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The Effect of Peer-assistance and Negotiation for Meaning upon Novice Learners' Speaking Ability

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ABSTRACT

Notwithstanding the widely accredited effectiveness of Communication Strategies (CSs) (Canale, 1983), the necessity of instructing them has been a contentious subject (Kellerman, 1991; Dörnyei, 1995). In this study, the instruction of prefabricated patterns (Brown 2007) which function as CSs was included in Task-Based Language Teaching to novice learners. We analyzed students' utilization of CSs in their topic conversations, as well as the functions of peer assistance or negotiation for meaning (NfM) (Foster & Ohta, 2005). Students audio-recorded their conversations four times and reported on their performance after each recording, subsequently their audio-recorded conversations were evaluated. We analyzed their conversations by means of the occurrences of peer-assistance and NfM to compare the differences between student groups who had improved the most and the least in their speaking capabilities. The results showed an increase of the quantity of conversation and CS usages of the better-developed group compared to the less-developed group. However, there were no significant differences between the two groups throughout the semester referencing to the demonstration of NfM. The functions of peer-assistance and NfM for novice learners might be distinguished from advanced learners, which might contribute to promote specific CS instruction for novice learners.

Keywords: Communication strategy, topic conversation, peer assistance, negotiation for meaning, novice learner

Introduction

We often communicate successfully with the help of CSs even in our native language whether we are conscious of the utilization or not. They are also useful for foreign language speakers though novice language learners may not use CSs only because they have not learned what CSs are nor how they can use them. Our CS instruction based on the belief, that some CSs work as peer assistance or negotiation for meaning, is supported by Foster and Ohta's (2005, p. 426) sociocultural perspective stating "Interactional processes including negotiation for meaning and various kinds of peer assistance and repair are among the many ways learners gain access to the language being learned." They also advocated that "For understanding SLA, a discovery approach to classroom talk seems useful in understanding the broader range of what is happening and how that might work to help or hinder language learning" (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p. 424). Therefore, we examined learners' conversation performed in TBLT with CS instruction, whose definitions are shown below with those of peer assistance and NfM.

TBLT

Tasks in TBLT “are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communication purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome” (Willis 1996, p. 23). Therefore, it is often assumed that pattern practice or role-play activities are not tasks. Learners are required to communicate their notions by using the target language in TBLT.

Communication Strategies

CSs have been defined by many researchers. Ellis (2008, p. 957) explained that they are “employed when learners are faced with the task of communicating meanings for which they lack the requisite linguistic knowledge.” CS classifications are varied but avoidance and compensatory strategies are the main dichotomy. We focus on prefabricated patterns which is a subordinate category of compensatory strategies (Brown, 2007). The strategic prefabricated patterns include “How about you?” “What do you mean?” “Sounds interesting” etc. Some CSs such as “That’s ...” and “I see” can work as peer assistance and others like “Could you explain?” and follow-up questions may be utilized as NfM.

Peer Assistance

Peer assistance operates to develop learners’ utterances when they stagnate or misstate in the conversation or to show reactions to an utterance to preserve comfortable circumstances. It happens between people with involved and is valuable from a sociocultural perspective. Foster & Ohta (2005, p. 420) explained the four components of peer assistance. Co-construction is “the joint creation of an utterance,” self-correction functions for a learner to correct “his or her own utterance without being prompted to do so by another person,” other-correction is “a peer correcting his/her partner” and continuer works “to express an interlocutor’s interest in what the speaker is saying and to encourage the speaker to go on.”

Negotiation for Meaning

NfM sometimes referred to as negotiation of meaning, occurs between people but the information received by a person is processed by him/herself cognitively before it is returned to the first communicator. According to Foster and Ohta (2005, p. 405), NfM “is a very familiar concept in cognitive approaches to second language acquisition,” which consists of the following behaviours (p. 410):

Comprehension checks: an expression to establish the interlocutor’s understanding of the speaker’s preceding utterance(s) (e.g. Do you understand?)

Confirmation checks: an expression to follow the interlocutor’s utterance to confirm his/her understanding is correct (e.g. Do you mean ...?)

Clarification requests: an expression to elicit clarification of the interlocutor’s preceding utterance(s) (e.g. I don’t understand. Try again.)

