being passive often reflects that a LL is not conversationally competent in the target language. Richards (1980) points out that errors involving conversational competence may have more serious consequences than syntactic and pronunciation errors, because

[they] are closely related to the presentation of self, that is, communicating an image of oneself to others. (p. 430)

When NNSs transfer discourse behaviors from their first language, this often leads to either misunderstandings about the person or stereotypes about the NNS's culture (Gumperz & Roberts, 1980; see also Noguchi, 1987).

Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985) claim when the "silent Finn" has conversation with people of other cultures, misinterpretations arise because Finns appear less active in conversation. Lehtonen and Sajavaara argue that Americans may think the Finn is nervous or finds the topic disturbing. This results in a

breakdown in communication often with both sides unaware of the sociolinguistic factors involved.

Yamada (1992) shows that Japanese and Americans have similar problems. She writes that Japanese are often surprised and even bothered by what they feel is “excessive talk” of Americans. Yamada quotes one Japanese saying “Americans are blunt and insensitive, they just plow through their opinions” (p. 63).

Meanwhile, Americans may be equally frustrated by “silent” Japanese. Americans, according to Yamada, think talkative and “open” people are being honest, while Japanese traditionally think that people cannot reveal one’s true feelings verbally. This sociolinguistic difference prompted one American in Yamada’s research to say “Japanese are evasive and illogical, you never know what they are trying to say” (1992, p. 63).

Scollon (1985) has looked at the comments of Athabaskans and Americans about each other and again found that passivity can lead to negative feelings and ethnic stereotypes. The misconceptions developed from the Athabaskan use of pauses and a perceived hesitance to take turns or select or continue a topic. The Athabaskans said that the Americans asked too many questions, always interrupted, talked too much about their interests, always spoke first, and never gave others a chance to talk. The Athabaskans see “an almost breathless rush of talking at them” (p. 24). Meanwhile, the native English speakers felt that the Athabaskans were slow in taking turns in conversation, did not start conversation, and never spoke about themselves. Scollon has heard people say that Athabaskans

are 'passive,' 'uncooperative,' 'unresponsive,' 'antisocial,' and even 'stupid.' Sadly, Athabaskan passivity in conversation led to frustrations, misconceptions, and negative stereotypes. Furthermore, recognizing the difficulties of intercultural communication, some NSs may avoid having conversations with people of other cultures all together (Gumperz & Roberts, 1980).

The fact that passive interlocutors rarely initiate topic moves also causes further problems in conversation. As mentioned earlier, students may never get to discuss subjects they are interested in and capable of discussing if they do not learn to select or change the topic. Furthermore, if LLs rely on NS questions to contribute to the conversation and if they always reply in a minimal fashion, there will be many sudden topic moves by the NS (Long, 1981). And Yamada (1992) writes that Japanese feel frustrated when Americans suddenly and 'insensitively' change the topic.

Nevertheless, this lack of conversational coherence could seriously harm LLs' chances of forming a meaningful relationship with an NS. After studying topic shifts in couples' conversations, Crow (1983) suggests that conversational coherence is "symptomatic of a healthy relationship" (p. 154). The coherence and frequency of topic shifts is essential in measuring how successful a conversation is. In other words, frequent and sudden topic shifts, as are common in NS-LL conversation where the LL is passive, are signs of unsuccessful communication. Crow goes on to point out that if two people fail in communication, their

relationship will fail also. If this is the case, passive LLs are unlikely to experience many successful relationships with NSs.

WHY LANGUAGE LEARNERS ARE PASSIVE

Determining why LLs are passive is the first step in finding solutions. Many researchers assume that LLs are passive because they do not know enough of the target language to take a greater part in the conversation (Gass, S. & Varonis, E., 1985; Takahashi, 1989; Zuengler, 1989, 1991). This is understandable. For example, beginning LLs may not have a big enough vocabulary to elaborate as much as they would like to. Indeed, Glahn (1985) found that more advanced LLs had much longer turns than less advanced students.

However, the problem may go beyond having a limited proficiency. For example, many LL know how to ask questions, but why do many rarely ask them in conversation? The variables in LL passivity discussed above may give hints as to why LLs are often passive. If certain NNSs are more active than others, analyzing the variables may lead us to understand why LLs are often passive in conversation with NSs. Some research supports the hypothesis that there are sociolinguistic and educational factors involved.

Sociolinguistic factors

Several sociolinguistic factors may lead LLs of certain ethnic groups to become passive in conversation with American NSs. These include power relationships, the language's turn-taking signals, the cultural group's views

towards silence, their reaction towards strangers, and their openness to talk about personal topics (Richards, 1980; Scarcella, 1983; Scollon, 1985).

Some ethnic groups may seem more passive in conversation with strangers because they are generally less open to strangers in their own culture. For example, Athabaskans are reserved when they converse with strangers and may hesitate to speak (Scollon, 1985). As mentioned earlier, this has led to negative stereotypes. Japanese are also considered less open and trusting of strangers than are Americans. As a result, Barnlund (1989) found that Japanese rarely have conversation with strangers. Meanwhile, some Americans feel it is perfectly appropriate to have conversation with someone whom they have just met. When Japanese do meet a stranger they are generally more reluctant to discuss private matters. "Two Japanese meeting for the first time," Barnlund claims, "would choose less personal topics, ask fewer questions, and reply in less precise ways" than Americans (p. 119).

In one study, many Japanese students reported being uncomfortable expressing their opinions as openly as an American would (Yamamoto, 1991). Because Japanese often hesitate to discuss private matters or their true opinions, Americans may believe Japanese are always quiet and shy. Of course this is not the case. Japanese may sometimes hide their opinions because balance and harmony traditionally are more valued than individuality in Japanese society. They usually reserve "frankness" for in-group interactions (Yamada, 1992). Thus,

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when asked their opinion or a personal question, Japanese may answer more briefly than Americans would.

In other settings, it also seems that Americans are more willing to hold their turn longer than Japanese. Yamada (1992) analyzed Japanese and American business meetings. She found that long monologues were common in American meetings, while many short turns by a variety of speakers were the norm in the Japanese business meetings (Yamada, 1992). The speaker who brought up a topic in the American meetings often ended up dominating the topic in terms of t-units, but this did not happen in the Japanese discussions. Although this research was not conversation-based, this significance could hint as to one reason that the American NSs often seem to have longer turns than LLs. Perhaps, long monologues are more acceptable to NSs than to LLs in conversation.

As mentioned above, linguists have suggested that status also seems to play a role in who directs the conversation and when one can take a turn. Status affects language in different ways in different cultures. For example, status plays a large role in Japanese. In studying patterns of group discussions among Japanese, Watanabe (1990) found that the person with the highest status, determined by age and gender, gets in the last turn. Even in English, the person of higher status often controls the conversation. Perhaps, this is even more so the case in other cultures where students are taught to respect elders and teachers more than Americans are. Thus, when LLs are speaking English with an NS, the LLs may see the NS as a person of higher status, especially if the NS is their English tutor or host parent. If

this is the case, the LL will likely be passive in conversation, which again leads to misconceptions.

Another reason that LLs may be passive in conversation is that many are not confident in their language ability. This may explain why Takahashi (1989) found that most (but *not all*) low-proficiency nonnative speakers (NNSs) contributed less in conversation than fluent NNSs. It is probably not necessarily because they have a low proficiency, but because they *perceive* their proficiency level to be embarrassing. In questioning Japanese students why they were not more active in group activities and in conversation, Yamamoto (1991) found that the Japanese students felt an 'inferiority complex' in speaking English compared to other LLs. They were hesitant because they were afraid of making mistakes and losing face. Many reported that they always took time before they spoke in order to think over exactly what they were to say. Yamamoto claims that they do this because the educational system in Japan leads language students to pay more attention to 'form' rather than to 'meaning.' This hesitation often leads to the Japanese losing their turn to speak. The students in Yamamoto's study admitted that the fear of making mistakes also led them to shorten and simplify their utterances when they did get a turn. As most language teachers will recognize, many other beginning LLs do not let their low proficiency keep them from actively contributing in conversations and group activities.

Many linguists suggest that a language's turn-taking signals have a big effect on NS-LL conversation (Richards, 1980; Scarcella, 1983; Tarone, 1989;

Hatch 1992). Listeners are aware of the global context and can recognize when the current speaker is about to finish with his or her utterance (Maynard, 1989). For example, listeners can predict when a speaker's narrative is nearly complete. But listeners also watch for turn-yielding to predict when the speaker is going to finish the turn. In American English, speakers signal that their turn is over by one or more of the following measures: relaxing their hands, looking back at their interlocutor, changing their intonation, decreasing the pitch at the end of a grammatical clause, drawling on the final syllable, and laughing (Duncan & Fiske, 1977; Schaffer, 1983).

To my knowledge, not much research on turn-yielding signals in other languages has been done. However, Hinds did notice that in interviews Japanese often give a sharp nod when finishing an utterance (as quoted in Maynard, 1989). This has not been listed as a turn-yielding signal in English. Linguists have suggested that American and English turn-yielding signals may have other connotations to people of other cultures (Gumperz & Roberts, 1980; Hattori, 1987; Stevens, 1987). In other words, LLs may not recognize when Americans are yielding their turn. This could lead to either the LL losing the chance to speak or the NS directly soliciting a response with a question. On the other hand, when LLs are speaking, they may unknowingly be giving an American turn-yielding signal in the middle of their utterance. The LLs would likely be surprised and frustrated when an American jumped in and 'interrupted' them.

In conversation between interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds, their views towards silence and uses of pauses may also cause one interlocutor to become passive. Americans actively avoid silence in conversation because it is less accepted in their culture. Americans with a high-involvement style may think that pauses during conversation reflect a lack of rapport and will therefore tolerate “noise and diffuse topics as opposed to silence” (Tannen, 1984, p. 95). Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985) claim that talk for Americans does not just function as the transference of messages but also as the avoidance of awkward silences. Furthermore, Hatch (1992) discusses the claims of Zimmerman and West (1978) that Americans interpret silence as disinterest or the lack of comprehension. Thus, even though some LLs may think that Americans ask too many questions, it is doubtful that NSs particularly enjoy spending the entire conversation asking questions and ‘interviewing’ LLs. It can be assumed that Americans ask so many questions with LLs to show interest, gain rapport, and avoid what they see as awkward silences.

LLs’ views towards silence may also lead to their being interrupted. Pauses are not needed to signal the end of a turn in American English. But when they do occur, brief silences are a “transition-relevance point” (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, p. 703). In American English, especially in some urban settings, the pause between speaker turns is usually a fraction of a second, with slight overlaps common. If the other interlocutors do not respond, then the speaker can continue speaking. Scandinavians allow more silence in conversation than

Americans (McCarthy, 1991; Hatch, 1992), while Japanese see silence more as a natural waiting period (Wayne, 1973 as quoted in Barnlund, 1989). Compared with American conversation styles, active participation for Finns means “delayed attempts at turn-taking” and “slow speech” (Lehtonen & Sajavaara, 1985, p. 194).

Therefore, even if a LL has recognized an American’s turn-yielding signal, the LL may not respond quickly enough. This would lead the American to continue speaking, and the LL might wonder when the American was actually going to give up the turn. Because Athabaskans have longer silences in between turns, Scollon (1985) writes that they may find it “difficult to get a word in edgewise” (p. 24). On the other hand when LLs are speaking, if they come from a linguistic background that tolerates longer silences, they may think Americans are being rude when they are ‘interrupted’ and their turn ‘stolen.’ If this is the case with LLs of English, NSs would dominate the conversation and have much longer speaking turns compared to LLs.

