

Turn-taking practices in multi-party EFL oral proficiency tests

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Abstract

This study focuses on multi-party talk among EFL learners during peer-to-peer interaction in oral proficiency tests. We conduct a micro-analysis of the way test-takers in small groups use questions like 'How about you?' to manage turn-taking when speaking in rounds or through a pivot. We find that these deceptively simple questions have both an indexical referential element and an addressee-determining element that is used in conjunction with bodily conduct to select next-speaker, making them in fact a sophisticated interactional achievement. The study concludes by discussing how turn-taking practices in multi-party speaking tests can help make visible novice language users' orientations to learning.

KEYWORDS: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS; TURN-TAKING; PEER-TO-PEER ORAL PROFICIENCY TESTS; MULTI-PARTY TALK; EMBODIED ACTION; NOVICE L2 TALK

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1 Introduction

One of the major issues that arises when oral tests are used to assess second language proficiency is that the test-taking situation itself can influence the talk, sometimes making it seem unnatural. The physical setting, the presence of other test-takers, and the obligation to talk about topics dictated by the tester can all work to make test-talk qualitatively different to mundane conversation, a form of communication that has been called institutional talk (Drew and Heritage 1992). During oral proficiency discussion tests, such 'testness' can become noticeable in the details of both *what* test-takers say and *how* they say it, including the way they manage the issue of who will speak next.

Conversation Analysis (CA) offers a tool for observing the details of talk. Knowledge of interactional practices can help oral proficiency test (OPT) examiners identify how test-takers co-accomplish a variety of actions, and in turn lead them to consider their students' ongoing pedagogical needs. According to Schegloff *et al.* (2002: 15):

CA research can illuminate what is going on in particular interactional L2 assessment encounters, not only so as to monitor inter-rater reliability and potential contamination of oral proficiency scores by interaction with the examiner, but also to discover routine and unique communication practices through which participants co-construct the assessment format itself as well as the actions these practices accomplish.

Many high-stake ESL speaking tests (such as the ACTFL OPI) involve an expert speaker interviewing the test-taker in a one-on-one situation, and the interaction in such contexts has been the focus of extensive research in recent years (He and Young 1998; Johnson 2000; Lazaraton 2002; Brown 2003; He 2004). Some researchers have compared OPI interaction to natural conversation (Egbert 1998), while others have investigated a variety of interactional features in one-on-one oral proficiency tests settings, including, the role of gesture and paralinguistic features of talk in OPIs (Jenkins and Parra 2003), preference organization in placement interviews (Lazaraton 1997), the way interviewers produce multiple versions of sequence-initiating actions (Kasper 2006; Kasper and Ross 2007), and how variations in the way interviewers phrase a question can impact on the interaction (Brown 2003).

While expert-novice interview tests are still widely used, increasingly students are also being tested by having them interact with another student in pairs. Brooks (2009) found that the interaction in such peer-to-peer tests was more linguistically demanding than that between examiners and test-takers, resulting in greater negotiation of meaning and more complex interaction. Due to the large number of students in some EFL classrooms, some teachers also make use of multi-party peer-to-peer speaking tests, in which the test-takers talk among themselves in a small group. The turn-taking practices in

such tests are inevitably different from OPIs, both in that there is no asymmetrical right and a reduced obligation to speak, and in that there are more than two participants in the conversation, meaning that the interactional issues of who is being addressed and who will speak next must be negotiated by the test-takers themselves.

The current study focuses on a series of oral tests conducted among EFL learners at a university in Japan, and aims to analyze how test-takers make use of certain turn-taking practices during multi-party talk in EFL oral proficiency test-taking contexts. In particular, we will examine how the indexical speaker-selection interrogative 'How about you?' can be used to re-address a prior action-initiating turn to another member. We will then consider the way that test-takers can use this phrase to yield the turn, or to involve less active members in the conversation, and how this can sometimes even afford opportunities for language learning.

2 The turn-taking system

Sacks *et al.* (1974), in their groundbreaking work on turn-taking, note that the speech-exchange system in mundane talk consists of a turn-constructual component and a turn-allocational component. One of the 'gross observations' they make regarding the organization of turn-taking is that 'one party talks at a time' (p. 700), and this is critical in understanding when a turn is complete from the participants' perspective. Sacks *et al.* distinguish between a turn and the units that make it up, which they term turn constructional units, or TCU (Sacks *et al.* 1974). A TCU has 'syntactic, intonational, semantic and/or pragmatic status as potentially complete' (Lazaraton 2002: 32; see also Ford and Thompson 1996); in other words, a turn can consist of one or more of a variety of units of talk, including words, phrases, clauses or sentences. Participants in a conversation can project where a turn will reach possible completion, and the point at which transition from the current speaker to another speaker could potentially occur is called a transition relevance place or TRP (Sacks *et al.* 1974).

The way in which the right to speak shifts from one person to the next is integral to the study of turn-taking. There are two ways in which change of speaker is effected at each TRP – 'current speaker selects a next' and 'self-selection for next speakership'. To illustrate these notions, consider the sequence of multi-party talk depicted in Extract 1.

