

# Developing practices for opening a classroom discussion

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## Introduction

This study is part of a larger ongoing series of projects that aims to both raise awareness of, and develop, L2 interactional competence (IC) in the context of classroom group discussions. While discussion is a common activity in university classrooms, Japanese learners of English may sometimes lack appropriate discussions skills. For example, Hauser (2009) reports on the “monologic” nature of discussions in English classes, where rather than developing a discussion together, Japanese students give their opinions in turn and unchallenged. This can lead to problems for Japanese students who find themselves unfamiliar with classroom discussion practices when studying overseas. For instance, in a study conducted on Japanese students studying in Australia, Yanagi and Baker (2016) reported that 79% of the students had difficulty speaking in classroom discussions. Specifically, students faced issues with turn-taking and breaking into a conversation to express opinions. Among other factors, this may possibly be a result of the students’ lack of knowledge and experience of the appropriate discourse practices for turn-taking in English classroom discussions.

A previous project by the authors of the current study has introduced a rubric for Japanese university students to use when analysing recordings of their group discussions (Stone & Kershaw, 2019). The rubric encourages students to notice and develop their own L2 IC in small-group discussions. As Pekarek-Doehler and Pochon-Berger have shown, there is “empirical evidence testifying to the fact that

interactional competence is not simply transferred from the L1 to the L2, but is recalibrated, adapted in the course of L2 development” (2015, p. 235). This means that participants need to learn how to interact in the L2, rather than simply relying on the interaction practices that they use in the L1.

### **Interactional Competence and Conversation Analysis**

IC involves the recognizable methods that people use to help an interaction progress smoothly. These methods for managing social interactions include practices for such things as repairing problems, taking turns, agreeing and disagreeing, and opening and closing interactions. The current paper focuses on the ‘openings’ of interactions by using Conversation Analysis (CA) as a framework to analyze longitudinal data of two university students interacting in a Japanese university classroom. CA studies have made significant contributions to the understanding of IC, and tend to look for changes in practices over time, as “longitudinal analysis of the micro-level organization of social interaction can enhance our understanding of change in human conduct” (Wagner et al., 2018, p. 28).

### **Openings**

One area of interest for CA researchers has been the ways in which participants in interactions achieve the openings of their talk. Participation in social interactions involves orienting to those who we are speaking with, and attempting to coordinate our actions with theirs so that we are able to successfully develop an interaction together. Although we are not necessarily aware of this most of the time, as we most often do it without problem and without thinking too much about it, the things we achieve in our interactions with others - including openings - involve an array of complex and socially-coordinated actions. Pekarek-Doehler and Pochon-Berger explain that openings need “to be configured so as to be recognizable and acceptable for co-participants, and thereby coordinated with them” (2015, p. 242).

Analysing the openings of interactions can show how participants organise

and frame upcoming action (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). In the current study, analysing dyadic task interaction will give an insight into how the language used by the students as they set about orienting to the task can act to frame and organize both the prefatory talk and the language-learning task itself. Furthermore, evidence of changes in their practices for opening interactions over time may indicate an improvement in IC.

There are a number of features that can be observed in students as they transition from teacher-student interaction to a student-student participation structure at the beginning of a task. These include greetings, postural alignment, gaze, gestures, and talk. Talk can include greetings, direct starts, turn allocation, task clarification, and inquiry into readiness. Which of these features students tend to use can depend on their level. For example, Hellerman (2008) shows that there are verbal and nonverbal moves for openings which are common to beginner students, and which differ from students at low-intermediate level (p. 46).

Greetings are not common in openings for dyadic task interactions in a classroom setting where students are already seated together. Postural alignment, on the other hand, is an important move and frequently seen in opening sequences regardless of language level. Mutual postural orientation often follows teacher instructions, either simultaneously or initiated by one student and mirrored by the other. Hellerman (2008) suggests that there are three functions of postural alignment: to mark a shift from teacher-fronted instructions to student-student readiness to engage in the upcoming task; to establish a “spatial field” in which gaze and gestures can be shared; to allow students to “orient to and manipulate objects such as printed material, pencils or other props from the classroom” (p.50). Gaze is of particular interest in the current study and this is a feature Goodwin has described as a crucial communicative signal for maintaining face-to-face interactions (Goodwin, 1986).

After teacher instruction and postural alignment, there are two common ways students begin tasks. Lower-level students are more likely to begin with what

Hellerman labels a “direct launch”, where one of the students initiates the task by using language directly provided in the task by the teacher. Higher-level students, meanwhile, are more likely to start with prefatory talk such as negotiating turn allocation and task clarification. Hellerman shows that lower-level students also engage in turn allocation and task clarification, but the sophistication of these features increases with proficiency as higher-level learners have “more linguistic and turn-taking resources” (p.57). In Hellerman’s studies, higher-level learners displayed more verbal and non-verbal approaches to negotiating who would take the first turn (p.53).

In terms of task clarification, Heyman (1986, p. 40) has argued that clarifying task demands at the beginning of the talk is “essential” for participants’ orientation to the topic. Similarly, Hellermann (2007, p. 91) notes that pretask talk is challenging for learners, but important for establishing mutual understanding of the context and task. Hellermann (2008, p. 82) also notes that more proficient learners engage in work to clarify and confirm aspects of the upcoming task. Gan et al. (2008) have also found that a group of participants in an oral proficiency interview, whose interaction assessors saw as exemplifying what that particular assessment was trying to achieve, defined the nature of the task (using phrases like “let’s discuss...” and “maybe first we talk about...”) at the beginning of the talk. Gan et al. (2008) further found that, once the participants in their study had begun formulating the task demand, they did not immediately move on to begin the discussion, but engaged in further preliminary talk before beginning the task proper.