The Japanese in Yamamoto’s research felt that they were not given enough time to express their opinions in discussions. In the discourse style and turn-taking conventions of Japanese, each speaker tends to be given a turn (Yamada, 1992). In an analysis of group discussions, Watanabe (1993) noticed that the Japanese started the discussions by deciding who should speak first by making suggestions and inviting others to lead off. But in American culture, especially in group settings, interlocutors have to ‘*take the floor*’ when they have something to say.

Japanese LLs who wait to be given a chance to speak will likely lose their chance to participate (Yamamoto, 1991).

Another effect of pauses in conversation is they may yield to topic changes. Scollon (1985) says that because Athabaskans may be quieter in conversation, this leads to the non-Athabaskan choosing the topic. Yamada (1992) writes that when Americans change the topic when a silence appears in conversation, Japanese often feel “crowded” because they think they were not given the chance to continue the current topic as they may have desired. Yamada noticed that long silences of an average of 6.5 seconds were present and acted as a “buffer” between discussion topics in the Japanese business discourse. She states that Americans open and change topics in a way to “satisfy their expectations of maintaining independence,” while Japanese are more concerned with “nonconfrontation” (p. 63). When shifting topics in Japanese, Yamada writes, it is also necessary to show how two topics relate to each other. Thus, it seems that Americans change the topic more often and more suddenly than in many other cultures.

In summary, transferring sociolinguistic factors from the LL’s first language often leads the LL to be less active in conversation than the NS. These include the LL’s view towards strangers and silence, their willingness to talk about their opinions or personal topics, and their language’s turn-yielding signals. This may cause a LL to take turn turns less often, which could lead the NS to continue talking or ask more questions. When LLs do take a turn, these factors may lead to short utterances. The LL also might be less willing to ask and select the topic as

readily as Americans. As mentioned above, this leads to misconceptions about the personality and interests of the NS and LL.

Educational factors

Several education factors also may lead students to be less active in conversation. This especially seems to be the case in classes that do not follow the communicative approach. For example, as mentioned above, if LLs are taught to pay too much attention to form, this may cause them to be hesitant in conversation. Furthermore, the traditional classroom has a very rigid and predictable turn-taking system, so students rarely get a chance to practice turn-taking in conversation (McCarthy, 1991). Once they get in conversation with NSs, these students might not have the skills to take the floor and actively participate in the conversation.

Moreover, in many ESL classes, teachers dominate the class with questions. In one analysis of a single 50-minute-class, an ESL teacher asked 427 questions (White & Lightbrown, 1984). Thus, if LLs do not have a chance to use English outside of the classroom, most of their experience in using English would be in answering questions. It seems appropriate to suspect that answering questions could become a habit in the second language. Because they have rarely asked questions in class, it is possible that many LLs begin to think of English as something that they use only when information is requested of them. Holmen (1985) hypothesizes that the advanced LLs in her study asked so few questions because they had been preparing for their final oral exams. In these tests, the students were expected to answer questions fluently but not to ask their own

questions. Thus, it seems these students carried their passive habits with them to English conversations outside of class.

Too many display questions by the teacher in the classroom also may lead students to get into the habit of answering with short responses. Brock (1986) has shown that display questions, as opposed to referential questions, do lead to shorter responses from students. Therefore, it could be assumed students become so used to giving minimal responses in the classroom that they do the same when asked questions in the target language outside of class.

Communicative teachers are taught, however, to ask referential questions and to give LLs adequate time to respond. As mentioned above, Yamamoto (1991) shows that ESL teachers, compared with other LLs, were less likely to interrupt when Japanese took a long time before responding to a question. But as with other features of foreigner talk, giving students a long time to respond may fail to prepare the students for what they will encounter outside of the classroom. If the students are used to being given plenty of time to respond, they might find that NSs outside of the classroom do not allow them the time to 'get a word in' in conversation.

The traditional language classroom may lead LLs to develop a passive attitude when using English outside of class. In this setting, the students are not used to asking questions or thinking actively. Therefore, combining the sociolinguistic and educational factors, it is understandable if LLs tend to be passive in conversation with Americans.

SOLUTIONS

After looking at possible sociolinguistic and educational causes for LL passivity, it seems that teachers could address the problem either directly or indirectly. Indirect solutions would attempt to prevent potential problems caused by the traditional educational practices mentioned above. However, teachers could also address the problem directly, especially the sociolinguistic causes, by teaching language skills that would help LLs take a more active role in conversation.

Indirect solutions – the communicative approach

Language teachers following the communicative approach may be indirectly helping their students be more active outside of class. For example, as mentioned above, asking referential questions in the classroom will yield longer and more personal responses. However, many language teachers advise simply asking fewer questions. Cooper (1986), for instance, suggests having students, not the teacher, ask reading comprehension questions. She advises students to ask the following four types of questions: factual, inference, vocabulary, and experience questions. By asking questions, especially the non-traditional comprehension questions, LLs can start thinking independently and use the target language more actively in the classroom setting.

Since the communicative classroom includes a lot of pair and group work, the students get numerous chances to practice turn-taking with other LLs (McCarthy, 1991). Ernst (1994) supports giving students a chance to have free

conversation in listening and speaking or mixed-skill classes. She argues that the “talking circle,” which is a group conversation in the language classroom, is one activity where the students can practice basic conversational skills, such as initiating topic moves.

Furthermore, Hatch (1978) points out that fluent conversationalists need a wide range of topics in the target language “to use at their disposal” (p. 78). This includes knowing the relevant vocabulary and grammar to be able to talk about the topics. Thus, it can be assumed that if teachers allow the LLs to choose their own topics for their essays and oral reports, students will be able to develop the lexical and syntactic knowledge for subjects they may want to discuss in conversation.

Following the communicative method and the advice above could indirectly lead students to be more active in conversation. The students will have had conversation practice in class where they ask questions, take-turns, and share their own opinions. Moreover, the LLs also may develop an ‘active,’ versus ‘passive,’ mindset when using the target language.

Direct solutions

Although no one to my knowledge has suggested teaching a series of lessons aiming to make LLs more active in conversation, many linguists have suggested that it may be beneficial to teach them such skills as turn-taking and initiating topic moves in English (Richards, 1980; Hatch 1992). McCarthy (1991) notes that even in communicative conversation classes teachers have emphasized transactional language over interactional talk used to establish and maintain social

relationships. Perhaps, a focus on social interaction and conversation micro-skills could lead students be more active in conversation.

In *The Grammar Book* (1999), Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman recognize that when LLs respond to NS questions like “Do you study?” with only “yes” or “no” (minimal responses), the LLs are failing at the pragmatic level though their answer is correct syntactically. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman suggest that students need practice in determining NSs’ true intention of a question and responding appropriately by elaborating.

To develop conversational competence, Richards suggests that students need to move beyond learning to answer predictable questions. Fluent second language speakers, he says, will make use of topic selection “to initiate and develop conversation with skill and confidence” (p.431). Richards and McCarthy (1991) suggest that learners need practice in introducing topics that are appropriate and that they are able to speak about. Richards says that LLs need to learn such lexical phrases as *well*, *that reminds me*, and *now that you mention it* in order to select or shift the topic.

Gumperz and Roberts (1980) recommend a course where students of different cultures analyze each other’s conversation styles and discuss how they may lead to misconceptions and stereotypes. The main purpose of the course would be for individuals to realize that these stereotypes are formed from communication difficulties and do not necessarily reflect the personality of others. The class is held under the assumption that the learners cannot be taught this

significance but must discover it themselves through awareness activities, discussions, and practice. Some of the sociolinguistic causes of LL passivity discussed above could be directly addressed in a course similar to the one Gumperz and Roberts suggest.

In teacher resource books and professional journals, some ESL professionals have suggested activities that help LLs develop skills that could help them become more active in conversation. As early as 1976, Keller suggested the 'interrupting game' where one student tries to tell a story and the other keeps on interrupting him or her. The students practice using lexical phrases to change and return to the previous topic.

The resource book *Conversation* (Nolasco, R. & Arthur, L. 1987) introduces several activities to help language students become more competent in English. Some of the activities could be used to help LLs realize the importance of being active. In one activity, the students look at an artificial dialogue between a NS and a LL. The two are at a party when they meet one another and have the following conversation:

A: Hey, where are you from?

B: From Singapore.

A: Why did you come here?

B: To study.

A: Oh, what are you studying?

B: Business.

A: How long are you planning to stay?

B: Two years.

The students analyze the conversation and figure out why A is likely to lose interest in B. The LLs are to come up with answers like “she should have answered longer” or “she didn’t ask any questions.” The students then are asked to change the dialogue to make B more active in the conversation.

Dornyei and Thurrell (1991) introduce several activities aimed at teaching LLs strategic competence. A couple of the activities would help students practice skills that would help them hold the floor and change the topic in conversation. They suggest having students practice nonsense dialogues where two students use as many floor-holding fillers as possible. In another activity, the students practice shifting the topic. One student asks a personal question and the other responds in a few sentences but does not answer the question. For example, if students are asked how old they are, they could reply, “That’s an interesting question. Isn’t it strange how people feel that they need to know a person’s age....” In another activity, “Judo,” the students practice changing the topic. The students are given a subject like ‘judo’ and no matter what their partner asks them, they need to shift the topic back to judo.

McCarthy (1991) recommends doing activities where students practice the reciprocity of typical NS conversation. Noting that interview-type activities often lead to one-sided conversations, McCarthy suggests designing activities where one student tells a story and then other LLs follow with related stories of their own.

He recommends other activities where students have to discuss an entire list of topics within a time limit. In these activities, the students would be developing coherent links between topics and practicing taking the floor.

Riggenbach (1999) suggests ways for students to use discourse analysis to improve their competence in the target language. Students identify a problem in their discourse, such as the failure to select a topic or 'get a word in.' Then the LLs study their own transcripts or an NS-NS conversation to look for solutions. With this activity, the students take control of their own learning and isolate areas that they feel are problems.

All of the above activities are said to be helpful to improve communicative competence. They can also be used to help students practice being more active in conversation (asking questions, elaborating, initiating topic moves, etc.). However, despite the suggestions of linguists and the creators of these activities, I have not found any research that shows whether 'teaching' students to be active will actually lead them to participate more actively in conversation with NSs.

CONCLUSION

This research intends to add to previous studies addressing LL passivity. It is hoped the data will help confirm Long and Holmen's claims that LLs are passive in conversation with NSs. This research also aims to bring together a series of activities that address LL passivity. It seeks to find out whether these activities are helpful in leading students to be more active in conversation with

NSs. Lastly, the results may suggest ways that NSs can encourage LL participation during conversation.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This research study was a pre-experiment involving a pretest, an experimental variable (the four-week course), and then a posttest to determine whether the class would lead language learners (LLs) to be more active in conversation. This chapter presents the methodology in greater detail. The first section describes the demographic information of the subjects. The next section describes the general procedure and processes for the data analysis in the pre and posttests. The final section discusses the four-week class that the language learners attended.

SUBJECTS

The language learners

In the fall term, 2000, twenty-eight ESL students from a Portland area Intensive English Program (IEP) signed up to be involved in the study. The IEP offers a variety of ESL classes with the goal of preparing the students to succeed at the university level in America.

