MODIFYING PAIRWORK ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE THE USE OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES : AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

William R. Pellowe

Abstract

Fluency activities with students working in pairs form an integral aspect of the teaching practice of many language teachers. This paper is a report of an investigation into how to make such activities a more effective learning experience for students. The action research project was divided into two stages. The first stage consisted of a preliminary investigation of how much English my students were using during pairwork. The second stage consisted of three action research cycles investigating how I could create conditions under which the students would maintain communication in English for the duration of the pairwork activity, push their output, and use communicative strategies in English rather than code-switching to Japanese.

Pairwork activities are an integral aspect of many teachers' approach to language teaching. (Note that I shall use "pair" to refer to groups of 2 or 3, as the odd number of students in the class under discussion necessitates one group of three students). The advantages to pairwork and small-group work over teacher-dominated classes, including a higher possibility of engaging an individual's preferred learning style, a proportional increase in each student's chance to be actively involved in language use, and a greater variety of types of language that students can use, have been extensively discussed in the literature on language teaching methodology (McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Brown, 1994b; Nunan, 1991; Long et al., 1976). Communicative or fluency activities, where the focus of the learners is primarily on the communicative message rather than on displaying control over a specific target structure (Ellis, 1988b), and the role output as well as as meaningful input is recognised, are given considerable support from the field of second language acquisition theory (Clément, Dörnyei and Noels, 1994; Ellis, 1988; Swain, in Skehan, 1994, p. 177 and Nunan, 1991, p. 50; Pica, 1994, p. 494; Tarone, in Larson-Freeman & Long, 1991; Chesterfield & Chesterfield in Larson-Freeman & Long, 1991 and Brown, 1994a).

Accepting, then, the usefulness of pairwork fluency activities in the language classroom, it stands to reason that if students are to reap the benefits of these activities fully, they must take place in the L2. Clearly, students could neither test hypotheses about language nor negotiate for meaning if they opt instead to revert to the commonly shared L1. McDonough and Shaw (1993, p. 237) point out that one disadvantage of pairwork is that "monolingual classes readily use their mother tongue instead of the target language, particularly where discussion is animated, (and) interacting in English ... may initially be perceived as artificial." Therefore, I wanted to investigate how much L2 (i.e. English) my Japanese students were actually using during fluency pairwork activities.

Preliminary Investigation

Subjects

All of the students (n = 13) are female first-year English majors at Aso Foreign Language Travel College, a two-year *senmon-gakko*. All are Japanese. The students are in the top group of four levels within the English conversation course for English majors. Students were placed into levels by the native English speaking staff (five teachers) based on: (a) the results of the BBC Video Listening Test, and (b) observations of the students during the first eight hours of instruction. The course meets for one-hour classes eight times weekly. In addition to the English conversation course, students receive instruction in English Grammar for Standardized Test Taking five hours a week, Situational English one hour a week, English Composition hour a week, and English Reading one hour a week from Japanese instructors.

Facilities

Classes are held four times a week in standard classrooms, and four times in the language laboratories (LL). There are two LLs; the primary distinction between them of relevance here is that in one LL, the teacher is able to connect the students' headphones together through a main board so that the students can converse over the headphones, much like a telephone switchboard. Individual students can be connected with one person or many (like a party-line). The system can support multiple, separate connections, so that (as an example) a class of 12 could have six separate,

simultaneous "telephone" conversations. The teacher has the ability to eavesdrop on individual pairs without the members of that pair knowing they are being listened to. The teacher can also "break in" to join the conversation. Classes meet in this LL twice weekly; this is where most of the research for this paper occurred.

Procedure for collecting information

To investigate how much L2 my students were actually using during fluency activities, I planned to observe them under two different conditions:

1. Language Lab headphone pairwork: While students engaged in a fluency activity, I would check on each pair for one to three minutes per pair to note their language use. I would not break in to admonish students to speak in English, nor would I praise them for speaking English.

