

Task Closings in L2 Text-Chat Interactions: A Study of L2 Interactional Competence

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Abstract

Employing a CA-inspired methodological approach, this study investigates L2 learners' interactional competence for dyadic interaction via text chat. Fifty-three dyads of Japanese learners of English at three proficiency levels (high, mid, and low) participated in this study, where they worked on three discussion tasks in L2 English. The data were 97 participant-generated task closings, which were analyzed in terms of linguistic repertoire and sequence organizations of terminal exchanges between participants in a dyad, and summons-answer sequences between participants and the researcher. The data showed that the participants recurrently implemented a sequence of soliciting and providing an agreement on the idea for task accomplishment to signal a forthcoming closing of task talk. The findings indicated that more proficient learners produced more extended sequences in conducting closing rituals. Some high-proficiency learners explicitly mentioned, or interacted with, the researcher, a third party, to initiate task closing or reformulate crossed messages in closing the talk. These findings provide insights into online L2 interactional competence in text-based CMC media.

KEYWORDS: INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE; CONVERSATION ANALYSIS; CLOSINGS; TEXT-BASED COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION; TEXT CHAT.

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Introduction

Interactional competence has recently become a topic of growing importance in second language (L2) pragmatics research, as well as research on L2 computer-mediated communication (CMC). Following an early definition by Kramsch (1986), Hall and Pekarek Doehler (2011) define L2 interactional competence as the “ability to accomplish meaningful social actions, to respond to co-participants’ previous actions and to make recognizable for others what our actions are” (pp. 1–2). The ability to sequentially organize and linguistically format conversational contributions is a crucial part of interactional competence, as is the ability to comprehend the meaning conveyed through interlocutors’ sequential organization and linguistic choices. To conduct micro-level analysis of linguistics and interactional resources, interactional competence is commonly viewed through the epistemology of Conversation Analysis (see Clift, 2016, for an overview).

Several studies have investigated the relationship between proficiency and interactional features (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012, 2014, 2018; Galaczi, 2014; Hellermann, 2007, 2008; Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2011; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2015). Interactional competence has been researched in various settings ranging from inside classrooms (e.g., Walsh, 2011) to non-classroom environments (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2014; Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018).

Interactional competence in computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an emergent subarea of L2 pragmatics. As Paulus, Warren, and Lester’s (2016) systematic review shows, more research on CMC in language learning settings is needed, and studies on L2 interactional competence in text-based CMC have been increasingly examined (e.g., Abe, 2019; Abe & Roever, 2019; Gonzales, 2013; González-Lloret, 2008, 2011; Tudini, 2010, 2015; Vandergriff, 2013).

This study is intended to contribute to research on learners’ developing interactional competence by examining task closings in L2 task-based text chat.

Background

Task Closings

Schegloff and Sacks (1973) established a long line of research in conversation analysis (CA) on conversation closings in talk-in-interaction, claiming that conversation “does not simply end, but is brought to a close” (p. 289). According to Schegloff and Sacks, closings in English are made up of two components, pre-closings and a terminal exchange. A pre-closing is a preliminary exchange of usually short utterances such as *okay*, *well*, *so*. With both the first and second *okay* (i.e., pre-closing sequence), a warrant for moving into closing of a conversation is secured. Pre-closings are closely related to interactional

competence as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) state that “by adjacently positioned second, a speaker can show that he understood what a prior aimed at, and that he is willing to go along with that” (pp. 297–298). A terminal exchange is a sequence of two utterances such as two *bye* tokens or their equivalent forms such as *see ya*, which signals that there is no more business to talk about and which inhibits interlocutors from taking a next turn (Sidnell, 2010).