### **The current study: method and data**

The participants in this study were two Japanese students taking an elective English communication course at a university in Japan. As these students were studying on this course voluntarily, they were relatively highly-motivated. One participant had spent some time living in an English-speaking country when they were younger,

while the other participant had visited an English-speaking country on a short trip, and they both saw English as being important for their future.

The data consist of four classroom discussions between the two participants, which were video-recorded over a period of two months. Prior to the first discussion, the participants were told only that the aim of the project was to investigate the learners' discussion skills and how they may be improved. They were also told that they would watch the video of their discussion the following week and evaluate their own performances, but they were not told how they would do this. The following week, the participants were provided with the rubric (see Appendix). The researcher quickly talked the participants through the items on the rubric, and gave a brief introduction to the concept of IC, explaining that the focus of the project was more on how they organized their discussion, rather than their correct or incorrect use of English. The participants were then left alone to watch the video together and answer the questions on the rubric. Once they had done this, they were asked to talk together to make some aims for their next discussion. The researcher observed these discussions, and participated minimally when asked a question. This process was repeated after each discussion.

## Analysis

### *Opening the first discussion*

The focus of the analysis in this paper is on openings. We are focusing on openings as this is what the participants themselves chose to focus on in their attempts to improve their discussions. We will explain how the participants came to focus on this below. First, however, we present an analysis of the opening of the first discussion recorded for this project. This recording was made on November 7th. The participants were given a topic ("What is the best season?"), which they were asked to discuss for 5 minutes. The opening of this discussion is presented in Excerpt 1.

## Excerpt 1

- 1 T: **right I think it's recording. (.) yes (.) good** ■ **okay**  
R: gazing at T ■ gazes at desk
- H: gazing at T
- 2 T: **\*we're ready.\***  
3 (1.0)  
H: gazes at desk
- 4 H: **okay so (.) what is the best season | (1.0) for you.**  
| gazes at R
- R: gazes at H
- 5 R: **okay. ■ MY opinion ■ is (1.0) I thi:nk (.) a:h the summer**  
■ nods once/gestures to self  
■ gazes at desk

In line 1, the teacher informs the participants that the camera is recording. The participants are sitting opposite each other across two desks that have been pushed together, and they are both gazing at the teacher. After the teacher says “good”, which shows that he is happy that the equipment is working and projects the upcoming start of the discussion, Rina shifts her gazes towards the desk in front of her. In line 2, the teacher quietly announces “we’re ready”. Just prior to line 1, the teacher had told the participants that he will “say nothing” while they have their discussion, and the quieter volume of his voice here suggests that he is relinquishing his speaking role and handing over to the participants.

There follows a short silence, during which Hayato shifts his gaze from the teacher to the desk. Following Hayato’s gaze shift, both participants are now gazing at the desks in front of them, and the bodily shifts that they performed in lines 1 and 3 have resulted in them being physically aligned with one another, ready to start the discussion. In this way, embodied actions play a role in facilitating the start of the discussion.

In line 4, Hayato says “okay” to transition from the teacher-led instructional

talk and onto the discussion. *Okay* is often used at moments of transition, and projects movement to some new activity (Beach, 1993). As Hayato says “okay”, Rina gazes up at him in a state of reciprocity, ready to receive the action projected by “okay”. Hayato also says “so”, which often prefaces a sequence-initiating action, such as a question, and is frequently used to indicate that the upcoming action (e.g. the question) is emerging from incipency (Bolden, 2009). In other words, *so* is often used when moving the interactional agenda forward. Furthermore, *so* is often used when what will follow has been “pending” - i.e. when the following talk has been on the agenda but has not yet been discussed (Bolden, 2009). The use of “okay so” in line 4, as well as the participants’ physical realignment away from the teacher and onto the interactional space between them, frames and contextualizes the upcoming discussion, separating it from what has happened previously.

Hayato then asks Rina the question that is on their agenda - “What is the best season?” At the end of this question, he pauses briefly while gazing up at Rina, and adds “for you”, which was not part of the teacher’s initial question. The gaze towards Rina, and the words “for you”, specify her as the recipient and personalize the topic.

We can see here that the use of “okay” and “so” at a point of transition to a new activity that has been pending (i.e. the discussion of the question given by the teacher) demonstrates the participants’ interactional competence in using appropriate English language resources to organize relevant actions in an interaction. Hayato’s use of both of these markers in Excerpt 1 is consistent with how the literature describes them being used, while Rina orients to their interaction-organizing properties appropriately through her use of gaze to assume reciprocity. As such, the participants transition smoothly from teacher-led talk and into their discussion.

However, as Sacks (1992) claims, speakers often start an interaction with ‘false first’ or ‘transitional first’ topics. That is, participants in an interaction will often mention other topics first, prior to getting down to business. Furthermore, Heyman

(1986) has argued that for participants to orient to a topic, it is essential that they clarify the task demands first. In Excerpt 1, the participants open with a direct launch, without any introductory talk or clarifying the task. As we will see later, this lack of clarification may cause problems in the upcoming task.