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

CSs have been applied in the TBLT English classes and it seems beneficial for the learners. More effective CS instruction is expected and we need to clarify what CSs are preferred by novice learners, how CSs function in conversation tasks and how differently learners utilize CSs depending on their conversation development. To explore these issues, we present three research questions:

1. What CSs are utilized frequently in novice learners’ conversation?
2. How do CSs in TBLT help students’ conversation?
3. What are the differences between more improved students and less improved ones?

Methodology

A TBLT course was involved in the study to improve proficiency level in students' English conversation. The participants had an English class once a week from April to August except for a couple of weeks when they had nursing practice in a hospital in July. They learned vocabulary, model dialogue, CSs during the pre-task period. For the task cycle, students repeated topic conversations changing partners in rotation. There were 43 students in the class which gave students many partners to talk with. To focus on language, the teacher joined the conversation or observed to find grammatical mistakes students commonly made and introduced such mistakes to all the students from time to time. Learners also transcribed their audio-recorded conversations and reviewed their language use.

The learners' audio-recordings, transcriptions, short comments and self-evaluations after audio-recordings worked as portfolios and their performance was evaluated by the teacher. After the course, they reviewed the course by answering questions. These usual materials constituted most of the data. The researcher only added interviews to the daily class management after the course. This study was completed anonymously and initials for focused students are all pseudonyms. The ethical properness of this study was examined completely by the ethics board of the college the participants belonged to.

Participants

Japanese junior college students participated the TBLT course which is a compulsory course for the first semester of the first year in 2013. Forty-three out of 80 students gave permission to use the data for our research and attended the indispensable classes for this study. Three of them were males and others were females who had just started studying nursing. Most of them had entered college just after they graduated from high school with a few exceptions and they were from 18 to 20 years of age. Their English proficiency was beginner's level and none of them had taken the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), General Tests of English Language Proficiency (G-TELP) nor International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

Procedure

Four topics were adopted for the conversation task: introducing each other mainly in April, to be a nurse in May and June, habits for good health from June to July and sexual transmitted disease (STD) in June and August. To have learners prepare and commence their conversations smoothly, starter questions were introduced for each topic: What are your hobbies or interest? Why did you choose nursing? What are your habits for good health? What would you do if your partner had an STD? Topic-concerning vocabulary and model dialogs as well as simple prefabricated CSs were instructed in the pre-task period of TBLT. After the pre-task of TBLT, they practiced timed conversation on a certain topic: they started with a starter question, answered to the question, gave short impressions and questions about the partner's answer using CSs. This task cycle was conducted for two or three weeks before their conversation recording with a randomly chosen partner using a digital voice recorder. They focused on language by transcribing their recorded conversation and marked utilized CSs with red pen to notice how CSs functioned in the conversation. After they reviewed their language, they self-evaluated their attitude or perception about the conversation. They also commented shortly about the learning especially reasons of their unsatisfying self-evaluation. Their recorded conversation was evaluated by the teacher from the perspectives of interactivity of communication, delivery and content in accordance with a rubric (See *Table 1*) which was revised from one used by Sato and Takahashi's (2008). This process of pre-task, task cycle and language focus was repeated for other three topics throughout the

semester. At the end of the semester, the learners answered survey constituted of 20 questions about the TBLT and conversation topics and gave short free comments.

Table 1

Rubric for Evaluation of Conversation

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| Interactive communication | Initiating / Responding | · Initiates and responds appropriately | A ⁺ (3) |
| | Development | · Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support | A (2) |
| | | | B (1) |
| | Use of CS* | · Uses CS appropriately | C (0.5) |
| Delivery | Pronunciation / Intelligibility | · Is intelligible | A ⁺ (3) |
| | | · Intonation is generally appropriate | A (2) |
| | | · Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed | B (1) |
| | Volume | · Can be clearly heard | C (0.5) |
| | Fluency | · Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation | |
| | Pace | · Did not have extended pauses | |
| Content | Cohesive / Coherent | · Uses a range of cohesive devices | A ⁺ (4) |
| | | | A (3) |
| | Relevant | · Contributions are relevant despite some repetition | B (2) |
| | | | C (1) |
| Depth / Extent | · Can develop the topic and include support for the reasons | | |
| *CS: Communication strategy | | A ⁺ = Meets all of the criteria (10) | Total |
| | | A = Meets most of the criteria | |
| | | B = Meets some of the criteria | |
| | | C = Needs improvement | |

Data Collection

All of the data listed below for this study were gained from some indispensable data of the course grading and from other reviewing records for educational purposes.