The students were all currently enrolled in level three in their grammar classes. Level three students are defined as intermediate learners by the IEP. They have scored between 65 and 74 on the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. In their listening/speaking classes, four of the students were in levels

two, eight were in level four, and one student was level five. Level two students are defined as lower intermediate (Michigan scores 49-64), level four as upper-intermediate (scores 75-84), and level five as advanced (85 and above).

Nevertheless, all the LLs were 'intermediate' in grammar.

The LLs were asked to join the four-week course on conversational skills free of charge. They were told that the class would focus on conversation skills with Americans, though details were not given. The students were informed that they would have recorded conversations with native speakers before and after the course. They were then asked to read the consent form (Appendix B) and ask questions if needed.

Table I. LLs who participated in both the pre and the posttest

Student Number	Native Country	Gender	Age
17	Japan	Female	20
14	Japan	Female	22
9	Japan	Female	30
26	Japan	Female	21
30	Japan	Female	21
31	Japan	Female	21
2	Japan	Female	20
15	Japan	Female	25
22	Indonesia	Female	23
7	China	Female	23
27	Korea	Female	19
25	Korea	Female	23
5	UAE	Male	24
23	Colombia	Male	35
12	Thailand	Male	28
11	Thailand	Male	26

The class took place from weeks three to five of the ten-week term in a regular classroom on campus. The class was held on Tuesday and Thursday from 12:50 to 1:50 PM. Since twenty-nine students showed interest in the class, it was necessary to divide the class into two sections. However, the students were taking four or five other classes and only eight students could join a second section on Mondays and Wednesdays at the same time. Thus, initially there were twenty students in the Tuesday/Thursday class and eight in the Monday/Wednesday class. Table I shows the native country, gender, and age of the LLs who took part in both the pre and posttests.

Of the eighteen LLs who participated in both tests, eight were Japanese, three were Korean, two were Thai, and there was one each from Indonesia, China, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Colombia. Twelve of the sixteen were female, including all eight of the Japanese. All the students were aged between nineteen and thirty-five. Because two of the conversations were not audible, sixteen were included in the posttest though eighteen LLs stayed in the class.

Table II shows a list of the LLs who took part only in the pretest. Of the twenty-six LLs whose conversation was recorded in the pretest (Tables I and II), eighteen were female and eight were male. Most of the subjects were from eastern Asia. Eight were Japanese, five were Korean, four were Chinese, three were Thai, two were Indonesian, two were from the UAE, one was from Turkey, and another was from Colombia. Most of the LLs were in their twenties. Two, however, were in their thirties and one was nineteen.

Table II. Students who took part in only the pretest

Student Number	Native Country	Gender	Age
19	UAE	Male	24
6	Turkey	Male	22
4	China	Male	24
8	China	Female	21
28	China	Female	27
24	Korea	Male	23
21	Korea	Female	27
3	Korea	Female	22
13	Thailand	Female	23
33	Indonesia	Female	23

Of the twenty-eight students that showed up for the pre-test, eighteen stayed with the class until the end. The students were dropped from the class if they missed more than two classes. When students were absent, they were emailed and provided an overview of the lesson they had missed so that they would not be too far behind if they came again. Some students had to change classes and were forced to quit the class. But for most of the students who stopped coming, it seems they simply got too busy and the non-credit class became a low-priority.

This was the first term at the IEP for a majority of the students, and more than twice as many students than expected signed up for the class. However, these students were taking four or five other ESL classes. By the third and fourth weeks, so many teachers at the IEP were receiving complaints about the heavy workload in their classes that the teachers had a discussion about it over their listserv. Moreover, at the IEP, the elective classes had recently been changed from pass/no-pass to graded because attendance had always been so poor in those classes.

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However, credit or a grade could not be offered for the training. Furthermore, in line with Human Subjects requirements, the students were reminded at the first class that they could quit at any time.

The Native Speakers

Having conversation with the LLs in the pretest and posttest were six NSs of American English (see Table III). The NSs volunteered to have four or five one-on-one conversations with the LLs within a period of forty-five minutes. However, since one of the recorders malfunctioned in the pretest, one NS had only two conversations (one of those was inaudible) and others had as many as six conversations. The NSs were all recruited from the university's Applied Linguistics program. All of the NSs had been overseas, and two of them were currently teaching ESL. Three were male and three were female. None of the NSs were aware of the research topic. They were told that the LL discourse patterns were being analyzed.

Table III. The NS subjects

NS	Gender	Age	Pretest Partners	Posttest Partners
01	M	26	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	15, 23
10	M	37	11, 12, 13, 14, 15	5, 22, 30, 31
18	M	45	8, 9, 19, 26, 27	12, 14, 25
16	F	27	17	7, 24
20	F	23	21, 22, 23, 25	2, 17, 26, 27
29	F	55	28, 30, 31, 33	9, 11

DATA COLLECTION

Procedures

The pre and posttests involved NS-LL conversations of five minutes. As with Long's research (1981), the subjects were told to have a free, recorded conversation. Because one purpose of this research was to determine how active the LLs were in initiating topic moves, the subjects were not given a conversation topic. The students were dismissed from the classroom to have the conversation with one of the six NSs, who were waiting in separate rooms within the building. An audio recorder was placed in between the two speakers. There were clocks in all the rooms, and both subjects were told to stop recording after five minutes though they could continue the conversation longer if they wished. In the posttest, the subjects were paired with a different partner.

Data Analysis

The recorded data were transcribed and analyzed to determine how active the LLs were. The transcription was analyzed for the following features:

- questions
- topic moves
- continuing statements (comments in reply to a partner's statement)
- elaborated answers
- words per content turn

These measures (all explained below) were chosen based on observations by Long (1981) and Holmen (1985) and the description of a passive LL mentioned in

Chapter I: (1) a LL who seldom makes topic moves; (2) a LL who rarely asks questions; (3) a LL who makes few comments after NS statements; and (4) a LL who seldom elaborates when answering NS questions. As noted in the literature review, other researchers such as Zuengler (1989, 1991) have used other measures in researching dominance and passivity.

Questions are a good measure of how active a speaker is in conversation because they demand a response and thus can be used to control who speaks at what time (Long, 1981; Maynard, 1989). They also dictate, in many ways, what is said. They can be used to select a topic, continue a topic, and elicit information. Information questions were counted, but not comprehension checks (e.g. 'Do you know...?' or 'Do you understand?') or clarification requests ('What does ____ mean?'), even if they were in the form of a question.

Comprehension checks and clarification requests show how active the person is in making sure that what has already been said is understood, while information questions are used to elicit new information. Questions involving negotiation of meaning were not counted because they are not lacking in conversation, even among passive LLs. For example, in research by Zuengler (1991), the LLs actually asked more comprehension checks than the NSs. However, an analysis of the conversations in Long's research (1981) show that LLs rarely ask information questions. Including the questions involving the negotiation of meaning would have inflated the number of LL questions and hidden the degree of LL passivity.

Certain topic moves were also used to measure how active the subjects were. As Long observed, NSs seem to make most of the topic moves in NS-LL conversation. This means that NSs control the conversation in terms of determining what is being talked about. Topic moves counted in this study were topic selections and topic changes, but not topic shifts, or topic drifts.

Topic selections are used to bring up a subject at the beginning of a conversation. The following example, not from the transcript, shows an example of a topic selection in italics.

LL: My name is Yuki.

NS: Nice to meet you. *So, how do you like America so far?*

Topic changes are used to move from one subject to a new one that is unrelated. The question by the NS would be a topic change.

LL: I like Korean food. I can cook it, too.

NS: Wow! Maybe you can cook it for me sometime! Anyway, *do you like sports?*

Topic shifts, which were not counted, are much like topic changes except they are used to move the topic to a related topic, as in the following example.

LL: I like Korean food. I can cook it, too.

NS: Wow! Maybe you can cook it for me sometime! *Can you cook Japanese food?*

Topic drifts are where the discourse slowly moves from one topic to the next over a series of turns. Discourse analysts agree that it is difficult to determine the

difference between a topic change, shift, and drift. Therefore, in this study, another linguistics student analyzed the data to check for rater reliability. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

The number of times the LLs commented after an NS statement (labeled a 'continuation statement') was also measured. The following in italics would be an example.

NS: Do you like sports?

LL: I like baseball and soccer.

NS: *I like baseball, too.* What is your favorite team?

Continuation statements were counted with the attempt to see how active the subjects were in continuing topics and contributing to the overall conversation. Because they seldom respond to an NS statement, Long (1981) has pointed out that LLs rarely continue a topic. In normal NS-NS conversation, interlocutors will respond to a comment or story of one speaker with a reaction, opinion, or story of their own (McCarthy, 1991).

Statements that changed the topic were not counted here, because they did not continue the topic and also because they were measured as a topic move. Comments in the form of 'How ___!' or 'That's _____!' were also not counted. For example, 'How nice!' and 'That's interesting!' were regarded as back channels because these utterances are often used in much the same way. They show that the listener is being attentive and are often used to prompt the speaker to continue. Furthermore, they are not comments that greatly add to the content of the

conversation and thus are not counted along with more elaborate and thoughtful responses.

Another way to continue a topic besides responding to a speaker's statement is to elaborate when answering a question. Passive LLs tend to respond minimally to NS questions, leaving the NS to ask several follow-up questions to get the 'full story.' Here, a minimal response was not measured in terms of the number of words. A response was counted as minimal when the LL answered a question in terms of content, but without elaborating with details or making any further comments. The following example shows many minimal responses:

NS: Where are you from?

LL: *I'm from Brazil.*

NS: And how long have you lived here?

LL: *I've been living here two months.*

NS: And you're taking classes here?

LL: *Yes, I am.*

NS: Whose classes are you taking?...

Here, the LL responded minimally to all of the questions leading the NS to ask more questions. This pattern shows that the LL was not active in the conversation and only gave the requested information. In this study, the number of times a subject elaborated after answering a question was counted. The following (in italics) would count:

NS: What classes are you taking?

LL: I am taking grammar and writing. *I want to take more classes, but I don't have time.*

This category is expressed by the percentage of time that the subjects elaborated when answering a question. For example, if a LL was asked ten questions, and they elaborated when answering three of them, their elaboration percentage would be 30 percent. It was simply recorded whether the subject elaborated or not. The length of their utterances was measured by words per content turn.

The total number of words in each utterance was also counted to calculate what is to be called 'words per content turn' (WPCT). A content turn differs from a normal turn in that, as mentioned before, back channels, confirmation checks, and repeated words were not counted as words or a turn because they do not add new 'content' to the conversation. Measuring WPCT instead of the usual words per turn allows the researcher to measure active participation based on the description of a passive speaker that is being used in this study.

Only the following words in italics would be counted in determining the words per content turn:

(line 1) NS: *Anyway, so how you like Portland so far?*(turn a)

(line 2) LL: *A lot.* (turn b)

(line 3) NS: A lot. (no turn)

(line 4) LL: Yeah. *Americans are nice....* (turn b, continued)

In this example, line three and the first word in line four were not counted because they constituted a confirmation check and response. Because questions and utterances involving negotiation of meaning were not counted as a turn, “Americans are nice” constitutes an elaborated answer rather than a comment in reply to a statement. Since line three was not a statement, line four is not a comment in reaction to the content of line three, but rather an elaboration to the answer in line two. This seems to be the true intention of the LL, and measuring content turns allows it to be counted as such.

If the conversations were longer than five minutes, only the first five minutes were analyzed. However, if the five minutes came to an end during a turn, the entire turn was included. And if this turn included a question, the answer was analyzed to see if the subject elaborated or not.

