Article

One Activity, Two Interactions: How Identities Affect Participation in the Classroom

Paul Stone *

Abstract

In this paper I employ the methodological framework of multimodal interaction analysis to analyze two Japanese university students performing an EFL classroom activity together. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how the participants' focus on different identities and roles provides for different kinds of interaction. These different kinds of interaction bring with them different kinds of language practice and, therefore, learning opportunities. At the beginning of the activity, as they focus on their 'student' identities, and in particular an aspect of the 'student' identity that I call the 'primary speaker' role, their contributions to the interaction are highly restricted. At the end of the activity, as they focus on more 'personal' identities, they are able to more fully develop dialogic and fluent talk.

Introduction

It is in the everyday contexts of mundane classroom interaction that education is experienced and lived by teachers and students, and that identities are produced and negotiated (Norris, 2011). The classroom, and its contingencies, facilitates the production of different identities and relationships, and it is through these identities and relationships that 'teachers' must teach and 'learners' must learn.

However, there is a comparative lack of situated studies of English as a

---

* Foreign Languages Department, Nippon Medical School

Foreign Language classroom interaction, as second language acquisition research has typically taken a statistical approach that focuses on the disembodied cognition of participants (Hauser, 2005; Firth and Wagner, 2007; Jenks, 2009). In response to this perceived imbalance a number of authors have argued that research into learning can benefit from more studies that focus on the social actions that participants perform in interactions in the classroom (e.g. Hall, 1995; Hellermann, 2008; Platt and Brooks, 2008).

Sociocultural approaches to language learning claim that social relations and identities performed in classroom interactions will affect conditions for language learning (Willett, 1995). This position makes clear the importance of face-to-face interaction and identity for language learning. Therefore, language educators and researchers need to take classroom interaction and identity issues seriously (Norton, 1997), and studies that illuminate our understanding of interaction and identity will also illuminate our understanding of how learners engage in learning.

In this paper I will present a detailed study of two first-year university students performing an EFL classroom activity together, investigating the ways in which their identities affect their performance. This interaction between these two learners is presented as being representative of the majority of small-group and pair interactions that took place in their class across the university semester.

A multimodal approach

Research into classroom interaction has often taken a linguistic focus, with many of the more recent studies (such as Hellermann's [2007] book length study on interaction in the ESL classroom) adopting a conversation analytical approach. However, interaction always consists of more than just talk, as the social world is organized through "the structured exchange of different kinds of sign" (Streeck et al, 2011, p. 1). On this argument it is not enough to examine the use of verbal resources alone (Bourne and Jewitt, 2003), and researchers have begun to investigate educational practices from a multimodal perspective (e.g. Bourne and Jewitt, 2003; Jewitt and Kress, 2003). There is, therefore, a challenge to incorporate the full range of communicative modes employed by participants when investigating communication in educational contexts.

Methodological approach

I make use of tools and methods from conversation analysis (CA) to investigate classroom interaction (see Markee, 2000). CA is concerned with analyzing and describing the structure of spoken interactions and its narrow focus on the sequential context of the interaction allows us to uncover the structural patterns of talk. However, CA places spoken language very much at the centre of the investigation and it does not look up from the micro-context of talk to consider the broader social context.

As such, I complement a CA approach by making use of Scollon's (2001) mediated discourse analysis (henceforth MDA) and Norris' (2004, 2011) development of this theory into the methodological framework of multimodal interaction analysis (MIA). This allows me to look beyond the micro-context of the talk to investigate other modes (e.g. gaze, gesture, and so on) as well as the wider social context.

MDA is a wide-ranging theoretical approach to research that combines elements of a number of fields, including CA. A major goal of MDA is to find a way to bring together discourse research, which ignores the wider social context (e.g. CA), and social research, which operates without reference to what people actually do and say (e.g. Bourdieu's [1977] practice theory). From an MDA perspective, the wider social context and the micro-context of talk are mutually constitutive, with one being accomplished through the other. The theoretical principles of MDA underlie MIA (Norris, 2004, 2011), which provides the basic methodological framework used for this study.

Method and data

In this project I take CA's concern with the sequential ordering of talk and combine this with the broader social and multimodal concerns of MDA and MIA. The project centres on a micro-analysis of interaction. I collected approximately 30 hours of naturally-occurring classroom interactions between students. The recordings came from two groups of first-year university students taking communication courses as part of a mandatory English programme. I then transcribed these recordings in detail, following the methods outlined by

Norris (2004). This involved transcribing each social action that was performed in each communicative mode (following MIA, a social action may be a word, a gesture, a head nod, etc. and modes include spoken language and gesture). The transcriptions of each mode were then combined into one transcript that allowed me to see how the different modes related to one another. Making these transcripts formed the initial phase of analysis that allowed me to start noticing structural patterns in the data.