Evaluation of conversation. The teacher listened to the recorded four materials and graded A+, A, B and C based on the rubric above. The results were converted to numbers to gain average figures.

Learners' self-evaluation. The participants answered by choosing 5-leveled Likert scale on their satisfaction in expressing their ideas, delightfulness in conversation, sincere attitude in English communication, no difficulty in speaking and understanding of partner's English after each recording. They also wrote reasons or explanations as short comments in Japanese to compensate their numeral evaluations.

Student survey. At the end of the course, 20 questions were asked about their perceptions and ideas about the TBLT (questions 1-8), the self-evaluation about their English performance (questions 9-16) and the treatability of 4 topics (questions 17-20). Students answered from 5 to 1 according to the positivity.

Conversation analysis. An analysis of speech unit (AS-unit) was examined to decide the quantity of each conversation. This unit is defined as "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with either" by Foster, Tonkyn and Wigglesworth (2000, p. 365).

Students' conversations were also analysed to examine the frequency of peer assistance and NfM. The occurrences of co-construction, self-correction, other correction and continuers of peer assistance in their conversation were counted as well as comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification requests of NfM.

Final report and interview. Along with short reports for every student to review the course, the focused students were interviewed after the course to learn their ideas and impressions which might not be expressed appropriately in Likert-scale answers.

Analysis

All of the 43 students were examined by the recorded data to know the general improvement. Moreover, evaluations by the teacher were investigated quantitatively to select students to be analysed precisely. Based on the improvement of evaluation in recorded conversations, the highest 7 and the lowest 7 students were focused. The differences between the two groups were examined by means the quantitative data gained from various points of view.

Findings and Discussion

Evaluation of conversation. The result did not show a straight rising process, which might have been affected by the two-week blank when students had nursing training in a hospital. The average points of the 43 students developed from 5.8, 6.0 and 7.0 from the first to the third recordings, however was declined to 6.6 in the fourth recording. Therefore, the first points were subtracted from the average points of second, third and fourth evaluation to know the improvement. Subsequently students listed in order according to the improvements (See *Table 2*). Seven students of each end to be focused were decided on the basis of the average and improvement of evaluation of the four conversations. The average of improvements was 1.7 and average of the four evaluations and 6.0 in the most improved group whereas -0.7 improvement and 6.5 average points in the least improved group.

Table 2
Average points and improvements of four conversations

| Initial | RM | TK | KK | KR | RR | NR | MR | KY | IM | NK | ER | ... |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|
| Improvement | 2.3 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | |
| average | 5.8 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 5.3 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 7.8 | 6.8 | 5.8 | 5.8 | |
| ... | TY | UK | K.U | SU | WN | US | TR | RA | RN | SN | TZ | Initial |
| | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | -0.3 | -0.3 | -0.7 | -0.7 | -0.7 | -1.0 | -1.0 | Improvement |
| | 6.3 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 7.0 | 5.8 | 7.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.0 | 6.0 | average |

Learners’ self-evaluation. The most and least improved students were compared using the average values of seven students of both extremes in five items of self-evaluation: satisfaction in expressing their ideas, delightfulness in conversation, sincere attitude in English communication, no difficulty in speaking and understanding of partner’s English. Differences in both groups were little in general. Most of the results resemble the decline after two rises in the evaluation of conversation. Different changes were seen in the least improved group’s sincere attitude and understanding and in the most improved group’s no difficulty. Most improved group is lower in their perceptions with the exception for no difficulty in the last topic though the difference is not significant. The differences in sincere attitude and understanding were comparatively clear (See *Figure 1*).