See Appendix C to see how one conversation was analyzed. As mentioned above, another linguistics graduate student analyzed five of the conversations to check for rater reliability. The student analyzed 200 turns of the conversations and we agreed on 193 of those turns, or 96.5 percent of the time.

After the discourse was analyzed, the data were recorded based on each conversational turn. The data were then put in the statistical software package SPSS. T-tests were used to test the hypotheses. For the first set of hypotheses, which predicted that the NSs would be more active than the LLs in the pretest, the data were analyzed to see if the NS had significantly more features of active participation per conversation than the LLs. For the second set of hypotheses, the

LL data from the posttest were compared with their pretest data to see if the LLs became significantly more active after the experimental variable. For this set of tests, only the pretest data of the sixteen LLs who took part in both tests were included.

THE EXPERIMENTAL VARIABLE

The experimental variable was a four-week course aiming to lead the LLs to be active in conversation. The classes included awareness activities and discussions, the introduction of language and methods used to be active in conversation, structured practice, and communicative activities (see Appendix A for the complete curriculum). This entire unit had been taught in a pilot study and in a summer exchange program.

The first step in the training was for the students to realize that LLs are often passive in conversation. The students were shown a dialogue where one speaker is passive. Characteristics of the passive speaker, such as those mentioned in Chapter I, were elicited.

The second part of the awareness training was to help the LLs realize that being passive could harm their ability to form personal relationships. Some of the consequences of being passive were elicited from the students by showing them the above-mentioned dialogue where one speaker is passive. The aim was for the students to realize that asking questions shows interest, answering an array of questions is more difficult than asking a few, continuing a topic shows fluency, and initiating topic moves allows the students to talk about what they are willing and

able to discuss. These advantages were written down and reviewed throughout the training. They were key to the whole program because they motivate the LLs to take the training and conversation activities seriously.

After the awareness training, the class moved on to four focuses that were expected to help the LLs become more active in conversation: asking questions, elaborating and holding the floor, initiating topic moves, and turn-taking.

The focus on asking questions began with the class reviewing the importance of questions in conversation. The class also discussed whether it is appropriate to ask 'personal' questions to strangers in the students' culture. The LLs then moved on to activities where they practiced asking questions in social settings that they were likely to encounter in America.

The next focus was on elaborating and keeping the floor. The typical minimal LL response pattern was compared with NS-NS discourse where speakers often elaborate after answering a question. Then the class practiced activities where they answered a question and then elaborated. During this section of the training, fillers and gestures used to hold the floor were also reviewed. The importance of these tactics was stressed so that the LLs would have a chance to hold the turn without losing the floor to an NS. The students then did activities where they used the fillers and tried to hold the floor, while other students tried to interrupt them if they paused or gave a turn signal.

The third focus was on initiating topic moves. The class reviewed the importance of selecting a topic that they were interested in and capable of

discussing. The students then brainstormed topics they felt comfortable talking about. Lexical phrases that the LLs could use to initiate a topic move (e.g. 'guess what?' or 'by the way') were elicited. After some practice with structured dialogues, the class moved on to communicative games and activities where they practiced selecting or changing the topic with their partners.

The last focus was on taking the floor. The LLs were reminded of their tendency to wait for an NS question before they speak (based on the pretest results). Turn-taking signals in American English were introduced so that the LLs could recognize when they are being given a turn. The class then practiced recognizing the signals. The students also did activities where they responded to their partners' stories with comments and stories of their own.

At the end of the training the students reviewed the characteristics of typical NS-NS conversation and compared it with the typical NS-LL conversation. The class also reviewed the importance of asking questions, elaborating, initiating topic moves, and taking the floor. Although it would have been beneficial for the LLs to analyze their pretest discourse to see how often they asked questions, initiated a topic, elaborated, etc., compared to their NS partners, this was not included in the training because it would have affected the results of the posttest too directly.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis of the pre and posttests. The first section contrasts the native speaker (NS) and language learner (LL) data in the pretest. The second section includes the LL data from the second set of conversations and compares it with the results from their pretest. Examples from the discourse are given where they offer relevant support.

THE PRETEST

The results from the pretest show the LLs' and NSs' mean number of questions, continuing statements, and topic moves per conversation, as well as the mean number of words per content turn. The percentage of time the subjects elaborated when answering a question is also presented. The pretest data were contrasted using t-tests to determine whether the NSs did the measures significantly more frequently than the LLs at the 0.05 confidence level.

Questions

The hypothesis that the NSs would ask significantly more questions than the LLs in the pretest was supported. In the twenty-six conversations, the NSs asked a great majority of the questions. As Table IV shows, the six NSs asked an average

of 14.5 questions per conversation while the twenty-six LLs asked just 1.8 questions per conversation. Thus, the NSs asked nearly 90 percent of the questions.

Table IV. Pretest results: Questions per conversation

Group	Number of Subjects	Mean Questions per Conversation	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
NSs	6	14.5	4.5	.00 ($p < .05$)
LLs	26	1.8	2.3	

As Table V shows, nine of the twenty-six LLs asked no questions at all, and only three of them asked more than five questions. Five of the six NSs asked an average of thirteen questions or more, and NS29 asked over eighteen questions per conversation. This imbalance led the discourse in the pretest to resemble an interview rather than a conversation, as the following example shows:

NS20: So, where are you from?

LL21: I'm from Korea.

NS20: Korea? And how long have you been here?

LL21: Five months.

NS20: Five months. How is it going so far? Enjoy it?

LL21: First time I went here it was like (inaudible). It's very beautiful place and peaceful.

NS20: Portland is the second place you've been then?

LL21: In the US.

NS20: And how do you like Portland in comparison?....

As with this example, nearly all the conversations in the pretest started out with the NS asking a series of questions. And in many cases, this trend continued throughout the entire five minutes without the LL learning a single thing about the NS.

Table V. Individual results in pretest: Questions per conversation

Subject	Questions	Subject	Questions	Subject	Questions	Subject	Questions
LL2	8	LL11	0	LL22	1	LL31	1
LL3	0	LL12	0	LL23	0	LL32	2
LL4	0	LL13	4	LL24	2	NS1	16.7
LL5	2	LL14	7	LL25	0	NS10	6.7
LL6	5	LL15	6	LL26	1	NS16	13.0
LL7	1	LL17	1	LL27	3	NS18	18.2
LL8	0	LL19	2	LL28	1	NS20	14.0
LL9	1	LL21	0	LL30	0	NS29	18.5

Continuing statements

It was hypothesized that the NSs would have significantly more continuing statements than the LLs in the pretest. This hypothesis was also supported. As Table VI shows, in the first set of conversations the NSs were twice as likely as the LLs to make a statement in response to a comment by their conversation partner. While the LLs made a continuing statement 3.0 times, the NSs had an average of 6.7 continuing statements. No LL made more than six continuing statements in the pretest.

Table VI. Pretest results: Continuing statements per conversation

Group	Number of subjects	Continuing Statements	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
NSs	6	6.7	1.6	.00 ($p < .05$)
LLs	26	3.0	1.9	

In the conversations that the NS controlled, a common pattern was NS question, LL answer, and a NS comment followed by another NS question. The following shows two examples of this pattern:

(line 1) NS18: What don't you like about the weather?

(line 2) LL26: I don't like rain.

(line 3) NS18: No, well if you've been here for the last six months, we've had pretty good weather. We've had a lot of sunshine.

(line 4) LL26: Yeah.

(line 5) NS18: The real rain is going to start here any day. It doesn't rain in Osaka much?

(line 6) LL26: Not so much.

(line 7) NS18:We were there in the spring. It was nice. Does it stay like that all year round?

Line 4 shows that the LL was given the chance to make a continuing statement, but only replied, "yeah" (regarded as a back channel). Since the LL was hesitant to take the floor, NS18 continued the turn and then asked another follow-up question. The NS continuing statements and follow-up questions show that the NS wanted to keep the topic and conversation going. Meanwhile, the minimal responses and lack of continuing statements by the LL do not show active participation. Table VII shows that no single LL had as many continuing statements as the NS mean of 6.7. Two LLs had no continuing statements at all.

Table VII. Individual results in pretest: Continuing statements (CSs)

Subject	CSs	Subject	CSs	Subject	CSs	Subject	CSs
LL2	2	LL11	6	LL22	3	LL31	1
LL3	0	LL12	1	LL23	2	LL32	5
LL4	3	LL13	2	LL24	4	NS1	4.5
LL5	4	LL14	6	LL25	5	NS10	5.4
LL6	6	LL15	4	LL26	3	NS16	9.0
LL7	2	LL17	1	LL27	1	NS18	7.8
LL8	2	LL19	3	LL28	5	NS20	6.6
LL9	1	LL21	0	LL30	5	NS29	7.0

Topic moves

The hypothesis that the NSs would initiate significantly more topic moves than the LLs would was also supported. As Table VIII shows, the mean number of topic moves by the NSs was 1.7, compared to just 0.2 by the LLs. In fact, only four of twenty-six LLs initiated a topic move at all. And twice when the LLs did choose the subject, it was because the NS offered them the chance, as below:

NS16: Okay, so what should we talk about?

LL17: How can I find American friends?

As with this example though, the topics that the LLs did choose were often more interesting than the ones the NSs selected. For example, one LL wanted to talk about how his food kept disappearing from his apartment. Meanwhile, the NSs selected the same topics over and over: the LLs' family, hometown, classes, and their impressions of Portland.

Table VIII. Pretest results: Topic moves per conversation

GROUP	Topic Moves	Standard Deviation	Significance Level
NSs	1.5	0.9	.00
LLs	0.2	0.5	(p < .05)

The NS seemed to try to stick to the topic for as long as possible by asking several follow-up questions and continuing statements. When it seemed the LL did not have much more to say about the topic, the NS would sometimes suddenly change the topic, as the following example shows after the interlocutors had been talking about the LL's native language for several turns:

NS29: How is the writing? Is it like the Roman alphabet or...?

LL33: Yes, we use the same. Like English or America, we use the alphabet.

NS29: Oh, well. That's interesting. And – um – what does your family do?
Do you have a large family?

As with this example, NS29 often changed the subject to family when she had grown tired of a certain topic. As the data show, it was usually the NS who shifted the topic at these times. In fact, only four of the LLs selected a topic at all. They were LL2, LL17 (twice), LL 23, and LL 31.

Words per content turn

It was also hypothesized that the NS turns would be significantly longer than the LL ones. Again, the hypothesis was supported by the data. As Table IX shows, the mean NS turn was almost twice as long as the mean LL turn. The average NS turn was 17.2 words, while the LLs had an average of 9.0 words per content turn (WPCT).

Table IX. Pretest results: Words per content turn

GROUP	WPCT	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
NSs	17.2	8.8	.00
LLs	9.0	5.2	(p < .05)

Table X shows that four of the LLs did have an average turn as long as the NS mean. However, seven LLs had an average of just five words per content turn or less. These LLs usually responded minimally to questions. When they did make comments, they were very brief.