Closing rituals have been an indicator of interactional ability in previous L2 studies on task-based interactions (e.g., Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Hellermann, 2007; Hellermann & Cole, 2008; Rine, 2009; Waring, 2009). Based on Schegloff and Sacks (1973), Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) investigated academic advising sessions between a native academic advisor and a non-native student with advanced-level proficiency. The authors mainly focused on two differences between session-closings and conversation closings: absence of reinvocation of previous talk and presence of post-closing extension of conversation. Practices of session-closings varied from ending a conversation with multiple pre-closing sequences, such as providing a summary statement or appreciation to producing no pre-closing practices, where a student used *thank you* as the first pair part of a terminal exchange. One unique pre-closing was *okay* with interrogative markers of the end of the session. In one example of session-closing, an advisor offered an invitation (“you are welcome to come back”), which was responded to by a student with a hesitation marker. Then, the advisor offered “okay?”, which was now taken as a projection of a session-closing by the student with an acceptance of the invitation. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig called this pre-closing “successful, if not fully native-like” (p. 103). Hellermann and Cole’s (2008) classroom-based research investigated classroom-based peer-peer interactions focusing on one learner’s interactional practice of disengagement from task interactions over time. The researchers found that the learner used embodied pre-closings such as offering eye contact and smiles and used linguistic practices such as appreciations in the later stages of learning. Hellermann (2007) found that postural shift or engagement in writing displayed disengagement from an ongoing pair activity and functioned as an embodied closing. Each of these studies explored context-specific closing rituals co-constructed by participants in interaction and investigated how the nature of the task influenced their interactional features. However, L2 proficiency was rarely considered as a factor affecting their interactional practices. The current study accounts for L2 proficiency in examining context-specific closings.

Closings in Text-Chat Interactions

Interactional practices in text-chat have been researched using CA based on the assumption that text-based CMC has conversation-like features (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester, & Reed, 2015). Although text-based CMC is broadly

classified into two types, synchronous or asynchronous, the distinction between these two is not clear-cut (Herring, 2013). A more distinctive characteristic of text-based CMC is its written modality, which makes it fundamentally different from spoken interaction. Due to this difference, researchers need to customize analytic tools to analyze text-based CMC (Giles et al., 2015). For instance, spoken interactions have gaps of a typical length between turns, which in English conversation is about 0.2 seconds (Levinson & Torreira, 2015), with shorter or longer gaps conveying implied meaning. By contrast, gaps in text-based CMC can vary greatly in length (and are thereby less implicative) due to the lack of visibility of message-in-progress and the quasi-synchronous or asynchronous nature of online communication. Thus, CA research for text-based CMC more profitably focuses on the linguistic features of the chat message (turn format) and the order of messaging (sequence organization), in which a particular social action is conducted. Several CA studies have investigated the overall structure of text-based CMC including openings and closings (Abe & Roever, 2019; Antaki, Ardévol, Núñez, & Vayreda, 2006; Gonzales, 2013; González-Lloret, in press; Kuriscak & Luke (2009); Markman, 2009; Meredith, 2017; Negretti, 1999; Pojanapunya & Jaroenkitboworn, 2011; Rintel & Pittam, 1997).

In terms of closings in CMC, Rintel and Pittam (1997) found several strategies to close Internet Relay Chat interactions, such as consolidating the relationship before leaving or saying farewell. Given that some methods for closing were non-verbal (e.g., virtual hug) or medium-specific methods (e.g., using a particular action command), familiarity with the chat system was crucial to close Internet Relay Chat. For instance, some participants did not show any problematizing stance to abrupt closings, presumably due to their knowledge of potential internet server problems. Based on their analysis of text-based interactions in *Second Life*, an online virtual world, Pojanapunya and Jaroenkitboworn (2011) found that closing in their data consisted of pre-closing, inserts, terminal exchange, and post-closing. In their study, pre-closing methods were divided into several strategies such as informing of the impending leave taking, appreciation, apology, or giving accounts of leaving. Their data analysis revealed that the majority (76.9 %) of closings included a sequence of pre-closings indicating users' tendency to avoid abrupt closings in *Second Life*.

In a language learning setting, Negretti (1999) investigated the overall structure of Webchat interactions between L1 English speakers and L2 learners. Negretti reported that participants used pre-closings to offer a reason for leaving the chat. Negretti's data included a message consisting of both a pre-closing move and a *goodbye* remark in different lines within one unit of chat-message. Based on this finding, Negretti claims that L2 learners have to not only master typical interactional methods in L2, but also to adapt these

methods to interactional needs of a particular text-based communication medium. Gonzales's (2013) case study focused on affiliative elements such as rapport building in text-chat closings in on-campus L2 Spanish learning systems. Gonzales's data showed that one L2 speaker initially packed several social actions such as appreciation and a *goodbye* remark into a single chat message and later he expanded closing sequences including, for instance, an arrangement for future contact, which is conducive to maintaining rapport between interlocutors. These two studies suggest that although it may be a possible strategy for L2 learners to compose a foreshortened message packing different social actions into one unit of written message, participants' interactional practices can be different depending on the level of L2 proficiency.