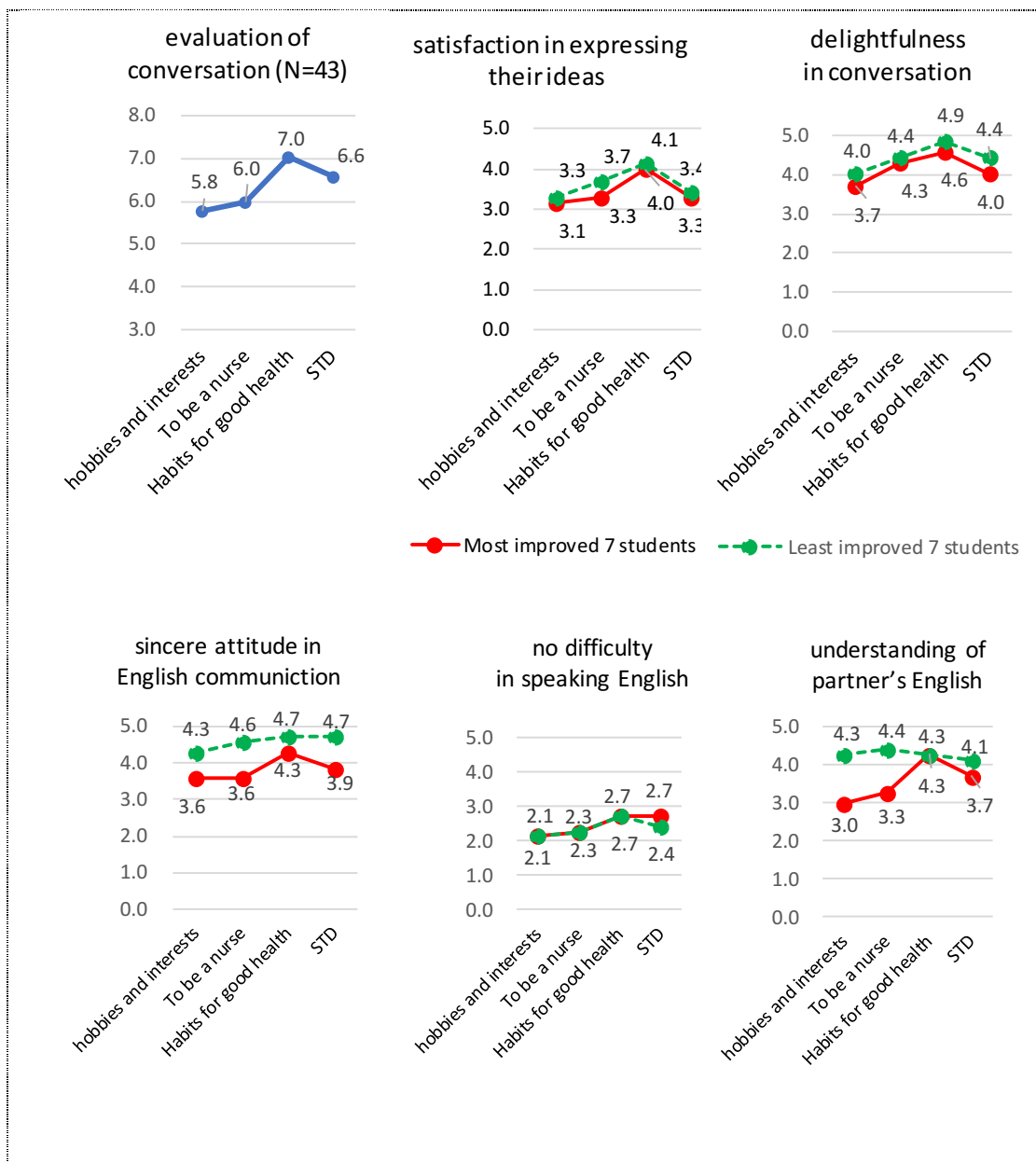


Figure 1. Results of learners' perceptions

Student survey. The average of 20 answers were 3.5 in the most improved students and 3.8 in the least improved ones. The most improved group exceeded in the only one item that “I did not feel embarrassed even when I made mistakes in speaking English” though other differences were mostly not significant. Admitting that these answers were subjective, some noticeable differences between the two groups were “The recording in pairs was effective for reflection,” “CSs were useful for the conversation,” “I tried to react to my partners’ utterances” and “I understood almost everything my partner said during the pair work.” (See Figure 2).

