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Integrating Conversational Analysis and Dialogic Reflection within Reflective Practice

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a collaborative and data-based reflective practice study carried out by two language teachers in a Japanese tertiary education context. This research utilized conversational analysis (CA) of audio-recorded classroom data which was subsequently discussed as part of a critical friendship. Both the inclusion of CA data and collegial discussion were in response to recent calls for increasingly data-led and dialogic reflective practice methods. In this study, the two teacher-researchers identified salient issues that they saw as incongruent with their stated teaching beliefs. They then collaboratively determined interventions to deal with the inconsistencies between their beliefs and their actual behavior and repeated the CA data collection and dialogic analysis phases. The two teachers found that the CA data and the opportunity to collaboratively interpret it provided valuable insights into their classroom practice while also offsetting the tendency for excessive self-criticism. This study provides a concrete example of a reflective practice approach that is both theoretically grounded and tied to bottom-up issues that are of interest to teachers.

Keywords: reflective practice; conversational analysis; collaboration; teacher beliefs; actual classroom behaviors

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Introduction

The benefits of teachers engaging in reflective practice have been widely recognized in both English language teaching (ELT) and in education in general. Through reflecting on their beliefs and classroom practices, teachers can become better informed about what is happening in their classes and gain confidence in their own professional practice. Reflective practice also provides stimulus for teachers who have fallen into the trap of routinization (Farrell, 2018). However, in recent years, several influential voices have claimed that reflective practice has often become routine and contrived, lacking evidence-based or collaborative explorations of what teachers think and do (Farrell, 2018; Mann & Walsh, 2017). Walsh and Mann (2015) in particular have advocated for a more data-based approach to reflective practice, with teachers collecting data from their classrooms, students, or in the form of teacher journals, which they can then discuss and analyze in conversations with a trusted peer or group.

Within ELT in Japan, there is a reported paucity of opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD) for non-Japanese teachers in a range of contexts, including assistant language teachers in secondary schools (Denston & Stringer, 2017), private English conversation school teachers (Hooper & Hashimoto, 2020), and those working in tertiary institutions (Roloff Rothman, 2020). In many cases, CPD opportunities that do exist are administered in a top-down lecture form (Roloff Rothman, 2020) rather than following a more socioculturally-oriented approach that “attend[s] to the value systems or experientially derived expertise” (Watanabe, 2016, p. 14) that teachers possess. That being said, it could be argued that some existing models of professional development targeted at Japanese educators such as *jugyou kenkyuu* (lesson study) are coherent with teacher development approaches that are based on classroom-level inquiry and implemented via collaborative reflection (Gutierrez, 2015).

Responding to the contextual considerations outlined above, this study explored a potential avenue for bottom-up CPD for all teachers within Japanese ELT. In this research, two university lecturers engaged in evidence-based and collaborative reflective practice focusing on classroom instructional practices. We used conversational analysis (CA) as a tool to analyze data that was interpreted both individually and then collaboratively in peer discussions as part of a critical friendship (Farrell, 2001). Through analyzing the CA data, we examined the relationship between our teacher beliefs and our “visible behaviors” (Farrell & Vos, 2018) in the classroom. Subsequently, we assisted each other in formulating interventions aimed at increasing the congruence between our actual and desired pedagogical practices.

Review of literature

Reflective teaching

Reflective practice has become a somewhat fashionable term in language education and a great deal of research has focused on reflective practice models (Farrell, 2018; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Watanabe, 2016), and its benefits (Brookfield, 1995; Farrell, 2015, 2018). Reflective practice has its roots in the work of Dewey (1933) who emphasized the value of teaching reflectively to prevent educators from drifting into regular practice where actions are led by “impulse or routine” (Farrell, 2015, p. 8). Benefits of reflecting on one’s teaching include developing the ability to link pedagogical theory and practice, creating opportunities to explore and evolve one’s teaching beliefs, and increasing self-efficacy and professionalism (Brookfield, 1995; Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Farrell, 2015; Schön, 1987). Watanabe (2016) argues that reflective practice has a key role in externalizing teachers’ beliefs and values, clarifying the effect they have on classroom practice, and analyzing the extent to which these beliefs are consistent with their actions in the

classroom. She cites Ashdown (2002), who asserts that a recognition and analysis of teacher cognition in relation to its role in practice is a key pillar of teacher CPD:

[T]he design of professional development needs to specifically (rather than implicitly) attend to teachers' value systems through discussion, role play, observations of teaching, and analysis of case examples, to ensure that teachers' growth and development is not only about specific skill and knowledge acquisition, but also about the process of recognizing and addressing the complexity of their value systems and the impact such systems have on their teaching. (Ashdown, 2002, p. 127)

In addition to the approaches that Ashdown proposed, there are a wide range of similar tools which teachers can utilize to promote reflective practice, including teacher journals, collaborative blogging, post-observation conferences, peer sharing, and action research. These tools make it easier to systematically engage in reflective practice that is data-driven (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017).