2. Classroom pairwork: I would walk around the room and make mental notes of the language being used, paying particular attention to the pairs that I was not standing near. This form of eavesdropping allows the teacher to discover what kinds of behavior students engage in when they do not realize that they are being monitored.

Results

The results of the preliminary investigation were discouraging.

1. Language Lab headphone pairwork: One pair was not heard doing the work at all. Some pairs spent up to half the allotted time discussing unrelated topics in Japanese, and this did not leave them enough time to do much work once they got started. Many students were using Japanese for interactional turns, meaning clarification and to make up for unknown lexis. A lot of the Japanese being spoken by the students was within their ability in English (for example, simple questions such as "Why?" or "When?"). Although two pairs in particular did stay on task in English for long stretches, they would not always extend themselves in English; rather, they too occasionally relied on Japanese.

2. Classroom pairwork: The situation was the same as with the headphones (above). In addition, pairs using Japanese would lapse into English as I walked near, and lapse back into Japanese when I got further away. One pair even had a lookout who would whisper "*kita*" ("he came") when I approached. Often the Japanese-to-English switch occurred without the conversation missing a beat:

> *Ano hito ne, tottemo sutekki na hito yo. Kare wa* has a nice car, and…
>
> That guy, yeah? very stylish / hip guy! He *has a nice car, and ...*

I decided that if I wanted the students to maintain stretches of discourse in English, I would have to motivate them to do so. They all reported that they wanted to learn to speak English better, yet drawing an explicit connection between trying to stretch their abilities during fluency activities and getting more competent in English did not persuade them to change their behavior. I realized that I would have to change the way I structure and administer pairwork in order to motivate them. The rest of this project concentrates on headphone pairwork (procedure 1, above) to eliminate the *kita!* effect (described above) on the investigation. The following Action Research Project is based on the guidelines developed in Richards and Lockhart (1994).

Action Research Cycle One

Initial reflection

- **Current Classroom Practice**

For pairwork, students are given a topic that had been either the focus of the current unit in their textbook (*Atlas 3*, Nunan, 1994), or a timely topic such as impending holidays or current events. Lead questions are provided or elicited from students prior to the activity. I would eavesdrop during the activity, actively encourage the use of English by reminding students to use it, and offer (often unsolicited) help with language.

- **Observation Which Prompted Concern**

Students do not maintain communication in English during fluency activities. They do not employ strategies in English for overcoming inadequacies; in other words, they do not push their output to an extent that would foster fluency development.

- **Question to Guide Investigation**

How can I modify my classroom activities to encourage students to extend themselves to maintain communication in English, push their output, and use communicative strategies in English rather than code-switching to Japanese?

Planning

I decided to inform students that a fluency pairwork activity would be assessed as a quiz, and that the criterion for success on the quiz would be using English and refraining from using Japanese. Students would be told that grammatical accuracy was not a factor in their grade at all.

I planned to put students in pairs over the language lab headphones for this activity. The main advantage to the headphones is that students do not know whether the teacher is listening or not. I decided not to talk to the students while the fluency activity was taking place. I planned to eavesdrop on each pair for at least 30 seconds at a time, long enough to assess what they were doing; I wanted to hear their answers and their follow-up discussion.

I devised a point scale to grade each section of the students' conversations I listened to (Figure 1).

Points	Criteria
4	Students are Beyond Task. They are asking further questions, expanding on the topic, or pushing their output by employing communicative strategies in English to overcome deficiencies or shortcomings in their interlanguage.
3	Students are On Task[i]. Students are asking each other the questions and answering them in English, with no extensions (described above). A minimal of Japanese may be allowed (for example: *ano* instead of *umm*; using a Japanese word in an English sentence).
1	Students are Below Task. The questions are read in English, but the reply and follow-up is wholly or partly in Japanese.
0	Students are Off Task in Japanese. Discussion is in Japanese. Discussion could be on the task topic or an unrelated topic[ii].