This allowed to me describe the micro-context of the interactions. To understand social context and the identities of the learners I conducted ethnographic research. This included interviewing students, making classroom observations, collecting examples of student writing, and so on. In particular, an important part of the project involved me watching video recordings of classroom interactions with the learners in order to obtain their understandings of what was happening. This gave me multiple perspectives on the video data and brought important insights into what was happening in the classroom interactions. In the following analysis I will be focussing on two students, Hitomi and Chisaki (these are pseudonyms), performing an activity together. The particular interaction analyzed comes from approximately halfway through the first semester.

The analysis

Based on my analysis of the 30 hours of video data I was able to notice frequently occurring structural patterns in the interactions. A major theme that emerged in the analysis of small-group talk was the way in which one student would take a turn as a 'primary speaker', with other students being relatively passive. This is a phenomenon first noted by Hauser (2009), who observed it in small-group discussions in a Japanese university EFL class. In these interactions one participant took a turn as the 'primary speaker', who must perform an action that meets the activity's brief. Other participants did not attempt to comment on the 'primary speaker's turn (for example, by asking questions, challenging, or supporting the 'primary speaker'), but instead listened passively. The 'primary speaker' turns are passed (almost literally) around the table. Once each participant has had a turn as 'primary speaker' the activity may be considered

complete. The range of actions that participants may take is extremely limited, turn-taking is highly predictable, and the interactions are monologic (rather than being a dialogic interaction in which each turn responds to the meanings of the previous turn).

Hauser made no claims to generalizability in his study, due to the relatively small amount of data that he analyzed (just two short interactions). I not only found the 'primary speaker' pattern described by Hauser to be prevalent in every small-group discussion recorded in my data, but also in every other small-group activity in which the focus was on speaking English. The pattern was in fact so common, that I argue that for the participants in this study the 'primary speaker' is a role that forms an important part of their classroom 'student' identity. However, whereas in Hauser's study the students oriented to the 'primary speaker' role throughout their discussion, not all of the students oriented to the 'primary speaker' role all of the time in my data.

In the first three weeks' of data recorded for this project, when students are performing small group activities with a focus on speaking English, we see only 'primary speaker' interactions. However, from the fourth week onwards, certain students begin to perform 'personal' identities in English in these activities. These 'personal' identities only occur once the students have already performed a 'primary speaker' interaction. That is, at the start of the activity they orient to 'primary speaker' interaction practices, and after a while they begin performing 'personal' identities. These different identities bring with them different kinds of interaction that afford different learning opportunities.

In the following I will focus on two students performing one activity together, in order to explicate the ways in which their participation in the activity changes as they shift their focus from the 'primary speaker' to 'personal' identities. This interaction, while being a unique moment in time and space, is representative of the how 'primary speaker' interactions were performed across the data. It is also representative of the ways in which some students in the class shifted their focus to 'personal' identities during an activity. I could have selected many different recordings from the data to present here in order to provide examples of this, and in many ways the choice of this particular recording is arbitrary (my main reason for choosing this video is that, as well as providing

an example of the 'primary speaker', one of the students has become a focal participant in the larger ethnographic project from which this data is taken).

The recording was made at the beginning of June (about halfway through the semester). I had randomly assigned partners for this task, and the two students did not know each other well. The particular part of the lesson from which this recording comes had been focussed on making comparisons and, along with some written language practice exercises, the textbook introduced some target language structures to provide examples of how to talk about similarities and differences between two things. I read these to the students when giving instructions prior to the activity. I first instructed the students to choose two things that they were interested in and then asked them to talk about their chosen topic for five minutes, discussing in what ways the things that they had chosen were similar and different.

Excerpt 1

The times written beneath each screenshot in the transcript indicate the time in the video recording at which the picture was taken. The transcript should be read from left to right, top to bottom. This extract shows the beginning of the video-recording, but not quite the beginning of the activity (which was captured on the audio recorder, but not the video recorder). Prior to the beginning of the video-recording Hitomi and Chisaki had agreed to compare Japanese and American food. Then, just prior to the beginning of the video-recording Hitomi had said "Japanese food", so that Hitomi's first statement is actually "Japanese food and American food are delicious". We can see in the first screenshot that Hitomi is gazing at the desk with her back to the camera and her left hand touching her head, while Chisaki gazes and leans towards Hitomi with her hands on the desk in front of her.

