

Developing Student's Communication Skills through the Use of
Communication Strategies and Writing

Introduction

After conducting AR at my main university in 2016, I decided to change my research focus further. In the first semester of 2016, when I started with AR, my lessons were based on reading, and I tried to help my students with speaking and writing through post-reading exercises. Gradually, I came to realize, that I had tried to do too many things and lost focus during this first semester of AR. When I started working with different students in the second semester, I learned to set three priorities in my lessons, namely conversation strategies (CSs), writing of essays and timed-conversations. I still worked with reading material and based the content of the lessons on the textbook topics, but I was aware of what I needed to focus on. First, I gave the students more opportunities to work with and practice CSs. When it came to writing, I made sure that students had time to organize their ideas before they had to write. Furthermore, I used a structured approach to not overwhelm the students with too much writing and narrowed the writing down to solely focus on the conversation questions and there was more emphasis on peer feedback. Most importantly, I learned to understand that students need to actually speak to get better at it. I learned to step back and give my students much more time to speak than I had in the first semester. The outcome of the performance test was much better than of the group of students that I taught in the first semester, and the students seemed to enjoy talking to each other about various topics. By trying to observe the process of CSs use, I learned that even though CSs are a wonderful tool for carrying a successful conversation, students had difficulties properly integrating them in their conversation.

For my final year of AR, I wanted to teach one group of students for a whole year instead of only a semester, therefore I chose a class at a different woman's university in Nagoya. My plan was to continue to teach conversation, CSs, and writing, but abandon reading. What I learned from doing AR the year before was to have a better focus. I was aware that reading is a very important skill, but since I only taught this class once a week for 90 minutes, priorities needed to be set. I choose a textbook that focuses on timed-conversations and CS called '*Nice Talking with You*' 1, by Tom Kenny and Linda Woo. The text was exactly suited for my goals as it promotes a communicative approach.

The new class consisted of 14 students in the first semester, and 12 in the second semester

because two students dropped out. The students' English ability was low and their motivation for studying English was as well. When I handed out the first task in April which was to complete five sentences that were meant to be used as a lead in for the actual activity that I had planned to spend 10 minutes on, I was surprised that that exercise took over 40 minutes. After a consultation with my supervisor, I decided to look into motivation as well and added it to my research issues.

When I first started to use the textbook, the students were not able to do the exercises in it, and whenever I asked them to do something in pairs it took too much time, and I almost had the feeling that the students had decided not to try at all. When I tried to assign homework from the text, most students would typically start doing it five minutes before the next class started. Additionally, when I tried to review the first set of CSs that were taught the previous week, students did not seem to remember. That taught me that I needed to adjust to the student's level, their ability and their willingness to learn English.

I tried to carefully observe what was going on in the classroom and based on my observations, I created handouts to scaffold my teaching even more than in the previous year, by breaking activities down into little parts. By doing so, I wanted to make sure that every student could follow the lessons. By trying out new things, I learned to understand what worked for the students, and where I needed to make adjustments. Because I chose a different textbook and stopped focusing on reading, I had more time to focus on the process that lead to carry timed-conversations and therefor support my students better.

In the following section, I will discuss related literature, relevant research issues and my research questions.

Theoretical Background

In this section, I briefly review some literature that I discussed in the Literature Review above that is particularly relevant to my 2017 AR.

Communicative Language Teaching

Before the 1960's language was taught in traditional methods like the ALM or the GTM. Some teachers who became frustrated teaching with those older methods, tried a new teaching method that was flexible, creative and responsive to learners' needs (Sauvignon, 1997, p. 7). A new term described this new way of teaching namely Communicative language teaching (CLT)

Common features that describe CLT are it is a meaning-based, learner centered approach to second language teaching, where fluency and not accuracy is given priority. The emphasis is mainly on the comprehension and production of messages, and not the teaching and correction of

language form (Spada 2007, p. 272).

In more recent years, there has been a realization of the limits of traditional teaching methods like ALM or GTM. In Japan where these methods were applied for a long time, MEXT implemented a new approach in English education that focuses on CLT, to promote learner's ability to use English for communication. To apply CLT effectively, teaching institutions need to modify their teaching style, curriculum and materials. Sato (2002) described how challenging those changes can be. He conducted a study that investigated EFL teachers' beliefs and understanding of CLT and found that generally even though most participants seemed to understand the importance of CTL, their lessons did not include communicative activities. Some teachers were resistant to try CLT, while others tried something new to a small extent, but failed to really change. The outcome of this study suggests that for Japanese teachers exposed to CLT, there are contextual obstacles that impede their ability to change their teaching practices.

Richards (2006) understood that with CLT, grammar does not take the central place and focus of language education. The focus of teachers' roles, syllabi and lesson plans shift more to an interactive and meaning-based approach. Savignion (2002) acknowledges that communication cannot take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of assumptions about how language works, along with the willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation for meaning. Structure drills are replaced with self-expression focused on meaning in the CLT classroom. Most scholars agree that the goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence, and I will explore this in the next section.

Communicative Competence

In the 1960's the term communicative competence (CC) began to appear frequently in discussion about language learning. For some teachers who did not regard ALM as a successful tool of language acquisition, it became a symbol of what ALM could not be: flexible, creative, and responsive to learners needs (Savignion 1997, p. 7).

Fifty years ago, Chomsky (1965) made a distinction between two aspects of language: performance and competence. Performance he sees as the use of underlying knowledge to communicate and competence as the underlying knowledge of the grammatical system that is shared knowledge between the speaker and listener. Some scholars criticize Chomsky's model as too idealistic and simplistic. Hymes (1971) points out that it fails to account for the social aspects of language. Hymes, who coined the term communicative competence, points out that in addition to linguistic competence, native speakers attend to other rule systems while speaking, and an

adequate theory of competence must be sufficiently general to account for all forms of communication (Hymes, 1971).

Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence in terms of three competences: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Canale (1983) refined the model by adding discourse competence. All these competences are important elements in naturally occurring conversations, and they highlight the importance of focus on meaning and the negotiation for meaning. Savignon (1997) captures the heart of communicative competence in the following quote.

“Language is communication, communication rich with social meaning. Talking about communication involves talking about grammar, yes, and more. Knowledge of language includes knowledge of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, modes of discourse, print and non-print genres, and rhetorical strategies, the use of language to influence others”. (p. 256)

Communication Strategies

The CSs were first described by Selinker (1972) as one of the five ‘processes’ he identified in interlanguage development. Ellis (2008) states that “CSs can be defined as discourse strategies that are evident in social interactions involving learners, or they can be treated as a cognitive process involved in the use of the L2 reception and reproduction.”

Dörnyei and Scott (1997) go further by distinguishing three types of communication problems that can give rise to CSs: (1) own performance problems (i.e. the learner recognizes that something he/she said is incorrect or only partly correct) (2) other performance problems (i.e. the learner finds a problem with something said to him/her) and (3) processing time pressure (i.e. the learner needs more time to plan L2 speech).

These difficulties occur in a natural conversation and should be taken into account to better understand how and why the use of CSs can be effective in communication. Implicit teaching of CSs through structured input will give students tools to maneuver difficulties that occur in conversations.

CSs are viewed from two different perspectives, one is the interactional one and the other is psycholinguistic. The interactional focuses on the interaction between language learners and their interlocutors, mainly the way meaning is negotiated by one or both parties (for example, Tarone 1990; Rost and Ross 1991; Williams, Inscoc and Tasker 1997). In this view, CSs are not only seen as tools for problem solving during communication, but also as a way to enhance communication, so they are extremely important for language learners.

For teachers, it is important for us to understand how and why the use of CSs can be effective in communication and how to help our students learn them in ways that avoid unnecessary confusion. Research has shown that implicit teaching of CSs through structured input can give students tools to manage difficulties that occur in conversations, so I wanted to make these an integral part of my own teaching.

Motivation

Motivation in second language learning is a complex phenomenon. There are two factors that help when defining it: learner's communicative need and learners' attitude towards the second language community. Lightbown and Spada (2013, p. 87) mention that if learners need to speak the second language in a wide range of social situations or to fulfill professional ambitions, they will perceive the communicative value of the second language and are therefore likely to be motivated to become proficient in it. That would, for example, apply to students who study overseas. Similarly, if learners have favorable attitudes towards the speakers of the language, they will desire more contact with them. However, in my classroom here in Japan, these two factors do not have a direct impact on students. Gardner (1982) proposes a model that focuses specifically on second language acquisition in a structured classroom setting rather than a natural environment. His model attempts to interrelate four features of second language acquisition: the social and cultural milieu, individual learner differences, the setting or context in which learning takes place and linguistic outcomes. All of these can impact motivation.

Dörnyei (2005), in his "L2 motivational self-system" outlined the basics of a new approach to conceptualizing L2 learning motivation. It focuses explicitly on aspects of the individual's self, yet it is "compatible with other influential conceptualizations of motivation by other researchers" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 9). Placing the self at the center of our motivational thinking has opened up a wide range of novel research directions. Ushioda (2009), for example, investigated a model that she labeled "person-in-context relational view" that centers on the individual as well. This model considers the complexity and idiosyncrasy of a persons' motivational response to certain events and experiences in their lives. What is key is that motivation is a very personalized thing, and it is important to acknowledge that motivation is very complex, and teachers need to understand that their students are multi-dimensional.

In the case of Japanese students, Miyahara (1996) and Matsukawa and Tachibana (1996) found that Chinese students tended to perform better than Japanese students and the difference could be attributed to motivation. If students do not give much importance to learning a

second language, they may have low motivation to learn it. How can a teacher motivate this kind of student to learn English? One answer may be to give structured support by carefully scaffolding the lessons and providing small tasks that can be achieved thereby building students' confidence. This may act as a motivating factor. Of particular interest to me is the use of writing tasks designed to support conversations. In the next section, I will discuss the relationship between speech and writing.

Relationship between Speech and Writing

In order for students to express their thoughts verbally, they need to have organized the ideas or opinions that they want to convey. For language learners, it might be helpful to shape their thoughts by writing them before they discuss them with a partner or in a group. In this section, I will explore this relationship between speech and written language.

Many scholars seem to agree that there is a connection between speaking and writing. Hughes (2013) postulates that speaking is defined as the interpersonal function of language through which meaning is produced and transferred and "writing is a way to produce language you do naturally when you speak" (Mayers, 2005 p. 2). Lee and Van Patten (2003) would likely agree as they say "writing is an act of communication- that is, it involves the expression, interpretation and negotiation for meaning, just as speaking does" Silva (1990) cited in Fathali & Sotoudehnaman (2015) remarks that writing follows a standardized form of grammar, structure and vocabulary which is inseparable from the structure of spoken sentences. In keeping with this, El-Koumy (1998) conducted a study investigating the effect of dialogue journal writing on EFL student's speaking proficiency. The results indicated, that while both groups scored about equally on the speaking pre-test, the experimental group which did the journal writing scored a significantly higher on the post-test. Thus, I was interested in seeing how writing might help support my students in their speaking.

Research Issues

When I conducted AR in 2016, I focused on whether students were able to speak longer when they used CS in conversation and how student's oral language output is affected when students discuss topics they have written paragraphs on. I tested the students using timed-conversations on various topics that were covered throughout the semester. While I was able to provide evidence that students could speak longer with the use of CSs, I failed to provide data that focuses on the relationship between writing and speaking.

When I began to teach a new group of students at a different university in Nagoya in

April, I found that my students level of English was very low, and the majority of students were not motivated to learn English. With my AR of the previous year in mind, consultation with my supervisor, and a new teaching context, I formulated research questions that could further investigate what I had started looking at in my previous research issues. The three research questions I designed were the as follows.

