

## The Development of Interactional Competence in a Situated Practice by Japanese Learners of English as a Second Language

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### Abstract

This paper investigated how three Japanese learners of English developed their interactional competence in one situated practice of calling to the bookstore. Even though explicit feedback was not given to the learners throughout the practice, as the theory of situated learning indicates, all of the learners (or novices) improved their interactional competence by getting implicit feedback from receivers (or experts). Among interactional competences re-defined by the author, the change of the linguistic patterns was the most obvious. The learners actively participated in the social activity (telephone calls to bookstores), tested their hypothesis on their discourse or lexical items, and learned more effective (less problematic) ways of communication in that situated activity. It is true that this research is limited in terms of the authenticity of the task, the scale of the practice, and the number of the participants, but the data collected and analyzed in this study can give us some clear evidence that learning occurred through participation in a situated practice.

### Introduction

Since Firth and Wagner (1996) criticized the imbalance in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research by pointing out that only the cognitive approach had been taken in SLA as a field, the social (interactional) approach has been highlighted. Although their attempt to reconceptualize SLA, by including not only the cognitive perspective but also the social (sociocultural) perspective, has not been accepted by all SLA researchers, it has been highly influential. As Zuengler and Miller (2006) summarized, this social perspective comes from several theories not necessarily originating in SLA: Vygotskian sociocultural theory, language socialization, and situated learning. Inspired by this sociocultural perspective, I conducted research on how learners of English as a second language developed their interactional competence through a situated practice—calling bookstores in the U.S. I will first review the notion of situated learning as well as previous studies on telephone talk. Then, I will present a study on telephone calls made by three Japanese-learners of English, and conclude with implications for teaching and learning.

### Situated Learning

The theory of situated learning (*legitimate peripheral participation*) sees learning as “an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). Lave and Wenger claimed that learning occurs in the process of joining situated activities: “a

new comer” (a novice) becomes “an old-timer” (an expert) by fully participating in the sociocultural practices of the target community (p. 122). They propose that learners gain necessary knowledge, skill, and discourse as well as develop their identity as a member of the community through interactions with and observations of the community’s experts. These processes are quite similar to the way that children develop their various competences through taking part in social interactions (Ochs, 2002). According to Ochs (2002), children, who are socially and culturally novice participants in a community, “become acquainted with activities not only from their own and other’s attempts to define what transpires in an activity, but also from how those participating in the activity respond to them” (p. 107). This explanation gives us an insight about how learners develop their interactional competence in situated practices.

From a pedagogical perspective, situated learning is related to experiential learning. The basic principle behind experiential learning lies in the importance of experience in learning. Reiterating the progressive philosophy of education articulated by John Dewey (1939), Kohonen (2001) states that “experiential learning is used to refer to a wide range of educational approaches in which formal learning (in institutional contexts) is integrated with practical work and informal learning in a number of settings” (p. 22). He adds that experiential learning includes a lot of interactive practices, all of

which have an element of “learning from immediate experience and engaging the learners in the process as whole persons, both intellectually and emotionally” (p. 23), and that participants observe the event and do something meaningful through active participation. Dewey (1939) himself emphasized the importance of learning by doing and maintained that “sound educational experience involves, above all, continuity and interaction between learner and what is learned” (p. x). Thus, both situated learning and experiential learning agree on the importance of engaging learners in interactive activities.

Another perspective closely related to the notion of situated learning is an ecological approach in language learning (van Lier, 2000). According to van Lier, the ecological approach maintained that “the perceptual and social activity of the learner, and particularly the verbal and nonverbal interaction in which the learner engages, are central to an understanding of learning” (p. 246), and therefore, “they do not just facilitate learning, they *are* learning in a fundamental way” (p. 246). In this sense, this approach may suggest a stronger position for the role of interactive activities in language learning. Similar to situated learning, in the ecological view, educators should provide a rich “semiotic budget,” that is, “the opportunities for meaningful action that the situation affords,” to shape the learner’s activities and participation (van Lier, 2000, pp. 252-253).

The notion of situated learning is thus connected with a cluster of sound theoretical foundations whose perspectives are highly useful for the study of second language acquisition. In this paper, I aim to examine second language learning from these perspectives in one situated practice, telephone calls to bookstores. The next section will describe some of its features.

### Telephone Conversation

There have been a number of studies on telephone conversations. Bowles and Pallotti (2004) classified the studies of telephone talk into three types: mono-cultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural studies.