Interactional Competence and Participation Framework

An under-explored aspect of interactants' interactional competence is their ability to take on different participant roles within an overall participation framework. In discussing the concept of a participation framework, Goffman (1981) distinguished *ratified* and *unratified* participants. Ratified participants consist of a speaker and (both addressed and unaddressed) recipients, while unratified participants are *bystanders*, which can be distinguished into *overhearers* or *eavesdroppers* depending on how intentionally they access what is discussed among ratified participants and how much these bystanders are known by the ratified participants (Bell, 1984). In recent years, participation frameworks have been researched in online text-based communication such as on newsgroups (Marcoccia, 2004), YouTube interactions (Dynel, 2014), and blogs (Bolander, 2012). Dynel (2014) divides ratified hearer roles into two types: the addressee, to whom speakers direct verbal and non-verbal cues, and the third party, to whom such cues are not addressed but are available for listening and understanding. Although participation frameworks have been considered one of the core components of interactional competence (Young, 2008), practices of adjusting it have rarely been investigated (though Okada, 2010, is an exception). There are no investigations on how participants manage changes in participation frameworks in task-based CMC, which is a gap this study will address.

Research Questions

In order to investigate L2 learners' online interactional competence, this study will investigate interactional practices of constructing task closings in text-chat interactions by learners with different proficiency levels. Through an application of CA to text-based interaction, we conducted moment-by-moment analysis to understand the meaning of actions from participants' perspectives. More specifically, our research questions are:

1. How are interactions closed in dyadic task-based text-chat interactions?
2. How does a learner's proficiency level affect their task closings?
3. How do learners manage the participation framework of a task-based interaction, specifically the role of the researcher?

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were 106 Japanese learners of English on a four-year university course in Japan, of which 38 had study-abroad experience. Fifty-eight were men and 48 were women, and they ranged in age from 19 to 23. At the time of data collection, they were majoring in various fields from humanities and social science to natural sciences. All participants were enrolled in at least one English language subject as a core or elective subject. Participants were recruited by one of the authors of the current study through the participants' English teachers' introduction. They voluntarily participated in the study as an extracurricular English-related computer-mediated activity, which was not part of their assessment in the English courses they were enrolled in. Each was asked to invite a classmate studying in the same proficiency-based classes in order to form a dyad. All participants had taken the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) within three months and were grouped into three proficiency groups based on their self-reported scores (high: scores ranging 800–990; mid: scores ranging 600–795; low: scores ranging 400–595).

Instruments

Three discussion tasks were used to elicit text-chat interactions (see Table 1). These tasks were decision-making tasks with convergent goal-orientation, which means that participants in a dyad were asked to reach an agreement so as to accomplish the task. The time limit for each task was set to 20 minutes, and participants were instructed to call the “examiner” (i.e., the researcher) once they had finished the task. Three minutes before reaching the time limit, the researcher reminded participants that they were running out of time, and if the time limit was reached, the researcher asked participants to abandon their discussion and move on to the next task. The data collection session progressed from Task 1 to Task 3, the easiest to the most difficult based on our pilot study, where Task 3 was reportedly perceived as the most difficult and Task 1 as the easiest by participants.

During task-based discussion, participants used their own smartphones, logging in to their own accounts of the social networking application LINE, which was the most common communication platform in Japan when the study was conducted. It was used by participants on a daily basis. Although

participants were asked to produce only text-based interactions without sending voice messages, typing systems and text-entry modes including functions such as autocomplete, spell checker, and voice recognition were not restricted since they were used by the participants for real-world CMC. Participants were asked not to use a dictionary or borrow sentences from the internet. It is worth noting that LINE does not indicate that an interlocutor's message is in progress (unlike Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, or Google hangout) so it is impossible for interactants to know whether at any given time an interlocutor is typing, thinking, or engaged in other activities (e.g., checking websites).

Table 1
Tasks

	Task	Task prompt
Content	1	You two are students studying in the same university. You two are planning to go overseas for five days. Where do you want to go?
	2	You two are opening a new stylish café. It is a small café having only four tables. What do you want to paint on the wall?
	3	Define "success".
Common instruction		Discuss and raise several ideas but decide one answer in the end. You have 10–20 minutes to discuss. Call the examiner once your discussion is done. Let's start!