- (1) How does the use of conversation strategies relate to the frequency and length of pauses students make in conversation?
- (2) How is student’s oral output affected when students discuss topics on which they have written paragraphs?
- (3) How is student’s motivation affected when they have structured support for their speaking development?

Method

This research was conducted from April 2017 to November 2017, and the objective of this study was to explore my three research questions. My teaching context was a university class at a women’s university, and my participants were 14 low-level, relatively unmotivated first-year students. I had 3 focus group students which were one students with a little higher speaking skill as the others, one students with a very low ability in English, but motivated and one with an average skill of English but not motivated. To answer these questions, I gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The methods used to collect this data were 1) Recording of timed conversations and transcriptions 2) CS Data Sheet One 3) video recordings of focus student group 4) questionnaires 5) CSs Data Sheet Two 6) interviews of focus student group.

Figure 1. Schedule and instruments for data collection.

Date	Instrument
November 13 th	Recording of timed-conversations and transcriptions.
November 13 th	CS Data Sheet One
November 20 th	Video recording of focus student group
November 27 th	Questionnaire
November 27 th	CS Data Sheet Two
December 4 th	Interview of focus student group

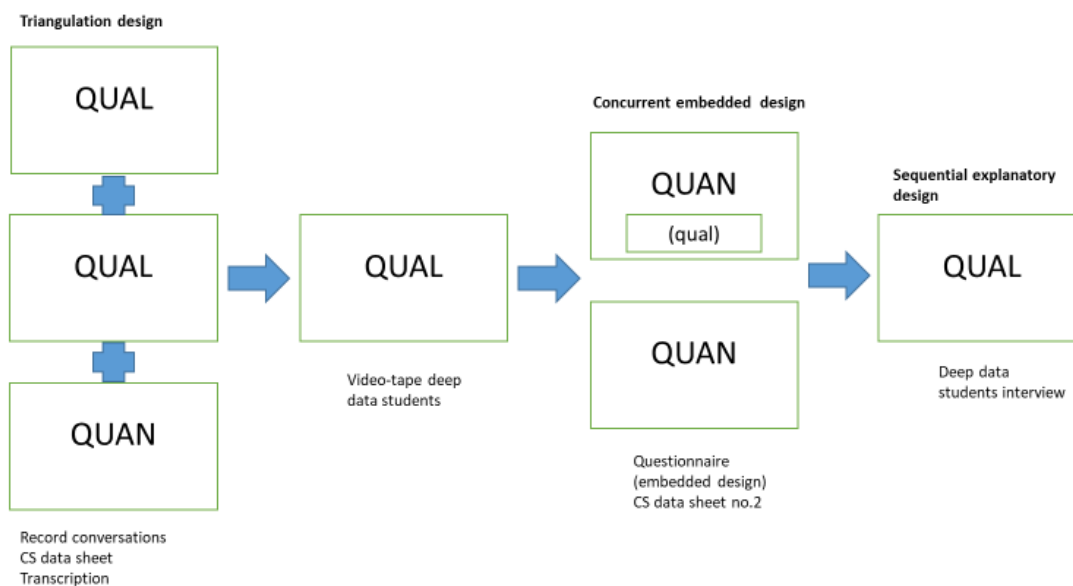


Figure 2. Research design for the 2nd semester.

For data collection, in the second semester, I used a concurrent triangulation design in the first phase to collect both qualitative and quantitative data (see Figure 2). The second phase was to collect qualitative data. The third was a concurrent embedded design and finally, based on the result of the quantitative data collected in the third phase, I gathered more qualitative data in the form of a sequential explanatory design. In the following section, I will describe the instruments of data collection, and how the data was collected and analyzed.

Recording of timed conversations, CSs Data Sheet One and transcriptions. To gather this data, I asked the students to record their conversations on their phones and fill out CSs Data Sheet One, by listening to their recorded conversation (see appendix 3). On this sheet, the students checked the CSs used in the conversations and how many times they used it. I tabulated the data to find out what CSs were used, and in what frequency.

The students' transcriptions were used to understand how the students used CS as explained above, and understand their use of pauses. Thus, the second step with the recordings was for the students to transcribe their conversations and mark all the pauses they made and their lengths. This data was useful for me, and it was important for the students to realize how often and how long they paused during their pair discussion. I gathered some of the recordings to compare it to the conversations recorded in July to identify the number and length of pauses. I compared the amount of CS used per minute in the conversations recorded in July and November transcribed the recordings and displayed it in the appendix (see appendix 4 and 5).

Video Recording of focus student group. The focus student groups conversations were video recorded for further analysis and to demonstrate whether their performances improved compared to July 2017. After recording these, I measured the lengths and frequency of pauses during these. I also investigated their use of CSs by counting the number of CSs used per minute both in the July conversations and the November conversations to see if there was a relationship between the number of CS used and pauses in student's conversations.

Questionnaire. This questionnaire, which was a combination of open and closed questions, investigated my research issues to gain a deeper understanding of my students' thinking. I analyzed the quantitative data by tabulating and graphing the results as seen in the result section. The qualitative open-ended responses as well as the data from the focus group students' interviews were used to support the quantitative data.

CS Data Sheet Two. To understand when students became familiar with the CS learned in this class, I designed a sheet for students to mark A) if they knew or did not know certain CS and B) if they were able to use them. For analysis, I collected all the sheets, tabulated the data in terms of when student first learned certain CSs to the time students were able to use them. I used this data to understand which CS were not well known to the students, and to understand why some were not being used by them.

Interview of focus student group. Based on the results of the questionnaire and how clear the answers were, I gathered more information related to my research questions through interviews. These interviews were conducted one week after the questionnaire and were semi-structured and I prepared a guide of open and closed questions (Arksey & Knight, 1999) based on questionnaire answers. I used the focus student group's answers to support the findings of the quantitative data from the questionnaires .