There is a clear focus on following the teacher's instructions for the activity ("compare and contrast two things"). First of all, Hitomi takes a turn to compare Japanese and American food with the statement, "Japanese food and American food are delicious". Chisaki then contrasts the two by saying: "and Japanese food is healthy and American food is more calories", linking two clauses with the conjunction *and*. Hitomi then contrasts American food and Japanese food with

```
0:00 - 0:05
01 H: and American food are (3.0)
02    [delicious.
03    [((gazes@C, nods))
```

```
0:05 - 0:08
04 C: nn::::: [delicious yea:ah
05            [((nods))
```

```
0:08 - 0:18
06 C: a::::nd Japanese fo::od is
07    [healthy
08    [((gaze@H, gaze@desk))
09 H: nn. ((nods))
10 C: ((nods)) a:::nd (.)
11    American food is
```

```
0:18 - 0:24
12 H: (gaze@C))
13 C: ((gaze@H, gesture))
14    more calories
15 H: ah.
16 C: nn nn[nn ((nodding, lean fwd))
17 H:      [nn nn nn ((nodding))
18 C: (2.0) ((gaze away)) a- a::nd (.)
```

```
0:24 - 0:27
19 H: American food [often use meat
20                  [((beat gestures))
21 C: >un un un un< ((nodding))
```

```
0:27
22 H: Japanese food (.) often. (1.0)
23    fish and vegetables.
```

the two statements "American food often use meat" and "Japanese food often fish and vegetables".

An important feature of the interaction is that, while one participant is taking a turn to compare Japanese and American food, the other takes a more passive and supporting role. It is of course normal that in dyadic interaction we expect

one participant to be listening as the other speaks. However, here we can see that the person listening takes a very passive role. For example, the 'listener' does little more than produce general backchannels (such as nods or the non-lexical token *nn*) that allow the 'primary speaker' to continue speaking. While Chisaki does perform an affective backchannel in line 4, demonstrating agreement with Hitomi, there are no attempts to develop the talk beyond the performance of simple statements about American and Japanese food by one student, and support of these statements with backchannels from the other student. There are no questions asked, no clarification requests, no real engagement with the others' ideas (by way of making a comment or adding ideas that build on the previous speaker's turn), and so on. Instead, there is a simple exchange of stand-alone statements that compare or contrast Japanese and American food. When one statement has been completed by one student (and not before), another statement is then performed by the other. So we see a limited range of actions performed in English and a predictable turn-taking structure. This is common of 'primary speaker' interactions across my data and also in Hauser's study.

We can see that as 'primary speakership' is passed between the two participants, there are accompanying postural shifts. In the first screenshot Hitomi is the 'primary speaker' and Chisaki is listening to her. In the second screenshot, as they transition between roles, Hitomi and Chisaki perform postural shifts. Following these postural shifts, in the third screenshot it is Chisaki who is now 'primary speaker'. These postural shifts are significant as they indicate that the participants are changing their roles (see Norris' [2004, 2011] discussion of *means*).

The next swap of 'speaker' and 'listener' roles is performed somewhat more clumsily. In line 14 Chisaki, who is the 'primary speaker', has reached a point where the speaker can change, having produced a turn that contrasts American and Japanese food. Hitomi however does not take a full turn-at-talk, and instead receives Chisaki's turn with the backchannel *ah*. Instead of continuing her turn, Chisaki leans towards Hitomi and says "nn nn nn" while nodding, and so makes a claim to have finished speaking. However, when Hitomi still does not take a turn as 'speaker' there is a short silence and Chisaki attempts to continue somewhat uncertainly. However, Chisaki clearly struggles to continue with the

turn, and in line 19 Hitomi suddenly realizes that she can (or should) take her turn as 'primary speaker'. Hitomi sits upright in her chair, raises her left hand into the gesture space in front of her and starts speaking. This evidences two things: one, that Chisaki expects Hitomi to produce an utterance once she has completed her own utterance and two, that Hitomi had not been listening to Chisaki.

On the basis of the above, I would argue that there is a clear division of roles and interactional work in this excerpt. Both participants are clearly focussed on their 'student' identities as they attempt to fulfil the activity's brief. To do so, they take it in turns to produce statements that address this brief. While one student is speaking, the other is listening (or not) in a passive role. These roles are clearly marked by nonverbal as well as verbal actions. While 'primary speaker', a participant is allowed to continue speaking without interruption until they have produced a turn that fulfils the activity brief (i.e. until they have produced a statement that either compares or contrasts Japanese and American food). The 'listener' makes no real comment on this (other than to demonstrate support through backchannels). There is little or no attempt to develop ideas or engage in dialogic talk.