### ***Choosing the focus on ‘openings’***

A week after recording their first interaction, the participants analyzed it using the rubric presented in Appendix 1. The participants were given a brief introduction to the concept of IC, and were then left to evaluate their first discussion and set aims for improvement in their second discussion.

The first question in the rubric asks the students to consider who starts topics, and when asked about this by the participants, the teacher explained that in a discussion we might expect participants to start topics equally, so that one participant does not dominate. Although this question is not necessarily supposed to concern the opening of the discussion, the participants noticed in their analysis that Hayato launched into the first topic somewhat unilaterally. They decided that one aim for their next discussion would be to begin in a more collaborative manner.

### ***Opening the second discussion***

The second discussion was recorded three weeks later on November 28th. This time, the topic that the participants were discussing was ‘children’, and they were given a number of specific questions related to this topic. The opening of the discussion is presented on page 10 in Excerpt 2.

As with the first discussion, both participants were gazing at the teacher as he gave instructions just prior to this excerpt starting. At the start of line 1, Rina shifts her gaze from the teacher and onto Hayato, as the teacher says “okay”. As mentioned above, *okay* is often used at moments of transition (Beach, 1993), and Rina is shifting herself bodily to prepare for the upcoming move to dyadic discussion that the teacher’s “okay” projects. In line 2, after the teacher has told the

students that they can start, Hayato shifts his gaze to the desk in front of him, much like he did in Excerpt 1. Both participants are no longer gazing at the teacher, but towards the space between them.

In Excerpt 1, when both participants had aligned themselves bodily, Hayato said “okay so” and then launched the discussion by asking Rina the discussion question. This time, after Hayato clicks his tongue, we can see that both participants speak in overlap. Hayato starts slightly earlier than Rina, but Hayato’s “alright” and Rina’s “okay” occur at almost exactly the same time. Like *okay*, *alright* is often used when initiating a new topic (Filipi and Wales, 2003), and both Rina’s and Hayato’s utterances can be seen as signalling the shift to the upcoming discussion.

As Rina says “okay”, she also moves her hands, which had been held together just under her chin, to the table and touches her notebook. In line 5, she also gazes down at her paper, so that both participants are now gazing at their desks. In Excerpt 1, Rina had gazed at Hayato, maintaining a state of reciprocity as he said “okay so”. This time, by gazing away from him, she is not maintaining a posture that suggests she is ready to receive Hayato’s question. However, she does maintain alignment, as both participants are gazing at their desks, displaying a joint focus on a shared activity.

Excerpt 2

- 1 T: **okay when you're ready you can go.**  
 H: gazing at T  
 R: hands in front of face, shifts gaze to H
- 2 (0.5)  
 H: gazes towards desk
- 3 H: ((clicks tongue)) **al[ri]ght.**
- 4 R: [■okay.  
 ■moves hands to desk
- 5 (0.5)  
 R: gazes at desk
- 6 R: **s[o::.**
- 7 H: [so::.  
 picks up pen, leans forward
- 8 H: **children?**  
 gazes at R  
 R: gazes at H
- 9 R: **children? ou- |our ■topics is |(. )■children.**  
 ■hand gesture ■hand gesture  
 H: gazes at R |gazes at T |gazes at R
- 10 (0.5)
- 11 H: **child. ye:ah yeah. [u::h.**
- 12 R: [yeah yeah ■child. yeah yeah yeah.  
 ■nods
- 12 (1.0)
- 13 R: **h[:m.■((laughs))**  
 gazes up  
 ■leans forward, gazes at R
- 14 H: [so we started from ah (.) do you want to have a (.)
- 15 H: **child or not.**
- 16 R: **okay.(.) yeah.(.) ■m::m.(1.0) yeah I wan- I ■want.**  
 nods ■gazes away ■gazes  
 at H

In lines 6 and 7, both participants again speak in overlap, as they say “so”. From lines 3-7, the participants have effectively repeated Hayato’s “okay so” from the first discussion (Excerpt 1, line 4), but have this time performed it collaboratively.

As they say “so”, Hayato leans forward in his seat and picks up his pen, echoing Rina’s just completed action of touching her notebook. Thus, both participants have (1) aligned themselves physically in readiness to begin the discussion, (2) engaged with the paraphernalia of the lesson (a pen and a notebook), and (3) verbally indicated the shift from teacher-centred talk to the upcoming discussion.

In line 8, Hayato makes a move to initiate the discussion, but rather than asking the discussion question, he simply says “children” with rising intonation. As he does so, both participants gaze at each other. Hayato has raised the topic of the discussion, but this is not framed as a question that requires an answer from Rina. However, the gaze towards Rina and rising intonation do invite Rina’s participation. She thus responds by repeating the word “children”, also with rising intonation, echoing Hayato’s turn. Hayato perhaps takes Rina’s repetition to be displaying some problem with understanding, as he turns to gaze at the teacher. The teacher has set the topic of this discussion, and by looking at the teacher, Hayato is looking to the authority figure in the room who can ultimately confirm what the participants should be talking about.

Rina may well have momentarily had some trouble understanding how to respond to Hayato’s minimal turn, evidenced by her repetition, but she demonstrates understanding by explicitly stating “our topics is children”. In line 11, Hayato confirms the topic by saying “child. yeah”, and in line 12 Rina confirms this by repeating these words and nodding. The participants have, in this way, collaboratively established what the topic of the discussion is. However, none of these actions suggest a way forward to begin the discussion, and a short silence follows in line 12.