Among the monocultural studies, Schegloff’s (1968) are often considered classic. In one of his papers, he focused on telephone conversation openings and analyzed their formulation by using conversation analysis. His study (Schegloff, 1979) included 450 phone calls, which involved various subjects in terms of age, gender, region, social class and so forth. He found nine types of caller’s first turn (Schegloff, 1979). Then, paying more attention to the feature of routineness in telephone conversation, he proposed four sequences in telephone call openings: “a summons/answer sequence,” “an identification sequence,” “a greeting sequence,” and “‘how are you’ sequences” (Schegloff, 1986, p. 116). These monocultural studies of telephone conversation are meaningful not only for the field of sociology but also for language learning. Stimulated by Schegloff’s work, Wong (2000, 2003) provided some pedagogical implications of teaching telephone conversation. She proposed a model lesson plan for teaching typical American English telephone conversations and pointed out the inadequacy of telephone conversations as they are presented in ESL textbooks.

Bowles and Pallotti (2004) examined opening sequences of telephone calls at several workplaces including bookstores in Italy and in the United Kingdom. Their study contains four types of analysis: comparing workplace calls with ordinary telephone calls, comparing workplace calls in Italian with those in English, comparing workplace calls with calls to bookstores, and comparing calls to bookstores in Italian with those in English. Thus, their study is both monocultural and cross-cultural. Their studies (Bowles & Pallotti, 2004; Pallotti, 2006) reveal some of the unique features in telephone calls in the workplace. For example, in the “identification sequence” (or identification-recognition sequence), receiver identification, which mostly provides the identification of place, is done in the first turn with the greeting, and caller identification occurs only when it is urgently required. Besides, in contrast to ordinary telephone calls, the “‘how are you’ sequences” are replaced by the “pre-request and initial enquiry se-

quence” in workplace calls, and this pre-request and initial enquiry sequence was achieved in one turn in 64% of the calls examined and in more than two turns in 36% of the calls examined in calls made to bookstores in English (Bowles & Pallotti, 2004, pp. 83-84). While Bowles and Pallotti’s (2004) research and my own share the same topic—calling bookstores, the difference is that my study is concerned with the intercultural type of telephone talk and involves Japanese learners of English calling bookstores in the US.

### Research Questions

Based on Bowles and Pallotti’s (2004)’s study and the perspective of situated learning, this research project was carried out to examine telephone calls between a native speaker (a receiver) and a non-native speaker of English from Japan (a caller). The purpose of this study is not to simply compare non-native speakers’ telephone calls with a native speaker’s calls, but to see how learners participate in this situated practice and how they change through repeated participation. According to the perspective of situated learning, if learners are given the opportunity to participate in the practice of a community, they will become more competent participants. Therefore, my research question is: how do Japanese learners of English develop their interactional competence through participation in the situated practice of calling a bookstore?

The term “interactional competence” refers to the ability to interact with people. Hall (1999) summarized it as entailing knowledge about “(1) the goals of the interactive practice, the roles of the participants, and the topics and themes considered pertinent; (2) the optional linguistic action patterns along which the practice may unfold, their conventional meanings, and the expected participation structures; (3) the amount of flexibility one has in rearranging or changing the expected uses of the practice’s linguistic resources when exercising these options and the likely consequences engendered by the various uses; and (4) the skill to mindfully and efficiently recognize situations where the patterns apply and to

use them when participating in new experiences to help make sense of the unknown” (p. 137).

Since Hall’s definition contains overlapping elements, I would like to re-define interactional competence in order to better suit my project. Specifically, the notion “interactional competence” will be used in this paper to mean the ability to (1) understand and express the goals, topics, and themes of a given situated practice, (2) understand and express the roles and participation structures/frameworks in that practice, (3) use linguistic patterns to achieve the goals, and (4) use linguistic forms with flexibility to handle problems in new situations. Because the data in my research did not entail new or unexpected situations, the fourth component will not be included in the analysis.

To complement Hall’s conceptualization, I will use Goffman (1981)’s definition of participation frameworks to examine the learners’ construction of participation structures/frameworks. In Goffman’s view, an utterance indexes a footing, or stance, for the speaker and others involved in the interaction. Through talk, people indicate to one another their participation status and identities, and these make up the participation framework of the utterance.