At points where the roles are changed, we can observe postural shifts and hand movements. These postural shifts are a kind of *means* (Norris, 2004, 2011) that indicate a change in the performer's consciousness, as they shift from foregrounding one role (e.g. 'primary speaker') to foregrounding another role (e.g. 'listener'). Hitomi supported this analysis with comments that she made in a playback session. She commented that, after she finished her first turn as 'primary speaker' and performed the postural shift shown in the second screenshot, she was less focussed on the ongoing interaction (i.e. what Chisaki was saying) than she was on thinking about her own upcoming turn as 'speaker'. At this point she was not gazing at Chisaki, but rather at the desk in front of her, and she was backgrounding what Chisaki was saying[2]. This helps to explain the messy transition between roles that occurs from lines 15-19. The backchannel

---

[2]   Movement of gaze is motivated by the interest of the looker, and the direction of gaze is an important indicator of a social actor's focus of attention (Lancaster, 2001; Norris, 2004).

that Hitomi performed in line 9 was performed on a backgrounded level of consciousness. Even after she sits up and gazes back at Chisaki, Hitomi still does not seem to be fully focussed on Chisaki's turn. Her *ah* in line 15 is performed with very flat (or even uncertain) intonation and demonstrates little engagement with the content of Chisaki's turn. As already noted, Hitomi commented in her interview that she had not really been following what Chisaki was saying. Then, rather than understanding line 16 as a claim to have finished speaking (and so taking a full turn herself), Hitomi mechanically repeats Chisaki's turn (again with flat intonation) in line 17. The subsequent silence, which is clearly marked for Chisaki (who has made a claim to have finished speaking and is gazing expectantly at Hitomi) shows that Hitomi is still focussed on being the 'listener'. This is further demonstrated by the fact that, after two seconds of silence, it is Chisaki who first of all attempts to repair the silence and take the next turn. It is only when Chisaki struggles to continue the turn that Hitomi finally understands that it is now her turn to speak.

All of this demonstrates that when Hitomi is in the 'listener' role she feels little obligation to pay attention to the content of Chisaki's turn, which subsequently leads to problems in the interaction here. So, in this excerpt the participants orient to the 'primary speaker' role as they attempt to fulfil the activity's brief by taking it in turns to produce standalone statements that compare and contrast two things. There is little focus on language structure, although turns are produced somewhat fluently.

At the beginning of the activity, Hitomi and Chisaki oriented to 'primary speaker' and 'listener' roles that focused their attention and constrained the development of dialogic talk. They produced a series of statements with neither the 'listener' contributing much to the talk, nor the 'primary speaker' attempting to build on the previous speakers' talk (or even to develop their own ideas, e.g. by providing examples, giving opinions, and so on). Rather than truly interacting with one another's ideas, they took it in turns to present standalone ideas to one another, in the form of sentences that compare or contrast Japanese and American food. So, at this point, while they were not really focussed on form and accuracy (i.e. trying to produce accurate utterances or use the language in the textbook), neither were they focussed on interacting with the meaning of one

another's ideas to develop dialogic talk.

Excerpt 2

This excerpt, which starts two minutes into the activity, marks a big change in the interaction. Hitomi's question from lines 1-6 is the first personal question that either participant has asked the other, and it marks a shift from the participants foregrounding the activity (and being 'students') to foregrounding personal talk and identities. It occurs once each participant has had a number of 'primary speaker' turns, and they are now struggling to think of more ideas.

While the asking of a personal question in itself does not necessarily mean that the participants are focussed on 'personal' identities, it is clear from the subsequent actions they produce that neither Hitomi nor Chisaki is focussed primarily on the activity any longer. That is, using Norris' (2004, 2011a) terms, prior to this question they had been foregrounding the higher-level action of 'doing a classroom activity', whereas after this question they foreground the higher-level action of 'talking to a classmate'. This shift in foregrounded higher-level action brings with it a shift in foregrounded identity.

But how do we know that they are now foregrounding the action of 'talking to a classmate', rather than the institutional talk they had previously been foregrounding? Institutional talk, such as classroom talk, comes with certain interaction roles that come with their own rights and responsibilities. The 'primary speaker' brings with it certain affordances and constraints on what kinds of actions the participants (the 'primary speaker' and the 'listener') take.