Extract 1: 4A Current Speaker Selects Next

- 01 Maki: [ah- I have-u: [(.) [part-time job now.
 02 [((looks at Aiko, right hand points to self))
 03 [((looks up))

- 04 [((looks at Aiko))]
 05 [((left hand pats air))]
 06 [(0.6)]
 07 [((Maki nods, maintaining gaze with Aiko))]
 08 [((Ryo nods and looks at Aiko))]
 09 [((Goro looking down at his paper))]
 10 Maki: Do you (0.4) [do part-time job (.) °now°?
 11 [((Figure 1))]
 12 [(0.3)]
 13 [((Maki briefly looks at Goro, then back to Aiko))]
 14 Aiko: Yes.



Figure 1: Eye gaze at line 10¹

Maki initiates a new topic in line 1 by providing some information about herself in the form of a telling. To consider how turn construction relates to turn allocation, let us consider how this turn unfolds temporally. One basic issue for the recipients who are monitoring this turn is when to start speaking; at what point is the current speaker potentially finished? At the micro-pause midway through line 1, Maki has produced the phrase 'I have', which may be a complete turn in certain circumstances (e.g. as a response to the question, 'Has anyone seen David?'); however, in this case it is hearably *incomplete*, in that Maki produces the phrase with flat intonation and uses vowel marking (Carroll 2005a) by ending the word 'have' with a stretch [u] sound to hold the turn while she carries out a brief word search sequence (Brouwer 2003). Of course, it is not only grammar that determines the completion of a turn: pragmatics and intonation also have a part to play (Ford and Thompson 1996). Although Maki's turn is syntactically and pragmatically complete at 'part-time

job', it is not intonationally complete until the 'now' at the end of line 1. The gap of silence in line 6 provides evidence that Maki takes this as a place where transition from one speaker to the next could potentially occur. At that point one of the other three co-participants might have self-selected to comment on what Maki said; however, in this case that does not happen and so instead Maki self-selects to continue talking in line 10. She constructs her next TCU as a question, making speaker transition even more relevant in the next turn. This question, in conjunction with eye gaze and other bodily conduct, serves the function of selecting the next speaker (Goodwin 1980; Lerner 2003), and indeed it is Aiko (the person who Maki has been looking at most) who delivers the next turn. In other words, the issue of who will speak next is dealt with on a moment-by-moment basis via the turn-taking organization, and as we shall see through the analysis in this paper, this can also have interactional repercussions for speakers in multi-party oral proficiency tests.

In short, the turn-taking system first outlined by Sacks *et al.* (1974) can be summarized as follows:

1. When a current speaker completes a TCU and therefore reaches a point of possible transition, the following rules apply in the order they are listed:
 - (a) If current speaker selects next speaker in the current turn, next speaker has sole rights and obligations to speak until the next TRP.
 - (b) If (a) has not happened, any other party can choose to self-select, with the first starter gaining the right to the next turn until the next TRP.
 - (c) If neither (a) nor (b) happens, current speaker can continue to speak by going on to produce another TCU.
2. If the current speaker is still talking (Rule 1c), then Rules 1a and 1b reapply at each subsequent TRP until speakership changes.
(Sacks *et al.* 1974: 702–704; Tanaka 1999: 27–28)

Naturally, the turn-taking system is more complicated when there are more than two speakers in the conversation. In order to determine who has been selected to speak next, participants need to pay greater attention to differences in the audience's knowledge base (Goodwin 1986) and, in co-present interactions, features of bodily conduct such as gaze and gesture (Lerner 1996a, 2003). In addition, multiple parties can select a next-speaker or more than one person can compete for turn to respond to a sequence-initiating action (Egbert 1997). Based largely on data collected from mundane conversations, these turn-taking practices nonetheless form the basis of the way turns are allocated and constructed in the multi-party peer-to-peer oral proficiency tests to be examined in this paper.

3 Background to the data

This study is based on a detailed analysis of video-recordings of ten 6-minute conversations carried out among groups of novice English speakers. Before proceeding to our analysis of several extracts from the conversations, we will give a brief description of the test procedure and the physical environment.

The corpus consists of multi-party peer-to-peer oral proficiency tests in which the test-takers were first-year undergraduate students at a university in Japan. There were generally four test-takers in each group, and the total number of test-takers video-recorded was 39. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 and their English ability could best be classed as false-beginner level; they had developed a significant passive knowledge of English grammar through six years of secondary education, but rarely had opportunities to speak in English outside of class. The discussion test was the final assessment item for a second-year oral English class that was part of a general undergraduate course, and the result from this test was combined with other in-class assessment to determine the students' grade for an Oral English class. Students who failed the test generally had to repeat the class, so they were highly motivated to engage in the discussion.

Test-takers were randomly placed into groups of four and assigned an examiner who was not their regular class teacher. Likewise, the other three test-takers were not from their regular class, so it was generally the first time any of them had spoken to each other. The tests were conducted at the examiner's office, a room none of the test-takers had been in before. The participants were seated directly facing each other: two on a sofa to the right, and two in individual armchairs to the left.