### Methodology

This is a case study investigating how learners learned English through repeated participation in a service encounter— telephone calls to bookstores in the U.S. The participants of this study were three native speakers of Japanese, who were learning English in a short-term intensive English program in Hawai’i. The program was scheduled for twenty hours per week with an emphasis on listening and speaking. Taro<sup>1</sup> and Jiro were sophomores at a university in Japan and enrolled in this program as a part of an exchange program at their university. They had studied English for almost 7 years but only at schools in Japan. They had studied English through the grammar translation method and had little time to practice speaking English. The other participant, Hanako, was in her twenties and enrolled in this program in order to im-

prove her communication skills in English. She had studied English for 12 years at school and an additional two years at junior college in Japan. She had been taking conversation lessons at a private English school in Japan for the previous three years. All three students had an intermediate level of English proficiency and were enrolled in the intensive program for three months, from October to December in 2006. This was the first time for Taro and Jiro to study in the U.S. Hanako had previously studied in Boston for three weeks when she was a student in junior college. The study was carried out in November, a month after they arrived in the U.S.

The participants were asked to call bookstores in the U.S. ten times within approximately an hour. There were two tasks: (1) to ask a bookstore whether they had a book or not, and (2) to ask for the store's hours of operation. After an explanation about the study (provided in Japanese by the author), the participants were given a worksheet (see Appendix A) with a list of bookstores to call. The data were collected individually in a public meeting room by using the author's cell phone with a speaker phone function, and their conversations were audio-recorded. The students were asked to find three types of books (see Appendix B): popular books which a bookseller could identify easily (List 1), textbooks which might be hard for a bookseller to find or identify (List 2), and books which have not been published yet (List 3). This information about the books was not provided to the participants.

The students were instructed to call the bookstores as if they needed those books and planned to visit the stores even when they did not have the books. Thus, there were two tasks for the learners to accomplish: (a) to inquire about the availability of a book, and (b) to inquire about the store's hours. They were told that they did not have to ask the clerk to hold the book for them. The three students chose the books from List 1 for their first five calls, from List 2 for their sixth and seventh calls, from List 3 for their eighth and ninth calls, and finally, back to List 1 for their last

call. Hanako and Jiro followed this procedure throughout, but Taro deviated by using List 1 for his first four calls and then returning to it for his last two calls. Because of technical problems, Jiro's ninth and tenth calls were lost.

After the students completed 10 calls each, they answered a questionnaire about their learning background, their previous experience calling bookstores, and how they felt about the study (see Appendix C). A follow-up interview was also carried out based on their answers. The questionnaire and the interview were conducted in Japanese and then translated by the author into English for this paper.

In order to see the participants' development more clearly, data from telephone calls by a native speaker of English were also collected. The participant, Jean, is a graduate student in her early twenties. This native speaker's data were collected by following the same procedure except for the number of calls. She made only three calls, one each from List 1, List 2, and List 3. Discourse analysis of the transcripts and tapes was carried out to examine the recorded conversations. The transcription followed the guidelines for analyzing conversations as described by Seedhouse (2005).

## Findings

In the process of calling the bookstore ten times, all of the participants came to communicate with receivers more smoothly and effectively. Certainly, the telephone conversations recorded contained features of native-nonnative talk found in previous research, such as "here-and-now" topics," and required the participants to make "interactional modification, produce repetitions, paraphrase, and check for confirmation" (Long, 1991, cited in Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 293). However, as the participants called the bookstores more, these features seemed to have decreased. To see their improvement more precisely, I will examine how they changed with respect to the three aspects of the interactional competence for a given situated practice as re-defined above: the ability to (1) understand and express the goals, topics, and themes, (2) understand

and express roles and participation structures/ frameworks, and (3) use linguistic patterns to achieve the goals.

### Goals, Topics, and Themes

In this section, I will discuss the learners' ability to understand and express the goals of this situated practice and to respond to the other participants in ways that show this understanding. More concretely, understanding the goals would involve the learners' focusing on the two tasks of the telephone call, namely, (a) to inquire about the availability of a book, and (b) to inquire about the store's hours. The learners' understanding about the topics and themes of the practice would be shown in the relevance of their utterances in this situation. All of the telephone calls collected in this

study showed the initial enquiry sequence regarding the first task. Thus, it seems that all three learners understood the main goal of this practice. However, this may be because they had been given the instructions for the activity in their native language before they started calling the bookstores. The learners had some trouble in accomplishing the second required task, inquiring about the store hours. The second task was accomplished in all of Taro's calls, in all but the third call by Jiro (because the receiver hung up in the middle of their conversation), and in all but the second call by Hanako (because the receiver terminated the conversation soon after her first inquiry). Excerpt 1 gives an example of how the learner may fail to sustain the conversation long enough to accomplish the second task.