However, in Excerpt 2, we see that Chisaki and Hitomi develop a personal topic with an absence of institutional interaction roles. Here, the turn-taking is freer and conversation-like. Previously, when focussed on the activity, a change of 'primary speaker' occurred only when the current 'primary speaker's turn had successfully compared or contrasted Japanese and American food (i.e. it had met the aims of the activity). Here, and for the rest of the interaction, the topics are of a personal nature and Hitomi and Chisaki ask each other questions, develop ideas together, and have equal participation rights (this can be seen especially in lines 18-26 of Excerpt 2, where there is a quick change of speaker and turns are often performed in overlap).

```
2:00 - 2:05
01 H:((gaze@C)) (1.0) [which do
02 C:                 [((gaze@H))
03 H: you like
04 C: ((nod))
05 H: Japanese food or (.)
```

```
2:05 - 2:08
06 H: [American food
07 C: [((sits up, gazes up, hands to head))
08    a:::h] I like (.) American food.
09    ((sits forward, left hand to desk,
10    right hand to face))
```

```
2:08 - 2:10
11 C: I like [meat
12          [((gestures both hands,
13           both hands to chin, leans
14           forward, laughs))
15 H: ((points@C)) do you like Chicken
16    tatsuta:
```

```
2:10 - 2:14
12 C: ((points@H, sits back and up, finger
13    beatx11)) AA:[:::::H
14 H:             [((sits back & up,
15                finger beatx3)) AA:::::H
16 C: [((sits forward, elbow on desk))
17 H: [((sits forward, elbow on desk))
```

```
2:14 - 2:19
18 C: I LIKE IT [((nods))
19 H:           [ME TOO ((nods))
20 C: ((nods)) nn::: it's delicious
21    [((hands to chest)) oo::
22 H: [((gesture left hand)) now McDonald
```

```
2:19 - 2:22
23 C: ((hands to chin))
24 H: sell on it (.) [a:::h.
25 C:               [I have to eat.
26    ((sits back, clenches fists))
```

There is a greater dialogicality to the interaction here, as each turn builds on the previous talk to develop the topic. There are also many actions performed here that demonstrate and build affiliation between the participants, such as the

high levels of mutual gaze and the pointing towards each other as they speak, as well as the actions performed in near synchrony or in repetition of the other participant. This demonstrates that the turns are directed at the other participant and performed in relationship with them (rather than being performed for a 'teacher-superadressee', as the 'primary speaker' turns are). In particular, the elaborate synchronised actions performed in lines 12-17 demonstrate high levels of affective engagement between Chisaki and Hitomi, as do lines 18-19, which are also performed with increased volume. Throughout the excerpt, Chisaki can be seen performing a large number of hand gestures (such as clasping her hands together in front of her) that demonstrate she is highly engaged, while both participants speak with greater volume and more 'excited' voices than previously. The turns produced by both participants also largely focus on demonstrating agreement and thus are affiliative.

While they shift the focus of their attention, so that their 'student' identities are more backgrounded than their 'personal' identities, the 'student' identities are still important in structuring this interaction. The question that Hitomi asks Chisaki arises from the 'student' interaction, and is not completely off-task, as it requires Chisaki to compare and contrast Japanese and American food in order to answer it. It is also important to note that this excerpt is performed in English, and so follows an important classroom rule specified by the teachers. So, Hitomi does not randomly initiate personal chat or gossip that is inappropriate to the classroom, but uses the contingencies inherent in the classroom to initiate the more 'personal' talk that interests her, performed within some of the constraints (and affordances) brought by the 'student' identity (such as the need to speak in English). There is no space to present the data here, but from this point onwards the conversation between the two participants continued for a further two minutes, until I stopped the activity.

Discussion

While this was one activity, there were actually two different interactions taking place, depending on the actions and roles/identities that the participants focus on. In Excerpt 1, Hitomi and Chisaki were foregrounding the actions of 'doing a classroom activity', whereas in Excerpt 2 they were instead focussed

on the action of 'talking to a classmate'. In Excerpt 2, they discussed personal topics, directed their utterances towards one another (rather than the teacher-superadressee), and engaged with the meaning of each other's turns.

While they moved away from the aims of the activity they increasingly engaged with the meaning of each other's turns and there was increased dialogicality. This kind of dialogic interaction was a stated aim of the course. So, a move away from focussing on the activity actually saw a move towards better meeting the aims of the course. Rather than producing standalone statements that describe Japanese and American food and orienting to an interaction structure that constrains the development of talk, they engaged in conversational talk that allowed for greater development of topics, as evidenced by the way in which they asked each other questions.