The test was devised by the classroom teachers and focused on active participation in the interaction as well as linguistic proficiency. Each group was assigned one of six topics that had been covered in class (such as 'travel', 'housing' or 'university life') and the test-takers were told to discuss the topic freely among themselves. The examiner did not participate in the discussion, but instead sat to the side assessing each speaker by rating them on a five-point scale according to the following three criteria:

- Participation (initiating/responding/receipt)
- Accuracy (grammar/pronunciation/lexis)
- Extension (content/turn length/reasoning)

In addition, the examiner provided brief written comments on each test-taker and gave a holistic impression of their performance. The test-takers were aware of the criteria on which they were being tested.

The video-recordings of the test sessions were transcribed by the authors according to CA conventions (see Schegloff 2007) and supplemented with framegrabs from the video where pertinent to the analysis. All names used in the transcripts are pseudonyms assigned randomly by the authors.

4 Analysis

Our analysis will examine some of the ways a current speaker selects the next speaker in the multi-party OPT data we examined. As seen in extract 1, the novice L2 users in these English proficiency tests used a range of turn-allocation devices, including gaze selection, gesturing and a variety of questions, including 'How about you?'. After considering how interactants use this indexical interrogative to select next-speaker, we will undertake an analysis of a longer stretch of talk to uncover how this speaker-selection practice can sometimes prove problematic for test-takers in multi-party oral proficiency tests.

4.1 How about you?

'How about you?' is one of the earliest formulaic expressions taught in Japanese junior high school English classes. Throughout the data we collected, this phrase was largely used by the test-takers in ways that seemed similar to those used by fully-competent speakers. In the 60 minutes of student group conversation examined we found 36 instances of 'How about you?' and it was present in the discussion of each of the ten groups, indicating that it is well known and frequently used by the novice English users we examined.

Although the principal function of 'How about you?' is to select next speaker, it cannot be used as the first question in a conversation. Sequentially it is found after one or more speakers have already made public their stance on a given topic, such as Maki did in extract 1. In this sense we can think of it as an indexical question, in that it references some sequence-initiating action that already occurred in previous talk, implying that the respondent's next turn will be somehow related to the current topic of conversation.

In multi-party talk, one very real issue for the recipients of a 'How about you?' turn is who does 'you' refer to? Lerner (1996) found that the proterm 'you' can be used in a question in combination with speaker gaze to designate one person within a group of known recipients as the intended addressee. Consequently, in order to make sense of the question 'How about you?' participants must make sense of (1) the indexical element in linking it back to some prior question and (2) the addressee-based element in determining who 'you' refers to in any given case.

Let us examine a typical instance from our corpus, taken from a group who were asked to discuss the topic 'travel'.

Extract 2: 6a (2:27) Selecting next speaker, indexing a prior action-initiating turn

01 Mao: → [what country wouldju: like to visit in za future?]
 02 [(Mao is facing Sho)]
 03 Sho: ah:: (. I will going to mm.
 04 (0.7)
 05 Sho: I will go::, (0.7) *doitsu?*
 Germany

((44.1 sec omitted, in which the group discusses Germany))

39 Toru: Okay
40 Jun: → Okay [m >How [about you?<
41 [((turns to Toru))
42 [((palm-selects Toru))
43 Toru: ah: l:: want to visito: Italy,
44 (.)
45 Mao: [m: ?=
46 Jun: [m: :=
47 Toru: =Becau:se I like soccer.
48 Mao: [m: [:
49 Jun: [m: [:
50 Toru: [So:: l:: I want to watch (.) uh- [Serie Ah.
51 [((nods))
52 Mao: [ah ::
53 Jun: [ah ::
54 Toru: → [mm ah:: how about you?
55 [((sideways glance to Mao and palm-selects her))
56 Mao: .hh heha [HA] ((glances at Toru))
57 Sho: [pfeh] ((looks away to down-left))
58 Mao: .hh I want to go to Europe.

In line 1, Mao initiates an action sequence by formulating a first pair part (a question), which requires the second part of the pair to be completed by someone other than her (Schegloff 2007). Since Mao has gaze-selected Sho, it is he who gives the first response to her question and a short discussion ensues. When Sho's response is complete, Jun selects Toru (line 40) using the indexical speaker-selection phrase. Note that Toru's response in line 43 is type-fitted to Mao's original question from line 1. Although Mao originally initiated the sequence and can therefore be considered the primary speaker to a certain extent, at this point in the conversation Jun has established himself as an active, proficient speaker who frequently adopts the role of the pivot in redirecting the question at other members, as he does in selecting Toru to respond to Mao's question.

Toru delivers his response in three incremental parts (lines 43, 47 and 50), which are interspersed with uptake tokens from the other participants. The recipients' responses change from passive reciprocity ('mm' in lines 45–46 and 48–49) to a much more noticeable change-of-state token ('ah' in lines 52–53) at the point where Toru provides the third increment to his turn (line 50). This third increment is more specific than the earlier two (giving the name of the premier Italian football league) and therefore works as an account for his initial response (Italy, line 43), making Toru's response hearably complete. By displaying their receipt of this as new knowledge the other test-takers are also indicating that they recognize Toru's turn has potentially finished, making speaker transition relevant as a possible next action. Toru then gives up the turn-at-talk by choosing Mao as the next speaker through the use of 'How about you?' (line 54) in combination with gaze and embodied action (line 55).