Figure 1. Marking Scheme to Grade Oral Performance for Tasks

Action

The theme of the current unit in their textbook was computers and technology. A supplementary reading activity involved an article from the Japan Times on how children in the United States were becoming computer literate. The fluency activity for the quiz consisted of open questions to elicit students' opinions and attitudes towards computers, as well as their reactions to the Japan Times article. These questions can be found in Appendix One. The task met the criteria for being suitable for fluency work (Ellis, 1988a, 1995):

- success would be evaluated in terms of behavioral outcome: the students need only speak English; no particular language forms were specified
- the focus of the students would be on the message content rather than on form - grammatical accuracy was not a criterion for success
- an information gap existed - each student's own interests and preferences would not necessarily be known to her partner, a "basis for genuinely rich and productive language practice" (Swan, 1985, p. 84) that could provide "more genuine reasons for (students) wanting to communicate with each other" (McDonough and Shaw, 1993, p. 168).
- communication stimulated by the task would be negotiated between the students, with only initial lead-in questions being predictable and pre-determined
- the students could use whatever resources they possessed (with the exceptions of recourse to Japanese, and gestures as the nature of the headphone pairings is similar to telephone conversations).

Students were paired up and given the task question sheet. They were told that this fluency activity session would count as a quiz, and that the only criterion for doing well on the quiz was using only English. (This criterion was set in order to deter students from keeping to "safe language", I wanted to lessen their apprehension about making mistakes so that they would stretch their abilities to the fullest).

During the activity, I listened in on each pair long enough to assess the extent to which they were using English or Japanese, and to determine whether they were On-Task or Beyond Task. I was able to listen to each pair three times.

Observation of results

The results of the activity were mixed (Table 1). Only one pair was able to perform beyond-task for the duration of the activity (pair 4). Of the two members of that pair, Kinuka is the more competent, but not the most competent in the class. She spent a few weeks in a homestay situation in the US. She is not outspoken in the class, but maintains solid work. Haruka is a very quiet girl by nature, never speaks in class unless spoken to, but is a conscientious student. Almost all of the other pairs performed below their ability. Pair number 6, Yukiko and Yasue, should have been able to do much better; Yukiko has an exceptionally good command of English, although she does not choose to participate often, and Yasue is a motivated, conscientious student who often volunteers in class, hands in good work, and generally falls towards the high middle on tests.

Number	Names in group	First	Second	Third	Average	Percent
1	Hatsuri, Rika	4	3	0	2.3	58
2	Rie, Sayuri	3	3	3	3.0	75
3	Hiromi, Kumiko	1	0	0	0.3	8
4	Kinuka, Haruka	4	4	4	4.0	100
5	Chieko, Keiko, Noriko	3	1	3	2.3	58
6	Yukiko, Yasue	1	0	0	0.3	8
	Class Mean Scores	2.7	1.8	1.7	2.1	51.4

Table 1. Compilation of Oral Performance Scores from First Task
First Task Assessment

Reflection

The activity did not manage to achieve its goals. The barriers to the change that I had wanted to achieve could have been the topic itself, or perhaps the reality of the quiz had not fully registered with the students. I decided to try again.

Action Research Cycle Two

Planning

I decided first of all to address the possible reasons why the activity in Cycle One failed to achieve its goals. I made the results of the quiz available to the students, and explicitly described the types of behavior that each point on the grading point scale represented, as I planned on using it again in Cycle Two. I also conducted a survey of the students interests.

- **Making the results of the quiz available**

Each student received a sheet of paper much like Table 1, the only difference being that under the Names column, each individual could only see their own name and the name of her partner; the other names had been erased. This way, the students could see how their pairwork performance compared with that of the others. Each student could also see that she and her partner received the same grade on the quiz.

The decision to give both members of each pair the same grade was deliberate. The purely practical aspect of ease of grading aside, this was to serve two purposes: One, I wanted students to realize that communication is a joint effort or "a collaborative venture in which interlocutors negotiate meaning in order to achieve their communicative ends" (Nunan, 1991, p. 47). Stressing this fits into the Japanese cultural construct where "a good conversation partner tends to empathise with others, being aware enough to jointly create a conversation" (Hinds, 1987 in Edwards et al, 1995, p. 99).