Table X. Individual results in the pretest: Words per content turn

Subject	WPCT	Subject	WPCT	Subject	WPCT	Subject	WPCT
LL2	6.2	LL11	9.4	LL22	10.2	LL31	4.1
LL3	6.0	LL12	18.1	LL23	20.4	LL33	11.1
LL4	5.8	LL13	9.9	LL24	20.6	NS1	6.8
LL5	14.2	LL14	6.3	LL25	17.1	NS10	29.7
LL6	10.4	LL15	8.0	LL26	3.5	NS16	26.1
LL7	4.6	LL17	3.9	LL27	4.9	NS18	15.1
LL8	9.7	LL19	5.5	LL28	8.7	NS20	12.8
LL9	4.0	LL21	7.6	LL30	4.1	NS29	12.5

Elaborations

As hypothesized, NSs elaborated when answering a question more often than the LLs. As Table XI shows, the LLs elaborated forty-seven percent of the time, but the NSs elaborated seventy-one percent of the time. The following example shows three minimal responses in a row by the LL:

NS29: And how long have you been here?

LL31: About six months.

NS29: Is this your first trip to the United States?

LL31: Yes.

NS29: Have you studied English in Japan?

LL31: Yes.

Although the LL gave the requested information, the NS was probably expecting a more thoughtful response. Thus, the NS needed to ask a series of follow-up questions.

When LLs asked a question, the NSs usually elaborated. The following presents two elaborations:

LL15: Were you learning Japanese?

NS10: Well, I was teaching English and trying to learn Japanese.

LL15: In an English conversation school?

NS10: No, I taught to business people. I used to like – we didn't have a school. I would travel to the company and I would give a lesson at every company. And so that was pretty interesting, but it was really busy. And I taught in the high schools, too....

The LL questions do not seem any more interesting than the NS ones in this example or throughout the entire set of conversations. Nevertheless, the NSs chose to elaborate and give extra information more often.

Table XI. Pretest results: Percentage of answers containing an elaboration

GROUP	Elaboration Percentage	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
NSs	71%	22%	.02 (p < .05)
LLs	47%	23%	

Often when the LLs answered briefly, the NSs repeated the LLs' minimal response giving them a chance to elaborate. But the LLs often just said, "yes" as in the following example:

NS1: Do you like Portland?

LL7: Yeah.

NS1: Yeah?

LL7: Yes.

Examples like this show that LLs were given chances to be active and elaborate, but that they often took a passive attitude and gave only the requested information.

Table XII shows the elaboration percentage of individuals. Only three of the LLs had an elaboration percentage as high as the NS mean (71%).

Table XII. Individual results in the pretest: Elaboration percentage

Subject	Elab. %	Subject	Elab. %	Subject	Elab. %	Subject	Elab. %
LL2	.70 (7/10)	LL11	.44 (4/9)	LL22	.53 (10/19)	LL31	.14 (3/22)
LL3	.39 (9/23)	LL12	.50 (5/10)	LL23	.83 (10/12)	LL33	.73 (11/15)
LL4	.37 (10/27)	LL13	.30 (3/10)	LL24	.70 (7/10)	NS1	.44 (7/16)
LL5	.22 (2/9)	LL14	.00 (0/1)	LL25	.70 (7/10)	NS10	.82 (14/17)
LL6	.64 (7/11)	LL15	1.00 (3/3)	LL26	.25 (4/16)	NS16	1.00 (1/1)
LL7	.45 (9/20)	LL17	.17 (2/12)	LL27	.57 (12/21)	NS18	.83 (5/6)
LL8	.64 (9/14)	LL19	.32 (6/19)	LL28	.60 (12/20)	NS20	.67 (2/3)
LL9	.43 (9/21)	LL21	.37 (7/19)	LL30	.29 (5/17)	NS29	.50 (2/4)

Conclusion

The first research question asked if LLs were passive in conversation with NSs. Since the five hypotheses mentioned above were supported, it suggests that the LLs were more passive than the NSs. As Figure I shows, in the two hours of LL-NS conversations in the pretest, the NSs asked significantly more questions, commented after more statements by their partner, selected more topics, had more words per content turn, and elaborated when answering questions significantly more often than the LLs.

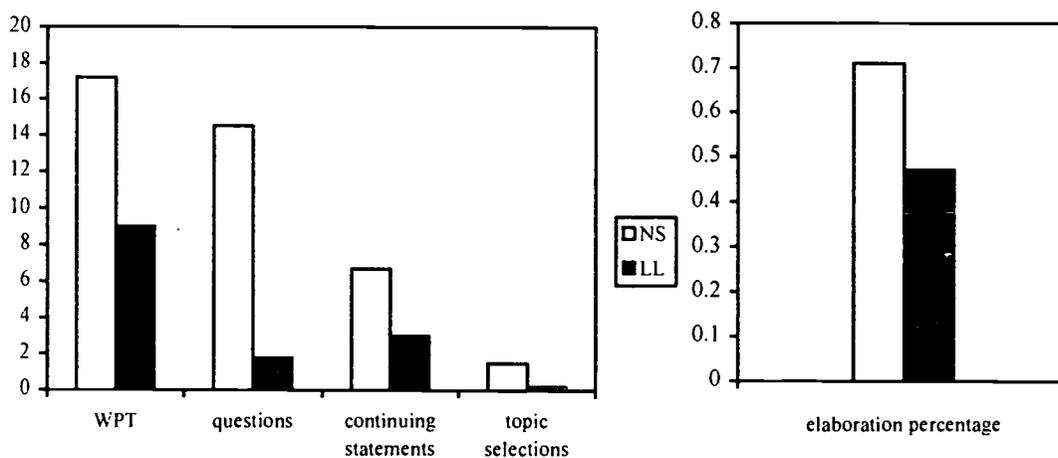


Figure I. Pretest Totals

THE POSTTEST

This section presents the results of the data analysis from the conversations after sixteen of the LLs had completed the four-week class. The analysis in the posttest does not include the NSs, because these results were not relevant to the second research question: can a course lead the LLs to be more active in

conversation? This section contrasts the LLs results in the pre and posttests to see if they became more active. It was hypothesized that they would become more active based on the LL results dealing with questions, continuing statements, topic moves per turn, mean number of words per content turn, and elaborations.

Questions

The hypothesis that the LLs would ask significantly more questions after the training than in the pretest was supported. Table XIII shows that the LLs asked over twice as many questions in the posttest as in the pretest. In the pretest, the LLs asked an average of just 2.0 questions per conversation while they asked 4.9 in the posttest.

Table XIII. LL results in the pre and posttests: Questions

Conversation Set	Questions	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
Pretest	2.0	2.6	.00
Posttest	4.9	3.1	(p < .05)

Table XIV shows that of the three students who actually asked fewer questions in the posttest than in the pretest, all still asked as many questions as the LL pretest mean. Most individuals made noticeable improvement. Two students who did not ask a single question in the pretest asked five questions each in the posttest. LL22 and LL31, who both asked just one question in the first conversation, asked ten and nine questions respectively in the posttest. After the NS asked the first two questions of the conversation, LL 22 changed roles and asked five questions in a row. An excerpt is shown here:

NS10: Did you live on an island when you were younger, or did you...?

LL22: After high school, I went to the capital and study there. How about you? Are you a student or...?

NS10: Well, yeah. I'm a graduate student.

LL22: Graduate student. What major?

...

LL22: So, you been teacher here?

NS10: Well, I don't know if I will teach here.... I taught in Japan for three years and my wife is Japanese. So, I want to go back for a while.

LL22: Are you – can you speak Japanese well?

After the posttest conversation this NS and another NS, both not aware of what the class had been about, expressed surprise as to how many questions the LLs had asked.

Table XIV. LL individual results: Questions (Qs)

LL #	Qs in Pre	Qs in Post	LL #	Qs in Pre	Qs in Post	LL #	Qs in Pre	Qs in Post	LL #	Qs in Pre	Qs in Post
2	8	5	11	0	1	17	1	3	26	1	0
5	2	5	12	0	3	22	1	10	27	3	2
7	1	3	14	7	5	23	0	5	30	0	6
9	1	5	15	6	11	25	0	5	31	1	9

Continuing statements

It was hypothesized that the LLs would have more continuing statements in the posttest than in the pretest. Again, this hypothesis was supported. As Table XV shows, the LLs had 5.4 continuing statements after the training, compared to 2.9 in

the pretest. When the NSs were answering questions instead of asking them, the LLs had the opportunity to respond to the NS statements with an opinion or comment of their own. The following is one example:

LL31: So, you like Portland?

NS10: So-so. There's a lot of good things and bad things. The hardest thing and the most difficult thing for me to get used to is the rain.

LL31: But I don't like Portland's weather, but I like Portland, because Oregon doesn't have shopping tax.

Indeed, with her question being answered, the LL had a chance to respond to a NS statement with a comment to continue the topic.

Table XV. LL results in the pre and posttests: Continuing statements

CONVERSATION SET	Continuing Statements	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
Pretest	2.9	1.8	.00 ($p < .05$)
Posttest	5.4	2.5	

Table XVI shows the number of continuation statements by individual LLs in the pre and posttests. LL26 was the only LL who had fewer continuing statements in the posttest than in the pretest. LL23 increased the most, going from two continuing statements to eleven in the posttest.

Table XVI. LL individual results: Continuing statements (CSs)

LL #	CSs in Pre	CSs in Post	LL #	CSs in Pre	CSs in Post	LL #	CSs in Pre	CSs in Post	LL #	CSs in Pre	CSs in Post
2	2	6	11	6	8	17	1	5	26	3	2
5	4	5	12	1	3	22	3	4	27	1	2
7	2	5	14	6	9	23	2	11	30	5	7
9	1	3	15	4	6	25	5	6	31	1	4

Topic moves

It was hypothesized that the LLs would initiate more topic moves in the posttest than in the pretest. However, although the sixteen LLs as a group initiated a topic move twice as many times in the posttest as they did in the pretest, the improvement was not statistically significant at the .05 level. Table XVII shows that the LLs initiated a topic an average of 0.3 times in the pretest and 0.7 times in the posttest. Once a topic was selected in the posttest, most of the LLs did not change the subject. Perhaps, because they were able to continue a topic longer, it was not necessary to change the subject during the five minutes of conversation.

Table XVII. LL results in the pre and posttests: Topic moves per conversation

Conversation Set	Topic Moves	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
Pretest	0.3	0.6	.07
Posttest	0.7	0.8	($p > .05$)

Nevertheless, a few of the LLs actively tried to choose a topic of their interest. Nine LLs (LLs numbered 2, 5, 7, 15, 17, 20, 22, 27, 30) selected a topic in the posttest compared to only four in the pretest. LL 5 selected the topic three times. In his conversation, LL23, a soccer fan from Columbia, took the first turn and asked, "Do you like soccer?" The two speakers maintained this topic for the entire conversation. In her conversation with NS 20, LL27 quickly ended the small talk about the weather, which had been going on for several turns, to discuss her own future:

NS20: ...it was nice and warm, huh?

LL27: Yeah, it's very good weather. I'm going to study here. Degree in (inaudible).... I'm going to study in America some, about five years.... I have a plan.

The two subjects maintained this topic for the rest of the five minutes.

Words per content turn

The hypothesis that the LLs would have more WPCT in the posttest than in the pretest was supported. Table XVIII shows that the LLs increased their WPCT from 8.7 in the pretest to 13.5 in the posttest.

Table XVIII. LL results from the pre and posttests: Words per content turn

Conversation Set	Words per content turn	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
Pretest	8.7	5.8	.02 ($p < .05$)
Posttest	13.5	7.1	

As Table XIX shows, thirteen of the sixteen LLs increased their WPCT in the posttest. Of the three whose WPCT decreased, their WPCT was still longer than the LL mean in the pretest. LL7 increased her WPCT more than anybody, going from 4.6 to 19.1 WPCT.