Results

In this section, I will share the results of AR in the year 2017 as they relate to the research questions. Before I focus on the research questions themselves, it is important to understand some background information related to what CSs students had acquired and which ones were used during the recorded timed-conversations (see CS Data Sheet One and CS Data Sheet Two, (see appendix 1-3) because I wanted to understand which ones the students claim to be able to use and which ones they actually used during the recording of their conversations.

When asked to fill out the CS Check Sheet Two which asked students which CSs they felt they knew and were able to use, students reported knowing all the CS learned. However, even in November, some strategies that were still difficult for some students to use in conversations (in order of most difficult to least difficult).

Table 1

Rating of CS difficulty (November 2017) n=12

Level of difficulty (1 high / 5 low)	Number of students who are able to use it
1. Could you repeat that please?	2
1. It is really hard to explain...	4
2. It is really hard to say	5
3. That sounds (great...)	7
4. Sorry, I didn't understand...	8

Note: Table one shows the most difficult CS for students to use.

Table 1 shows the most difficult CSs for the students to use. Some of these were consistently problematic for students, for example only two out of 12 students claimed to be able to use “Could you repeat that please?” On the questionnaire, students were asked to report... a scale of one to four respectively, strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) agree (3) and strongly agree (4) the students rated the following statements about communication strategies.

Communication Strategies and Pausing. In this section I will present data that relates to the use of CS and the lengths and frequency of pauses students make in their conversations. Furthermore, how CS helped students in their speaking development.

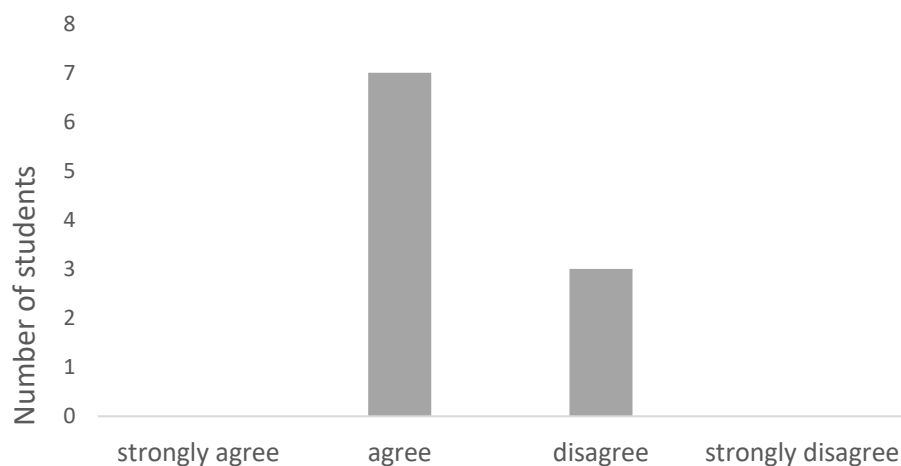


Figure 3. n=12 The pauses I make during a conversation are shorter because I use communication strategies.

Table 2

Communication strategies (Nov. 2017) n=12

	Mean	SD
a) I know how to start and end a conversation better.	3.3	0.49
b) I can speak longer with my partner.	3.0	0.43
c) I can ask more questions.	3.0	0.00
d) The pauses I make during a conversation are shorter because I use CS.	2.6	0.51
e) The communication strategies help me to communicate better than before.	2.8	0.4

Note. On a scale of four the numbers represent respectively, strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) agree (3) and strongly agree (4) in terms of communication strategies.

Table 2 shows that students believe their conversation ability has improved somewhat, but they do not appear to be convinced that CSs help them. However, when compared to results from July (see Table 3), there is a noticeable change in perception and students seem to believe that they can speak longer with their partners. Table 2 indicates that students believe that CS helped them to shorten their pauses.

Table 3

Communication strategies (July 2017) n=10

	Mean	SD
a) The communication strategies help me to communicate better than before.	2.9	0.74
b) I know how to start and end a conversation better.	3.2	0.42
c) I can speak longer with my partner.	2.6	0.97
d) I can ask more questions.	2.9	0.74
e) I have more confidence in speaking English.	2.2	0.79
f) I enjoy speaking English more.	2.1	0.74

Note. On a scale of four the numbers represent respectively, strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) agree (3) and strongly agree (4) in terms of communication strategies.

Table 4
Length and frequency of pauses

	Total length of pauses per minute		Number of pauses	
	July	November	July	November
Nene	7.5	3.2	6.0	2.5
Miki	3.3	0.0	3.3	0.0
Yuki	4.7	0.5	3.8	0.6
Naoko	2.0	0.8	2.0	2.0

Note. This data was taken from students recording of timed-conversations from both audio and video-recordings.

Table 5
Number of CS used per minute

	July	November
Nene	2.6	4.3
Miki	2.0	3.4
Yuki	3.0	3.3
Naoko	3.0	3.3

Note. This data was taken from students recording of timed-conversations from both audio and video-recordings

Table 6
Use of CSs in November (Nene)

Opening a conversation
Ending a conversation
Shadowing,
Showing interest positive and negative
Pausing
Asking the same question

Table 7
Use of CSs in July (Nene)

Opening a conversation
Showing interest positive and negative
Pausing
Asking the same question.

Table 6 and 7 shows the CS used by Nene in her conversations conducted in July (Table 7) and November (Table 6) (see appendix 4 and 5). The frequent use of shadowing in the conversation done in November, may be a good indicator why she could reduce the lengths and number of pauses in November (see Table 4)

Table 4 indicates that the lengths of pauses these students made during timed-conversations became shorter in the period from July 2017 to November 2017. It also shows that the frequency of pauses decreased. Table 5 demonstrates a slight increase in the use of CS in November, but not by much. This may be an indication that pauses are shorter and less frequent because more CS were used, but it is not conclusive. The student responses of the questionnaire suggest that they believe that the lengths and frequency of pauses during their conversations decreased because of the use of CS.

All students believed that they made fewer and shorter pauses. Here is a comment of one student.

When I use CS in conversation, I can converse more smoothly and reduce pauses.