In line 13, Rina gazes up with a ‘thinking face’ while saying “hm”, demonstrating that she is considering the topic, but she does not make a move to start the discussion. Instead, in lines 14-15, starting in overlap with Rina’s “hm”, Hayato asks one of the questions that the participants were asked to discuss. As Hayato starts speaking, Rina gazes at him and leans forward, displaying reciprocity

and engagement. This question is an initiating action that makes relevant an answer from Rina, and this starts the discussion.

### ***Excerpt 2: Summary***

Whereas in Excerpt 1, Hayato launched the discussion almost immediately after saying “okay so” while Rina maintained a state of reciprocity, here “okay so” is performed by both participants and accompanied by a number of embodied actions that physically align them. The participants’ use of embodied actions, concurrent talk, repetition, and so on, demonstrate their attempts to begin this discussion collaboratively. The discussion topic is clarified by both participants over a number of turns, before Hayato finally initiates the discussion in lines 14-15. In this way, we can say that the participants have been successful in their attempt to be more collaborative in how they open the discussion.

### ***Opening the third discussion***

The third discussion was recorded on December 12th, and the topic was similar to the topic of the first discussion. In the first discussion, the participants discussed “What is the best season?”, while in the third discussion the topic was “What is the best Japanese food?”

### Excerpt 3

- 1 (0.5)  
H: gazing into distance  
R: hands clasped together in front of face, gazing at H
- 2 R: ((laughs))  
H: gazes at desk, leans forward
- 3 H: **okay.**=  
places arms on desk  
R: puts hands on desk
- 4 R: **=s::o|(.) let's start with (.)■a::h (1.0)■best**  
■gazes up ■gazes at H  
H: |gazes at R
- 5 R: **Japanese food right?**
- 6 H: **yes.**
- 7 R: **yeah (.) okay.**  
nods  
H: gazes into distance
- 8 H: **best a[::m.**
- 9 R: [so ■what do you think?  
■gestures with right hand
- 10 H: **best Japanese food? [I mean in |terms ] of**  
leans back in chair |gazes at R
- 11 R: [best Japanese food.]
- 12 H: **popularity maybe sushi.**

This time, the video does not capture the teacher’s final words before handing over to the students. In line 1, Rina is gazing at Hayato, while Hayato is gazing into the distance, somewhere behind Rina. As in Excerpts 1 and 2, the interaction opens with shifts in posture and gaze (in lines 1-2), and as in Excerpt 2 they are again being collaborative, with Hayato saying “okay” in line 3, and Rina “so” in line 4.

While in Excerpt 2 (lines 8-9), there had been a little trouble in introducing the topic, here Rina introduces the topic quite smoothly, saying “let’s start with a:h best Japanese food right”. This turn is not designed to elicit Hayato’s thoughts on what the best Japanese food is. Rina is instead suggesting that they start their discussion

of “best Japanese food”, and by ending her turn with “right?”, she is inviting Hayato to agree to this and confirm the topic. Positioned at the end of an utterance, *right?* may be used to confirm that a listener understands (Gardner, 2007, p. 320), and Rina’s use of “right?” here is asking Hayato to confirm the correctness of what she has said, and to establish mutual understanding of what the topic is.

Hayato confirms the topic in line 6, and Rina responds to this affirmatively in line 7, saying “yeah okay”. The participants have thus collaboratively established the topic of the discussion. Hayato gazes away now, and in line 8 says “best a:::m”. His gaze away, with what appears to be a ‘thinking face’, suggests that this utterance is not necessarily directed at Rina, and she speaks in overlap with him, saying “so what do you think?”. This is a direct question, said while gazing at Hayato, making an answer relevant. This discussion of the question has thus been initiated, and Hayato starts to answer the question in line 10.

### ***Excerpt 3: Summary***

As in Excerpt 2, the participants have again been collaborative in opening the discussion. This time, the participants performed “okay so” together (with Hayato saying “okay” and Rina saying “so”), while Rina introduced the topic in an utterance with *right?* positioned at the end, thus asking for Hayato to confirm the topic before beginning. Again, the participants display some interactional competence in using discourse markers (*okay*, *so*, and *right?*) to organize the opening of the interaction.

### ***Defining the topic during the discussion***

However, when evaluating their third discussion, the participants were particularly unhappy. In this interaction, after completing the opening shown in Excerpt 3, they had initially attempted to discuss what the “best” Japanese food was, as per the instructions for the activity. However, just over a minute into the discussion, they started to struggle to do this, because they found it difficult to come to a mutual

understanding of what food can be called “Japanese”. At this point, they switched their attention to defining what food is Japanese, and this is what is shown in Excerpt 4. Excerpt 4 is not concerned with the focus of this paper - namely, openings - and is provided to illustrate what it was about the interaction that the participants themselves were not satisfied with. Therefore, in order to save space, we have not included embodied actions here. The excerpt starts from 1:50 in the recording.