Utilizing the reflective practice tools described above can provide educators with solid and contextually relevant data that they can then use to base informed reflective decisions upon and engage in CPD. Despite this aim, however, classroom research may at times be seen as daunting to teachers since they might associate the idea of research with the more rigid forms of academic inquiry that dominate the SLA or educational fields (Hale, Nanni, & Hooper, 2018). Often, a hierarchy (with academics at the top and teachers at the bottom) is reproduced in a *top-down* approach to CPD – institutionally or governmentally initiated programs where teachers are instructed by an outside expert in the field – that frames teachers as being in a position of “deficit” where their problematic practice needs to be fixed by an outside authority (Farrell, 2013). In contrast, a *bottom-up* approach to CPD is initiated by teachers, allowing them to focus their attention on the specificities of their practice that they believe are interesting or problematic. Girocki and Farrell (2017) argued that encouraging teacher agency through bottom-up action research has the potential to stimulate and empower educators as they are led by their own curiosity rather than having a topic of interest defined by an external authority. Furthermore, the concrete evidence produced means that key moments in the classroom are less likely to go unnoticed or misremembered by teachers as they perform their often hectic and demanding professional role (Hale et al., 2018).

Data-led and dialogic reflective practice

A relatively recent evolution in how reflective practice is conducted was stimulated by recent calls (Kim & Silver, 2016; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Sert, 2019; Walsh & Mann, 2015) for a more rigorous and collaborative turn in this area of CPD. It has been argued that reflective practice needs to be reconfigured due to differing and often vague ideas of what reflective practice actually is and how it should be conducted. Mann and Walsh (2013) argued that reflective practice was in danger of becoming “bloated and riddled with inconsistencies” in that it lacked a “detailed, systematic and data-led description of either its nature or value” (p. 292). They therefore proposed an approach to reflective practice that was data-led, collaborative, both spoken and written, and more varied and timely in terms of reflective tools.

Due to the complexity of teaching as a process, Mann and Walsh (2017) have reasoned that in order to stimulate effective reflection, data or evidence to base decisions and analyses on is required. Some examples of data sources for teacher reflection could be transcribed spoken reflections or classroom observation recordings. Furthermore, teachers working with their own collected data provide particular value as there is a greater sense of ownership of the evidence found, which in turn is more likely to inspire changes in their teaching behavior.

When carried out in isolation, reflective practice may be judged as a narcissistic or egocentric endeavor (Pang, 2017; Walsh & Mann, 2015). Conversely, by engaging in dialogic reflection with other teachers or members of a reflective community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), educators can articulate their own beliefs and interpretations of events by reformulating them for others. This provides opportunities for other members of the community to learn from each other's experiences (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Kim & Silver, 2016; Mann & Walsh, 2017). Farrell (2001, 2018) has also advocated dialogic reflection via a critical friendship – a collaborative arrangement between teachers built on trust and established ground rules that may involve discussion, questioning or even confrontation for the purposes of examining teaching practice. Walsh and Mann (2015) have stated that shifting towards a more dialogic model of reflective practice can reduce the risk of reflection becoming a “checklist or box-checking exercise” (p. 353) where teachers provide inauthentic answers that they feel institutions may want to hear. Rather than encouraging educators to reflect deeply on their practice, these routinized methods could be contributing to a culture of “fake reflection” (Pang, 2017).

Farrell and Vos (2018) provide one example of collaborative reflective inquiry sidestepping the aforementioned concerns over ‘isolationist’ or ‘routinized’ reflective practice. Their study examined teacher principles – “teachers’ assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions of teaching and learning” (Farrell & Vos, 2018, p. 2) – and the ways in which they may differ from their “visible behaviors” (Farrell, 2015) in the classroom. The researchers attempted to raise teachers’ awareness of what their principles were by articulating them in dialog and subsequently observing the classroom to “see what is happening rather than what a teacher thinks is happening” (Farrell & Vos, 2018, p. 12). This focus on teacher principles is in keeping with Farrell’s (2013) aforementioned assertion that RP is best conducted bottom-up and based on issues close to teachers’ hearts, as opposed to being dictated top-down by “experts” or institutions.

Teacher reflection through conversational analysis

One potentially effective approach to data-led reflective practice for bottom-up CPD is utilizing conversation analysis. CA in relation to evidence-based reflective practice involves practitioners analyzing naturally occurring data (language spoken in a non-experimental setting like the classroom). It allows researchers/teachers to understand the complexity of what interlocutors (teacher-student or student-student) do when they interact and how different types of interaction may facilitate or constrain opportunities for participation and learning (Kim & Silver, 2016; Wong & Waring, 2010). CA data is transcribed using a finely detailed system (see Appendix A) that includes pronunciation, intonation, speech speed, overlapping speech, and pauses (Hale et al., 2018). A short excerpt of CA transcription from Hooper (2016) can be seen below in Figure 1.

→	049	Y	kind of ship. (3.0) hm. anduh <i>eh</i> to:(2.0) right s: righto-right side of
	050		the house there is a mou-uh ↑hill-hill.
	051	K	°hill?°
	052	Y	((draws in breath)) (1.0) °mm° small mountain.

(Hooper, 2016, p. 120)

Figure 1: Example of CA transcribed audio data

As one might imagine, it would be rather time-consuming for teachers to transcribe a lengthy audio recording. However, due to the amount of detailed insight that CA transcription provides, even a very short excerpt of transcribed data is likely to reveal something interesting to examine. Reflective practice where CA is the primary analytical tool may differ from traditional action research models in that the point of interest to be examined is not decided upon beforehand and

should instead arise later upon examining the data (Hale et al., 2018). This is referred to as “unmotivated looking” and is core to a CA approach (Seedhouse, 2004). CA has been utilized as a tool for reflective practice in a number of studies where it was argued to be effective in raising teacher awareness in areas such as student talk (Mori, 2002; Taomae, 2011) and teacher talk (Hooper, 2016; Sert, 2010; Walsh, 2006, 2012).