Two, I hoped that this would serve as an additional motivating factor: Students would feel an obligation to their partner to try their best; also, any student who found herself paired with an individual who did not participate would have the right to admonish her partner to participate.

- **Explicitly describing the Marking Scheme**

Helping students recognize the links between their own efforts and the outcome (the grade) is a motivating factor, especially if failures can be attributed to controllable factors (Dörnyei, 1994). As the sole criterion for success was the usage of English, and not the accurate production of English, students could not claim that they were unable to do the task; they may have been unable to say something as accurately or as beautifully as they could in Japanese, but they should have at least attempted to get their meaning across. Therefore, this is a controllable factor.

Class feedback confirmed that students were not fully aware that I would be recording the grades for the activity, nor that the grades would count as a quiz toward their final mark for the course.

- **Survey of Students' Interests**

A list of thirty topics were distributed to the students, who were asked to give each topic a score to indicate their interest in that topic. A score of 1 would indicate that the topic was considered "very interesting", 2 showed that "it's O.K.", and a score of 3 meant that the topic was "not interesting". Table 2 shows a partial listing of the results. This reveals that the topic of computers was not interesting to the students, whereas the topic of music was very interesting to all but one student.

Selected Topics:	Computers	Music
	2	1
	3	1
Student Survey Answers	3	1
	2	1
	3	1
	3	1
	3	1
	1	1
	2	1
	2	1
	3	3
Mean	2.45	1.18
Mode	3	1

Table 2. Selected Survey Results

Action

A week after the initial quiz of Cycle One, we had the second quiz. Before starting the fluency activity, I made sure that students understood that it would be counted as a quiz, "the same as last week". Students were reminded of the grading point scale, and told explicitly that they should try to go beyond the questions on the paper.

The task was taken from the textbook *Crossroads* (Fuller, 1992: 22-25). It consisted of a series of open questions concerning the topic of music, in which the students had

shown an interest via the class survey (Table 2). Students were told to do Exercise 2 (a list of "interview questions" such as "What's your favourite kind of music?", "Do you find *karaoke* enjoyable?"), Exercise 7 (a list of "discussion questions", such as "Have you ever taken any music lessons?", "Have your tastes in music changed over the years?"), and Exercise 8 (a list of 15 names of popular Western and Japanese musicians and groups, which were to be rated according to a five point opinion scale). The questions were not explained prior to the activity, as it was hoped that if any questions proved difficult, the students could work out in English what the question entailed. The students were instructed to ignore the directions accompanying the exercises.

Students were paired up, with an effort to create different pairs than before. (It is standard practice in our class to try to have different partners each time headphone pairwork is done; the main criterion for pair selection is lack of physical proximity). I was able to listen in on each group four times. I transcribed the parts of conversations that I heard as I was listening (Appendix 2). I listened to some pairs at times longer than others when the conversational strategies being employed were interesting.

Observation of results

The results this time were much more encouraging (Table 3). With little exception (Pair 3 and one on task turn by Pair 1), students were consistently performing beyond-task. Students used a variety of strategies described by Tarone (in Larson-Freeman and Long, 1991; Brown, 1994a) and Chesterfield and Chesterfield (in Brown, ibid.) to facilitate conversation, as well as some not described. These strategies are listed below; the number in brackets refers to the transcript line number in Appendix 2.

- anticipatory answer (answering their partner's question before the partner had finished) (30, 59)
- appeals for justification (asking someone to justify an apparent discrepancy in what they are saying) (23-26)
- appeals for assistance (67-75, 78)
- circumlocution (65, 78)
- clarifying adjustment (adjusting and expanding on a message in order to clarify your intention for your interlocutor) (8)
- extensive message repair (32-40)
- literal translation (15, 16, 51, 63, 81)

- message adjustment (rather than abandoning a message they couldn't complete, students rephrased it another way) (11-13)
- repetition [19, 41 (learning strategy, not communication); 39]
- requests for clarification (7, 81)

There were also occasions of message abandonment (21) and language switch (17, 21, 42?).