#### Excerpt 4

1 H wha- what fish?  
2 R: what fish?  
3 (1.0)  
4 H: tuna?  
5 R: a:h (0.5) ah (.) best. [(.) famous?  
6 H: [hm.  
7 H: yeah yeah.[famous.] (.) common popular  
8 R: [a::m ]  
9 H: yeah.  
10 (1.0)  
11 R: a::h  
12 (0.5)  
13 H: tuna?  
14 R: ((laughs)) tuna? (1.0) yeah tu[na.  
15 H: [salmon.  
16 H: ((clicks tongue))  
17 R: ((laughs))  
18 H: it's not [very Japanese, is it?  
19 R: [maybe::  
20 H: a::m.  
21 R: I thi:nk (2.0) I don't know. (1.0) *maguro*?  
22 H: yeah that's tuna. (.) ye:ah.  
23 R: tuna?  
24 H: ye::ah.  
25 R: *maguro* is tuna?  
26 H: yeah.  
27 R: [I didn't know.

Prior to the start of the excerpt, as the participants began their attempt to come to a mutual understanding of what food is “Japanese”, Rina had suggested that

fish was commonly eaten. In line 1, Hayato asks “what fish”, and Rina responds by repeating this with rising intonation, suggesting that she has some trouble understanding his turn. Rather than explaining why he has asked “what fish”, Hayato offers a candidate answer to his own question, saying “tuna”.

Rina then responds by saying “best (.) famous” with rising intonation on famous, seeking confirmation of why Hayato has asked about and suggested a type of fish. The participants have been asked to discuss what the “best” Japanese food is, and prior to the start of this excerpt, Rina had suggested that fish might be a popular food in Japan. Rina is here seeking confirmation that Hayato is thinking of examples of “best” or “famous” fish. In lines 7-9, Hayato confirms that he is searching for types of fish that are “famous”, “common”, or “popular”. Rina struggles to immediately provide a candidate, and instead there is a silence followed by Rina saying “a:h” (while gazing away with a thinking face), demonstrating that she is thinking of a response, but not immediately able to provide one.

Hayato breaks the silence by again suggesting “tuna”. The first time he suggested “tuna”, Rina had performed repair on this by seeking to confirm why he had said it. This allowed them to achieve mutual understanding they are searching for “famous” Japanese fish, but Rina did not confirm tuna as an example of this. By repeating “tuna”, Hayato is making relevant Rina’s confirmation that this may be considered “famous” Japanese food. Rina does confirm this in line 14, and in line 15 Hayato also offers “salmon” as another candidate, before dismissing this as “not very Japanese” in line 18. Line 18 makes explicit that Hayato is attempting to come to an understanding about which fish are “Japanese”.

#### ***Excerpt 4: Summary***

We have seen in Excerpt 4 how, 90 seconds after opening the discussion, the participants are attempting to define exactly what it is that they are talking about. Although they establish that tuna can be considered Japanese food, we can see

through the silences, and comments like “it’s not very Japanese” and “I don’t know”, that they encounter some trouble in this definitional talk. The remainder of the 5-minute interaction largely involved the participants listing types of food and cooking processes in an attempt to establish whether or not they were “Japanese”. This is why they were unhappy with this discussion, as they did not really discuss and come to a decision about what the “best” Japanese food was.

### *The fourth discussion*

In their evaluation of the third discussion, both participants expressed disappointment with their performances, citing the time taken on these attempts to define what Japanese food is, as well as the fact that they were unable to properly discuss the question that they were asked. In response to their evaluation of the third discussion, the participants decided that, as well as opening the next discussion in a collaborative way, they should spend more time defining the task and the topic prior to attempting to start the discussion.

The fourth discussion took place on 9th January. The teacher offered a range of slightly more academic topics to the participants, and they decided to discuss “Why are less Japanese students choosing to study abroad?” The opening of this discussion is presented in Excerpt 5 on pages 18 and 19.

In lines 1-4, we can see the now customary shifts of gaze and posture, as well as “okay so”, that occur after the teacher hands over to the students and prior to the beginning of the discussion proper. This time, Rina performs “okay so” by herself, although in line 3 Hayato says something that the camera did not pick up clearly in between these words. After “okay so”, there is a two-second silence as Hayato and Rina gaze at each other. Their mutual gaze suggests engagement, but neither participant makes an immediate attempt to launch the discussion.

Instead, in lines 4-5, Rina breaks the silence by suggesting they start discussing the topic. This turn is very similar to how she suggests starting the discussion in lines 4-5 of Excerpt 3, and (after Hayato confirms the topic by saying

“yeah” in line 6) she again finishes the utterance by saying “right?” As in Excerpt 3, she is not making relevant Hayato’s response to the discussion question assigned by the teacher, but is instead seeking to mutually establish what the topic of the discussion is.

In Excerpt 3, after Rina and Hayato had confirmed the topic (lines 4-8), Rina asked a question that initiated the discussion. However, in Excerpt 5, after confirming the topic Rina does not initiate the discussion. Instead, in line 7, after saying “right?”, she pauses slightly and says “so”. As discussed above, *so* often prefaces a question when moving the interactional agenda forward, and what follows *so* is often something

### Excerpt 5

- 1 T \*okay.\*  
 H: gazing at desk  
 R: gazing at T
- 2 R: **oka:y.**  
 smiles, shifts gazes at desk
- 3 H: ((inaudible))  
 places arms on desk
- 4 R: **s::|:o|(.) (2.0) let's start with a:h studying**  
 claps, gazes at H, leans forward  
 H: |gazes at R
- 5 R: **abroad?**
- 6 H: **yeah.**
- 7 R: **right? (.) s::o (1.0) ■where (.) ■a::h (1.0) so**  
 gazes at desk ■gaze at H ■gazes at desk
- 8 R: **ho- how ■|define |(1.0) [how should we should we**  
 ■gazes at H  
 H: |sits up |gazes at notebook
- 9 H: [how define. (.) a::m.
- 10 (1.0)  
 H: smacks lips  
 R: rests chin on hand, gazes at desk
- 11 H: **okay. (.) in this discussion let's talk about**  
 R: gazes at H