Procedures

Participants selected their preferred date and time for data collection. They were asked to be in different locations for data collection so that the only means of communication was text chat. The supervising researcher started the data collection session with greetings, self-introduction, and a brief explanation of the session in Japanese, followed by the first task-based talk where participants used L2 English. The second and third tasks were provided consecutively with a small transition time of about 30 seconds.

The researcher monitored each ongoing discussion on his computer screen in Australia. His role during the interaction was to initiate task talk by providing a task prompt and reminding participants of the time limit twice: when the remaining time reached three minutes and when time had run out. The messages were respectively "Three more minutes!" and "Time is up!". The progress of the chat interaction was video-captured on the researcher's computer and the video was later used for measuring time gaps between chat messages.

Data Analysis

Given that this is written chat rather than spoken interaction, we call each individual message a “post”, and use posts as the unit of analysis, akin to “turns” in Conversation Analysis. The scripts for the analysis of the task-based interactions were created by adding a precise timestamp for each post. In the chat transcript, the time stamp for post 1 showed “zero” and the second and subsequent posts have time stamps indicating elapsed time. The data was analyzed based on a CA-inspired next-turn proof procedure (Sidnell, 2010), where the meaning of a post was understood by referring to the following post.

The data set consisted of 159 task closings. Task closings were either conducted by a participant dyad, who told the researcher that they finished discussing (i.e., participant-generated task closings), or the researcher closed the task when participants ran out of time. For the purpose of investigating dyadic participants’ interactional competence, only participant-generated task closings were considered, of which there were 97 (62.2% of the whole data set).

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of tasks with closings across the three proficiency levels and the three task types. There was no clear relationship between proficiency and task in terms of closings.

Table 2
Total Number of Participant-Generated Task Closings

	Low (18 dyads)	Mid (18 dyads)	High (17 dyads)	Total (53 dyads)
Task 1	12	8	10	30
Task 2	14	14	10	38
Task 3	12	9	8	29
Total	38	31	28	97

Below we show linguistic and sequential features of task closings associating with the three different proficiency levels of participants.

Low-Level Learners’ Task Closings

Overall, low-level learners’ task closings were accomplished with a terminal exchange showing a variety of social actions. However, transitions from topical discussion to closing were abrupt rather than stepwise. In other words, they showed minimal topic extensions in projecting a task closing. See the following excerpts (a terminal exchange and a summons-answer sequence are indicated by T_f and T_s , and S and A, respectively).

Excerpt 1 (Low-level learners: Task 3)

16	6:28	Jiro		Painted world map suit with white wall very much !
17	7:37	Nako		Yes ! I want to see that world map !
18	8:05	Jiro	T _f	Do you agree me ? OK ?
19	8:25	Nako	T _s	Ok!
20	8:33	Nako	S	終わりました ! "We've finished!"
21	8:34	Res	A	はい! "Yes!"

Excerpt 2 (Low-level learners: Task 3)

8	11:34	Daigo		It contain to make good relationship.
9	11:35	Eiji		I see.
10	12:38	Daigo	T _f	Do you have any idea?
11	12:46	Eiji	T _s	No
12	12:58	Eiji	T _s	I agree with you
13	13:09	Daigo	S	終わります "We'll finish"
14	13:10	Res	A	はい! "Yes!"

Excerpt 3 (Low-level learners: Task 2)

10	7:52	Hide		They can relax
11	9:30	Kan		They may stay for a long time.
12	9:51	Hide	T _f	Our choice is to paint one brown color. Is it ok?
13	10:06	Kan	T _s	Ok!!
14	11:14	Hide	(T _i)	ok, this task finish.
15	11:55	Kan	S	阿部さん終わりました "Mr. Abe, We've finished"
16	11:56	Res	A	はい! "Yes!"

Excerpt 4 (Low-level learners: Task 1)

28	9:55	Kota		I am very interested in car industry
29	10:18	Jin		It is nice
30	10:23	Jin		I want to go,too
31	10:39	Jin	T _f	I agree to go America
32	13:42	Kota	T _s	I want to go to together!
33	14:02	Jin	S	終わります "We've finished"
34	14:03	Res	A	はい! "Yes!"