Throughout this 'personal' talk both Hitomi and Chisaki were more engaged than they were when focussed on their 'student' identities. In an interview, Hitomi repeatedly said that she found the textbook activities uninteresting and that she preferred to talk about things connected to her life outside of the classroom. Here, she demonstrates her interest in learning about her partner and discussing personal topics. Chisaki, too, explained that she found the personal talk more engaging. So, as well as being an aim of the course, this more dialogic talk is more motivating for both Chisaki and Hitomi and allowed them to enjoy participating in the class.

Looking across the 30 hours of video data collected for this study, the 'personal' talk can be argued to push greater fluency, as there was considerably less silence when compared with the 'student' talk. There was more silence in the 'student' talk as there were longer gaps between turns when the participants were trying to think of something to say, as well as more frequent pauses within turns.

There was also less Japanese used in the 'personal' talk. This was because the function of the 'student' talk was to support the production of standalone English utterances that addressed the brief. Each English utterance comparing and contrasting Japanese and American food could be seen as a product constructed to meet the activity brief, and the construction work was simply a means to reach this end (and so could be performed in Japanese).

There was also greater accuracy (when looking at the grammatical accuracy of clauses) in the 'personal' talk. While the greater accuracy would suggest that they were not perhaps challenging themselves as much during the 'personal' talk, there were also a larger number of repetitions and false starts, which would suggest the opposite. Repetitions and false starts can be used as a measure of fluency (e.g. Skehan and Foster, 1999) as they are more likely to occur when speakers are having problems producing a turn, which suggests that they are stretching their language resources. So, although 'personal' talk has less silence, it does have more repetitions and false starts. Looking at the videos, what we see is that although there were a greater number of simple and accurate utterances (e.g. "I like meat", "I like it", "me too"), there were also a number of moments where they stretch their English speaking ability (e.g. "I I I choose I can't choo-choose", which is not presented in the above excerpts). This is likely because the participants had less time to prepare their upcoming turns when compared with the 'student' talk. With the 'student' focus they have more time to prepare their upcoming turns due to the predictable 'primary speaker' structure and the inter-turn silences, and this results in less repetitions at the beginning of turns, but not necessarily more accurate turns (e.g. "American food is more calories").

This suggests that the 'personal' talk was pushing fluency more (despite the increased repetitions), while still challenging learners linguistically. Although the language produced is of a comparatively low level, it is worth considering that these learners are at a low level of spoken proficiency and that they find this talk challenging. Certain participants struggled to participate even at this level, as will be discussed below. The 'personal' talk was also more engaging and motivating for the learners and allowed them to practice a greater range of actions than 'primary speaker' interactions. The 'primary speaker' talk did less to develop fluency, as it was focussed on the production of standalone statements that met the activity's brief (as it was understood by the participants). However, the 'primary speaker' role ensures that all learners participate equally and attempt to perform the activity given to them by the teacher.

Learners performing 'personal' identities

By the end of the semester, approximately half of the participants in this

study began to regularly perform 'personal' identities in English in classroom activities. Five participants in particular frequently performed 'personal' identities. These participants were the most engaged in the class and reported in both formal university evaluations and interviews for this project to have enjoyed the course more than other participants. They were also the students who achieved the highest grades in the English programme.

These participants, particularly the five participants who I observed to be most likely to perform 'personal' identities, were more likely to say in interviews that they wanted to connect the work they did in the classroom to their lives outside of the classroom. They were also more likely to express an interest in learning about the other people in the classroom. And a number of these participants, when asked what they considered to be the most important thing that they learned on the course, answered "learning to enjoy English conversation" (I had identified this theme in informal classroom interviews, and then presented this as an option in a short survey administered after the course was complete).

Most of the participants in the study reported that they had not taken a course focussed on English communication prior to this course and had not seen 'personal' talk in English as an acceptable part of classroom work. Those participants who were most likely to perform 'personal' identities in English were, not surprisingly, those who were most likely to say that they had come to see 'personal' talk in English as an acceptable classroom practice.

In order to seek more opportunities to engage in what they called "real English" communication, a few of these participants began attending international parties, which they claimed was related to their enjoyment of the communication course. In this way, the 'personal' English-speaking identities that they were beginning to develop in the classroom could be taken out of the classroom.

Learners not performing 'personal' identities

Those participants that did not move beyond the familiar classroom role of the 'primary speaker' claimed that they felt unable to take part in English conversation, as they "did not know what to do". These participants oriented to the 'primary participant' and other familiar classroom roles to help structure

their interactions in English. These roles provided them with a familiar and comfortable framework in which to participate.