- 12 H: **u:h study: (.) [in university.]**  
|gazes at R  
R: gazes at desk
- 13 R: [((inaudible))  
gazes at H
- 14 H: ((inaudible))  
sits back in chair, gazes at R
- 15 R: **a:h ■study university?**  
■nods twice
- 16 H: **yeah.**
- 17 (1.0)  
H: gazes at notebook  
R: nods
- 18 R: **ah |so (.)■university? (.)■define this?**  
■gestures/nods ■nods  
H: |gazes at R
- 19 (1.0)  
H: gazes at notebook
- 20 H: **yeah.**
- 21 R: **oh ok[ay.**  
nods
- 22 H: [u:h (.) a:h we- we could talk |about  
|shifts posture
- 23 H: **a:m o::ther schools but I think [|let's just stick**  
|gazes at R  
R: nods
- 24 R: [■okay.  
■nods
- 25 H: **to ■(1.0) univer[sity.**  
gestures  
R: ■nods
- 26 R: [■sity. okay (0.5) ■yeah (.) we  
■nods, gazes at desk■thumbs up
- 27 R: **should.=**
- 28 H: **=a::nd (.) |sh- do do do do you have any reasons?**  
|gazes at R  
R: gazes at H

that has been “pending” (Bolden, 2009). As evidenced by the pauses, recycled words, and false starts, Rina has some trouble fluently producing what follows “so” in lines 7-8, but we can see that she is attempting to ask how they should define something. Prior to this discussion, the participants had agreed to engage in more task definitional work at the beginning of their interaction, and as this task definitional work is “pending”, Rina is attempting to initiate it now.

As Rina speaks, Hayato shifts his posture and sits upright in his chair, displaying readiness to speak. After the one-second pause in line 8, Hayato begins to speak in overlap with Rina, displaying understanding of what Rina is saying, and Rina abandons her turn. In line 10, there follows a silence, during which both participants gaze towards the desks between them, again demonstrating a shared focus.

Although Rina did not complete a grammatical sentence, Hayato displayed understanding and readiness to speak, and Rina does not now claim a turn. Her previous turn, which was asking a question, makes relevant a response from Hayato, and he starts his response in line 11 with “okay”. Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1980) has noted how, in the openings of telephone conversations, *okay* may mark a movement to an initial topic. Here, “okay” is marking and projecting the upcoming shift to task-defining talk that is a response to Rina’s question. As he says “okay”, Rina shifts her gaze to him and assumes a state of reciprocity.

Hayato then suggests that they limit the discussion to studying at university. After a couple of utterances that were not clearly picked up by the recording equipment, in line 15 Rina receipts Hayato’s turn with “ah”, and then seeks to confirm his suggestion by repeating the words “study university” with rising intonation while nodding. Hayato confirms the topic in line 16 with “yeah”. There follows a one-second silence in which Hayato gazes at his notes, and Rina maintains her gaze towards Hayato. Rina’s gaze towards Hayato displays her continued orientation towards the ongoing talk, and she breaks the silence to seek further confirmation of the topic, saying “university define this” with rising

intonation. Despite having apparently already established mutual understanding regarding the topic, Rina asks this question which makes relevant Hayato's further confirmation of how they will define their topic. Following another silence, during which he gazes at his notes, Hayato says "yeah" to again confirm the topic. Rina demonstrates understanding of this by nodding and saying "okay" in line 21.

Although they have apparently reached mutual understanding about the nature of the topic, Hayato goes on in lines 22-25 to mention that, although they could look at other schools, they should "stick to" discussing universities. This extra turn acknowledges the possibility of extending the topic beyond "university", but reaffirms his position that they should not do this. Rina demonstrates agreement with this in line 26-27, co-completing the word "university" in overlap with Hayato, showing agreement and affiliation. In line 28, Hayato finally begins the discussion by asking Rina if she has any reasons for why less Japanese students are studying abroad.

### ***Excerpt 5: Summary***

We can see that this opening is much longer than any of the previous ones. The participants' concern to define their topic prior to initiating the discussion is apparent, and is achieved collaboratively, as they engage in interactional work to establish exactly what they will talk about. Although there were a number of moments at which mutual understanding about the topic was apparently achieved within the interaction, the participants continued to clarify the topic until line 17.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

### ***Changes in practices for opening a discussion***

In the analysis, we have seen how the participants' practices for opening a dyadic classroom discussion in English changed and became more complex over the four interactions. In the first discussion, the opening is relatively short and simple. The participants performed shifts of gaze, and Rina assumed a state of reciprocity as

Hayato launched the discussion in a fairly unilateral way, saying “okay so” and then initiating the discussion with a question.

