Teacher-learner interaction with asymmetrical power and knowledge: A case of a noncooperative pair

Midori Tanimura¹, Etsuko Yoshida², Koichiro Nakamoto³, Kazuhiro Takeuchi⁴

¹Kyoto University Of Foreign Studies, Japan
²Mie University, Japan
³Yamanashi University, Japan
⁴Osaka Electro-Communication University, Japan

There are many occasions when people talk noncooperatively, yet little research has been done in this field. This paper explores how noncooperative interaction in an asymmetrical setting is designed by using conversation analysis.

We video-recorded a task-based dialogue of ten pairs of English speaking teachers (ESTs) and Japanese English learner (JELs), based on Clark and Krych (2004)’s Lego task. A JEL assembled the Lego blocks based on instruction from the EST. One pair, who did the task noncooperatively, was the main focus of this study.

We used conversational analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974), which focused on investigating the sequential organization that is observably produced through the interaction in a particular setting. We especially focused on turn taking organization, closing sequence, and lexical choice, based on the study of institutional talk (Drew and Heritage 1992).

Analysis of the video-recording revealed three key points. The first was that the EST didn’t pause, where the JEL could intervene, especially when the EST was closing sequences. It seems to be clear that the closing sequence was designed by the EST to avoid allowing questions from the JEL (See Heritage 1997). Secondly, the lexical choice ”OK?” by the EST, which was used to check the JEL’s attention, agreement, or readiness for the next turn (Carletta, et. al. 1995) was also designed to favor a ”yes” response from the JEL, rather than inviting questions. Lastly, the interaction involved special turn-taking practices as a means of reducing conflict between the participants. The JEL used backchannels as an indicator of showing his understanding (See Brennan 1998), though it was clear that both knew the task was not completed correctly.

In sum, the EST and JEL designed their turns so that each participant couldn’t take a turn as ”listener” and ”speaker” nor contribute to the interaction.

Keywords: sequential organization, conversation analysis, noncooperative, teacher-learner interaction.