Excerpt 1 illustrates how two interactants reach an agreement in the terminal exchange in a sequence of a first move of soliciting agreement and an affirmative response to it with lexico-syntactic alignment or format tying (Sacks, 1992). An agreement can also be achieved by a sequence of a first move of asking whether there is any topic left to discuss and a negative response to it, as is demonstrated in Excerpt 2. Furthermore, an agreement can be constructed in a “three-turn” sequence with a first agreement-soliciting move, a subsequent response, and a third move to pursue a full agreement as shown in Excerpt 3. It is also notable that the performative verb “agree” explicitly occurs in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2, putting the agreement necessary to terminate the task talk explicitly on the record. Similarly, in Excerpt 3, completion of the task is explicitly mentioned. Excerpt 4 shows a terminal exchange whose first move is a statement in post 31, followed by an affirmative response with the agreement upgraded by the exclamation mark in post 32. Although no question form is used, the performative verb “agree” occurs here as well as part of the terminal exchange.

These four excerpts represent linguistic and sequential patterns of low-level learners’ task closing practices. In all low-level learners’ terminal exchanges and summons-answer sequences, the first and second moves are provided in an adjacent position. Social actions in terminal exchanges ranged from achieving an agreement to confirming whether the talk was over. All low-level learners used L1 Japanese in the summons-answer sequence.

Although low-level learners addressed the researcher in summons-answer sequences, they never mentioned the researcher in prior talk. In other words, aside from the summons-answer sequences the learners never changed participation framework during task-based L2 talk.

Mid-Level Learners' Task Closings

Mid-level learners' task closings showed less explicit marking of agreement and in some cases more stepwise transition from task-related talk to closing. Excerpt 5 illustrates a less explicit statement of completion before the terminal exchange.

Excerpt 5 (Mid-level learners: Task 1)

57	19:14	Miki		We can go!!
58	19:23	Fuyu		Yeahhh!
59	19:29	Fuyu	T _f	That's all?
60	19:44	Miki	T _s	Yes!
61	19:53	Fuyu	S	終わりました。笑 "We've finished. lol"
62	19:54	Res	A	はい! "Yes!"

In post 59, Fuyu checks whether Miki agrees that the task is complete without using a performative verb, and Miki confirms completion in post 60. It is notable that the transition from task talk to closing is still quite abrupt. It is also interesting to note that Fuyu's turn designed to the researcher in post 61 includes “笑”, a laughter token in L1 Japanese, functioning in a similar way to an English laughter token “lol” (Choe, 2018).

Excerpt 6 shows a more extended, stepwise closing sequence.

Excerpt 6 (Mid-level learners: Task 2)

110	16:34	Oka		Not gold colors gold
111	16:35	Taku		Like a shining and shimmering head
112	16:43	Taku		Joking
113	16:43	Res		3 more minutes!
114	16:46	Oka		Ok
115	17:00	Taku		So in conclusion
116	17:12	Taku		The background would be sea
117	17:17	Oka		Yes

118	17:31	Taku		With wavy sea and windy day
119	17:36	Taku		And sun
120	17:38	Oka		Yes
121	17:53	Taku		And bald man whose head is shimmering
122	18:05	Taku		Haha. Forgot it
123	18:20	Taku	T _f	So that's it??
124	18:32	Oka	T _s	Ok
125	18:38	Taku	S	決まりました！ "We've decided"
126	18:40	Res	A	はい！ "Yes!"

Once the researcher issues a time reminder in post 113, the actions are markedly different compared to the earlier part of the interaction. Whereas participants discuss ideas for task accomplishment before the time reminder, after the time reminder, Taku clearly indicates that a transition to closing is forthcoming by using the topic transition marker "so" (Bolden, 2008) followed by the expression "in conclusion" in post 115. He then summarizes the agreed upon components of the task solution with Oka confirming the accuracy of his summary in posts 117 and 120. Only in post 123 does Taku initiate closing, and he does so in a very similar way to Fuyu in Excerpt 5.

Overall, mid-level learners' task closings were not saliently different from low-level counterparts in terms of linguistic resources and actions to construct task closings (see Appendix). However, mid-level learners were less explicit in their terminal exchanges and, in some cases, transitioned towards closing in a more stepwise fashion. In terms of the participation framework, mid-level learners' practices were similar to low-level learners' in that the researcher was treated as the third party during task talk. The only difference was that, unlike low-level learners, some mid-level learners ($n=2$) offered a laughter token in the first part of a summons-answer sequence.