The participants demonstrate through their responses that they understand this phrase refers to the same question as Mao asked in line 1. The indexical device is used as an abbreviated form of a prior-produced question and comes after the current speaker's response has come to completion. Frequently this leads to rounds of talk (Carroll 2005b; Hauser 2009), in which the speaker responds to a given question and then passes the question on to another person by asking 'How about you?'.

However, the indexical speaker-selection phrase is not always used successfully. Occasionally its mistimed usage can cause problems in establishing incipient speakership. The following instance is a continuation of the talk that appeared in Extract 1. In this case, 'How about you?' prevents a self-selecting next-speaker from potentially expanding the current topic, by allocating the turn to a third speaker instead.

Extract 3: 4a simplified (0:15) Yielding the turn

- 01 Maki: uh- I have.u: part-time job now (0.6) do you
 02 (0.4) do part-time job (.) °now°?
 03 (0.3)
 04 Aiko: Yes
 05 (0.4)
 06 Aiko: → I have (.) a part-time job. I'm tutor.
 07 [How about you?
 08 [[[palm-selects Goro]]
 09 Maki: [Oh me too=
 10 Aiko: → =[ah.][How about you?
 11 [(((brief nod to Maki)))]([palm-selects Goro))
 12 Goro: NO

In lines 1 and 2, Maki initiates the first question in the discussion test by doing a brief telling and then selects Aiko by addressing her with a question on the same topic. As outlined earlier in extract 1, Maki's gaze is directed at Aiko, and Aiko appears to recognize that she has been chosen as next-speaker, providing an affirmative response token, 'yes' (line 4), and then responding according to the form of Maki's question by producing a specification on the same topic ('I'm a tutor'). After this, she immediately yields her turn by pointing a raised palm at Goro while using the indexical speaker-selection phrase (lines 7 and 8).

At the same time, however, Maki self-selects in overlap (line 9) to respond to the first part of Aiko's turn. Aiko gives a minimal acknowledgement (a brief nod plus the uptake token 'ah,' which is roughly equivalent to the English 'uhuh'), but instead of developing the thread of talk further on that topic she repeats the phrase 'How about you?' to Goro (lines 10 and 11). Aiko could have said more about her part-time job,³ but instead she provides Maki with a minimal receipt to acknowledge her overlapped utterance, but then gives up her turn, selecting Goro instead as the next speaker.

By not expanding on the current topic and giving up her right to turn, Aiko could be attempting to divert the group's attention toward another participant. There is a general orientation to short turns throughout this data; students frequently answer the question without extending the topic, and in this case Aiko's attempt to deflect the talk is particularly noticeable because her speaker selection (line 7) appears to be in conflict with Maki's attempt to further the topic (line 9). Instead of delaying her next-speaker selection, Aiko briefly responds to Maki with a Japanese acknowledgment token ('ah'), then repeats her prior turn, which is designed to allocate the turn to Ryo. In other words, Aiko is making public her reluctance to engage in extended talk at this moment in the conversation. This sequence comes at the very start of the test, just after the examiner has given the group the topic. Delaying one's turn would allow the speaker more time to prepare an answer.

4.2 Selecting a non-active participant

Holding the turn or giving it up to someone else can have important consequences to interactants in these conversations, as ultimately it provides them with an opportunity to boost their English grade. Logically it is in the test-takers' best interests to demonstrate their oral proficiency by trying to talk as much as possible, which could conceivably lead to competition for turn. However, in reality what we continually observed in the data was just the opposite. Massively these students avoided overlap, and there were routinely noticeable gaps of silence between speakers. They generally took short turns and avoided dominating the conversation. Even where one participant had greater English proficiency than the others, such a student generally tended

to use his or her turn to involve others in the discussion rather than to speak at length herself.

In the analysis so far we have seen that turn-taking in these tests is regularly carried out via formulaic speaker-selection questions such as 'How about you?', a phrase that is often recycled in successive turns through 'rounds' (Carroll 2005b) or by a single speaker acting as a pivot (Hauser, 2009 and this issue). In this section we will analyze two extended sequences in which such turn-taking practices reveal the institutional nature of the talk. Here we see how the projectable flow of the conversation is disrupted in order to give a reticent speaker a chance to talk. The sequence shown in Extract 4 begins 1 minute 17 seconds into the six-minute oral test. Prior to this sequence, Yuto and Hana have dominated the talk and Nami has just completed an extended sequence of turns on a different topic. Rin's role up until this point has been largely that of a passive listener. She has not initiated a turn and has produced only a few minimal receipt tokens.

Extract 4:10a (1:17) Involving a passive listener

- 01 Yuto: [Why didju apply]=
 02 [((Yuto looks at Hana))]
 03 =[to, ((name of university)).]
 04 =[((Looks at Nami))]
 05 [(1.3)]
 06 [((Yuto looks at Nami.))]
 07 Nami: ah:: (0.5) I love (0.2) this,
 08 (0.5) la:rge-i,=
 09 Yuto: =Ah:[:
 10 Nami: [campus.=
 11 Yuto: Oh (.) ah very la(h)rge(h).
 12 Nami: .hh heh [aha ((nodding))]
 13 Rin: [°u[n.°]= ((nodding))
 14 Yuto: [un.] ((nodding))
 15 Nami: =[°Yes:::°
 16 [((Averts gaze from Yuto))]
 17 [(1.0)]
 18 Rin: [((nodding))]
 19 [((Yuto, Nami and Hana turn to Rin))]
 20 Hana: → [>How abo[ut you<
 21 [((palm-selects Rin))]
 22 Yuto: [>'bout you<
 23 [((points to Rin))]
 24 Rin: [((head to side: thinking pose))]
 25 [(1.7)]
 26 Rin: [u: :n.] ((averts gaze))