Table XIX. LL individual results in pre and posttests: Words per content turn

LL #	WPCT in Pre	WPCT in Post	LL #	WPCT in Pre	WPCT in Post	LL #	WPCT in Pre	WPCT in Post	LL #	WPCT in Pre	WPCT in Post
2	6.2	12.7	11	9.4	25.3	17	3.9	8.3	26	3.5	7.3
5	14.2	31.2	12	18.1	9.4	22	10.2	13.71	27	4.9	12.3
7	4.6	19.1	14	6.3	7.5	23	20.4	17.7	30	4.1	6.3
9	4.0	9.9	15	8.0	15.9	25	17.1	12.2	31	4.1	6.6

Elaborations

It was hypothesized that the LLs would elaborate when answering a question a greater percentage of the time in the posttest than in the pretest. As

Table XX indicates, this hypothesis was supported with the LLs elaborating 45 percent of the time in the first set of conversations and 61 percent of the time in the second set.

Table XX. LL results in pre and posttests: Elaboration percentage

Conversation Set	Elaboration %	Standard Deviation	T-test Significance Level
Pretest	45%	.27	.04 ($p < .05$)
Posttest	61%	.21	

Sometimes the LLs were asked the same or similar questions in the posttest as the pretest. Interestingly though, the LLs often elaborated when answering the question in the posttest where they had responded minimally in the pretest. When asked where she was from in the first set of conversations, LL22 answered, “Indonesia.” When she was asked the same question in the posttest she answered, “I come from Indonesia – the capitol of Indonesia, Jakarta. But I was born in south island....”

When the topic of LL9’s living arrangements and family came up in the pretest she responded minimally, inspiring NS follow-up questions:

NS18: You miss home?

LL9: No.

NS18: No? Do you have a family?

LL9: Yes.

NS18: In Kyoto?

However, in the posttest, LL9 seemed to have a different approach when a similar topic came up:

NS29: And are you here with family members or do you live alone?

LL9: I have host family. Host father is Spanish and host mother is Cambodian. So, they have three kids. So, one-year boy and four-years girl and eleven-years girl.

There are more examples from LL9. In the pretest when she was asked whether she took English in Japan, she answered with one word. When she was asked the same question in the posttest she answered with thirty-one words. In the pretest when asked if she would return to Japan after studying ESL, she again answered briefly. But she elaborated in the posttest when answering the question:

I want to learn just English. I don't want to go to regular (inaudible). If I want study other subject, I want to study in Japanese. It's easy to understand.

Although, the LLs still responded minimally in the posttest 39 percent of the time, they elaborated more often and gave extra information instead of having to answer countless follow-up questions.

Conclusion

The second research question asked whether the LLs would be more active in the posttest than in the pretest. Because four of the five hypotheses were supported, it seems that the LLs did become more active in the second conversation. Figure II shows they asked significantly more questions, responded to more NS comments with continuing statements, elaborated more often, and took

longer turns. Though they did not select the topic significantly more than they did in the pretest, as a group they still doubled the number of topic moves.

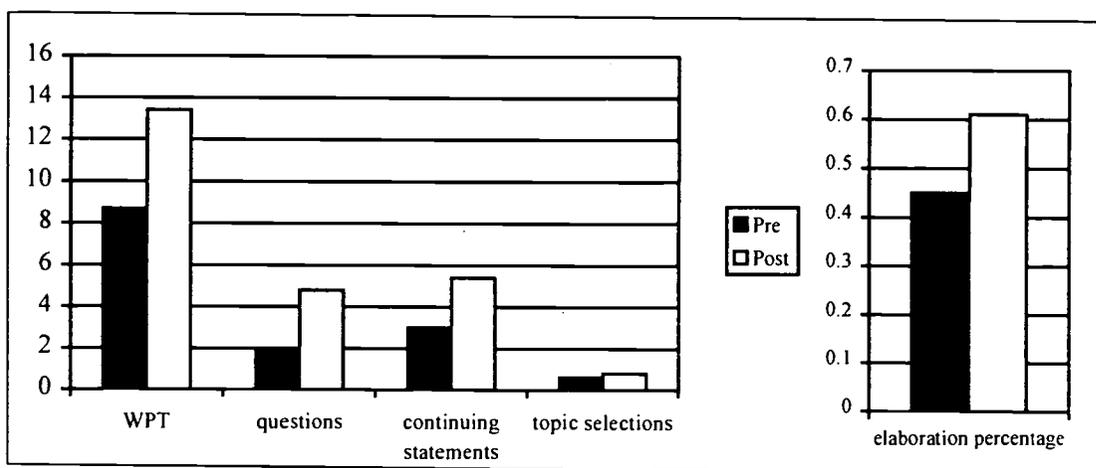


Figure II. LL Totals in Pre and Posttests

SUMMARY

This chapter has dealt with the results of twenty-six NS-LL conversations in the pretest and the sixteen NS-LL posttest conversations. The results from the pretest support the hypothesis that LLs are more passive than NSs in conversation. The data analysis from the posttest supports the hypothesis that the training helped the LLs be more active in conversation.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The data results will be discussed in this chapter in more detail. The chapter will also explore details that do not directly relate to the research hypotheses but are relevant to the topic of language learner (LL) passivity, including a discussion of different variables, such as gender and native language. This chapter will discuss the native speaker (NS) data results in the pretest and what they did or did not do to encourage LL participation. The limitations of the study will also be presented. Next, the chapter will discuss how this study adds to the past research and also provide ideas for future research on LL passivity. Finally, the possible implications that this study has for ESL teaching will be explored.

HOW NATIVE SPEAKERS ENCOURAGED PARTICIPATION

Chapter four discussed the results of the attempt to ‘teach’ the LLs to be active in conversation. With the goal of understanding ways to encourage LL participation *during* conversation, this section discusses the NS data results from the pretest in further detail. Possible relationships between the NS data and their LL partner’s data will be explored. A qualitative analysis of the discourse is

included to provide a broader perspective on how the LLs were or were not encouraged to participate.

The NS Role

Although all the NSs took the role of the 'interviewer' by choosing LL-centered topics and asking countless questions to get the LLs speaking, their conversational style varied. Table XXI shows the NS individual results in the pretest.

Table XXI. NS individual results compared with the NS and LL mean in the pretest

SUBJECT	Questions	Continuing Statements	Topic Moves	WPCT	Elaboration %
NS1	16.7	4.5	1.7	6.8	44%
NS10	6.6	5.4	1.6	29.7	82%
NS16	13.0	9.0	0	26.1	100%
NS18	18.2	7.8	1.6	15.1	83%
NS20	14.0	6.6	1.4	12.8	67%
NS29	18.5	7.0	2.8	12.5	50%
NS Mean	14.5	6.7	1.5	17.2	71%
LL Mean	1.8	3.0	0.2	9.0	47%

The data suggest that NSs 16, 18, 20, and 29 had one way of encouraging participation, while NS1 and NS10 each had their own style. NSs 16, 18, 20, and 29 seemed to have a similar style in that they used a lot of questions, continuing statements, and words per content turn. NS1 was unique in that, although he asked a lot of questions, he had fewer words per content turn and elaborated less often than the LL mean. NS10 seemed to have a distinctive style in that he asked less than half as many questions as the others but had the most WPCT.

LLs responses to NS attempts of encouraging participation

The NSs' styles seemed to encourage LL participation in different ways. NSs 16, 18, 20, and 29 seemed to use a high number of questions to get the LLs speaking. Their high number of continuing statements acknowledged the LL response and seemed to fill in time before their next question. The following example between NS20 and LL21 in the pretest illustrates this pattern:

(turn 1) NS20: What other things have you done since you've been here?

Like do you live here on campus? Do you live with a family?

(turn 2) LL21: Before I stayed – home stayed just one month. Then I moved (inaudible) Tower.

(turn 3) NS20: Oh, is that nice?

(turn 4) LL21: Yeah.

(turn 5) NS20: I lived in some places on campus. They are nice. How has it compared with where you lived in Korea? Do you live with a family?

The fact that she asked several questions per turn in turns one and five seems to suggest that NS20 was searching for a response and just suggesting possible topics for the LL. As in turn five, NS20 usually made some short comment in response to the LL answer before asking another question. These frequent questions did get the LL talking as shown in turn two above. The data showed a slight correlation (.252) between the number of NS questions and the number of LL words per five-minute conversation in the pretest. However, it is possible that the LLs become reliant on the frequent NS follow-up questions.

It could be hypothesized that the LLs rarely elaborated, because they knew that a follow-up question was coming soon. The data from the pretest show only a slight negative-correlation between the number of NS questions and the LL elaboration percentage (-.175). However, the data show a stronger negative correlation (-.361) between NS questions and LL WPCT ($p = .04$). Thus, the more NS questions, the shorter the average LL turn tended to be. It is not clear if this is because the short LL turns triggered more NS questions, or if the frequent NS questions led to shorter LL turns.

NS1's style of asking a lot of questions but making few continuing statements and taking short turns was another attempt to get the LLs speaking; as NS1 mentioned himself after the research. He said that silence forces the LL to say something. This strategy becomes apparent when listening to the tapes. When the student answered a question with a minimal response, NS1 was hesitant to ask a follow-up question or utter a continuing statement. He often tried to prompt the LL to go on by repeating his or her answer or giving a back-channel, as in the following example from the pretest:

NS1: Have you been to San Francisco?

LL2: Yes.

NS1: Oh, you have?

LL1: Yes.

However, as with this example, the LL did not elaborate when prompted. Overall, this strategy did not seem to work. Of the three LLs that had NS1 in the pretest and

went on to take the posttest, their words per content turn (WPCT) all doubled in the posttest. Although most of the LLs, regardless of their NS partner, had longer turns in the posttest, their WPCT did not increase as much as those who were paired with NS1 as Table XXII shows.

Table XXII. WPCT of LLs paired w/ NS1 in the pre compared to LLs paired with others

Subject	WPCT in Pretest	WPCT in Posttest	Percent Increase
LL2	6.2	12.6	103%
LL5	14.2	31.7	123%
LL7	4.6	19.1	315%
LL mean w/ NS1 in pre	8.33	21.15	154%
LL mean w/ other NSs in pre	8.76	11.68	33%

In an email after the study, LL7 said that her ‘improvement’ in the posttest was partially because she thought NS1 was “not happy” and seemed “tired” in the pretest. Although there were too few subjects to make generalizations, the data seem to suggest that NS1’s attempt to get the LLs speaking was not effective.

NS10’s style of talking a lot about himself seemed to be successful in prompting questions in the pretest. As Table I above shows, NS10 asked much fewer questions than the other LLs. When the LLs responded to one of his statements, instead of asking follow-up questions, NS10 often responded with a comment about his own life that related to the LL answer, as in the following example:

LL15: If I get a 500 in TOEFL, I want to major art in PSU.

NS10: My father is an artist. He's a graphic designer. But he's pretty old, so, he doesn't do it on computers. He does airbrush....

This long continuing statement seemed to get the LL interested in the NS. As a result, the next two utterances by the LL were questions. Indeed, NS10 was asked significantly more questions than NS16, 18, 20 and 29. While those four NSs were asked an average of 0.9 questions per conversation, NS10 was asked 3.4.

Summary

The NS participation patterns from the pretest show different ways of trying to get the LLs involved in the conversation. The results suggest that NS statements trigger LL questions and that frequent NS questions may lead to shorter LL responses. It seems that NSs can encourage or discourage equal LL participation depending on what role the NS takes. This area needs further research, however.