High-Level Learners' Task Closings

In addition to a more stepwise transition into task closing, high-level learners' task closings showed internal sequential expansion, which disrupted the adjacency of the posts constituting the terminal exchange and only occurred among high-level learners. They were also the only group to change the

participation framework by mentioning the researcher to signal that task closing is imminent, as shown in Excerpt 7 and Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 7 (High-level learners: Task 3)

94	15:47	Rumi	T _f	shall we call Mr Abe ?
95	15:54	Yuki		Difficult topic is not suit for us haha
96	16:03	Yuki	T _s	Ok!!
97	16:10	Rumi		haha we can't be serious
98	16:12	Rumi	(T _c)	ok
99	16:23	Rumi	S	あべさん、トピック3を終わります！ "Mr. Abe, we are going to finish Topic 3!"
100	16:25	Res	A	はい！ "Yes"

In Excerpt 7, Rumi suggests calling the researcher by mentioning his name in post 94. Possibly crossing with this post, in post 95, Yuki offers a possible joke or trouble talk with a laughter token and in post 96 Yuki affirmatively responds to Rumi's suggestion. In post 97, Rumi responds to Yuki's joke followed by third-position agreement in post 98 and a subsequent call to the researcher. In addition to using the researcher's name to indicate transition to closing, these interactants inserted a joke into the terminal exchange, making its components non-adjacent. This did not occur with low-level or mid-level learners.

Excerpt 8 (High-level learners: Task 1)

102	15:07	Rumi		so in conclusion
103	15:29	Yuki		Yes
104	16:00	Rumi		we'll visit Singapore for its weather , language , clean city and the hotel
105	16:15	Rumi		and also the price too ?
106	16:19	Rumi		agreed ?
107	16:21	Yuki		Right!!
108	16:27	Yuki		Agree 🐼
109	17:01	Res		3 more minutes!

110	17:12	Rumi	T _f	We should call Mr Abe then
111	17:24	Rumi		Than you yuki :)
112	17:27	Yuki		Thanks to conclude our discussion Rukui!!!
113	17:38	Yuki		Sorry miss typinghaha
114	17:40	Rumi		what
115	17:41	Yuki		Rumi
116	17:44	Yuki		Haha
117	17:47	Rumi		haha ok
118	18:02	Yuki	T _s	Let's call mr.Abe
119	18:11	Rumi	S	あべさん、トピック1ディスカッションを終わります！ "Mr. Abe, we are going to finish our discussion for Topic 1!"
120	18:13	Res	A	はい！ "Yes!"

In Excerpt 8, Rumi signals the beginning of her conclusion in post 102, which is responded to by Yuki's go-ahead (Schegloff, 2007). In posts 104–106, Rumi summarizes their idea for task accomplishment and explicitly solicits Yuki's agreement, though the elliptical use of the participle verb form is noticeably different from lower-level learners' practices. Yuki provides a complete alignment using an elliptical *agree* token with an emoticon in post 108. After the researcher's time reminder, the topic shifts to closing the discussion. In post 110, Rumi explicitly mentions the researcher, followed by an expression of appreciation in post 111. In post 112, Yuki also provides an appreciation to make a two-turn appreciation sequence. It should be noted there is only a relatively small time gap (approximately three seconds) between the two appreciation moves which may indicate a case of crossed posting). Posts 113–117 are repair and laughter sequences before Yuki responds to Rumi's first move with a format tie. In addition to a non-abrupt transition to closing, this excerpt also shows sequential expansion around the first and second parts of a terminal exchange with extended exchanges of posts.

In addition to insert sequences in terminal exchanges and reference to the researcher, higher-level participants also altered the participation framework non-minimally to integrate the researcher, as in Excerpt 9. In this excerpt, two participants display a concern with their task closing to the researcher rather than to each other.

Excerpt 9 (High-level learners: Task 2)

64	14:12	Ryu		Let's conclude the idea.
65	15:30	Ryu		The painting integrating the monotone and modern art is decorate the cafe in Tokyo, the near-future city.
66	15:36	Mei		Pictures of integrating modern arts and monotone to make the space mysterious and stylish!
67	15:40	Mei		Oh, thanks
68	15:52	Ryu		Thank you
69	16:05	Ryu		at the almost same time!
70	16:26	Mei		Yeah
71	16:44	Mei	S	Mr. Abe! We've done!
72	16:45	Ryu		haha so why don't we finish the discussion?
73	17:11	Mei		Oh, sorry! I was a little bit fast
74	17:31	Res	A	はい！ "ye...s!"
75	17:44	Mei		大丈夫そうですか "do you think we (you) are all right?!"
76	17:51	Ryu	(S)	一応終了しました！ "at least we've done!"
77	17:57	Res	(A)	はい，ありがとうございます！ "yes, thank you!"