There was some evidence, however, that students were not totally focused on message content at all times. Students would sometimes give an utterance in Japanese and then say its English equivalent (19, 49, 61). Repeating in English what has already been said in Japanese is not engaging in communication, as no new information is given. This suggests that the students were in fact focused (at least partially) on form, completely aware that they were engaged in an exercise whose ultimate purpose was the production of English. However, as this exercise was intended as a learning exercise of a different sort, this message content / form distinction is a minor one.

After the exercise, I read some of the transcripts (anonymously) to the class to illustrate some examples of communicative strategies.

Second Task Assessment							
Number	Names in group	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Average	Percent
1	Kinuka, Yasue	4	3	4	4	3.8	94
2	Hatsuri, Sayuri	4	4	4	4	4.0	100
3	Hiromi, Haruka	4	3	1	0	2.0	50
4	Yukiko, Rika	4	4	4	4	4.0	100
5	Noriko, Rie	4	4	4	4	4.0	100
6	Keiko, Chieko	4	4	4	4	4.0	100
	Class Mean Scores	4.0	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.6	90.6

Table 3 : Compilation of Oral Performance Scores from Second Task

Reflection

- **Conclusion and further action**

The results are good, but the research employed is problematic. After Cycle One, two possible variables were suggested: the students' lack of concern or knowledge about being quizzed and the choice of topic. In Cycle Two, both of these variables are treated, the first by making students aware of the quiz results and the marking scheme, the second by finding a topic more interesting to the students. There is no way of knowing how much of the change in results is due to which variable. Also, changing the partners may have been a third variable that confounded the results. There is no way to show that this in itself was not more influential than the stated variables. However, as it is standard practice in our class to change partners, and the pairwork from the Preliminary Assessment and Cycle One (with different partner pairs) were similar in results, changing partners may not have been as influential a factor in Cycle Two. Indeed, a follow-up to Cycle Two of my action research project (Cycle Three), again with an effort to change partners, achieved results ($\bar{x} = 3.9$) that were similar to the results of Cycle Two (where $\bar{x} = 3.6$). Space does not permit a detailed description of Cycle Three.

The activity managed to achieve its goals. I learned that, for a fluency activity to be successful, one or both of these conditions should be met: the topic must appeal to the students, and the goals of what successful behavior looks like must be made explicit to the students. To further motivate my students to maintain English during pairwork fluency activities, attaching a grade to the exercise is very helpful. Clearly, although some are motivated simply by a desire to learn, not all of the individuals are. Extrinsic reward, despite its reportedly detrimental effects on learner motivation (Brown, 1994b), seems to factor strongly in some of my students' overall motivation. Simply drawing an explicit connection between being an active learner (an active listener, an active writer, an active doer of classroom tasks, etc.) and acquiring English does not seem to be enough to motivate active behavior. Regular progress interviews with the students on an individual basis, for example, could give them feedback on how closely their behavior conforms to good behavior (a relief, I am sure, to the quiet, active listeners who may otherwise worry that they are not perceived as "good"). Ideally the desired classroom norms should be made explicit from the very first.

I also learned, and I think the students did too, that they are indeed capable of maintaining extended discourse in English. Further action will include consciousness-raising tasks around communication strategies in order to make students more aware of the range of strategic options available to them.

The procedure of headphone quizzes works well in my current teaching situation. It would be of little direct application to other situations that lacked the appropriate equipment. However, it seems clear that a participation-based marking scheme that is explicitly understood by the learners, when combined with topics of interest and relevance to the learners, serves as a powerful motivational device for maintaining English (so that students fall back on communicative strategies rather than L1) in classes of students similar to those under discussion. Further investigation is needed to explore effective ways of achieving similar results consistently in regular classroom situations.