Although a number of these participants said that they had no interest in learning English, lack of motivation was not a reason for all of them. Some of these participants explained that they wanted to improve their speaking fluency and negatively evaluated their own performances on the course. Two participants in particular had attempted to improve their spoken fluency by copying the exaggerated spoken style of the actors on an English learning CD they had listened to together. This involved them over-acting and speaking loudly in a classroom activity. However, they took these exaggerated turns in a 'primary speaker' interaction, and they were not developing their own speaking styles, but rather mimicking the way in which they believed Americans to speak. There was clearly an attempt to engage in what they considered to be "real English", but this was done as a form of acting or role playing, rather than an attempt to develop and perform their own 'personal' identity as an English speaker. To achieve her aim of improving her fluency, one of these participants eventually enrolled on one of the University's study abroad programmes. When asked about her reasons for doing so, she said that she wanted to force herself to change.

Implications for teaching

What implications does this have for the teaching? Identity is clearly an important part of language learning, and learners' identities need to be taken seriously by teachers. Those participants who were able to start developing 'personal' identities in English were the most motivated learners in the programme and achieved the best grades.

Based on this study, I would suggest that teachers should not be too concerned with learners engaging in 'off-task' talk in the classroom. Provided that this talk is happening in English, it may be helping the learners to develop English-speaking 'personal' identities that they can take with them beyond the classroom, while also affording them opportunities to "practice the real-life discourse of genuine communication in a foreign language" (Taylor, 2013, p. 127). And, in fact, the talk that learners engage in when focussed on their 'personal' identities is very rarely completely 'off-task'. Rather, it grows out

of the 'student' talk and is connected to it in some way, as we could see in the excerpts above.

How can we encourage learners to focus on 'personal' identities when speaking English in the classroom? Participants who performed 'personal' identities in English said that the "atmosphere" of the classroom was important in encouraging them to speak more. A recurring theme in their comments was that they appreciated the 5-10 minutes that they were given at the start of each class to greet each other and talk together in English. This was, they said, a rare opportunity to engage in an English interaction in which they were not so constrained by the aims of a classroom activity. They also said that they liked being allowed to choose their own topics for classroom activities, and were pleased when I spoke to them about who they are and what they wanted to do in the class.

During spoken activities, 'personal' identities were only focussed on by learners once they had completed at least one round of 'primary speaker' turns. It was not until the participants felt that they have fulfilled their minimal obligations as 'students' performing the activity that they then affected a shift to 'personal' talk. This would suggest that, if teachers wish to encourage learners to perform 'personal' identities in English, they should allow ample time for them to both finish the activity and then engage in this 'personal' talk.

This of course assumes that the learners are both motivated to engage in 'personal' talk in English, and see it as acceptable in the classroom. To this end, I repeatedly told the learners in this class that as long as they did their work they should not hold back from talking to one another in English as much as possible. Some learners were initially surprised by this. However, once they understood my attitude, and realised that they had their teacher's permission to talk together, many learners in the class began to engage in 'personal' talk in English.

An important part of the research design involved me watching the videos I recorded for this study with the learners (in small groups) and discussing what was happening with them in English. This allowed us to come to understandings of the classroom together, and also allowed the learners to express to me what they were interested in and what they wanted to learn. This gave me insights into what motivated them and what they thought of the classes, and also allowed me

to better explain my aims and intentions to them. A number of learners reported that these video sessions gave them increased confidence and motivation to speak English. Furthermore, it gave the learners more practice of communicating in English for genuine reasons.

But not every participant enjoyed the conversational aspect of the classes and, as already discussed, not every participant performed 'personal' identities in English. In giving time for learners to speak in English, I offered little guidance in how they should structure their interactions, instead expecting them to figure it out for themselves. A number of participants commented that they "did not know what to do" in the 5-10 minutes that I allotted at the beginning of each class for them to speak together in English. These participants were most likely to speak in Japanese at this time. As mentioned above, this was not necessarily due to a lack of motivation to study English or even due to a lack of ability to produce English utterances. They were, for example, able to participate in 'primary speaker' interactions as well as any other student. What they found difficult was organizing an English conversation (i.e. who should speak first, what should they say, how could they nominate a next speaker, and so on). This was partly due to their identities (they were less likely to be outgoing than other participants) and also partly due to their lack of experience of taking part in conversations in English (almost all of the participants claimed to have very limited experience of this).

It would have benefitted these learners to have had some instruction in how to organize a conversation in English. The textbook used in the course focussed on speaking strategies such as circumlocution, paraphrasing, and hesitating. These strategies are all useful in conversation, but none of the classroom classes looked specifically at how to participate in a conversation. A resource such as Wong and Waring (2010) may have been useful here.