In post 64, Ryu suggests that they produce a conclusion, thereby possibly projecting closing of their task talk. Their posts for concluding seem to be crossed in posts 65 and 66, followed by mutual thanking in posts 67 and 68. Although Mei offers the first move of a summons-answer sequence (using L2 English) in post 71, Ryu's suggestion for closing appears in one second in post 72. It seems that Ryu's crossed post inhibits the researcher's immediate offer of his answer to Mei's summon. Subsequently, Mei offers an apology and an account for the crossed terminal exchange. Within 20 seconds, the researcher offers an answer to complete the summons-answer sequence, a slightly modified version of using three-dot ellipsis possibly indicating his hesitation (Vandergriff, 2013). In posts 75 and 76, each participant offers L1 utterances, which are directed to the researchers judging from the use of grammatically polite forms such as *-desu* (in post 75) and *-masu* (in post 76) forms (instead of casual

form) in L1 Japanese. Both Mei and Ryu seem to display their concern with their task closings judging from the words they select, which indicates that they probably regard the researcher's use of punctuation as an indication of a problematizing stance. In short, all parties are oriented to Mei and Ryu's crossed terminal exchange.

High-level learners' interactional repertoires covered what the other two lower-level groups showed with one exception of clarifying that there is nothing to talk about (see Excerpt 2), which high-level learners never used (for other linguistic resources, see Appendix). Only high-level dyads ($n=2$; Rumi and Yuki, and one more dyad) produced a terminal exchange with other two-turn sequence(s) inserted.

Also, only high-level dyads ($n=4$) mentioned the researcher or a pronoun referring to him prior to a summons-answer sequence. This is strikingly different from the cases where participants directly addressed the researcher by his name in the summons-answer sequence (see Excerpt 4). In their task closings, the researcher was directly mentioned in the third person outside the summons-answer sequence, which never occurred in the low- and mid-level groups' data. In addition, only high-level dyads ($n=3$; Ryu and Mei, and two more dyads) made the researcher accountable for participating in reformulating a crossed and (thereby failed) task closing instead of just offering a minimum routinized answer “はい! (Yes!)” to the summon. In these task closings, the researcher participated as a ratified participant to jointly maintain the progressivity of the task closing.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings echo other work in development of L2 interactional competence (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012, 2015; Hellermann, 2008; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2011) in that a sequential analysis of the two structures for task closing, that is, terminal exchanges and summons-answer sequences, revealed interactional methods associated with particular proficiency levels. While participants were capable of moving from task-related talk to jointly accomplishing closing of the talk regardless of proficiency, the observable sequential and linguistic means to jointly construct task closings, their interactional competence, differed.

One frequently observed interactional tool across levels was the use of *okay* tokens with question marks. This move is reminiscent of a teacher's call before moving on to the next activity (Waring, 2009) or a teacher's question asking whether there is anything students want to discuss (Rine, 2009) in teacher-class interactions. It seems that although *okay?* tokens make an acceptance or a decline relevant, a preferred response seems to be an affirmative response

such as *okay* without a question mark or *yes* tokens. In that sense, the task closing with *okay?* in the current study was an interactional method packing two actions achieving task-related core business (i.e., a decision-making with a mutual agreement) and projecting an end of a task talk. However, generic pre-closings consisting of *okay-okay* exchanges, as Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) showed in academic advising sessions also existed in our data.

A linguistic repertoire or a variety of actions which was shown only in low-proficiency learners seemed to confirm that there are no more ideas to talk about. Unlike an *okay?-okay* sequence for soliciting an agreement and an affirmative response to it, a move such as *do you have any idea?* makes a negative response preferred. This method of projecting a task closure was only found in low-level participants, who appear to be not interactionally competent enough to construct a more stepwise topic shift into task closing.

Several mid-level learners showed interactional practices that low-proficiency learners never demonstrated, such as inserting phatic moves or exchanges with laughter tokens into their task closings. Also, some mid-level pairs showed a more stepwise transition from task-related talk to closing, which is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that sequences get more extensive and refined with increasing interactional ability (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012, 2014, 2018; Galaczi, 2014; González-Lloret, 2011; Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2011).