While the examples of reflective teacher research listed above showed how CA can allow teachers access to valuable insights from their classrooms, many of these teachers (often by necessity) carried out their reflections largely in isolation. Consequently, teachers were not able to benefit from the act of their reflections being “articulated and then reformulated [to another teacher] in a progression towards enhanced understanding” (Mann & Walsh, 2017, p. 39). Within his exploration of CA as a tool for teacher education, Sert (2010) also proposed that collected CA classroom data be provided to both a teacher-candidate and mentor upon transcription. The two would then engage in joint analysis of the data and subsequent reflection sessions.

By engaging in data-based and dialogic reflective practice, we aimed to implement the above suggestions to deepen our understanding of our own classroom practice and the incongruences that may exist between what we believe and what we do as teachers. Furthermore, we believe that other teachers can potentially adapt the approach we utilized to their own situation and collaborate with colleagues in continued professional development. With these tentative aims in mind, we sought to address the following questions related to our classroom practice and the research process itself.

Research questions

1. To what extent were our stated teacher beliefs congruent with our visible behaviors observable in classroom data?
2. In what ways did critical dialog influence our reflections on classroom data?

Methods

Participants

The study was conducted at a medium-sized private university located in Chiba, Japan where we, the teacher-researchers, currently work. We are both in our thirties and possess MA TESOL degrees, with over ten years' experience working in Japan. While we can both communicate in Japanese to varying degrees, the university requires that classes be conducted solely in English, and therefore Japanese competence is not a prerequisite for employment. The classes we teach consist of approximately twenty students per class, majoring in either English or International Communication. The students' previous language learning experiences tend to stem from teacher-dominated school environments (Sakui, 2004), and thus they sometimes have difficulty acclimatizing to the more communication-focused, student-centered classes which the university advocates.

Procedure

We began with purposeful sampling to choose information-rich cases (Patton, 1990) to record. The lessons selected were chosen for their potential to produce abundant teacher-student

interaction, in order to maximize opportunities for analysis of the teacher's role in the classroom. All student participants signed consent forms having read a detailed breakdown of the study, provided in both English and Japanese. We were each recorded twice during the study: once at the beginning, and then again with the same groups of students after our first joint dialogic analysis and discussion. Each ninety-minute lesson was audio recorded using pocket-sized digital recorders, seen as the optimum method of capturing data whilst minimizing distraction to students. Pertinent sections of the recorded lessons were then transcribed following CA transcription conventions (see Appendix A).

Data analysis

Rather than identifying a specific element to investigate in advance, we opted for an “unmotivated looking” approach (Seedhouse, 2004), teaching each lesson as we normally would, and then individually exploring our own data afterwards to detect any disconnections between our pedagogical focus and what actually occurred during the class. Once these disconnections were identified, we each transcribed the relevant sections of our audio, and analyzed them individually in conjunction with a review of relevant literature. This enabled us to thoroughly prepare for the next stage of the process: joint dialogic analysis.

Our joint analysis began with us briefly talking about our own teaching histories, and the beliefs and identities that had emerged from them, in order to provide some rationale for our chosen transcription focus. This stage of interaction was aided by our existing rapport and familiarity with each other through a reflective practice teacher development group within our institution. Dialogic analysis of our transcribed data then followed with both of us acting as critical friends (Farrell, 2001, 2018), facilitating deeper introspection on the implications of the data in relation to our teacher beliefs.

Subsequently, we collaboratively determined pedagogical interventions to deal with the inconsistencies between our teaching beliefs and our displayed behavior in the CA data. These interventions were then implemented into a second phase of the study, as we audio recorded our lessons again with the same groups of students. Individual analysis of our recordings and CA transcription of pertinent sections followed. However, both individual and joint dialogic analysis in the second cycle focused specifically on the success of the interventions and future implications for teaching, as opposed to seeking new pedagogical disconnections. We each then produced a final reflective narrative, discussing our experiences of the research project and what we discovered. Our individual findings and reflections on each stage of the process are detailed in the following section.

Findings

Andrew's reflection

First stage

In the following excerpt, the students and I are engaged in the latter stages of what Gourlay (2005) referred to as a “checking episode” through a series of IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback) sequences (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). The activity consisted of ten comprehension questions testing the students' scanning skills. Eight of the answers had been previously elicited, and question 9 (“What do Eastern culture and Western culture have in common?”) and 10 (“How many sources of information does this article cite?”) were being covered:

82:22	→	013	T	>>okay<< u:h group four?	
		014	S5	<<we couldn't find the answer.>>	
	→	015	T	okay. (1.0) group five? question nine? did you get it?	
		016	S6	°they were heavily influenced by rel...religion during its	
		017		early development.°	
	→	018	T	>>yep, good, yep,<< u:h do you know which paragraph?	
		019	S6	(5.0) °u:h paragraph four.°	
		020	T	>>yeah good. well done.<< u:m <<so>> we're looking at	
		021		here. <u>like</u> the west, eastern culture was heavily influenced	teacher pointing at projector
		022		by religion during its early development. (1.0) >>okay?<<	
		023		that's the key sentence. >>yeah, well done.<< (3.5)	
		024		>>okay,<< and u:h last one. (2.0) <<how many sources?>>	
	→	025		(1.0) group five?	
		020	S7	(2.5) eight?	
		021	T	(1.0) <u>eight</u> ?	
		022	S8	°eight.°	
	→	023	T	(1.0) any <u>different</u> answers? (3.0) >>so you think eight?<<	
		024		did everybody think eight? (1.0) it's actually <u>more than</u>	
		025		eight.	
		026	SS	°hhhhhh° (5.0)	
		027	T	so the answer is actually <u>ten</u> .	
		028	SS	°ten. (1.0) ten.°	
83:44	→	029	T	<<so>> let me show you,	