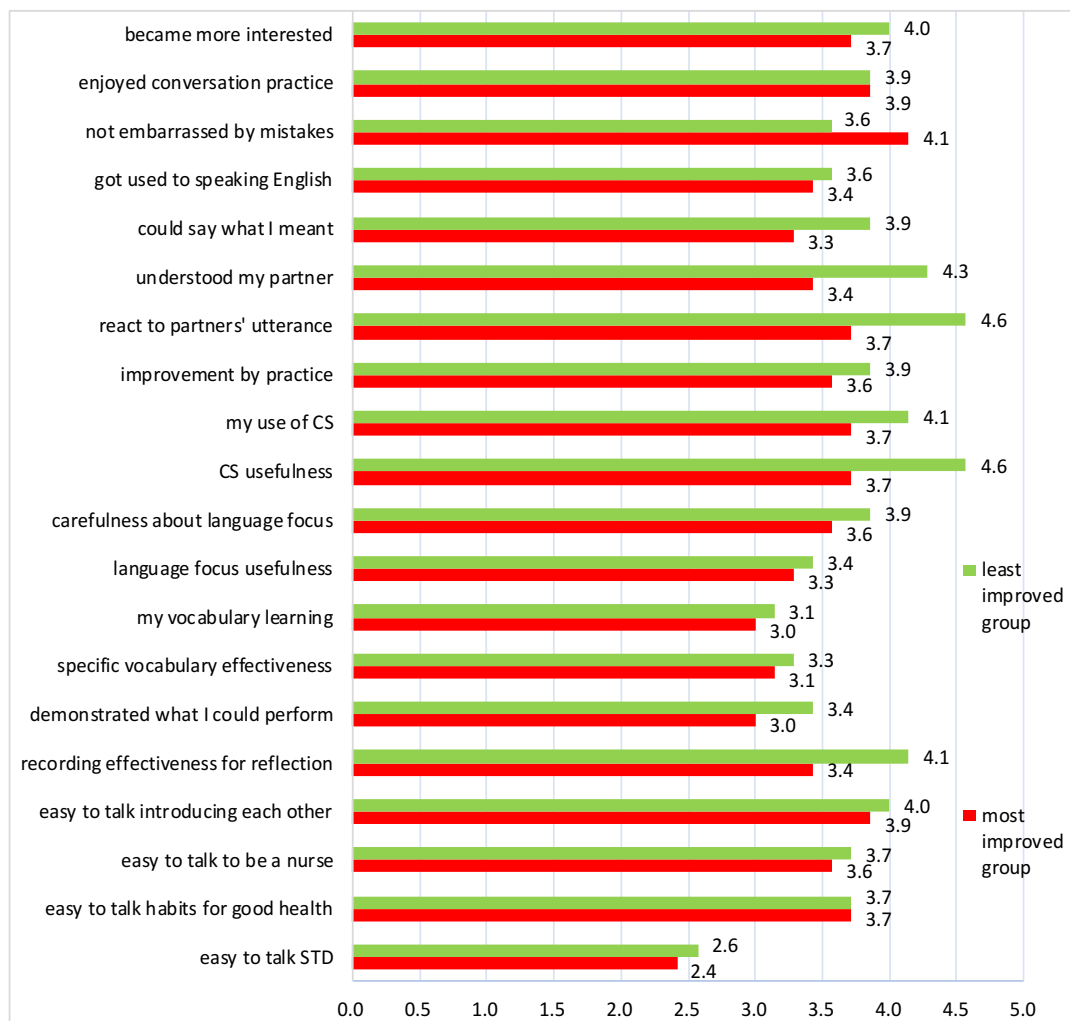


Figure 2. Results of student survey in the extreme groups of 7 students each

Their average answers of topic easiness in the focused students were clearly high in daily and concrete ones and low in non-daily supposed case like the last topic. Average preference of 14 students for the four topics were 3.9, 3.7, 3.6 and 2.5 respectively.

Conversation analysis. Average value of AS-unit by the most improved group was lower than that by the least improved one in the first topic although values were reversed in the rest of the topics (See Figure 3).