(会話の中に入れることによって、間がなくスムーズに会話を進めることができた)

When asked the focus student group they all agreed that they could reduce pauses in their conversations by using CS.

Miki: “At first I was confused about CS. The more I used them though, the easier it became to speak to my partner.”

Yuki: “Because of CS I can speak longer and more smoothly. I feel my pauses became shorter.”

Naoko: “Using pausing or asking the same question takes away pressure when I talk. I for example can use ‘let me see...’ and think about my answer without feeling rushed.”

Responses from the questionnaire indicate that CS helped students with speaking in general. Here are some responses:

I can keep speaking longer. (会話を長く続けられる)

I can respond more quickly to my partner. (相手の会話に対してすぐに返事が返せるようになった)

I have acquired various patterns for conversation. (いろいろなパターンで会話できるようになった)

When listening to the conversation recordings, I noticed that whenever a CS is used, there are shorter pauses or no pauses during these conversations. When there are pauses, most appear when students try to formulate questions or have to answer questions. Compared to the students’ July recordings, students use CS more frequently, and carry out smoother conversations. This improvement could be because of the recursive conversation practice and or the more frequent use of CS. Overall, I believe it is a combination of both. While students still seem to have

problems with grammatical accuracy their utterances became more fluent when compared to their performance in July

Impact of Writing. In the following section I will talk about the impact of writing of paragraphs on the conversation topics and whether students oral output is affected by it.

Writing

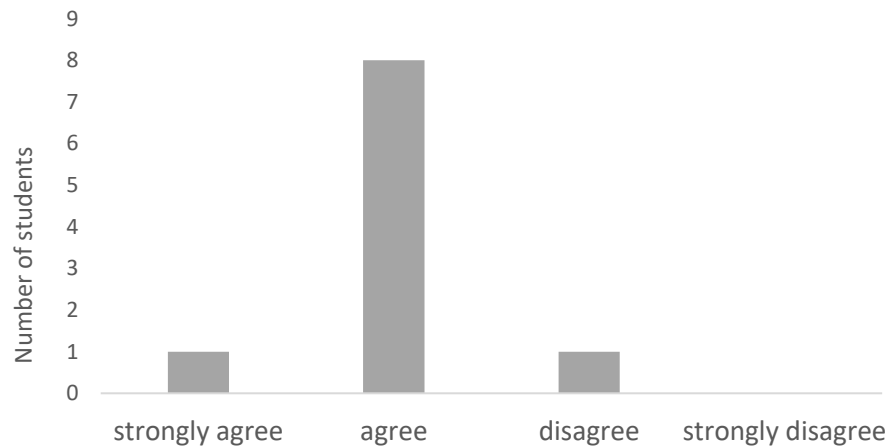


Figure 4. The writing activities help me with speaking.

Figure 4 shows that 8 out of 11 students believe that the writing activities helped them with speaking. Two students disagree to that comment.

Table 8

<i>Impact of Writing (Nov. 2017)</i>		n=12	
		Mean	SD
a)	I can write about a topic easier than I could last semester.	2.8	0.39
b)	The writing activities help me speak more smoothly.	2.8	0.72
c)	When I write about a topic it is easier to talk about.	2.9	0.45

Note. On a scale of four the numbers represent respectively, strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) agree (3) and strongly agree (4) in terms of writing.

Table 8 indicates that most students think that the writing activities support their speaking ability. Furthermore, students believe that their writing has improved since the last questionnaire in July. (see Table 9). The data suggest that most students believe that because of the writing activities they can speak more smoothly.

Table 9
Impact of writing (July 2017) n=10

	Mean	SD
a) To write about a topic is easier than before the semester started.	2.8	0.63
b) The writing activities help me with speaking.	3.0	0.47
c) When I write about a topic it is easier to talk about.	3.1	0.32

Note. On a scale of four the numbers represent respectively, strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) agree (3) and strongly agree (4) in terms of writing.

When compared to the result of the questionnaire in July (Table 7), students believe that they could further improve their writing in the second semester.

The writing activities on the conversation topics seem to have an impact on the students oral output. The responses to the open-ended question about the influence of writing on speaking suggest that the students could benefit from writing on the conversation topic. All students believe that their speaking has improved because of the writing activities. Here are some comments:

I can check vocabulary that I do not know before the conversation.

(分からない単語を事前に知ることができる)

Because I wrote before the conversations, the conversations became smoother.

(先に紙に書くと、会話がスムーズにできる)

Because I could select vocabulary beforehand my conversations became ‘wider’

(関連ワードを事前に書く事で、会話を広げやすくなった)

It is easier to come up with words or sentences because I had written about it beforehand.

(文章や単語を思いつきやすい) (頭の中だけの英語力では上手に会話できない / 話しながら会話の内容を考えるのは難しいから、書いてあると良い)

All the students in the focus group found the writing activities helpful for their speaking development:

Miki: “When I wrote about the conversation topic I could look for words that I wanted to use and prepare those. I believe that writing about the conversation questions was helpful because I could focus on each question and that made my conversation broader.”

Yuki: “Writing on the conversation topics helped to arrange the conversation better. Because I wrote about the conversation I could imagine the actual conversation better.”

I believe that there is connection between writing and speaking. It helps to converse more smoothly, and I can reduce my pauses.”

Naoko: “I agree with Miki, writing on the topics helped me to prepare words that I wanted to use. When I write about a topic, I have more time to think about the topic and what I want to say. I believe that because of the writing activity, I can speak more smoothly.”

Those comments suggest that their oral output is affected when students discuss topics they have written paragraphs on. Some students believe that because of writing, their conversations became smoother and they could reduce pauses in their speech as well (see figure 4, table 8 and 9).

Motivation. This section examines whether structured support for students speaking development has an effect on student’s motivation. Moreover, I will state some comments from the focus student group interviews and their opinions on motivation.

Table 10

<i>Motivation</i>	n=12	
	Mean	SD
a) I am more interested in speaking English now because I received structured support for conversations.	2.9	0.29
b) I am more eager to continue learning English than before.	2.9	0.29

Note. On a scale of four the numbers represent respectively, strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) agree (3) and strongly agree (4) in terms of motivation.