Figure 2: Undesirable distribution of talk

I chose this particular data section because there were several aspects that made me feel uncomfortable:

1. Undesirable distribution of talk. Throughout the interaction, I managed turn-taking and restricted student responses to verbatim text repetition or a paragraph number. Furthermore, regarding Question Ten, rather than eliciting answers, I gave a lengthy monologue providing all ten answers and their text location. These issues represented the biggest mismatch between my teaching beliefs and what actually occurred.
2. Over-use of explicit positive assessment (EPA), as demonstrated in lines 018 (“Yep, good, yep”) and 020 (“Yeah, good, well done”). Waring (2008) stated that EPAs tend to serve as sequence closers through marking the initial student response as correct.
3. Issues that arose due to inadequate instructions. Providing the paragraph number was not included in my instructions. Line 019 displays a typical time lapse (in this case, five seconds) as the student had to relocate the answer in the text.

All of the above issues were addressed in our first critical conversation. The issue of inadequate activity instructions was straightforward (a planning oversight, easily rectified in future lessons), but distribution of talk was discussed in greater depth:

“And here I am, merrily nominating group by group. Which, yeah, I shouldn’t be doing, so, you know, reading Markee’s stuff about speaker nominates next, I could just do that, so this isn’t really necessary. So we’re off to a bad start already.” (Andrew, Critical conversation 1)

However, rather than simply accepting my negative self-appraisal, Daniel inquired about my motivation behind nominating groups. This led to a discussion regarding not only teacher authority and the resulting disparate rights in classroom exchange (e.g. Lemke, 1990), but also Japanese learners’ disposition towards reticence (Ellis 1991; Humphries, Burns & Tanaka, 2015), particularly within settings where they are likely to stand out (see Anderson, 1993). Furthermore, Paoletti and Fele (2004) pointed out that despite the restrictive nature of teacher-controlled turn allocation, “the teacher has the duty to guarantee equal participation by all students and the orderly development of classroom activities” (p.78). Through the discussion with Daniel, it was clear that all of these issues were unconsciously affecting my teaching decisions.

The next issue we addressed was my use of EPA:

Andrew: They got it, and then here I go again, so “Yep, good, well done,” that’s my EPA.

Daniel: That’s your EPA, but how could you expand that? Do you think an EPA is inappropriate there?

(Critical conversation 1)

Daniel argued that the pedagogical goal was to confirm answers swiftly and, in addition:

Daniel: And EPA is like, you know, from what I’ve read as well, it’s, it’s... they shut down interactional space, which I don’t, I think, which is probably true, but here, what interaction are you going to get from it anyway?

Andrew: No, nothing.

Daniel: Nothing, right?

(Critical conversation 1)

I came to realize that my EPA self-critique was perhaps overly harsh and merely represented a typical IRF sequence common in most classrooms. As Wong and Waring (2009) stated, “our challenge is to take advantage of the positive effect that “very good” brings without suppressing learning opportunities” (p. 202), and my use of EPA in Figure 2 served to foster students’ confidence rather than quash their voices.

Our discussion concluded with Daniel exploring my “visible behaviors” (Farrell & Vos, 2018) versus my underlying teaching beliefs:

Daniel: So, basically what I want to find out is, does what you’re doing here, considering the context of the activity, what you’re trying to achieve, does this gel or diverge from your kind of idea of what good teaching is? Do you think? Your principles?

Andrew: Yeah, diverge. Because I’m...

Daniel: Why?

Andrew: Because I'm talking too much and it's not necessary, and that's my big thing.

Fundamental aspects of the recorded lesson betrayed my desire for a student-centered and student-led lesson. This discovery was crucial when prioritizing interventions for the follow-up recording. I decided to experiment with two approaches: “current-speaker-selects-next” (Markee, 2000, p. 92), and assigning students the role of “primary knower.” My aim was to improve what van Lier (1996) referred to as *symmetry*, namely “equal distribution of rights and duties in talk” (p. 175) and to “change the interactional behaviors of learners so that they play a more equal role in classroom discourse” (Walsh, 2011, p. 22).

Second stage

In the following excerpt, taken from the second recorded lesson, the students have completed a vocabulary-definition matching activity in small groups (the topic is ethics in warfare), and the checking episode begins. As each student provided an answer, I wrote it on the whiteboard.