Instructed CSs which were utilized were examined by analysing each conversation as follows:

- KZ: My habits are eating a lot of vegetables and getting up early.
- KK: Oh, your habits are... to eat... eating a lot ... Your habits are to eat a lot of vegetable and to sleep early? ← confirmation check
- KZ: No, no. To get up early. ← assistance
- KK: Oh, sorry. Your habits are to eat a lot of vegetables and to get up early. ← confirmation check
- KZ: Yes. ← continuer
- KK: Oh, that's nice. ← continuer
- KZ: Thank you.
- KK: What are you...do you... what do you get up... ← self-correction
- KZ: (very low voice) What time... ← assistance

KK: What time do you get up?

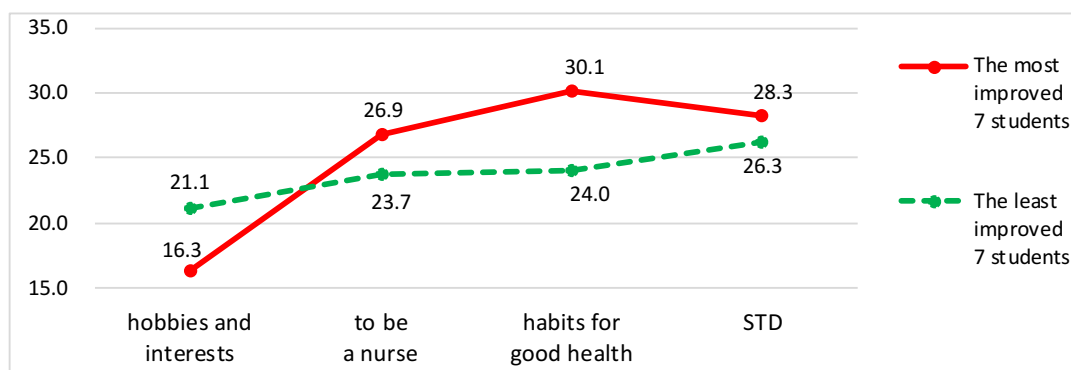


Figure 3. Quantity of AS-unit

CS functions as peer-assistance or NfM in each recorded conversation were also counted. Total frequency of peer assistance usages in the analysed conversations showed similar changes to those of AS-unit: the mean values of most improved students started lower in the first topic and exceeded the other group in the rest of the topics (See Table 4 and Figure 4). We could not find any CS which was not introduced in the class during the analysis.

By counting the CSs, it was clarified that frequently used continuers include “That’s ...,” “Sounds...,” “I know,” “Oh really?” “Oh yeah?” “I see,” “Me too,” and

Table 4

Frequency of Peer Assistance

| | | hobbies and interests | | | to be a nurse | | | habits for good health | | | STD | | |
|----------------|----|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| | | Assistance | Self-Correction | Continuer | Assistance | Self-Correction | Continuer | Assistance | Self-Correction | Continuer | Assistance | Self-Correction | Continuer |
| -Most Improved | RM | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| | TK | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| | KK | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| | KR | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| | RR | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| | NR | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| | MR | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| total | | 0 | 3 | 16 | 3 | 8 | 43 | 1 | 9 | 51 | 3 | 6 | 45 |
| | | 19 | | | 54 | | | 61 | | | 54 | | |
| Least Improved | WN | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| | US | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| | TR | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| | RA | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| | RN | 1 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| | SN | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| | TZ | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| total | 1 | 3 | 31 | 2 | 8 | 24 | 4 | 4 | 32 | 1 | 8 | 33 |
| | 35 | | | 34 | | | 40 | | | 42 | | |