Although both mid-level and high-level groups showed sequential expansions, management of participation framework was a distinguishing marker between them. Only high-proficiency learners directly mentioned the researcher in closing task talk, thereby, moving the researcher's participation status from the third party to an addressee (Dynal, 2014). This finding suggests that high-proficiency learners modified the participation framework by introducing an emergent addressee who was otherwise positioned outside the task talk, in order to implement him as a resource to project an upcoming task closing. This practice also indicates that task closings are an interactional site where L2 learners' identities are shifted from one involving discussion tasks within a language learning context to one participating in a data collection session as a more equal member of a community.

Less prominently, only high-proficiency learners occasionally broke the adjacency of the terminal exchange by inserting a sequence before providing a second-pair part to close the talk. This break in adjacency has been shown with higher-ability learners in other studies (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012, 2018), and indicates prioritization of social relationship over transactional task-talk. Lower-proficiency learners tend to foreground efficiency and task completion, likely due to their language processing system being heavily taxed by the demands of real-time text-based conversation (Abe & Roever, 2019).

Clear communication by means of explicit performative verbs and an unrelenting focus on task reduces processing burden whereas higher-proficiency learners have the processing capacity to handle implied meanings and suspend the immediacy of adjacency pairs allowing them to insert sequences oriented to their social relationship before completing the pair.

There are several limitations in the current study. Our findings can possibly suggest a hypothetical developmental trajectory of L2 interactional competence, but the number of examples for discriminating different degrees of interactional competence was still small. In order to confirm, or further explore, the developmental trajectory, longitudinal studies are required to document the same participants' interactional practices over time, which is another strand of L2 interactional competence research (e.g. Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2015; González-Lloret, 2011; Hellermann, 2007, 2008; Hellermann & Cole, 2008; Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018; Rine 2009). In addition, this study was limited to an analysis on learner-driven task closing rituals, which accounted for only 62.2% of the whole data set. To further explore the social nature of closings of text-based interaction in a language learning context, the discussions terminated by the researcher could be examined from an emic perspective based on CA's analytic principles.

Lastly, the current study has pedagogical implications. The interactional practices for task closings can be learning objects for L2 learners. Various interactional repertoires such as use of generic pre-closing move such as *okay* or *well*, multiple sequences prior to an upcoming closing, or even use of medium-specific semiotic resources such as laughter tokens or other visual languages (e.g., emoticons) may be not only teachable, but also learnable, between learners since text-based CMC affords the persistence of the written interactional practices as an interaction log. Whether implicitly learned or explicitly instructed, these learning objects may help familiarize learners with the interactional resources afforded by the communication medium. Such instructional interventions in a CALL setting would be beneficial to enhance L2 learners' adaptability for working with others in various L2 online environments.

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Appendix. Linguistic Repertoire for Task Closings in the Three Groups

	Low	Mid	High
1. okay or alright tokens			
okay (including ok, OK)	√	√	√
okayyyy			√
okay phew			√
okay then			√
alright			√
alright then			√
2. appreciation tokens			
thank you (including thanks)	√	√	√
thank you + address term			√
3. soliciting an agreement			
okay? (including ok?, OK?)	√	√	√
okay + confirmation (e.g., OK, so Taiwan it is then!)	√	√	√
confirmation + okay? (e.g., Our idea is animal wall, ok?)	√	√	√
is it ok? (Is this ok?)		√	√
do you agree?	√	√	√
agreed?			√
do you disagree?	√	√	
are you agreed?		√	
do you decide my idea?	√		
do you also choose X?	√		
is it right?	√		
so success is X?	√		
so + the agreed idea		√	
we reached the best idea		√	
our idea/conclusion is X?		√	√
are you good with that?			√

4. confirming whether the talk is over		
so, that's it??	√	
anyway X, that's it		√
it is decided		√
we are done		√
finished!		√
finished?	√	
finish...?	√	
can we finish?		√
what do we say when we're done?		√
we've reached conclusion	√	
discuss is over?	√	
we reached the best idea		√
so it's final decision?		√
that's all	√	
that's all?	√	√
we decide X right?	√	
5. suggesting calling the researcher		
call sensei/Mr. Abe		√
shall we call Mr. Abe?		√
we should call sensei		√
6. clarifying that there is nothing to talk		
do you have more ideas? (Do you have any idea?)	√	√
oK Any idea??		√
any comments??		√
do you have any idea. I don't have.	√	
what another idea do you have?	√	
have any ideas?	√	
any other questions?	√	