37:13	→	001	T	>>alright<<, u:ch number <u>one</u> can I ... have a volunteer for	
		002		number one. put your hand up if you know the answer.	
		003		(1.0) okay, S1, number one.	
		004	S1	alternative.	
	→	005	T	(4.0) okay. S1. <<choose the next student to answer.>>	writing on the whiteboard
		006	SS	hhhhhhhh	
		007	S1	mmmmmm... S2.	
		008	SS	hhhhhhhh	
		009	S2	number two is torture.	
	→	010	T	choose the next student,	
37:54		011	S2	\$\$3\$	

Figure 3: Current speaker selects next

The novelty of the interaction likely provoked the laughter from the students (lines 006 and 008), but the twelve answers were elicited quickly. The fact that students would be asked individually had been included in my instructions and, as the checking episode continued, I took a more passive role with students eventually selecting the next respondent without being prompted. Furthermore, I avoided commenting on the answers provided, in order to facilitate peer correction, which occurs in the excerpt below:

40:21	→	034	T	>>okay,<< so, we've got a <<few repeats>> here, haven't	
		035		we. so, <u>torture</u> , <u>vicious</u> , <u>engage in</u> . (1.0) >>so, any ideas?<<	
		036	S7	(2.5) number four.	
		037	T	uh-huh,	
		038	S7	wage?	
40:43	→	039	T	number four, wage. (5.0) any other changes?	

Figure 4: Opening the exchange and peer correction

Having completed the activity in groups, the students were able to confidently supply the corrections in a timely fashion as I opened the exchange to the whole class, eliciting peer contribution through questions such as “Anyone else?” and “Do you all agree?” On the surface, this appeared to be a successful intervention, but a possible drawback to the approach was discussed:

“It could get a bit long if nobody had the right answer, or they were making it worse, if they were changing some of the ones that were already correct, so I got lucky this time.” (Andrew, Critical conversation 2)

Later in the lesson, a further checking episode for a True or False scanning activity provided the opportunity to assign the role of “primary knower” to the students:

49:10	→	001	T	okay. stop. (7.0) question one (2.0) volunteer please.	
		002	S1	(13.0) paragraph one.	S1 raises hand
		003	T	(2.0) true or false?	
		004	S1	a:h, false.	
	→	005	T	false, <<paragraph one,>> <<correct. so your group>>	walking towards S1
	→	006		(2.0) these are all the correct answers, (1.5) <<please ask	
		007		the other groups for the other answers.>>	
		008	SS	((laughing and murmuring))	
		009	T	>>okay?<<	
		010	SS	((laughing and murmuring))	
		011	S1	ask?	
		012	T	mm-hm.	
		013	S1	uh. any group?	
	→	014	T	>>yep, you choose.<<>>you're the teacher.<<	
	→	015	S1	okay! °hhh° <<number two,>> umm, <<group one.>>	
		016		(2.0) please tell your answer.	
		017	S4	true? and paragraph three.	
50:28		018	S1	correct.	

Figure 5: Assigning the role of primary knower

The CA data here reveals restricted code use, whereby “a teacher’s speech is slower, louder, more deliberate, and makes greater use of pausing and emphasis” (Walsh, 2011, p. 6), most noticeably in lines 005 to 007. Extended wait time (line 002) was also evident. My brevity of instructions was a topic we later discussed:

Andrew: Even though it might look like lack of instructions, it's deliberate.

Daniel: Yeab, this is something I often do. Very short. You're kind of "I'm not going to hold your hand through it, you're going to have to work it out," right?

(Critical conversation 2)

As the checking episode continued, the “primary knower” group shared responsibility, taking it in turns to nominate. Mortensen (2015) described how teacher-student interaction often determines the next speaker, with students displaying willingness to be selected and teachers orienting to these displays in order to choose a subsequent speaker. However, in both checking episodes above, responsibility to manage turn allocation and interpret displays of willingness rested with

the students. While teaching the class, it was evident that the selection choices students made were heavily influenced by their classmates' body language. This would clearly need to be considered in future "primary knower" checking episodes to ensure balance of talk for all students.

Although minor, these actions represented positive steps towards greater student control over the learning process, and led us to reflect on the overall success of the interventions.

Daniel: So this is a huge difference from the first transcript right? Like night and day. Those huge teacher turns are all gone.

Andrew: Yeab, no lengthy explanations.

Daniel: How do you feel about it overall, the changes you made? Are you going to keep them?

Andrew: I'll keep doing them, although I'm not sure all the time. It depends on the activity.

(Critical conversation 2)

Analyzing the transcript, as well as our critical conversation, made me aware that rather than being a panacea for all ills, these techniques should be matched carefully with suitable activities to enhance the students' learning experience and foster what Hennessy, Deaney and Ruthven (2005) referred to as "fading," whereby teacher assistance recedes as learner independence increases.

The CA analysis, critical dialogs and literature review involved in this study not only produced tangible interventions, but also enhanced my understanding of communication occurring in my classroom. Furthermore, this project reminded me of my fundamental teaching beliefs, and the importance of more conscious decision-making to ensure that my classroom behavior harmonized with these beliefs.

Daniel's Reflection

First stage

As I examined the transcribed CA data of my interactions with students, I noticed a number of occasions where I felt my teacher explanations within a supposedly student-centered activity were very one-sided and ineffective and, as a result, chose this area as my focus.

42:41	→	015	T	↑YEAH, kind of, yeah, like uh, ↑depends on the animal.	
	→	016		some have ↑>>lots of ha[ir<<, some] have >>not so much.<<	
		017	S1	[ah...]	
	→	018	T	(3.0) or like you know >>for example<< a dog (1.5) no hair	points to nose
		019		here right?	
		020	S1	°mmm,°	
	→	021	T	but everywhere else, hair.	
		022	S1	hair.=	
		023	S2	=oh...	
	→	024	T	okay?	
		025	S1 + S2	Soh...\$	
	→	026	T	so it depends which part of the body.	
		027	S2	↑a[h...]	
43:08	→	028	T	[°okay.°]	

Figure 6: Ineffective comprehension checking strategies

In the above excerpt, I was responding to a student question within a jigsaw activity where students were required to explain animal classifications (invertebrate, reptile, amphibian, etc.). In this case, the students were having trouble with the description of mammals (see Appendix B) having “hair – more or less” and called me over to explain this point. As previously mentioned, having transcribed this exchange, the main issue that I noticed was the one-sided nature of the exchange as I was continuing to add explanation without stopping and checking students’ comprehension. This was a problematic issue that I recognized in our first critical conversation.