In the second discussion, the participants performed the opening in a more collaborative way. This again included shifts of gaze, but this time instead of assuming a state of reciprocity, Rina co-constructed “alright/okay so” with Hayato. After this, rather than immediately launching the discussion, the participants confirmed their topic with minimal turns (“children?”) and a question (“our topics is children?”) to achieve mutual understanding prior to initiating the discussion. The third interaction opened in a similar way to the second, with gaze shifts, “okay so” performed collaboratively, and mutual understanding of the topic being established (“let’s start with best Japanese food, right?”) prior to the discussion being initiated.

The fourth opening was the most complex. Again, there were initial gaze shifts and “okay so” as they moved from teacher-fronted talk to begin their dyadic interaction. They also established the topic in a similar way to previous discussions, with Rina saying “let’s start with studying abroad, right?” Thus, the first initial moves of 1. gaze shift, 2. “okay so”, and 3. a question establishing the topic, were performed in the same way as in the previous two openings. (The first opening featured only the first two of these moves). However, in the fourth opening they continued to further define the topic, by further clarifying what they were (“university”) and were not (“other schools”) going to include in their discussion. It is only after this that they initiate the discussion. We can see how the participants went from the relatively simple, direct, and unilateral opening in the first interaction, to a more complex and collaborative opening in the final interaction.

### ***Participants achieved aims they set for themselves***

The learners displayed agency in the development of their own practices for opening a discussion. After the first discussion, the teacher explained the concept of IC in simple terms to them, and then asked them to evaluate their discussion

with the rubric provided in Appendix 1. The first item on the rubric asks about who starts topics, and although this is not necessarily asking about the opening of the discussion, this caused the participants to look closely at the opening and conclude that it was too direct and could be more collaborative. They then set themselves the aim of being more collaborative in opening future discussions, and they achieved this aim, as can be seen in the analysis of Excerpts 2, 3, and 4.

The participants set a further aim for the openings of their discussions after the third discussion. This aim was not necessarily a direct result of something in the rubric, but rather their dissatisfaction with the success of the third discussion. They had been asked to decide what the “best” Japanese food was, but had spent most of their time trying to decide just what food might be considered Japanese. As a result of this, they aimed to more clearly define their topic at the start of the fourth discussion, and they did just this. In the fourth discussion, as well as being more collaborative in opening the discussion and establishing the topic, they engaged in extra definitional work to specify what they were and were not going to consider in their discussion.

### ***Did the participants develop IC?***

We have seen how, through repeated participation in classroom discussions, and reflection on those discussions using the rubric that we provided them with, the participants’ practices for opening dyadic classroom discussions changed over the course of two months. Definite changes in interactional practices can be seen, but does this mean the participants are displaying greater IC?

It is worth noting that the participants displayed their IC from the very first discussion. The use of “okay so” to transition from teacher-talk to the upcoming discussion, which had been “pending”, as well as the fine-tuned use of embodied actions to facilitate this shift, demonstrate that the participants were already interactionally-competent in opening a dyadic classroom discussion.

However, previous studies (e.g. Gan et al., 2008; Hellermann, 2007; Heyman,

1986) have suggested that we might expect more proficient speakers with well-developed IC to clarify and confirm aspects of the task before beginning it. We saw in the analysis how the participants in this study moved from a relatively direct launch of the task in the first discussion, to perform more talk that confirmed and clarified the topic prior to initiating the discussion in later interactions. In this sense, we may argue that the participants display some development of their interactional competence in this context.

***What is the potential value of the rubric in the classroom?***

Although we cannot say that any of the changes we saw in the interactional practices were necessarily a direct result of a question in the rubric (at least as that question was intended to have an effect), we can argue that the rubric at least focused the participants' attention on interactional features that they could improve. The rubric caused the participants in this study to consider not their 'correct' or 'incorrect' use of English, but rather the interactional practices that they used to engage in a discussion together. Because of this focus on how they took turns and developed topics, the participants set aims to improve the openings of their discussions, and were able to act upon these aims. The rubric, as used in this study by these participants, can therefore be argued to have been useful in focusing the attention of the learners on interaction practices.

In a previous study (Stone and Kershaw, 2020) we asked participants to watch a video of 'expert' speakers performing discussions, and then to incorporate elements from these videos in their own future discussions. This focused the participants' attention on the language that was used in the videos to perform certain actions. While this focus on language led to uptake in future discussions (the participants made use of a phrase for initiating word searches that they had seen in the video), the participants had not carefully considered *how* to use this language, and they did not always fit the language well into the interaction. In the current study, rather than focus on the language that is used to achieve actions, we

have used the rubric to focus the participants' attention more on the interactional practices themselves. Accordingly, the participants set themselves aims for improving the ways in which they worked together to perform their discussion, rather than on attempting to use particular phrases.

### ***Implications of the study for English Language Teaching, and its limitations***

This study follows a number of others (e.g. Berger and Pekarek-Doehler, 2018; Wootton, 1997) in focusing on how a small number of participants (often just one) develop practices for dealing with organizational issues over time. Such systematic analysis can offer detailed insights into how learners develop participation in social practices and orient to normative expectations.

The present study demonstrates how two English language learners are able to work together to use a rubric to notice some organizational issue in their own talk and develop their interactional practices for dealing with it (in this case, collaborative openings). This suggests that students are able to use such a rubric to evaluate their own discussions and develop their classroom discussion practices without direct teacher intervention. The results of this study are thus promising, in that they suggest that such a rubric may be a useful classroom learning tool.