Table 10 indicates that the majority of students believe that because they received structured support for their speaking development they are more motivated. Moreover, most students agree that they are more eager to continue learning English than before.

When I interviewed the focus group students they supported what the majority of the students in class felt about receiving structured support of their speaking development and their motivation. Now, I present their comments.

Miki: “I am more motivated in studying English now. In high school the GTM was used, but in

this class, I have a chance to form opinions of what I want to say and speak about it. The structured support for speaking helped my motivation, but lately there was too much scaffolding and I got tired of it.”

Yuki: “I am more motivated now in learning English. At high school the English lessons were very teacher fronted, but now we do conversation practice. The structured support helped, but we should have had writing activities on one topic only for two, instead of three weeks.”

Naoko: “I am not more motivated than before, but the structured support had an impact on my motivation because I was able to do all the tasks.”

Even though, these comments indicate that structured support for students speaking development is related to their motivation, I felt that this group of students was not very motivated, especially in the second semester. Furthermore, motivation is hard to measure. I also could be a misconception of mine, and the students became more motivated and felt comfortable in this class.

When I summarize my notes, my own observations and feelings about this class, it draws a negative picture. Most of the time I was struggling with this group of students. I found their motivation low and believe I had never such a low motivated group of students in my teaching career. It may contradict the results from the questionnaire and interview of the focus student group, but these are my own observations.

Discussion

The results show a rather positive outcome of this study. It indicates that both the CS and writings on the conversation topics could support students’ oral output. The students’ conversations have become smoother. Whether the length and frequency of pauses is directly connected to the use of CS is difficult to prove. The number of CS used in student’s conversations increased, but not by much (see figure 3, table).

Both, the quantitative data gathered and open-questions from the questionnaires and focus group students indicate a positive relationship (see page 9 and 10). On the other hand, by looking at the transcriptions and places where pauses were made it shows that especially pausing (with the use of CS) natural pauses occur. These pauses are wanted because they indicate that students learned to converse more naturally. However, too many CS introduced at once, can confuse students of a lower level and can be overwhelming for some students. When I consider the acquisition of my students CS and the usage of it, I realized that I could have even more

simplified the teaching of CS. In the text I used, there are 30 different kind of CS introduced and many variations of it. In my teaching context, the limited amount of CS taught, already caused confusion (see appendix 1 and 2).

Considering the relationship between writing and speaking, and whether writing of paragraphs affects students oral output, when they write about the conversation topics, seems to be true (see figure 4, table 8 and 9). Some students in this class were reluctant to write, but even those, found the writing exercises beneficial. The student's comments on writing suggest that especially, if writing is about the conversation question, or closely related to it, can support students oral output (see page 11 and 12). All data collected on writing hints to a positive relationship between writing and speaking.

The last issue was motivation. By looking at the data analyzed, it is suggested that structured support for student's speaking development can be a motivating factor for the reason that especially low-level students are able to follow the lessons, and see progress made. On the other hand, too much structure can be demotivating because the progression of is too slow (see table 10).

Conclusion

In this section I will first talk about some of the results of this study and issues I faced. Then about CS and writing and how it related to students oral output. Finally, I would like to talk about some future issues.

There is one question that is related to my AR class and the individuals in it. Why was I not able to release my students' full potential or at least more of their potential? Compared to a similar group of students with about the same skill of English that I taught on the same day, it seemed that I had failed. This other class taught me that when students are willing to learn, they can make good progress. I believe in my AR class, I failed to do so because I did not address some students rather negative attitude toward this class. If I had been stricter with homework assignments and had asked more of the students, I believe I could have been more successful and students would perhaps have taken the lessons more seriously. Moreover, the fact that I first failed to focus more on the research side of this study and did not collect enough evidence is a weakness of my research, especially in the first semester of 2017.

On the positive side, I believe that I did achieve my goals of helping my students to communicate better. my students made progress, especially in their timed-conversations. The reason for this is, that I kept working with CSs and writing, to support the conversation topics.

My AR clearly shows that CSs are extremely useful tools for supporting conversations. They can give a conversation structure, (opening a conversation, ending a conversation, leading into a question) help students formulate their utterances (pausing), overcome comprehension issues (if they do not understand), and support their partner (showing interest). By using follow-up questions, conversations can be extended and more information, that leads to a deeper understanding of the speaking partner can be gathered. Transcripts of my students' conversations revealed the benefits of CS in action.

As a teacher, I came to the understanding, especially in challenging context where I conducted my AR this year, that it is important to slowly and steadily to see strong improvement. The results of my research shows that it is worthwhile for teachers to teach all students CSs regardless of ability or motivation level. Considering the success my low-level, unmotivated students had using them, I think how my students in the past lost an important opportunity since I did not use to teach them. I wonder how students speaking skill improves without them, when CS are not taught. Do students somehow acquire them naturally? Can they carry on somewhat naturally sounding conversations without them? Whatever the case, I know that I plan to continue to teach CSs to my future students and search for ways to help them improve their speaking ability and confidence using English.

An issue concerning CSs that I am curious about, is the difference between receptive knowledge of certain CSs, and productive ability, actually being able to use them in a conversation. While for example all my students were familiar with the strategy of 'answering a difficult question', only half of the students in class believe that they are able to use this strategy learned (see appendix 1 and 2). It would be worth investigating what is necessary to help students move from only have receptive knowledge about CSs to being active users of the strategies.

Most students in this class believe that writing on the conversation topics supported their oral output. In this class of low level students, in second semester, I tried to scaffold the teaching process even more, by focusing on each individual conversation question. Furthermore, students had the opportunity to discuss every single question, which they answered in a written form, first. The recorded conversations show that they became longer and more complex, when compared to the ones recorded in the first semester.