“Yeah, that’s kind of what caused it, but I think I could have dealt with it a lot better because what I’m doing is teacher echo, I’m just echoing myself, keeping, digging myself deeper, right? Rather than just waiting or asking a clarifi..., asking a comprehension question.” (Daniel, Critical conversation 1)

At this stage, I began to explore the literature relating to how teachers “orchestrate” classroom interaction (Walsh, 2011), the nature of understanding-check (UC) questions (Waring, 2012) and how these factors may shape the quality and amount of opportunities learners are provided for active class participation. Subsequently, I began a more detailed analysis of my transcribed data, the decision-making process behind my choices, and whether my stated beliefs matched my “visible behaviors” in the classroom (Farrell & Vos, 2018). The situation contextualized within the class as a whole was that the group I was conversing with in Figure 6 had yet to complete the first stage of the jigsaw activity. This meant they were preventing the other groups from moving on to the second peer teaching phase. This put me under pressure to resolve their question as quickly as possible and keep the other groups from waiting. Perhaps resulting from these situational pressures, I resorted to a hasty, one-sided teacher explanation where I controlled the majority of the turns (015, 016, 018, 019, 021, 024, 026) while students were able to give only minimal backchannelling or repetition (turns 017, 020, 022, 023, 025, 027) that did not confirm comprehension of the material.

The rushed nature of my treatment of this question was also reflected in my orientation towards yes/no UC questions like “right?” and “okay?” (lines 019, 024, and 028). Waring (2012) examined teachers’ use of yes/no UC questions using a CA methodology and found that during explanation/instruction phases, *no-problem* student responses – responses that indicate that

something has been understood – were preferred by teachers and allowed them to close the interaction and move onto a new lesson segment. The potential problem lies in the fact that students also realize that a *no-problem* signal is the preferred response (Pomerantz, 1984) to a yes/no UC question like “okay?” and may as a result falsely signal understanding.

In our first critical conversation, I stated I was uncomfortable because time pressure had led to a type of teacher-student interaction that did not reflect my teacher principles of creating a low teacher-student power differential and developing students’ fluency and communication strategies.

Having analyzed my CA data, Andrew noticed that while I would often provide students with wait time to formulate their responses to a teacher question, when faced with a student question, I would tend to panic and try to answer it as quickly as possible, which sometimes resulted in ineffective UC strategies.

Andrew: Yeah. And maybe giving yourself more time as well to think about it.

Daniel: Okay.

Andrew: So like, like you give students...

Daniel: Rather than just panicking...

Andrew: Well, it's the same thing, you give students time to think about it.

Daniel: That's a good point.

Andrew: Right? When we've been discussing this, you're always like, you know, there's three seconds here, there's five seconds here because you're always giving students time to think. Why can't you have time to think as well?

(Critical conversation 1)

I planned another jigsaw activity (see Appendix C) for the next scheduled lesson recording so that, based on Andrew’s advice, I could try to implement a new interactional approach with increased teacher wait-time. I hoped this would result in more effective comprehension checking strategies and more interactive exchanges with students.

Second stage

Upon transcribing the recording of the second jigsaw activity, I realized that even when I gave myself more time to formulate my comprehension checking strategies (lines 009, 010, and 012), students were at times still reticent, perhaps due to shyness or insufficient understanding. This led to me feeling increased pressure and resulted in me slipping back into extended teacher turns (line 014 to 017) and using UC questions that would encourage no-problem responses regardless of actual comprehension (line 021).

03:46	→	009	T	>>can you think of an example?<< (1.5) of a one trick	
	→	010		pony. (2.0) in real life. (8.0) a famous example. (5.0)	
		011	S2 + S3	Hhhh	
	→	012	T	(9.0) so someone who's good at <u>one thing only</u> . (9.0)	
		013	S1	uh...	points at a picture of something
		014	T	uh, you think this is a one trick pony? (1.0) yeah, it's a	
		015		good example. I would say some ↑comedians, in japan.	
		016		like kojima yo- yoshio.>> or whatever his name is.<< he	
		017		has his catchphrase.	
		018	Ss	mmm...	S3 gestures Kojima Yoshio's dance move
		019	T	that's it.	
		020	Ss	hhhhh=	
04:56		021	T	=right?	

Figure 7: Increasing teacher wait (thinking) time

In our final critical conversation, I referred to my frustration over the students' continued reticence despite my attempts to afford them increased interactional space. Andrew provided me with his perspective on the data, and the issues surrounding it, while also offering encouragement.

Daniel: However, yeah, as I said, even though I gave extended time, there were still occasions where students didn't feel comfortable filling the space, and I eventually slipped back into a one-sided explanation just because nothing was happening. And, yeah, um, I don't know how I would have dealt with that. It was just like, when you're getting nothing!