- 27 Hana: [OH. you](.) =
 28 Rin: [.heh heh] ((returns gaze to Hana))
 29 Hana: =[you're fr]o:m. Hok- (0.3) Hokkaido?=
 30 Rin: =\$Ye:s.\$
 31 Yuto: Oh::
 32 Rin: ah: (0.2) ne:ar (0.2) my hometown.
 33 Nami: [ah: =
 34 Yuto: [ah: =
 35 Hana: =ah. ah. ogh[:..
 36 Yuto: [°Kitami.°
 37 (0.8)
 38 Yuto: It's easy. ((nods))
 39 (1.0)

In line 1 Yuto initiates a sequence related to the topic that was provided by the tester. At the start of his turn, his gaze is directed toward Hana on his right, but midway through the turn he moves it to Nami, who is on his left. In delivering this kind of broad, sweeping gaze, Yuto seems to be indicating that any of the participants is welcome to respond to the question, and in fact in some of the other instances we examined this kind of initial question is accompanied with a raised-palm gesture that makes it even clearer that it is appropriate for any of the recipients to respond. However, in this case Yuto barely looks at Rin as he moves his eyes from Hana to Nami, and since it is Nami that he is looking at as he delivers the last half of his turn as well as during the gap of silence in line 5, Nami responds with an assessment and the other participants acknowledge her turn with a variety of receipt markers and embodied displays of agreement. In line 18, Rin is still nodding a little after the others have stopped, and when Nami does not develop her response any further the others turn toward Rin, the only one of the three recipients who seems to be performing some action, albeit an embodied one. It is at this point that Hana selects Rin with 'How about you?' (line 20), an action that is co-completed by Yuto in overlap (line 22). In this group, Hana is the most proficient in English and often acts as the pivot in redirecting the turn, but here Yuto seems to be making a bid to retain some ownership of the original question in delivering the next-turn selection in overlap with Hana.

Rin does not respond immediately. At first there is a significant gap, during which Rin conducts an embodied display of uncertainty (line 24), displaying that she realizes she has been selected but is unable to respond at that point. She then averts her gaze and produces a stretched hesitation marker (line 26) which further indicates she is not able to come up with a timely response, though such turn reservation devices potentially orient to the fact that she could be preparing one. Since Rin's response is delayed, Hana provides a can-

didate response, offering Rin's place of origin as an account for why she chose this school (lines 27–29). Rin then ratifies this (line 30) and elaborates on it a little (lines 32 and 36).

As her first major contribution to the test discussion, this brief response gives a general impression of disfluency, largely because Rin does not provide a timely response. However, by paying attention to the details of the talk, we can appreciate that this hesitation is not entirely hers. Rin was demonstrably orienting to the discussion as a recipient at the moment when she was selected by Hana (line 20), and she could reasonably have expected Yuto to have selected the next speaker, since he had originated the topic. For her part, Hana was no doubt attempting to keep the conversation going by getting a passive speaker more involved, but in this case it seems to have had the opposite effect.

Rin remains oriented to the role of listener throughout the remainder of the test, and by halfway through the test, she is yet to contribute significantly further to the discussion. It is at this point that a very similar event again occurs.

Extract 5: 10a (2:59) Snowboard

- 01 Nami: ((to Hana)) Can you:. (0.3) play. (0.4) snowboard?
 02 (0.5)
 03 Yuto: ((laughing)) .he[hah
 04 Hana: ((nodding)) [Ye(h)s .hh heh heh HA.
 05 Yuto: O(h)h: (really?) Snow[board.
 06 Hana: [but I'm not. very. good.
 07 (0.3)
 08 player.
 09 (0.2)
 10 Nami: °.hn heh ha°
 11 Yuto: (o:h) Ski?=Skiing?
 12 (0.7)
 13 Hana: Yes.
 14 Yuto: oh oh [::
 15 Hana: [I also like skiing.
 16 (1.3)
 17 Yuto: [I want]=
 18 Hana: [How-]=
 19 Hana: → =[how about you?]=
 20 Nami: =[[((faces Yuto))]=
 21 Yuto: =[[((faces Hana))]=
 22 Hana: =[[((palm-selects Rin))
 23 Nami: =[[((faces Rin))
 24 Yuto: =[[((faces Rin))
 25 (1.2)
 26 Rin: Sports?