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APPENDIX 1

Questions for first fluency pairwork exercise

- What do you think about parents buying computers for 4-year old children?
- The newspaper article we read discussed two computer schools for children. What do you think about children going to computer school?
- The parents in the article believed that computer knowledge was very important for their children's success in school and the future. What do you think about this? What is the situation in Japan?
- The children in the article enjoy computer school very much. What kind of lessons did you take as a child? Did you enjoy them?
- Can you use a computer? Would you like to take lessons to learn how to use a computer?
- How important is computer literacy for your future?
- Do you want a computer? Do you have a computer? What could/do you use it for?

APPENDIX 2

Transcript of second headphone pairwork fluency quiz : October 19 th 1995.

This transcript was compiled after the class from notes taken during the class. The option of recording the exchanges was not available. The notes were full transcriptions of the students' speech with a type of shorthand; students spoke slowly enough for this to be possible, and where it wasn't, those exchanges were not included below. There is no effort to show pauses, interruptions or intonation, as there is no recording of the exchanges for rechecking the transcript.

The students' exchanges are numbered sequentially line-by-line for ease of citation. Citations appear in brackets, so (3) refers to Transcript Line 3.

When students used Japanese, I have tried to write the Japanese in standard Romaji. If I could not understand what the students were saying or could not catch the word used, I indicate this with parenthesis. For example, (a Japanese singer/group) in (1) shows that I assume from context that the word is either a singer or group name, but I either could not hear it well enough to write it down or simply did not note it during the shorthand transcription. For the reader who knows how to speak Japanese, note that the students tend to use a relaxed form of local dialect rather than standard "Tokyo" Japanese or textbook language.

- This exchange was extremely interesting. As the reader may be aware, Japanese kanji characters can have a variety of different readings (ways of pronouncing them). For example, my daughter's name is Hana (not "flower" but a different kanji), but when her name is read as part of a word, the most common reading is "ka" as in "gouka", the Japanese word for "gorgeous". Occasionally a Japanese person will recognize a kanji character, but not know how it is read in that context; this often happens with personal names and the names of locations. In the exchange below, we see one student explain to another the kanji reading of a Japanese singer/ group name in order to explain who she is talking about (8). This strategy was not described in the literature, but may be considered as clarifying adjustment. Other strategies displayed are requests for clarification (7), literal translation (15, 16), and an interesting strategy of message adjustment (11-13). (This was pair number one, Yasue and Kinuka.)

1	A:	Do you like (a Japanese singer/group name)?
2	B:	Yes, I do.
3	A:	Me, too.
4	B:	I like (another Japanese singer/group name).
5	A:	Really?
6	B:	Do you like (another Japanese singer/group name)?
7	A:	Huh?
8	B:	Japanese character write (kanji reading), read (group name/different kanji reading)
9	A:	Oh. No. In my junior high days, I liked (another group name).
10	B:	Oh? I know them.
11	A:	Do you used to... I don't know grammar.
12	B:	That's OK.
13	A:	Did you like Pink Ladies?
14	B:	Yes.
15	A:	I don't have that memory. (laughs)
16	B:	(laughs) I liked them very much. Maybe I was three or four.

- The question was, "Do you think you'll like the same kind of music when you are older?" Here Student A first asks B in Japanese how to say "I don't think so" (17), and we see the same student later struggle to say "I'll change (in some way) how I feel (about music)" (21). Rather than try to talk around her inability, or to employ some strategy to compensate for her lack of competence, she code-switches to Japanese (21) (nan yaro - talking to self, "What's the word?"), and ends up by completing the turn in Japanese, a case of message abandonment. We also see the strategy of repetition (19). (This was pair number three, Hiromi and Haruka).

17	A:	Soo omoiwanai'tte do iu ? (Translation : How do you say "I don't think so?")
18	B:	"I don't think so."

19	A:	I don't think so.
20	B:	Why?
21	A:	I will change nan yaro feel... nanka kawaru to omou. How about you?
22	B:	Maybe I'll not change because I like foreign music.