The results also suggest that lower-level learners can develop some of the more sophisticated features of higher-level learners when initiating discussions and tasks in the classroom. That is, they can improve how they “co-construct different ways to frame and launch their task interactions” (Hellermann, 2008, p. 81). This is a point that EFL students could be encouraged to notice themselves, as in this study, or be guided to notice and improve by teachers. Furthermore, practices like this can help contribute to the “language of a classroom community of practice” (Hellerman, 2008, p. 82).

However, an obvious limitation of research of this kind is the small number of participants. It is not possible to generalize from a study of just two learners, and it

is not clear how more or less proficient learners in different contexts would make use of this rubric. Furthermore, we have looked at just one interactional practice: the opening of a discussion. We cannot say with certainty that participants would be equally able to develop practices for dealing with other organizational issues.

While the present study offers some tentative hope for the use of this rubric in the classroom, further research would be needed, looking at different students in different contexts, and focusing on different organizational issues. However, it should also be noted that, in longitudinal studies of changes in interactional practices, a greater quantity of observations would also need to be considered carefully, as practices do not usually completely change over time (in that a new practice for interactional organization completely replaces an older one), but rather *tend* to be accomplished differently at different moments (Wagner et al, 2018).

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## Appendix 1. The rubric

### EVALUATING INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE

#### 1. Topic Development

<b>Who starts topics?</b>
Usually the same group member introduces all topics A variety of group members introduce topics
<b>Are topics developed or not?</b>
Yes, each topic is usually developed. No, topics are not really developed.
<b>Who develops topics?</b>
Usually, one person develops topics more than other people Two or three group members tend to develop topics, while the other(s) are silent Everyone in the group develops topics equally
<b>Do speakers respond to previous comments?</b> (E.g. by agreeing, disagreeing, supporting, challenging, adding information, giving feedback, asking questions, etc.)
No, they don't often comment on what previous speakers said. Yes, they sometimes respond to something a previous speaker said. Yes, they often respond to something a previous speaker said.
<b>What did the members of your group do when listening to each other?</b>
Not much. They were mostly quiet. They sometimes responded with head nods and little sounds like 'un'. They often responded with head nods, little sounds, and they also agree, disagree and show emotion with words and short phrases like "yes", "that's right", and "really?"

## 2. Cooperating and being social

<p><b>Did the members of your group cooperate with each other to have a successful discussion?</b> (E.g. Helping when someone didn't understand or couldn't think of a word, or asking others for help)</p>
Mostly Sometimes Rarely
<p><b>Was the language used appropriate for a university classroom discussion</b> (E.g. not too formal/informal, not too direct/polite, spoken with appropriate speed and intonation, etc.)</p>
Mostly Sometimes Rarely

## 3. Taking turns to speak

<p><b>The conversation is natural and smooth, without awkward pauses</b></p>
Mostly Sometimes Rarely
<p><b>The members of the group responded to each other appropriately</b> (E.g. group members gave answers when asked a question, or said 'thank you' when they were given help)</p>
Mostly Sometimes Rarely
<p><b>If a speaker cannot give an appropriate response</b> (e.g. they cannot answer a question they are asked), <b>they give a reason</b> (e.g. "I'm sorry, that's a difficult question, can you give me a moment to think?").</p>
Mostly Sometimes Rarely

#### 4. Saying things clearly

**The members of the group use language in a clear way to make it easy for the other group members to understand**

Mostly  
Sometimes  
Rarely

#### Appendix 2. Transcription conventions

[	Point of overlap onset
]	Point of overlap termination
=	Indicates that there is no gap between utterances
(3.2)	Interval between utterances (in seconds)
(.)	Very short untimed pause
:::	Lengthening of the preceding sound
?	Rising intonation, not necessarily a question
ˆ	Slightly rising intonation
CAPITALS	Louder sounds relative to surrounding talk
.	Falling (final) intonation
(( ))	Researcher's comments
-	Abrupt cutoff
**	Utterances between these signs are noticeable quieter than surrounding talk.

## 教室でのディスカッション開始方法の 発展について

Paul Stone

Matthew Kershaw

ディスカッションは多くの大学の教室で一般的な活動ですが、日本人の英語学習者は英語でのディスカッションを組み立てる際に困難を伴う場合があります。この論文では日本にある大学において第二言語として英語を学習する学生が教室でのディスカッションに関する文脈において、どのような相互作用能力 (Interactional Competence, IC) を発展させていくかについて調査した一連のプロジェクトの一部である研究について報告します。この研究では、2人の英語学習者間の教室におけるディスカッションを分析するにあたり、縦断的アプローチを取り、ディスカッションをする方法の変化に注目して調査します。具体的には、会話分析を使用して、学習者が教室でのディスカッションを開始する方法がどのように発展するかを調査します。

2人の学習者は、研究者が開発したルーブリックを使用して、ICの観点から自分たちの相互作用のビデオ録画を分析し、将来の改善のために自分たちの目標を設定します。分析の結果、学習者は協力してルーブリックを使用し、ディスカッションの開始時にディスカッションの組み立てに関する問題に気づき、その後、それらに対応するための会話の実践方法を発展させることができたことがわかりました。この結果として、本ルーブリックは学習者が自分のICの側面に気づくと同時にそれを発展させるのに役立つツールになる可能性があることが示唆されていると考えられます。ただし、これはディスカッションの開始のみに焦点を当てた2人の学習者の研究であるため、さらなる研究が必要です。