VARIABLES

In the literature review, several variables were mentioned that could affect LL passivity. These include the LL's first language, gender, age, fluency, etc. This research was not set up to test these variables. The subjects were not randomly selected, and there were not enough LLs in the various groups to adequately test most of the variables. Nevertheless, it was possible to test variables such as first language (L1) and gender to measure whether certain groups were more active in the pretest than other groups.

Japanese and Non-Japanese LL results

It was mentioned above that Japanese LLs have the reputation for being more passive than other LL groups. The eight Japanese subjects in the pretest, all women, did have significantly different results in some of the measures compared to the eighteen subjects from other countries. The Japanese women had turns half as long as the rest of the LLs. The average Japanese turn was 5.0 words compared to 10.8 for the non-Japanese LLs ($p < .05$).

While the Japanese LLs were more passive in terms of average length of turn, the Japanese LLs asked significantly more questions than the non-Japanese. The Japanese asked an average of 3.1 per conversation, compared to 1.2 questions by LLs of other nationalities. There was no significant difference between the Japanese and the other LLs in terms of elaboration percentage or the number of continuing statements. Nevertheless, the data involving questions and words per content turn suggest that L1 is a variable when considering LL passivity.

The non-Japanese LL and NS results were contrasted in the eighteen pretests in which they were paired to see if the non-Japanese LLs were more passive than the NS based on the five measures. In these conversations, the 14.1 words per content turn by the NSs was not significantly greater than the 10.8 words per content turn by the non-Japanese LLs ($p = .18$). The NSs were also not significantly more active in terms of elaborated answers. The non-Japanese elaborated when answering a question 52 percent of the time compared to 62

percent by the NSs ($p = .19$). However, these LLs were significantly more passive than the NSs in terms of questions asked, continuation statements, and topic moves.

Gender

The eight men and eighteen women LLs showed no difference in four of the five measures in the pretest. The only difference was in WPCT, where the women had 7.2 WPCT compared to the men's 13.0 words ($p < .05$). But these results could be biased because eight of the eighteen women were Japanese, while none of the eight men were.

In the pretest conversations involving the male LLs, the LLs did ask significantly fewer questions, select fewer topics, and have less continuation statements than the NSs. However, their 13.0 WPCT was not significantly fewer than the 15.9 WPCT by the NSs ($p = .26$). And the NSs did not elaborate an answer a significantly greater percentage of the time than the male LLs. However, because there were only eight conversations with LL men, these data do not prove that male LLs are as active as the NSs based on these two measures.

Interestingly, the LLs matched with NSs of the opposite sex asked significantly more questions than those paired with NSs of the same gender in the pretest. The twelve LLs matched with a NS of the same sex asked just one question per conversation, while the fourteen LLs paired with partners of the opposite sex asked 2.8 questions ($p < .05$). In the other measures, their results were not significantly different.

Support groups

Because there were data on whether the LLs had American friends, lived with a host family, or had a native speaking roommate, it was possible to test whether the students who had one or more of these 'support groups' improved more than those who did not. Of those who were involved in the posttest, there were nine LLs who had one or more of these support groups and seven who did not have any. The two groups did not show any difference in their improvement between the pre and posttests in three of the five measures. Though the LLs with one or more support groups did improve significantly more than other LLs in terms of words per content turn, the students without a support group actually improved significantly more on the number of questions asked. Thus, there was little evidence showing that interacting with native speaking friends, roommates, and host families helped lead the LLs to be more active.

Summary

Although there are not enough data from this research to strongly support whether male LLs and non-Japanese LLs are passive or not, these do seem to be variables to consider when discussing LL passivity. In this research Japanese LLs and female LLs asked more questions, had fewer words per content turn, and elaborated less often than non-Japanese and male LLs, respectively. This research does not show that LLs with American friends, roommates, or a host family became any more active than those who did not have any of these support groups.

LIMITATIONS

Because it was not in the researcher's means to conduct a full experimental research project, this study has the common limitations of pre-experimental research. There was no control group and the subjects were not randomly selected, and thus the results may not hold true for LLs studying in different contexts, LLs in different levels, or learners of languages other than English.

The two biggest limitations of this research were that the subject size was small and they were not randomly selected. Considering that the group contained many Japanese students and more females than males, the ability to generalize the results to other LLs is somewhat limited. This is even more so the case since the results mentioned in the above section show that Japanese LLs and female LLs may be more passive than other LLs on certain measures.

Another weakness of this study was that there was no control group. Therefore, one could argue that the LLs would have become more active whether they had taken this class or not. Between the pre and posttests, there were four weeks in which the LLs were taking other ESL classes and living in the United States. However, because there was little evidence showing that interacting with native speaking friends, roommates, and host families helped led the LLs to be more active, this limitation of having no control group is lessened.

Another limitation to the study was that the conversations were set in an artificial context. The subjects were told to have a timed conversation sitting in an office with a recorder placed in front of them. The LLs may have been nervous in

this setting, which could have affected their performance. Therefore, the results may not reflect what would happen in a more natural context where the subjects might have been more comfortable and had some context on which to base their conversation.

These limitations could affect the validity of this research. If possible, any further research on the topic should be experimental to test the validity of the results here. Other suggestions are mentioned below.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Hopefully, this research will bring LL passivity into the consciousness of language educators and spark further research on the topic. More confirmation that LLs are passive is needed, and the possible variables, including gender, nationality, and proficiency, should be thoroughly investigated to see if other groups are as passive as the LL subjects were in this study. The effect of the course on these other groups of LLs could be tested as well.

Future research on LL passivity could also be done differently than it was here, and many more areas could be explored. One way in which this study could have been more informative would have been to include silences in the transcripts and analysis. Thus, one would be able to determine when the NS pauses within a turn. If the conversations were videotaped, the researcher could also watch for non-verbal signals to determine when the NS yields a turn. Thus, the researcher could count how many times the LL failed to take the turn after an NS turn-yielding

signal. This could be done in both the pre and posttest to see if the LLs became more active and learned to recognize turn signals in American English.

This research could be even more informative by not only counting the number of questions, but also recording the kind of questions. For example, one could test if open-ended questions produce longer response than other kinds of questions. It would also be beneficial to see which topics elicited longer turns. This would further indicate how NSs could encourage active LL participation.

Another way this research could be improved is to have another posttest several months after the course has finished. In this research, the LLs had only one posttest two days after the last class. It would be beneficial to test the LLs again three or even six months later to see if they are still as active and to test the long-term effects of the course.

It would also be interesting to see how active LLs are when speaking in their native language. Similarly, it would be beneficial to see how active the NSs are when speaking a second language. To test this, one could pair Korean LLs of English, for example, with NSs of English who are studying Korean. The two groups could be paired to have conversations in both the English and Korean language. If the Americans were more active than the Koreans in English, but more passive in Korean, this would help support a claim that LLs are more passive than NSs, regardless of the language.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL TEACHING

Despite its limitations, this study adds to the little research done concerning LL passivity. Though Long's research (1981) suggests that LLs are passive and Holmen's (1985) research adds some support, studies by Zuengler (1989, 1991, 1993) questioned whether LLs are always passive and introduced some variables concerning LL participation in conversation. However, this study has helped support the claim that LLs are often passive in one-on-one conversation with NSs. Furthermore, it has discussed the consequences of LL passivity, and more importantly, tested some fresh solutions.

The data in this research suggest that LLs are often passive in free conversation with NSs. Compared to their NS partners, this research has shown that LLs ask significantly fewer questions, elaborate less often when answering a question, make fewer topic moves, and utter fewer comments in response to a partner's statement. This research strongly supports claims by Long and Holmen and should bring the issue of LL passivity into the consciousness of language teachers.

The results of this study suggest that a course can lead LLs to be more active in conversation. Thus, the activities included in this study can be considered for use in other classrooms. The course introduction raised the students' awareness of their passivity in conversation, and the communicative activities provided the practice needed to improve the students' skills in taking and holding the floor. More importantly, the course seemed to help the LLs develop a more active attitude

in terms of asking NSs questions and elaborating when answering a question. Considering the disadvantages passive LLs face in maintaining relationships with NSs, the activities used in this study could be seen as a potential solution to LL passivity. These activities do not necessarily have to be done as a unit as they were here. The skills could be spiraled throughout a course by integrating the activities into various lessons over the term period. Many of the activities could also be effective as warm-ups in listening/ speaking classes to get the students actively participating.

Although not the primary purpose of this study, the data present ideas on how NSs can encourage active participation during a conversation. It suggests that when NSs speak about their own lives, they may help elicit LL questions or statements. The data also question the relationship between the number of NS interrogations and the length of the LL responses.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to test the success of a course aiming to teach LLs to be more active in conversation. Twenty-six ESL students had five-minute conversation with one of six NSs. The pre-test data indicated that the NSs were significantly more active than the LLs based on the five measures analyzed. After the four-week course, awareness activities and communicative practice, the LLs had another five-minute conversation with an NS. The LLs were significantly more active in the posttest than they were in the pretest on four of the five

measures. The research supports the claim that LLs are passive in conversation and offers a solution.

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APPENDIX A: Course Curriculum

(started class two here)

Step 1: Introduction (understanding the importance of being active)

A: Make students aware that language learners (LLs) are often passive in conversation with native speakers of English (NSs)

* Simplified discourse analysis. Role play the following: A (an American) and B (an exchange student) are at a party. B wants to meet some friends. A walks up to B....

A: Hey, where are you from?

B: From Osaka.

A: Why did you come to Oregon?

B: To study.

A: Oh, what are you studying?

B: Business.

A: How long are you planning to stay?

B: Two years.

(A leaves) Ask the class why A left. Ask them, "What do you think A thinks about B?"

* Discussion: Being passive often leads NSs to think that a LL is boring, uninterested in others, unconfident, and not fluent. Tell them that many host families complain that their exchange students won't actively participate in conversation.

* Point out the typical NS-NNS discourse: Question (Q) Answer (A) QAQAQAQA. Point out that LLs rarely ask questions and often answer NS questions as simply as possible. Remind them of this pattern when introducing typical NS-NS patterns (Statement (S)QASSSSSQASSSSSS).

* Change the above dialogue so that B is more active. Role play both parts. Review this dialogue at the beginning of later classes as a reminder of the effects of being passive in conversation (Nolasco & Arthur, 1987).

B: Help them realize the benefits of being active (list on the board)

* Put them in the 'hot seat' (ask a student many questions as quickly as possible). Help them to realize (1) answering a number of questions is not easy or comfortable.

* Talk about a tough subject like politics and help the LLs feel the need to change the subject. Being active means (2) selecting your own topics – talking about your own interests and talking about what you are capable of.

* Review the above discourse. Asking questions and elaborating makes you appear (3) interested, (4) confident, and (5) fluent.

(started class 3 here)

Step 2: Four focuses: Introduce the key strategies, follow with structured practice and communicative activities.

A: Asking questions

* Remind them of the fact that LLs rarely ask Qs and the benefits asking Qs. Tell the students the results of my research: NSs asked almost all of the questions in NS-LL conversation.

* Discussion: Is it okay to ask personal questions to strangers in your culture? Discuss which topics are acceptable in the US.

* 'Picture album': Ask students to bring some photographs or a picture album to class. Their partner has to ask three questions per picture. If a person doesn't pictures, they can use the teacher's pictures and pretend they are him or her (this is actually more fun for the students).