- The following exchange was interesting in that student A (who we saw above (1-16) explaining the name of the Japanese group) challenges B on a seeming contradiction in what B is saying. This shows that the topic was abstract in that students were called on to justify their positions. Untranscribed here is when A had asked B what her favorite kind of music was, and B replied that she didn't like rock music at all. A asked B who her favorite musician or group is, and B replied that her favorite was the rock group Kome Kome Club; she loved the group, and was a fan club member. A senses a discrepancy:

23	A:	But sometimes Kome Kome is rock.
24	B:	Yes. Rock music on CD, I skip the song.
25	A:	Even Kome Kome?
26	B:	Yes.

- The following exchange was between a high-proficiency learner and a low-proficiency learner (Yukiko and Rika, pair number four). It is interesting in the strategy the high-proficiency learner employs to help the other while keeping within the rules of the quiz (32-40). Student A's misunderstanding (31) occurs when A supplies B with a vocabulary word ("composer") in an anticipatory answer (30), but B takes the word to be the name of a composition, a musician or a group (31). We see B employ repetition twice (39, 41).

27	B:	What kind of music do you like?
28	A:	I like classical music.
29	B:	Who's your favorite...
30	A:	Composer.
31	B:	I never heard composer.
32	A:	No, you asked me, "composer?"
33	B:	Eh?
34	A:	You said, "Who's your favorite...I said, "composer" Composer means
35		(Japanese word) in Japanese. So your question in Japanese is (Japanese
36		sentence), right?
37	B:	Uh, yes.
38	A:	So that question in English is, "Who's your favorite composer?"
39	B:	Composer?
40	A:	Right.

| 41 | B: | Who's your favorite composer? |

- Students frequently went beyond the task satisfy their own curiosity. Talking about singing in front of other people, these students began talking about karaoke. One of the students had been singing karaoke the night before, so A questions her further about her night out. (An establishment that consists mainly of small karaoke party rooms is called a karaoke box in Japanese, and many students forget that it would be called something different in English. This would either be an unintended language switch or simply a bilingual code switching.)

42	A:	How long did you stay in karaoke box?
43	B:	One hour, maybe.
44	A:	Did you drink some of alcohol?
45	B:	No.

- These students were asking each other how many CDs each had. Here we can see A talking to herself in Japanese while searching for a way to formulate her sentence (49) ("What's "erase (in English)... erase the sound..."). She may have been searching through a dictionary. When she came up with the phrase she needed, she exclaims "wakatta!" which means (in this context) "I've got it!" We can also see literal translation, perhaps in (51), as "this tape need not" is a word-for-word translation of the Japanese, "kono teipu ga iranai."

46	B:	I have less than 55.
47	A:	I...
48	B:	Huh?
49	A:	Kesu'tte nan kai na... oto kesu wa ne... wakatta! I get rid of old tapes.
50	B:	Ah!
51	A:	I think... I... I think this tape is... this tape need not, so I have more tapes and CDs. I give
52		CDs I don't listen to I give my brother.
53	B:	I see.

- Students frequently asked for information about different bands or about what kind of music various bands played, as illustrated below (54-60). We can see an anticipatory answer as well (59). (It doesn't show up well in the transcription, but this was an interruption of A (58), who rather that not being able to formulate the question was instead interrupted while asking it.)

54	A:	Could you tell me about them? I don't know about them very much. I heard
55		Sakawa {band member name} is very nice, but I don't know who is Sakawa.
56	B:	Sakawa is vocalist.
57	A:	How many people are...
58	B:	Four.
59	A:	Sakawa and... who?

- In the following exchange, I assume that the question prior to my eavesdropping concerned the nature of the lyrics of the songs. We can see what is a frequent pairing among Japanese students of "tatoiba" and its English equivalent "for example". These students' Japanese English teachers use the same formulation frequently in formal and informal staff room discussion. We can see strategies of literal translation (64) (further discussed below) and circumlocution (66).

60	A:	I can't hear, I can't understand vocals's voice.
61	B:	Do you dislike, uh, tatoiba for example, do you dislike X-Japan?
62	A:	I've never heard their music.
63	B:	Oh, that's good! Good! Really!
64	A:	Really?
65	B:	Heavy metal, a little pop, quiet...good!
66	A:	OK.