Andrew: Yeah, but it wasn't, it wasn't bad, because a lot of people fill that with talking and you didn't.

Daniel: Right.

Andrew: So it's fine for them to have the opportunity and not to use it. I don't see a big problem, that's a, that's a Japan thing isn't it, really? I guess. But they should still have the opportunity.

(Critical conversation 2)

Aside from this issue with the first group I approached, generally I found that the increased teacher wait-time and the greater focus on comprehension checking strategies did, in fact, appear to produce more interactive exchanges between my students and me. In the following extract, where the group is working out the idiom "to weasel out of something", lines 035, 036 and 037 show that I am taking a number of pauses where I am formulating my explanation and highlighting the key word "excuse". One student responds in line 039, letting me know that he understands the word through our common knowledge of his L1. My explanation strategy is more based on elicitation through giving examples (lines 035, 042 and 043) and asking for examples (lines 045 and 047). Also, my teacher turns are more spaced out with students asking clarification questions (line 041 and 046) and providing short utterances (lines 038, 039, and 044) before student 4 finally provides a clear real-life example in lines 050 and 051 of someone "weaseling out of something", thus signaling his comprehension of the idiom. After this has been

confirmed, I quickly give an EPA (line 052) and move onto the next group, leaving student 4 in a peer-teacher role.

06:10	→	035	T	↑yeah. (1.0) and say, (2.0) i'm very sick, or i'm too busy,	
		036		with my part time job, (1.0) >>like some kind of<< (1.5)	
		037		↑excuse? (1.5) do you know excuse?	
		038	S4	ah yeah.	
	→	039	S?	°iiwake.°	"excuse" in Japanese
		040	T	↑yeah. that's right.	
		041	S5	(3.0) is this a kind of verb?	
	→	042	T	weasel. yeah. <<this is a verb.>> yeah. (1.0) so <<he always	
		043		tries to weasel out of doing (0.5) housework >>	
		044	S4	cleaning.	
	→	045	T	cleaning, (1.0) do you know ↑anyone like this?	
		046	S4	(5.0) anyone?	
		047	T	yeah. any of your friends, or family, or...	
	→	048	S4	(1.0) uh my school friends.	
	→	049	T	okay. (3.0) what would they do.	
		050	S4	we have to clean uh clean uh ↑class, but he said i have to go	
		051		club,	
07:30	→	052	T	ah (1.0) °perfect.° °perfect.° well done. that's it.	

Figure 8: Utilizing different comprehension checking strategies - eliciting L1 translation and examples

In this particular excerpt, there are fewer instances of yes/no UCs oriented towards no-problem responses (only line 037 – and understanding was actually confirmed with an L1 translation in line 039), and comprehension questions instead required some kind of open student response, such as giving a real-life example (lines 045 and 049).

Through both the analysis of my CA data, exploration of relevant literature, and the co-constructed understanding with Andrew of what was transpiring in these exchanges with students pre- and post-intervention, I became more aware of a gap between my stated teaching principles and “visible behaviors”. Through this data-based reflective process, I was gradually able to understand how decisive my teacher talk strategies can be in creating affordances for classroom interaction and, ultimately, learning (Van Lier, 1996).

Discussion

The first question that guided this study related to how closely our stated beliefs or principles on what entailed sound pedagogy corresponded to how we actually ran our classrooms. Through CA analysis, we discovered notable divergence. While we both advocated limiting teacher talk time and maximizing opportunities for student L2 interaction, our analyses revealed that some of our classroom practices may have been shutting down “interactional space” (Walsh, 2012), a potentially crucial issue in an EFL context like Japan with few opportunities for L2 interaction. The CA transcriptions facilitated detailed focus on specific characteristics, such as EPAs, turn distribution, UC questions, and teacher wait time. Furthermore, having a written record allowed us to collaboratively interpret the data at a leisurely pace during our reflective meetings.

From the joint analysis and discussion of our first round of CA data, we formulated interventions to bring our classroom interaction practices more in line with our teaching beliefs. Andrew addressed a perceived lack of interactional symmetry (Van Lier, 1996) by allowing students to control conversational turn-taking and implementing peer correction. Daniel gave himself more wait time, increasing opportunities for learner interaction and improving his UC questions. Although problematic issues in our second phase transcriptions remained, such as continued student reticence, our interactive practices had largely become more congruent with the teacher beliefs we had discussed in our initial meeting.

According to Watanabe (2016), the adoption of reflective practice in Japanese ELT is congruent with Kumaravadivelu's (2006) principles relating to the 'borrowing' of methodologies from other contexts in that it exhibits *particularity* (context-sensitivity), *practicality* (both theory and practice can inform each other), and *possibility* (enhances sociopolitical awareness and identity construction). This was relevant to our study in that the data-based and collaborative approach we adopted was very much in line with existing local CPD practices such as *jyugyou kenkyuu* (Gutierrez, 2015) and because our analysis and interventions were shaped by bottom-up contextual experiences of Japanese classrooms. Additionally, although our analysis was eventually informed by existing CA research, our primary focus was the classroom data that we had collected and our situated understanding of it. This prevented our reflection being dragged away from the classroom and into the realm of academic abstraction. Finally, our discussions of our teaching histories, beliefs, and identities framed our study and teaching practice in those terms. By collaboratively *narrativizing* our teaching lives, we were able to examine what we deemed to be competent practice within a larger community (Wenger, 1998), and investigate to what extent our practice matched our stated principles.