* Review the importance of questions. Remind them that when a LL says something, an NS will often follow with several questions, but if an NS says a statement, LLs often sit quietly. Role play a situation where a follow-up question should have been asked. Help the students feel the importance of follow-up questions.

* 'Follow-up question game': The teacher says something like "I just bought a new house" (something that could elicit many follow-up questions). The students, in teams or small groups, think of as many appropriate follow-up questions they can within thirty seconds. They get a point for each question they ask.

* 'Find someone who...': A common activity, but with a twist. If a student says 'yes,' the student who asked has to ask three follow-up questions.

(Started class 4 here)

* 'Two truths, one lie'. The students write down two 'disprovable' truths and one lie about

themselves (A good example: I almost drowned when I was a kid. A bad example: I like cookies). The group asks questions to try to find out which one is the lie.

Everyone take turns asking questions (for about five minutes) and then they guess. Demonstrate this activity as a class first with the teacher coming up with three good sentences of his or her own and the students asking Qs (Roemer, 2000).

Note: Remind students during each activity that they are practicing being active in conversation. During these activities, they can imagine that they are having conversation with a native speaker.

Optional Homework:

Send them to their host family or conversation partner with things to find out about them (their favorite music or movie, their childhood, etc.). Don't write the question, just supply topic. They form their own questions.

B: Elaborating/ keeping the floor

* Review the typical NS-NS discourse pattern (QASSSSSSSQASSS) versus NS-LL 'interview' pattern (QAQAQA). Explain that this is because LLs often answer NS questions as shortly as possible forcing the NS to ask a series of follow-up questions. Say that you are now trying to move towards NS-NS pattern and are going to practice elaborating and holding the turn.

* 'Yes/ no question' game. Say that it is hard to elaborate after answering 'yes/no questions' but that it will make the conversation more interesting and prevent further NS questions. One partner asks a 'yes/no question' but the partner cannot answer 'yes' or 'no' (if they do, they get minutes one point)! Instead, they have to say three sentences. Example: "Do you like Chinese food?" "Well, I like authentic Chinese cooking. But, you know, I had Chinese food the other day and it was gross. I think Americans cook Chinese food differently...."

* Explain that another reason LL answers are often short is because NSs often ask them boring, predictable questions ("Where are you from? When did you get here? What are you studying? etc.") In pairs, one person pretends to be an NS and asks a 'boring' question. The partner has to answer with at least three sentences.

* (TAPE) Listening practice. Explain first, that some LLs want to elaborate but they feel they are often interrupted by the NS. Then listen to authentic or staged conversation where the speakers use fillers to hold the floor. Tell the students to listen for the fillers.

* Elicit other fillers ('so, well, let's see, you know, um...' as well as repetition) and their importance: pauses may lead an NS to steal floor, because Americans hate silence (it makes a feel there is a lack of rapport). Explain that some languages tolerate more silence. But in English conversation, LLs may think they are being interrupted, but the NS is just trying to make a comfortable situation.

(started class 5)

* Nonsense dialogues. The students do nonsense dialogues and try using 'well, you know...' as much as possible (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1991).

* The students tell a story or answers what they think about a certain subject. If they pause without a filler, the partner says, "stop" and records how long they talked (optional). See who can hold the floor the longest.

* Have the students observe the movements as the you 'hold the floor.' Elicit them (Looking away from your partner, moving your hands around, etc.). Discuss whether the same are used in the students' cultures. Repeat the above activities.

* 'Math quiz'. In groups of three, one person asks another a math question that takes a few mental moments to come up with (hand out a list of problems, for example, $3 \times 17 = 54$). If they don't hold the floor with a voiced filler or body language, another player can steal the floor, question, and point.

Optional Homework: Practice predicting follow-up questions and answering them before they are asked. Hand out a worksheet that includes questions and short answers. The LLs guess what the next questions will be. (Did not assign)

(started class 6 here)

C: Selecting the topic

* Remind them of benefits of taking the floor (you can talk about what you are interested in and capable of discussing) and that in NS-LL conversation, NSs choose most of the topics. Again, talk about local politics or something they don't really know anything about; help them feel the need to change the topic.

* The students brainstorm topics they feel comfortable with. For example, in Japan I often found myself talking about food, my family, or sumo. They will use these topics in the following activities.

* (TAPE) Record a conversation with your friends where you change the topic a few times and bring it to class. The students answer: how did the speakers change the topic?

* Review lexical phrases that allow students to select / change a topic (by the way, guess what, so, anyway, that reminds me, now that you mention it...).

* Model dialogues w/ lexical phrases where the students change the topic. For example:

A: How do you like the weather lately?

B: Pretty bad, huh? By the way, did you hear that _____?

A: Oh, really?

B: Yeah.....

* 'Judo'. Give the students a certain topic like judo (or basketball, your dad, bananas). Ask the students a question and they have to change the subject to the chosen topic ('judo') no matter what. Do it as a class first, then in pairs. Here, they should ease into the new topic rather than using a lexical phrase (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1991).

* Practice changing/ selecting topics. Two partners have two different topics and talk for one minute. They try to talk about their topic as much as possible. Option: Make it competitive. A third person can determine who talked most about their own topic.

* Everyone chooses one topic. They mingle and try to discuss their topic as much as possible.

* 'Interrupting game'. One student tries to talk about a certain topic, while others try to change the subject. Review language used for returning to a topic ('anyway' or 'as I was saying') (Keller, 1976).

(started class 7 here)

D: Taking the floor

* Tell the class that LLs often do not speak in conversation unless they are asked a question!

Remind them that NSs don't wait for a question to take the floor and that statements elicit other statements.

- * Introduce turn signals. The teacher speaks. Ask: what do I do when I finish talking? (Exaggerate the following: Relax hands, unfilled pause, look at audience, and end quietly with lower intonation). Explain that silences are not needed to take the floor and overlaps are common. In English, we use turn signals to know when to speak

- * The teacher gives a mini speech. The students watch for turn signals and raise their hand when they see one.

- * Review measures above used to hold the floor and tell the class they are also can be used to take floor. We also start loudly to get attention.

- * In groups, all students think of something to say on similar topic. They try to speak about their topic as soon as possible. Note the order in which they get their words in. the students who speaks first wins, next person gets second, etc.

- * (TAPE) Listening practice. Record two NSs talking. One tells a story. The other follows with a related story of his/her own. As a class, analyze the conversation. It's not a Q & A – the listener spoke even without being selected. They listen to more examples and see how the stories relate, if at all.

- * The students practice this pattern in pairs. One tells a short story, the other responds with some related story (McCarthy, 1991).

(started class 8 here)

Conclusion

- * Review the importance of being active and the keys points discussed in the course.

- * A great way to end is to have the students record their conversation with a native speaker and see how active they were. They can count how many questions they asked, how many times they elaborated after answering a question, how many times they responded to an NS comment, and how often they selected the topic.

APPENDIX B: Human Subjects Form for the Language Learners

Conversation Skills with Americans

You are invited to join a conversation class and research by Caleb Prichard, a graduate student in linguistics at Portland State University (and ESL instructor). The class and research are part of the researcher's requirements to get a master's degree. It is supervised by Marge Terdal, a professor of linguistics. The researcher hopes to learn if a class will help your conversation skills with Americans. You were selected because you are now studying English.

If you want to join, you will be asked to attend eight one-hour classes. You will be taught conversation skills to use with Americans. The class is free. The class will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays for four weeks (10-3 to 10-26) from 12:50 – 1:50 on campus. During the first and last class, you will also have a conversation with an American for five minutes. The two conversations will be recorded (audio taped). They will be used to see if your conversation skills will get better after the classes. You will get a lot of practice speaking English and will be taught many conversation skills. Your English ability could get better.

Your name will not be used in my research. The information gathered in my research will be confidential. You **do not** have to join my class or research. If you do not, it will not hurt your grade or relationship with any of the teachers in the program. You may quit at any time of the class.

If you have a problem or question about the research, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-8182. If you have questions about the study, contact Caleb Prichard at 1217 SW 11th #401, Portland, OR, 97205, (503) 525 -9169.

If you sign below, that means that you agree to join the study. By signing you are not losing any legal claims, rights, or remedies. The researcher will give you a copy of this form.

Signature

Date

Email

Phone

APPENDIX C: Example of an analyzed transcript

Q = question

TS = topic selection or change

CS = comment after a partners statement

E = an elaboration after answering the question

Words and turns in brackets are comprehension checks, confirmations, or back-channels and were not counted.

NS20: So, where are you from? (5, Q, TS)

LL21: I'm from Korea. (3)

NS20: [Korea?] And how long have you been here? (7, Q – notice the repetition was not counted)

LL21: Five months. (2)

NS20: Five months. How is it going so far, enjoy it? (8, Q)

LL21: First time I went here it was like __, __ time. It's very beautiful place and peaceful. (16, E – notice inaudible words were counted)

[NS20: Portland is the second place you've been then?] (comprehension check)

[LL21: In the US.] (confirmation)

NS20: [Yeah.] And how do you like Portland in comparison? Compared to the first place? (13, Q)

LL21: Actually, I been here two time. Three years ago, I traveled west side US _____. I think most of nice places, I think Portland. Portland have four seasons _____. Very quiet and _____. (35, E)

NS20: Well, neat. And how about Portland State? The school, do you like that? (13, Q)

LL21: [The school?] Yeah. (1)

NS20: How long have you attended classes? (6, Q)

LL21: This is second term. (4)

[NS20: Second term?]

[LL21: Yeah.]

NS20: What kind of things are you taking? (7, Q)

LL21: Listening / Speaking, Grammar, Reading.... (4)

NS20: You speak very well. What are you working on right now? What are the harder things for you? (18, CS, Q)

LL21: Conversation. So _____. I think conversation is very difficult. (11, E)

NS20: [Yeah.] Do have you have classes with non-ESL students? (11, E)

LL21: No. (1)

NS20: Just ESL classes. Well, fun! Have you been able to interact, communicate with people on campus? (16, Q)

LL21: Yeah. (1)

NS20: [Yeah?] Well, good. What kinds of activities? What kinds of things do you do? (13, Q)

- LL21:** Actually, I enjoy International Focus, every Friday night. (8, E)
- NS20:** Good. What do you do there? (6, Q)
- LL21:** They have- just enjoy dinner. Just like the soup ___ ___ and just like conversation. (15, E)
- NS20:** And how long is that? A couple of hours? (9, Q)
- LL21:** Three hours. (2)
- NS20:** Fun! How neat! What other things have you done since you been here? Like do you live here on campus? Do you live with a family? (26, Q)
- LL21:** Before I stayed - home stayed just one month. Then I moved ___ Tower. (13, E)
- NS20:** Oh, is that nice? (3, Q)
- LL21:** Yeah. (1)
- NS20:** I lived at some campus places. They are nice. How has it compared with where lived in Korea? Do you live with your family or alone? (26, CS, Q)
- LL21:** Family. (1)
- NS20:** [Family.] Fun. Do miss them? (4, Q)
- LL21:** Yes. (1)
- NS20:** Is there anything else? What's the most fun thing you've done since you've been here? (4, Q)
- LL21:** A fun thing is before I never met to a lot of international people. But here right now, I have a lot of international friends. (E, 25)
- NS20:** From Europe and-. How fun! That's cool. Are there other people here also that speak Korean? (16, Q)
- LL21:** Yes. (1)
- NS20:** That's good. That's nice to feel at home. (8, CS)
- (Five minutes)**



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