- 27 (0.2)
 28 Hana: [Yeah.
 29 [((nods))
 30 (0.8)
 31 Hana: [>Do you like< ski[ing?
 32 [((palm-selects Rin))
 33 Rin: [n::n
 34 (2.2)
 35 Yuto: .h[hheh ((a breathy laugh))
 36 Rin: [n::n=
 37 Nami: =.hheh=
 38 Rin: =No.
 39 Hana: [eh heh ha HA] ((leans back in chair))
 40 Yuto [No. ()] ((facing Rin))
 41 (2.8)
 42 Hana: <Do yo[:u like,> (0.3) skiing?
 43 [((palm-selects Nami))
 44 (1.4)
 45 Nami: Yes I want to pla::y, (0.3) this win-ta: skiing.
 46 (0.3)
 47 Nami: But, (0.5) I'm very busy.
 48 (0.3)
 49 Yuto: ah:,ohn.=
 50 Nami: =I (0.2) don't, (0.6) eh- I didn't
 51 <go to> ski (ah). (0.7) yet.
 52 (0.3)
 53 Yuto: Y'=oh:n.
 54 (0.6) ((Nami nods))
 55 Hana: → [How about you.
 56 [((points to Yuto))
 57 (0.8)
 58 Yuto: [I:::, (0.4)] I can do skiing.
 59 [((scratches nose))]
 60 (0.2)
 61 Yuto: [°Skiing°.
 62 [((Nods head towards Hana))
 63 (1.2)
 64 Yuto: Bu:t I: want to try (.) snowboard.

In line 1, Nami initiates the sequence by asking a question which receives uptake from both Yuto and Hana. Yuto produces a brief laugh token and Hana gives an affirmative response which she then qualifies in line 6 by adding an additional TCU to downgrade her previous turn. Yuto then extends the talk by putting forward a related topic 'Ski, skiing?' (line 11). He produces this with

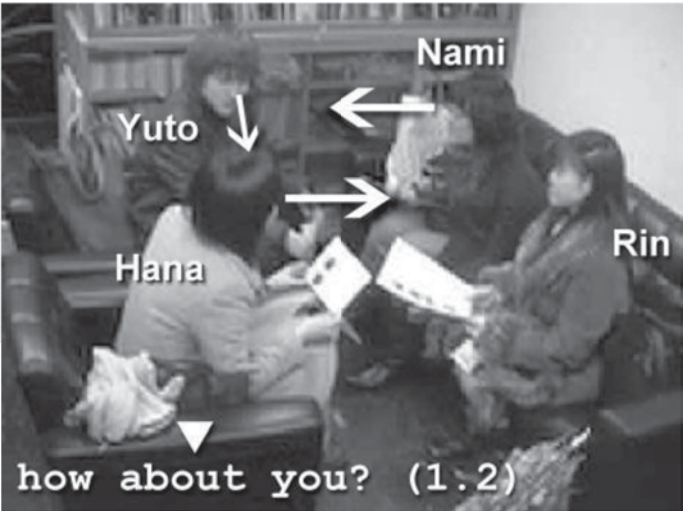


Figure 3: Gaze direction in line 19 (3 min 14.7 sec into the test)



Figure 4: Gaze direction at the start of the silence in line 25 (3 min 15 sec into the test)

After Hana responds to Yuto’s question in lines 13 and 15, there is a reasonably long gap (line 16) before Yuto and Hana both self-select in unison in lines 17 and 18 (Figure 2). Although both speakers stop their turn-in-progress in deference to one-speaker-at-a-time in conversation (Sacks *et al.* 1974), Yuto’s aborted turn (line 17) seems to be projecting further on-topic talk and since it begins with the first-person proterm initial ‘I want’, he is hearably on the way

to giving his own opinion about one of the winter sports. However, in the next turn, Hana wins the floor, self-selecting to repeat her turn in the clear (line 19). The action that she performs here however is to select yet another speaker, Rin. She uses the indexical speaker-selection phrase 'How about you?' (Figure 3), then, as shown in Figure 4, points an open palm toward Rin, the participant who is least engaged in the conversation at this point. In other words, Hana has redirected the conversation to someone who was not actively indicating a desire to talk at a point where someone who was actively engaging in the discussion could have self-selected to expand on the topic at hand.

This complicated moment of interaction is also problematic for the other recipients. Nami faces toward Yuto in response to his attempt at self-selection in line 17; however, Yuto aborts his turn-in-progress and instead looks toward Hana (Figure 4), displaying recognition that the talk is in overlap. After her brief cut-off, Hana restarts her turn in line 19 to finish selecting Rin as next-speaker and consequently both Yuto and Nami turn towards Rin (Figure 5).

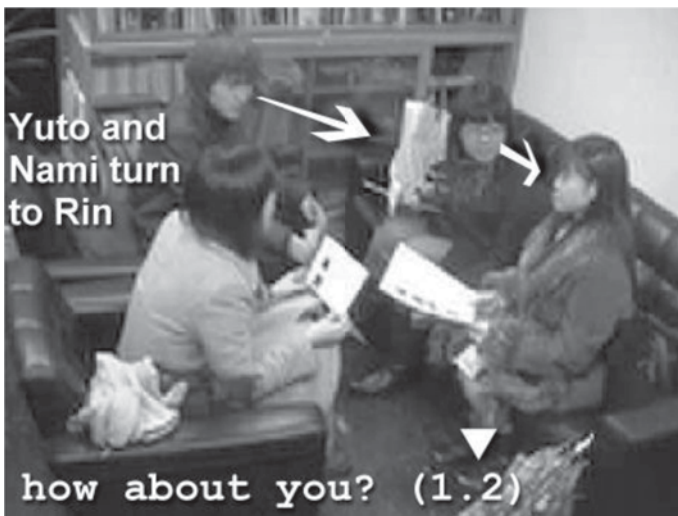


Figure 5: Gaze direction toward the end of the silence in line 25 (3 min 15.6 sec into the talk)