Our second research question focused on how critical dialog influenced our reflections on the classroom data. One of the most striking aspects of the critical dialog was that it fostered broader reflection. Rather than scrutinizing classroom incidents in isolation, the "critical friendship" enabled us to explore the rationale behind decisions, allowing us to discuss the wider implications of our respective approaches. Moreover, the trust and mutual accountability developed within our "critical friendship" enabled us to not only feel comfortable giving each other feedback, but allowed us to mediate each other's occasionally harsh self-critique. The tendency for teachers to engage in negative critique of their own practice is described as a common impulse, and one that may be to the detriment of their self-confidence and continued professional development (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Ghaye, 2011). Additionally, due to our shared experience of teaching within the Japanese context, we both understood the impact of issues such as student reticence (King, 2013) on pedagogical decisions that we had made. This in turn framed the suggestions and comments that we shared as more nuanced and situated as opposed to simply prescribing broad suggestions from research or institutional guidelines. Finally, peer engagement prompted reflection on areas that might otherwise have been left unexplored. Potential limitations of the approaches adopted were discussed, as well as further avenues for investigation, such as the impact of teacher intervention on students' conversations.

Conclusions

This study points towards a more dialogic and evidence-based form of reflective practice. Having detailed CA data not only allowed for "evidence-based decision making" (Mann & Walsh, 2017), but also facilitated a deeper collaborative analysis of our classroom interaction. There were two key factors specific to this study that contributed to its success. Firstly, as advocated by writers such as Edge (2002), reflection was non-judgmental, and a supportive atmosphere was fostered throughout. Additionally, although by no means a prerequisite, the shared situated knowledge

stemming from many years working in ELT in Japan helped us to empathize with each other and offer nuanced and contextually appropriate suggestions.

This project reinforced that research does not have to be carried out in isolation from teaching, but can rather serve as a powerful means of deepening understanding of classroom interaction. Specifically considering the Japanese context, the approach to reflective practice exemplified in this study could serve as a practical model for bottom-up teacher development in many ELT contexts in Japan where formal CPD opportunities for non-Japanese educators may not exist (Roloff Rothman, 2020). Furthermore, it could be argued that similar approaches to data-based and dialogic reflective practice offer flexibility to teachers who may not have legitimate access to a local physically-situated professional community of practice, such as *eikaiwa* (private conversation school) teachers or ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) who work in the Japanese school system (Hooper, 2016; Ohtani, 2010). The approach demonstrated could be carried out synchronously and asynchronously using shared online documents (transcribed/CA data) and videoconferencing (critical conversations) between members of an online distributed community of teachers.

While this project succeeded in generating revisions to our teaching practice, its focus was solely on teacher talk: although a narrowed focus seemed pertinent to our research aims, further analysis of the transcripts and relevant literature would most likely bring to light other issues, such as student talking time, materials efficacy and time management. Furthermore, the nature of this study means that teachers will not be able to extract generalizable truths from it. However, it is the process itself that we hope will resonate with teachers, and applying similar methods could provide them with valuable insights tailored to their own teaching context. It is hoped that this study can act as a catalyst for reflective practice in other institutions and settings, executed by teachers, for the benefit of their teaching community.

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Appendix A

Conversation analysis transcription symbols

.	(period) Falling intonation.
?	(question mark) Rising intonation.
,	(comma) Continuing intonation.
-	(hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off.
::	(colon(s)) Prolonging of sound.
<u>word</u>	(colon after underlined letter) Falling intonation on word.
<u>word</u>	(underlined colon) Rising intonation on word.
<u>word</u>	(underlining)
<u>word</u>	The more underlying, the greater the stress.
WORD	(all caps) Loud speech.
°word°	(degree symbols) Quiet speech.
↑word	(upward arrow) raised pitch.
↓word	(downward arrow) lowered pitch.
>>word<<	(more than and less than) Quicker speech.
<<word>>	(less than & more than) Slowed speech.
<	(less than) Talk is jump-started—starting with a rush.
hh	(series of h's) Aspiration or laughter.
.hh	(h's preceded by dot) Inhalation.
[]	(brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.
=	(equal sign) Latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker.
(2.4)	(number in parentheses) Length of a silence in 10ths of a second.
(.)	(period in parentheses) Micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
()	(empty parentheses) Non-transcribable segment of talk.
((gazing toward the ceiling))	(double parentheses) Description of non-speech activity.
(try 1)/(try 2)	(two parentheses separated by a slash) Alternative hearings.
\$word\$	(dollar signs) Smiley voice.
#word#	(number signs) Squeaky voice.

Appendix B

Mammals classification jigsaw reading sheet

Mammals

- Give birth to live young.
- Feed their babies with their own milk.
- Are more or less covered with hair.
- Are warm-blooded.



Appendix C

Animal idioms jigsaw reading sheets

a one-trick pony



- Describing someone as a "one-trick pony" means the person has only one ability or good quality that he/she is known for, and doesn't have any other abilities.

*"Yeah, I know he's good at making presentations. Unfortunately, that's all he's good at! We need a good all-round worker, not just a **one-trick pony**."*

weasel out of something



- Weasels have a reputation for being sneaky. If a person "weasels out of" some responsibility, it means they abandon their responsibility or commitment in a way that is sneaky or cowardly.

A: "I feel sick so I think I'm going to go home early"

*B: "You're not sick! I know you're just trying to **weasel out of doing this work!**"*

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