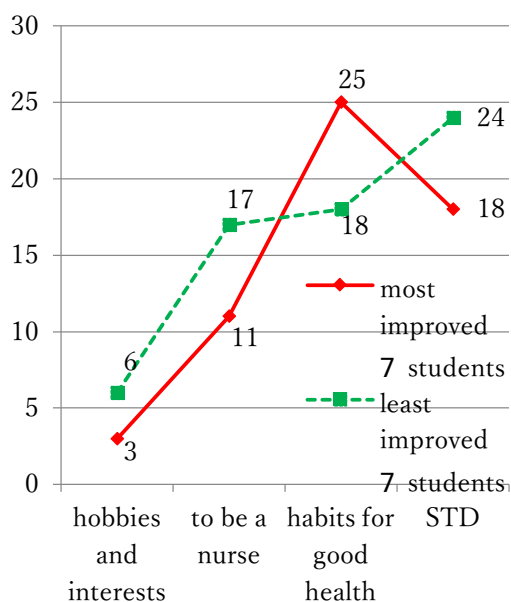
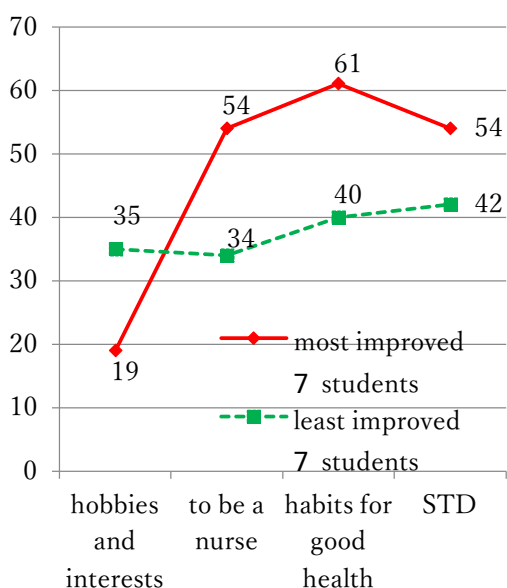


Figure 4. Frequency of peer assistance

Figure 5. Frequency of NfM

“Me neither.” As clarification requests, various wh-/how questions, “Pardon me?” “What does ... mean?” etc. were utilized. For the purpose of confirmation checks, to repeat interlocutor’s words which was called as “shadowing” in CS instruction was sometimes used by students (See Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7 and Figures 4 and 5). NfM occurrence improved rapidly in both groups, although most improved group did not exceed the least improved group until the third topic and declined again in the fourth topic in frequency of NfM (See Figure 5 and Table 5).

Table 5
Frequency of NfM

| | | Hobbies And Interests | | | To Be A Nurse | | | Habits For Good Health | | | STD | | |
|---------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| | | Comprehension Check | Confirmation Reauest | Clarification | Comprehension Check | Confirmation Reauest | Clarification | Comprehension Check | Confirmation Reauest | Clarification | Comprehension Check | Confirmation Reauest | Clarification |
| Most Improved | RM | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | TK | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| | KK | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | KR | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | RR | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| | NR | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|----|---|---|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|
| | MR | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| total | | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 21 | 4 | 1 | 13 | 4 |
| | | 3 | | | 11 | | | 25 | | | 18 | | |
| Least Improved | WN | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| | US | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| | TR | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | RA | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | RN | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | SN | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | TZ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 |
| total | | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 18 | 6 |
| | | 6 | | | 17 | | | 18 | | | 24 | | |

Table 6
Frequencies of Peer Assistance and NfM Used by Most Improved 7 Students

| Peer Assistance | Interests | Hobbies And | To Be A Nurse | Habits For Good | STD | NfM | Interests | Hobbies And | To Be A Nurse | Habits For Good | STD |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|
| Assistance | 0 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | Comprehension Check | 0 | 0 | 9 | 1 | |
| Self-Correction | 3 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 6 | Confirmation Check | 2 | 9 | 21 | 45 | |
| Continuer | 16 | 43 | 51 | 45 | 45 | Clarification Request | 1 | 2 | 4 | 11 | |

Table 7
Frequencies of peer assistance and NfM used by least improved 7 students

| Peer Assistance | Interests | Hobbies And | To Be A Nurse | Habits For Good | STD | NfM | Interests | Hobbies And | To Be A Nurse | Habits For Good | STD |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|---------------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|
| Assistance | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | Comprehension Check | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|----|----|----|------------------------|---|----|----|----|
| Correction | 3 | 8 | 4 | 8 | Confirmation | 4 | 17 | 14 | 18 |
| Self- | | | | | Check | | | | |
| Continuer | 31 | 24 | 32 | 33 | Request on Clarificati | 1 | 0 | 4 | 6 |

Comments after recordings. From short comments about reasons or explanations of their numeral perceptions after each recording, those of focused 14 students were assessed for positive expressions or negative ones. Fourteen of 28 comments were positive expressing their improvement, pleasure or getting used to in the most improved students, whereas positive ones were 10 of 28 in the least improved students.