("Oh, that's good!" was understood to mean, "Their music is very good." As there was no repair on the part of the other student, we can assume that this was in fact the intended meaning. It is a Literal Translation of "are wa ii yo!" This aspect of the student's interlanguage would probably be misunderstood by a native speaker to mean "It's a good thing you've never heard it.")

- One pair misunderstood the instructions. They believed that they were supposed to write down their partners' replies. This provides an interesting example of students helping each other with coping with the task at hand (albeit misguided help). The pair had just finished discussing one of the questions.

67	A:	Next.
68	B:	Oh, what you wrote now?
69	A:	Now?
70	B:	Yes.
71	A:	Exercise five?
72	B:	Yes.
73	A:	I already wrote down you said "....".
74	B:	I don't know what I should write.
75	A:	Maybe you should write down "...".

- Students employed strategies of circumlocution to make up for vocabulary they couldn't supply on their own (78). This frequently performed the same function as an appeal for assistance in that it elicited the correct item from their partner (79). This extract also shows B asking for clarification of the word "second" (81). (In the following extract, the word "grade" (81) reflects a direct transfer from Japanese: to illustrate, kookoo ichinen sei translates directly as high school first year, or grade).

76   A: I haven't listened to (band name) for five years.
77   B: Five years!
78   A: My... not high school, not elementary school...
79   B: Junior high school?
80   A: Yes, junior high school second.
81   B: Second grade?
82   A: Yes. One, two, three, four, five, six, oh six years!

The following extract was one of the most amusing and enlightening in that it illustrated that teachers are not always aware of what the students' perceptions are of what they are doing. These two students (pair number 4, who had done the extensive repair above (32-40) were discussing a music-related topic when one blurted out:

83   A: We finished 20 minutes ago!
84   B: What time is it now?
85   A: It's 12:37 or 6 or 5, I don't know.

The teacher can perceive the students as being on task, whereas in the students' minds, they have finished and are now just biding their time until the teacher calls a halt. (The corollary to this notion is well-known to teachers experienced with Japanese students; often students appear to be off-task when in fact they are assessing and clarifying with others exactly what the task entails).

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[i] The terms On Task and Off Task are from DeGuerrero and Villamil (1994), who used the terms to discuss On-Task Episodes, About-Task Episodes and Off-Task Episodes in student peer revision of essays. They framed this within Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development, and analyzed student interaction not only in terms of On-, About- and Off-Task, but also in terms of the interacting students' relative levels of ability within the task, a relationship that is important in the zone of

proximal development construct as a "knower" guides a "non-knower" towards in imitation of, and eventual independence in, the task. DeGuerrero and Villamil's coding scheme could be generalized and adapted to fit Willis' discourse classification scheme under Pseudo and Free.

[ii] The reason the scale is ranked 4-3-1-0 rather than 3-2-1-0 is due to the grading scheme at my school:

A   =   100-80 %

B   =   79-70 %

C   =   69-50 %

D   =   49-40 %

E   =   39-0 % (fail)

On a 4 point scale with 4 as the highest

- Beyond Task 4 = 100 %

- On Task :   3 = 75 %, a B grade. This is "good" at my school.

- (Not Used) 2 = 50 %, a C grade, almost D. This is "low mediocre" at my school.

- Below Task   1 = 25 %, which is a failing grade.

- Off Task: 0 = 0 %, showing no effort.

If I had opted to employ a scale from 3 to 0, this would have been:

- Beyond Task 3 = 100 %

- On Task: 2 = 66 %, a C grade - "mediocre" I considered it too low a grade for On Task performance.

- Below Task   1 = 33 %, which is nearly a passing grade; I considered it too high for Below Task performance.

- Off Task: 0 = 0 %, showing no effort.

When I was designing the grading scheme, I created several scenarios to check the grading scheme. The scale with 4 as highest yielded results that corresponded to my feelings as to the merits of performances, whereas the scale with 3 as highest seemed to penalize students who were merely On Task, and give too many points to those who were Below Task.