In this two years of conducting AR I came not only to understand how important it is to constantly improve upon teaching and making adjustments. I also learned that is essential to gather data from various angles to be able to provide data that can support what had happened in

a classroom. I came to realize that only by one's own observations and feelings one is subjective and valuable to only a small degree.

This year of AR was a very important experience for me, and I will make further adjustments when I teach at the same university with new students from April. I believe I grew as a teacher, and I am determined to succeed in teaching my students timed-conversations, CS and writing.

Appendices: 1

Conversation strategies

Comparison of CS in terms of knowledge and usage between April and July 2017

	April			July		
	did not know	knew	used	did not know	knew	used
Opening a conversation						
<i>How is it going?</i>	6	3	0	0	0	9
<i>How are you doing?</i>	2	6	1	0	0	9
Ending a conversation						
<i>It was nice talking to you.</i>	8	1	0	0	0	9
Asking the same question						
<i>How about you?</i>	1	5	3	0	0	9
<i>What about you?</i>	4	4	1	0	1	8
If you don't understand						
<i>Pardon?</i>	0	4	5	0	0	9
<i>Sorry, I didn't understand</i>	7	2	0	0	5	4
<i>Could you repeat that please?</i>	8	1	0	0	8	1
Pausing						
<i>Hmm, let me think...</i>	8	1	0	0	6	3
<i>Let me see...</i>	7	2	0	0	4	5
<i>Well...</i>	5	3	1	0	2	7
Answering a difficult question						
<i>It's really hard to say...</i>	9	0	0	0	7	2
<i>It's really hard to explain...</i>	9	0	0	0	8	1
Leading in to a conversation						
<i>By the way...</i>	7	2	0	0	0	9

Appendix 2
 CS Data Sheet Two
 Comparison of CS in terms of knowledge and usage between Sept. and Nov. 2017

12 students	September			November		
	didn't know	knew	used	didn't know	knew	used
Opening a conversation	0	0	12	0	0	12
Ending a conversation	0	0	12	0	0	12
Asking the same question						
<i>How about you?</i>	0	0	12	0	0	12
<i>What about you?</i>	0	2	10	0	0	12
If you don't understand						
<i>Pardon?</i>	0	3	9	0	0	12
<i>Sorry, I didn't understand</i>	0	8	4	0	4	8
<i>Could you repeat that please?</i>	3	8	1	0	10	2
Pausing						
<i>Hmm, let me think...</i>	0	3	9	0	2	10
<i>Let me see...</i>	0	3	9	0	0	12
<i>Well...</i>	0	3	9	0	0	12
Answering a difficult question						
<i>It's really hard to say...</i>	3	8	1	0	7	5
<i>It's really hard to explain...</i>	2	9	1	0	8	4
Leading in to a conversation						
<i>By the way...</i>	0	0	12	0	0	12
Shadowing	9	0	3	0	3	9
Showing interest pos. neg						
<i>Wow! (nice, great...)</i>	1	2	9	0	2	10
<i>Really?</i>	0	1	11	0	0	12
<i>That sounds (great...)</i>	3	7	1	0	5	7
<i>That's too bad!</i>	5	6	1	0	6	8
<i>I'm sorry to hear that!</i>	3	8	1	0	6	8

Appendix 3

CS data sheet one.

Communication strategies used when students recorded conversation.

November 13th 2017

No. of students:10

	Number of Students	Used in total
Open a conversation	10	10
End a conversation	10	10
Asking the same question		
<i>What about you?</i>	3	9
<i>How about you?</i>	9	24
Shadowing	3	5
Showing interest (positive)		
<i>1. Wow! (nice, great...)</i>	10	37
<i>2. Really?</i>	4	4
<i>3. That sounds (great...)</i>	2	2
<i>4.</i>		
Showing interest (negative)		
<i>1. That's too bad!</i>	2	2
<i>2. I'm sorry to hear that!</i>		
Pause during a conversation		
<i>1. Hmm..</i>	5	14
<i>2. Let me see... (think)</i>	7	10
<i>3. Well</i>	3	3
<i>4.</i>		
Answer a difficult question		
<i>1. It's really hard to say...</i>	1	1
<i>2. It's hard to explain...</i>		
If you don't understand		
<i>1. Pardon?</i>	1	1
<i>2. Sorry, I didn't understand.</i>	5	5
<i>3. Could you say that again, please!</i>		

Appendix 4

Length: 2.31 Date: July, 2017

Nene: Hi

Yuna: Hallo

Nene: **3** How is it going?

Yuna: Great. How about you?

Nene: I am fine thank you. **1** Where ah...

Yuna: Where are you from?

Nene: I am from Nagoya city Aichi

Yuna: Where are you from in Nagoya?

Nene: I am ...My hometown is near the Nagoya station **5** and you?

Yuna: My hometown Oharu town

Nene: **Sorry, I don't know.**

Yuna: Tell me about your hometown?

Nene: [0.5] my home. [1] **Ah let me so** it famous at my hometown [0.2] there is a good Miso Katsuya [0.5] in the near [0.3] Nagoya station. I love [0.2] Miso dote and Miso Katsu.

Yuna: Hmm

Nene: **And you?**

Yuna: My hometown famous red shiso and spinach (?)

Nene: How do you eat red shiso?

Yuna: Tofu or shiso it's really yummy

Nene: What do like doing?

Yuna: I like Karaoke

Nene: [3.5] Who's song do you like?

Yuna: I also like Ahese? Jump to the Janis

Nene: Tell me about his group

Yuna: His group ninth member, very cool

Nene: Whom do you like most in this group?

Yuna: I love Yamada Ryoske

Nene: Ahh

Yuna: What do you like doing?

Nene: I like playing music

Yuna: What do you play?

Nene: I I like Wagaki I [0.5] I [0.5] play the Sharmizen. I am practicing on the Shakuhachi now

Yuna: A-mazing

Nene: [1.5] What is a hobby you don't like?

Yuna: I don't know like ???? ball game

Nene: **Oh, me too** [1] why?

Nene: I'm scout (?)