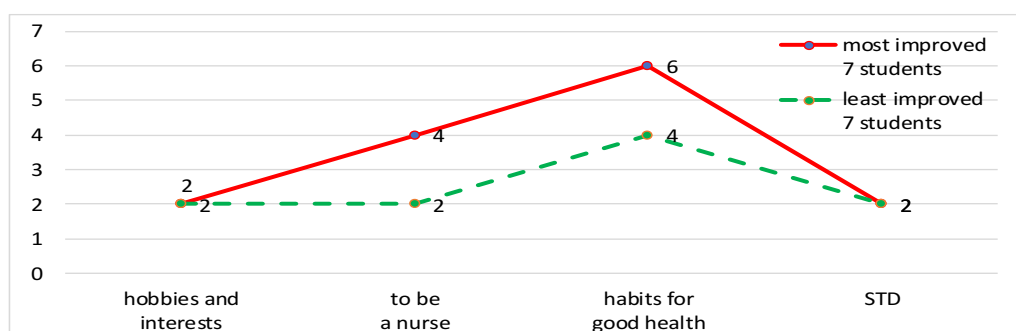


Figure 2. Positive comments after each recording of focused students

Final report and interview. The followings are some of the statements gained from the interview with the more improved students at the end of the course.

I could not speak English without reading some note in April. Now I can speak with CSs when I understand my partner’s utterance (TK).

In April, I often kept silent because I didn’t know how to say. As I remembered some CSs I can say something though sometimes only words and not sentences (KK).

I didn’t want to speak when I could not make a complete sentence in April. Now I try to say something even with incomplete sentences to communicate to my partner (KR).

I did not like speaking English in April. But now I enjoyed the class and I come to like speaking English (KR).

The least improved students were also interviewed and the following were some of their feelings or opinions.

I felt embarrassed to speak in English in April because I did not speak English in high school English classes. In this course, it was a communicative class and I spoke as other classmates did during classes (WN).

In April I only try to say what I wanted and it was difficult to understand my partner. But I had to say something using CSs and I tried to listen to my partner carefully. I come to have conversation trying to understand what my partner wants to say rather than only concentrating on telling my idea (TR).

English classes were anguish at first because I could not understand English but I practiced every week and I got used to listening and I understand the partner’s words more (TZ).

Conclusion

The answer to the first research question was gained from the results of frequently used CSs: Continuers were preferred most by both group of students in every topic conversation. Confirmation checks were also used many times especially by most improved students as they proceeded. Self-corrections or assistances were also used but not so many times. From the analysis, learners' CS use were restricted to what were instructed. Therefore, more variety of CS instruction would help develop their conversations.

The second research question was clarified from the conversation analysis that learners reacted to the answers of the starter questions with continuers of CSs, in the first place after listening to utterances. It was also with CSs that they tried to ask questions about the interlocutor's statement because they had learned they could ask with wh-/how questions. In other cases, they tried to tell their similar ideas or experiences somehow sometimes after "Me too," or "Me neither." From their survey, they appreciated CSs as useful in conversation and in their comments and interviews they often expressed the helpfulness of CSs.

For the third research question, more positive answers were found in the least improved students in results of perceptions and survey. The interesting exceptions were that even when the topic was considered to be difficult, the most improved students did not feel the difficulty so much compared with the least improved students, and the most improved students were more positive about making mistakes than the other group. As for the increase of the CS utilizations, more improved students showed remarkable process in continuers and confirmation checks. Clarification requests also increased continuously though occurrences were not high. Moreover, positive comments were found more in the most improved group. Accordingly, as it has been advocated, keeping students in relaxed class atmospheres is necessary. In addition, encouraging students to evaluate themselves strictly may be relevant to better learning.

The comparison between most improved students and least improved students includes a question that the improvement may be conspicuous in learners with lower abilities. More improvement research should be conducted with students of the same levels of English proficiency in the future.

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