Although Rin can normatively be expected to speak next, she does not do so straight away, instead designing her response in a way that formulates it as dispreferred (Pomerantz 1984). There is a long gap of 1.6 seconds before she talks (line 25),⁴ and her turn in line 26 is not an answer to the question but a next-turn repair-initiator (Schegloff *et al.* 1977) that seeks confirmation on the topic. In line 31 Hana modifies the question to specify skiing as the current topic, and after several delay markers (lines 32 and 36) and another significant

gap (line 34), Rin completes the sequence with a falling, prosodically terminal 'no'. This negative response receives laughter from Hana, and when Rin does not elaborate further, Hana redirects the question to another participant.

At least part of Rin's hesitation between lines 25 and 36 can be attributed to the fact that at the point when Hana calls on her (line 19) Rin was orienting to the talk primarily as a recipient, rather than as candidate next-speaker. Just prior to this, Hana has been engaging with Yuto on her left and (perhaps due to the episode of overlapped self-selection in lines 17 and 18) she is still directing her gaze toward him at the beginning of line 20.

By using this kind of turn allocation Hana seems to be orienting to a preference within the oral test setting that each participant should have a relatively equal opportunity to speak. Despite the fact that she is obviously reticent to contribute, the others go out of their way to include Rin in the talk, by specifically selecting her and by refraining from self-selecting during the silence that comes immediately subsequent to a turn competitive point in the conversation (line 25). We can see this in lines 21 and 24, when Yuto stops talking and looks instead toward Rin. By refraining from continued competition for turn through subsequent attempts at self-selection, Yuto also allows Rin to speak even though she has not been an active participant in the conversation. In fact, it may even be *because* she has not been speaking that Rin is selected by Hana in the first place.

While Yuto loses the opportunity to talk about himself in line 17, Hana takes on the role of the pivot and later gives Yuto a chance to finish his earlier turn (lines 55–56), but only after she has sought an on-topic response from Rin and Nami. As the conversational pivot (Hauser, this issue), Hana determines the direction of the talk, and by choosing Rin over Yuto her speaker-selection practices show that she favors a speaker who has yet to demonstrate her English proficiency and/or conversation ability over one who has played a considerable part in the talk.

The indexical speaker-selection phrase 'How about you?' can therefore be employed in this pursuit to select a speaker who was not displaying a willingness to speak. By selecting Rin, again Hana appears to have been orienting to the fact that Rin had yet to contribute significantly to the discussion, but unfortunately in this case, this resulted in another disfluent moment in which the other-selected member, Rin, has potentially come across to the tester as even less capable in English. Turn-taking practices therefore sometimes cause problems for the speaker that may or may not be misinterpreted by the examiner as related to a lack of language proficiency. A tester would have to make the decision whether or not to penalize Rin for the disfluency she experienced when she was selected by Hana. Given that such decisions are often made quickly based on overall impressions, it is possible that a tester who was not sensitive

to the turn-taking organization may simply see the disfluency, and not the fact that it came about due to an episode of unexpected speaker-selection.

In addition, there are several ways in which the participants' turn-taking practices reveal the institutional nature of the talk as a testing situation, rather than as simply mundane conversation. First, in addition to the regular gaps of silence between turns, the 'testness' of the talk can be seen in the rather even distribution of turns, or at least in the participants' attempts to distribute turns evenly. In mundane talk, it may be perfectly acceptable for one person to listen attentively without speaking, but in the test-talk that we have examined, not talking for 6 minutes would be detrimental to that person's grade, so participants orient to this by allocating a turn to quieter students. Second, the ubiquity of 'How about you?' as a turn allocation device may also point to the second language nature of this talk. Although it was certainly not the only speaker selection resource available to them, these novice English speakers used 'How about you?' with an overwhelming regularity, not only as a turn-allocation technique, but also as a turn-relinquishing device. The 'how about you?' turns are used to enact rounds of speakership, which provides participants with a projectable slot in which to respond and ensures that all participants have an opportunity to speak.

5 Turn-taking and orientations to learning

While this paper has chiefly addressed the issue of turn-taking in oral test situations, it is also worth considering how the test-takers orient to opportunities to use (and potentially learn) language through the interaction. As we have seen, by using next-speaker selection devices such as 'How about you?' comparatively competent test-takers can act as pivots and therefore progress the talk by deflecting turns to other speakers, especially those who appear reluctant to self-select. Some language learners are therefore able to deftly manage and extend the talk in multi-party situations, giving others more chances to speak. Obtaining a turn-at-talk is one of the basic prerequisites to participating in an interactional event. If test-takers are to display what they know, then the skilful use of turn-allocation techniques by more confident co-test-takers can help provide them with opportunities to speak.

By ensuring turns are allocated widely, pivots can also help establish mutual intersubjectivity. Recycling an initial question by readdressing it to a second or third participant (through round or pivot turn-allocation techniques) generally gives the subsequently selected speakers slightly longer to prepare their answer and this usually results in smoother responses. There is some evidence to suggest that such recipients are not just passively listening, but are also actively monitoring the others' talk in preparation for their own contribution. If we

return briefly to Excerpt 5, we can see where one of the speakers is orienting to learning that may have been facilitated due to his postponed selection.