It may also have been beneficial to have started the video sessions earlier in the semester. I had assumed that many of the students who were not performing 'personal' identities in English had been unmotivated or otherwise reluctant to take part in class. I discovered, however, that a few of these students were very motivated, but that the teaching methods were not suited to them, and they were not sure quite how to participate. These video discussions proved to be

very fruitful and, had I started them early in the semester, I may have been able to adapt how I taught these learners. As well as this, the opportunity to speak in English in a meaningful dialogue with their teacher would have potentially allowed them to start developing English-speaker 'personal' identities early on in the semester.

Conclusion

As well as teaching speaking skills and strategies, language classes should be concerned with providing learners with opportunities to develop their English-speaking 'personal' identities. The analysis presented above provides an example of how one activity can provide for two different kinds of interaction as the participants shift their focus between different roles and identities. While the 'primary speaker' talk ensured that they both took turns practicing language in line with the aims of the activity, the participants' eventual focus on 'personal' identities allowed them to engage in more fluent and dialogic talk, as well as attempting more complex language. Hitomi and Chisaki were generally more engaged and motivated throughout their 'personal' talk and positively evaluated this class based on this.

Generally speaking, the learners in this class who were most engaged and who evaluated the course most positively were those who most often performed 'personal' identities in classroom activities. These learners also generally achieved the highest grades across the English programme. This, however, may have been simply because the course suited their identities as learner, and it is necessary in the future to consider how to encourage all learners to develop their 'personal' identities in English.

References

Bourne, J. and Jewitt, C. (2003). 'Orchestrating debate: a multimodal analysis of classroom interaction.' *Reading* 37(2), pp. 64-72.

Firth, A. and Wagner, J. (2007). 'Second/foreign language learning as a social accomplishment: elaborations on a reconceptualized SLA'. *The Modern Langage Journal* 91, pp. 800-819.

Hall, J. K. (1995). '"Aw, man, where you goin'?": classroom interaction and the development of L2 interactional competence'. *Issues in Applied Linguistics* 6(2), pp. 37-62.

Hauser, E. (2009). 'Turn-taking and primary speakership during a student discussion.' In

Nguyen, H. and Kasper, G. (eds.) *Talk-in-Interaction: Multilingual Perspectives*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii, pp. 216-244.

Hellermann, J. (2008). *Social Actions for Classroom Language Learning*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Jenks, C. (2009). 'Exchanging missing information in tasks: old and new interpretations.' *The Modern Language Journal* 93, pp. 83–96.

Jewitt, C. and Kress, G. (2003). 'A multimodal approach to research in education.' In Goodman, S., Lillis, T., Maybin, J. and Mercer, N. (Eds.) *Language, Literacy and Education: A Reader.* Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books/Open University Press, pp. 277-292.

Koole, T. (2003). 'The interactive construction of heterogeneity in the classroom.' *Linguistics and Education* 14(1), pp. 3-26.

Lancaster, L. (2001). 'Staring at the page: the functions of gaze in a young child's interpretation of symbolic forms.' *Journal of Early Child Literacy* 1(2), p. 131-152.

Markee, N. P. P. (2000). *Conversation Analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Erblaum.

Norris, S. (2004). *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction*. London: Routledge.

Norris, S. (2011). *Identity in (Inter)action: Introducing Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis*. Berlin*:* De Gruyter Mouton.

Norton, B. (1997). 'Language, identity, and the ownership of English'. *TESOL Quarterly* 31(3), pp. 409-429.

Platt, E. and Brooks, F. B. (2008). 'Embodiment as self-regulation in L2 task performance'. In McCafferty, S. G. and Stam, G. (eds.) *Gesture: Second Language Acquisition and Classroom Research*. New York: Routledge, pp. 88-87.

Scollon, R. (2001). *Mediated Discourse: The Nexus of Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Skehan, P. and Foster, P. (1999). 'The influence of task structure and processing conditions on narrative retellings'. *Language Learning* 49(1), pp. 93-120.

Streeck, J., Goodwin, C. and LeBaron, C. (2011). 'Embodied interaction in the material world: an introduction'. In Streeck, J., Goodwin, C. and LeBaron, C. (eds.) *Embodied Interaction: Language and Body in the Material World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-28.

Willett, J. (1995). 'Becoming first graders in an L2: an ethnographic study of L2 socialization.' *TESOL Quarterly* 29(3), pp. 473-503.

Wong, J. and Waring, H. Z. (2010). *Conversation Analysis and Second Language Pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.