Yuna: Why?

Nene: [1] Because a ball is close with a face

Yuna: Haha cheer up

Nene: Thank you, it was nice talking to you.

Yuna: To you too

Nene: Bye

Yuna: Bye

Nene's lengths of pauses: Total, 18.7 seconds 7,5 per minute

Frequency of pauses: Total 15 times 6 times per minute

CS used per minute: 2

Nene rarely uses CS and struggles with some of her utterances.

Appendix 5

Length: 5:35 Date: November 2017

Nene: Hallo

Mai: Hallo, how are you?

Nene: I'm fine thank you **and you?**

Mai: I'm good

Nene: **Oh, good**

Mai: What movie genres do you like?

Nene: [0,5] I like movie is animation movie

Mai: Oh, animation movies. Why?

Nene: I like Disney movie. I like musical. Disney movie is musical because [0.2] Disney movie is musical animation.

Mai: Nice

Nene: [1] What movie genres do you like?

Mai: I really likes comedies

Nene: **Oh, comedy.** Why?

Mai: Because I can relax when watching one.

Nene: **Relax? Oh** [0.5] what movie genres do you like don't you au [0.3] don't you like?

Mai: I don't you like a science fiction

Nene: **Science fiction?**

Mai: Yes, I

Nene: Why

Mai: Because I cannot sleepy

Nene: **Not sleepy? oh**

Mai: And you

Nene: I don't like [0.5] movies nothing.

Mai: Nothing Why?

Nene: All genres have good point

Mai: Please tell me one your favorite movies?

Nene: My favorite movie is Pirates of Caribbean. Do you know? Do you know?

Mai: I know

Nene: **Oh**

Mai: Why do you like it

Nene: [2] this movie is its feel take us to the world of dreams [4] do you now Johnny Depp?

Mai: Yes

Nene: He is very cool

Mai: I like Jonny Depp.

Nene: **Oh** [3] please tell me about one of your favorite movies?

Mai: My favorite movie is human drama called Tatcha

Nene: **Tacha?**

Mai: Do you know Tacha?

Nene: I don't know. What kind of story is that?

Mai: This story is gamble story

Nene: Its movie its danger

Mai: Yes

Nene: **Hmmm.** What do you like it?

Mai: take (Japanese)

Nene: Why?

Mai: Ah Because this movie is ??? love and interesting
 Nene: **Hmm**
 Mai: And my favorite actor is in it.
 Nene: **Favorite actor?** Who is it in this movie?
 Mai: Is Top
 Nene: **Oh Top?**
 Mai: Do you know top?
 Nene: I don't know
 Mai: Top is Korean idol
 Nene: **Korean idol?**
 Mai: Big bang
 Nene: Ah Big Bang **I see I see.** [1] who is an actor that you really like?
 Mai: Ah I like actress is Nagano Mei
 Nene: **Nagano Mei.** I don't know
 Mai: She is a high school student.
 Nene: **Highschool student?** Very young! What is special about her?
 Mai: Hmm She is very cute
 Nene: **Oh cute**
 Mai: I thought that she played very well in that movie and she is loved by everyone
 Nene: **Hmm** what first saw her?
 Mai: I am first saw her in a movie called Oremono Gatari
 Nene: **Oremono Gatari?**
 Mai: Do you know Oremono Gatari
 Nene: Yes, I also saw her saw the movie
 Mai: Nice
 Nene: What character does sh. [0.5] her play?
 Mai: She plays Yamato Rinko
 Nene: **Yamato Rinko? Ah I know I know.** [0.5] She is so cute.
 Mai: And you?
 Nene: I like I really like actor is Miya Rurika 1 She is stage actor and member of Takarazuka. Do you know Takarazuka?
 Mai: Yes. What is special about her?
 Nene: She is popular as a male actor. She is very cool and beautiful and sexy and cute
 Mai: What first saw her?
 Nene: [2] I first saw her musical "Mei Chan no Shitugi". Do you know "Mei Chan Shitugi"?
 Mai: Yes. What character does her play?
 Nene: She plays Shibata Kento. [2] She play is very cute!
 Mai: Nice.
 Nene: Yes, bye!
 Mai: Bye

Nene's lengths of pauses: Total, 18 seconds 3.3 per minute

Frequency of pauses: Total 14 times 2.5 times per minute

CS used per minute: 4.3

While Nene struggles with grammatical structures the use of CS helps her to carry a relative smooth conversation. She could reduce the lengths of pauses per minute to 3.5 seconds, compared to her conversation in July where she paused 7.5 seconds per minute. She uses about twice as many CS as in July. This may indicate that her conversation became more fluent

Appendix 6

Lesson plan

Time	Interaction T-Ss, S-S, S	Activity and Procedure
3	T-Ss	<u>Greeting, Attendance, Name cards,</u>
2 5	T-Ss T-Ss	<u>Checking homework assignment</u> Teacher gives vocab. word students give a definition. Teacher read sentences, students fill in the blanks. (Verbally) Class talks about variations of answers.
5	S	<u>Preparation for writing of last conversation question</u> Students prepare themselves for writing a short paragraph (mind map or any other way) This was the 3 rd time so students knew what to do.
15	S	<u>Writing of a paragraph on the third conversation question</u> Students work on their own and write a paragraph
10	S-S	<u>Reading of partners paragraph and writing two follow up questions.</u> Students read each other's writings and add two follow up questions.
10	S	<u>Final preparation for timed conversations</u> Students fill out a preparation sheet for the timed conversation and use past writings and CS sheet and model writing/dialog to prepare.
25	S-S	<u>Students practice timed conversations with different partners.</u> Students carry four conversations with different partners. First sitting down/slow, then two three minute and one four minute conversation.
10	S-S	<u>Students practice individual conversation questions in front of the teacher</u> In pairs, students ask and answer one of the three conversation questions in front of the teacher.
5		<u>Students fill out weekly self-reflections</u> Students fill out the reflection sheet and grade their effort in the lesson.

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