Recall that in line 11, Yuto produced 'ski? skiing?' to broaden the topic by initiating a related but alternative version of Nami's original question to Hana about snowboarding (line 1). The form of Yuto's question is structurally simple and in fact it is hearable as a question only due to its intonation and sequential context. While it would be entirely possible for an expert speaker to produce a similarly elided one-word question, the way that Yuto enacts self-initiated repair by immediately replacing 'ski?' with 'skiing?' indicates that he may be treating the former as a potential trouble source. The word 'skiing' is frequently difficult for novice Japanese students of English because its Japanese equivalent is *s'kii*, which sounds closer to 'ski' than 'skiing'. By providing both forms Yuto demonstrates that he knows they exist; however the question of whether he knows the appropriate usage remains at issue, both for his co-interactants and for the examiner who is testing him.

The point worth noting here is that the ongoing conversation may afford Yuto with an opportunity to reflect on this usage. As outlined above, after this Hana re-directs the talk toward Rin, and Yuto is not selected until the end of the round (line 55). In the interim, the word 'skiing' is used by the other participants four times (in lines 15, 31, 42 and 45). When Yuto finally receives his chance to respond in line 58, he uses the word 'skiing' in a more grammatically and interactionally complex turn, 'I can do skiing'. Of course, in this case 'I can ski' would have been equally valid, but it seems that Yuto is at least orienting to the form of his turn (see Kasper 2004) as he repeats 'skiing' in line 61 while nodding toward Hana, who has by now established herself as the most proficient English user in the group.⁵ The extended delay while Hana directed the talk toward the reluctant speaker (Rin) became an affordance for Yuto, allowing him more time to prepare and giving him several peer-produced examples of a word form he was clearly having trouble using. In other words, he was orienting to learning even within the context of the oral proficiency test.

6 Concluding remarks

Through the micro-analysis of the interactional practices for selecting next-speaker in proficiency test conversations among EFL learners, our analysis has revealed that the multi-party nature of the test has repercussions for the way test-takers establish speakership. Given the practicalities of managing large speaking classes, such as those in Japanese universities where conversation classes of 40 or more students are not uncommon, teachers often choose to test their students in small groups rather than pairs. Despite their widespread use in EFL contexts small group oral proficiency tests and the interaction that goes on in them have received little coverage in the literature.

Naturally, paired tests will provide students with greater opportunities to speak and turn-taking will be easier to negotiate. Hughes (1989: 121), for example, advises against conducting peer-to-peer oral proficiency tests with more than two students, since reticent speakers will be unable to satisfactorily display their abilities. To a certain extent, that was shown to be the case in the data we examined; however, at the same time we have found that once more proficient speakers had established their ability within the group, they often assumed the role of pivot and actively worked to allocate speakership to the more reluctant speakers in the group. Undoubtedly reluctant speakers like Rin would have been forced to speak more in a paired test, but the sorts of minimal responses they produce may also arguably place an interactional burden on their test partner. In a small group, however, the opportunity to speak with a number of different people can allow test-takers to produce a greater variety of talk. In addition, negotiating speakership within a group is in itself a very real interactional activity that is part and parcel of the business of taking part in natural conversations, and therefore constitutes a valid part of speaking a language.

Notes

1. The inverted triangle indicates the point in the talk at which the framegrab was taken.
2. This seems to indicate that, for Goro at least, there was an expectation that each participant would respond briefly around the circle.
3. Notice in the following L1 data segment, taken from 'news-of-the-day' stories between a husband and wife, that the 'How about you?' in line 53 leads to extended talk by the recipient.

Gardner A&BD4a.

- 45 Bob: an: 'j'st all a the things;= >I wanneda< get-
 46 do:ne;= I didn' get- do:ne;
 47 (1.1)
 48 Ann: Yea:h; -ehhh
 49 (0.4)
 50 Bob: °en:d ehrhh° (0.2) so oh:nhh.= s' that's been
 51 the da:yhh.
 52 Ann: Mm: hm:.=
 53 Bob: → ='n'ow 'bout you:.
 54 (0.9)
 55 Ann: Good-. (0.2) I w's quite- busy this afternoon;=
 56 I went ou:- (.) te:m;hh (0.5) ta do a few
 57 things;= one: ev which wes;= to: try: en:d
 58 e:m; (1.5) or; wa:s. ta get- the t~i:le grou:t~
 59 en tha;t?

- 60 Bob: Q̣:wh;= right;= 'n' howdja go;ɿ
 61 (0.2)
 62 Ann: We;ll-, (.) I couldn' get- thee igzɑ:ct h (.)
 63 colour?
 64 (0.2)

4. Despite the fact that the other three participants have gaze-selected Rin as next speaker, at least part of this gap could also be due to the competition for turn in lines 15 and 16. Rin might simply be waiting to see if Hana is going to try to speak further.
5. Lazaraton and Davis (2008) note that identity formulations, such as 'proficient' and 'competent' are constructed, mediated, and displayed in and through the talk, and are therefore continually being (re)accomplished on a turn-by-turn basis in peer-to-peer test talk.

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