[Excerpt 1]

- Hanako 02                      List 1    R: receiver (a bookseller) C: caller (a learner)
- 7 C:                              thre:e- what pardon?
- 8 R:                              (1.5) if you wanna call back? a couple of days, we are hoping that we might have some in.
- 9 C:                              ah no, thank you.
- 10 R:                             okay thanks.
- 11 C:                             thank you.

It seems that in this conversation, Hanako could not start talking about the second task due to the receiver's invitation for the caller to call back (line 8). This made it unnecessary for the caller to visit the store and thus there was no need to inquire about the store hours. In line 9, since Hanako thanked the store clerk, it allowed the clerk to end the conversation (line 10).

In retrospect, the second task was imposed on the learners by the researcher, and it may not be natural for certain conversations to move into this task (as seen in Excerpt 1). If a book is not available at a store, the store clerk may not expect the caller to visit the store, and thus, if the participants wanted to inquire about its hours, they might need to perform additional interac-

tional work. This is a weakness in the design of this study that I hope to improve in future research.

Regarding the topic of the conversations, most of the time the learners discussed only relevant topics in this study. However, Taro used seemingly irrelevant verbs in his first three calls and in his eighth call. He used the verb *lend* in his first and second call when he tried to add explanation about the reason to call. Interestingly, even though he said, "I wanna lend. So if you have this book, I will go" (first call, line 46), and "I wanna lend this book so I went to there" (second call, line 20), this use did not affect conversation at all. However, when he used the verb, *borrow*, in his third call, the receiver got confused for a while:

- [Excerpt 2] list 1  
Taro 03
- 20 C: yes no no no i i wanna borrow (.) this book.  
21 R: (2.0) i'm sorry?  
22 C: (.)hi (2.0) hi, [i wanna  
23 R: [er  
24 C: i wanna borrow *valley of silence*.  
25 R: (2.0) do you wanna buy the book of *valley of silence*.  
26 C: borrow borrow borrow.  
27 R: we don't borrow books. we're not a library.  
28 C: you don't have?  
29 R: we have it.  
30 C: [oh  
31 R: [we] can sell it to you we don't check them, we don't lend them out.  
32 C: okay okay, i i will go to there.  
33 R: okay what's your name? so i can hold the book for you?

When Taro said, “I wanna borrow this book” (line 20), the receiver could not understand what he was talking about because Taro’s utterance did not fit the situation. After some negotiation about the meaning of Taro’s utterance (line 22-26), the receiver understood Taro’s intention and responded to his request by explaining that the bookstore is not a library (line 27 and 31). Taro overcame this trouble by saying, “Okay, Okay” and shifting the topic (line 32). This interaction, however, did not seem to help Taro avoid the use of *borrow* in this practice, since he used this word again in his eighth call.

In the follow-up interview, I found out that Taro had misunderstood the task. He thought that he was calling libraries, not bookstores. In this sense, Taro misunderstood the goals of the activity. His misconception was perhaps caused by the set-up nature of this activity and by insufficient explanation on my part. Given Taro’s misunderstanding, it was extra-ordinary that he was able to maintain the conversations in the other seven phone calls.

### **Roles and Participation Structures/ Frameworks**

If people are experienced members of a community, they should know what roles

each participant plays in social activities and adapt themselves to these roles. Therefore, it can be said that each situated practice comes with certain expected participation structures. Since the learners in this study are engaged in telephone conversations, they need to know how to perform on the telephone. They also need to recognize the typical role of a customer and produce utterances the expected framework of a service encounter.

All of the learners answered in the questionnaire that this was their first time to call a bookstore in the U.S. However, since they were brought up in Japan and were familiar with telephone conversation in Japanese, they knew the typical participation structures of phone calls. Unlike multi-party conversations, turn taking on the phone is relatively simple: a caller and a receiver talk by taking turns unless either of them is asked to hold by the other. Both parties are expected to respond quickly enough to let the other know that he/she is there. For example, Jiro said, “Hello?” (sixth call, line 9), when the receiver did not say anything for 12 seconds (Excerpt 3).

[Excerpt 3]

- Jiro 06 list 2
- 5 C: hello. i wanna buy (2.0) *situated learning*.
- 6 R: (2.0) i'm sorry?
- 7 C: *situated learning*.
- 8 R: (12.0)
- 9 C: hello?
- 10 R: Uh-huh, i'm i'm here i'm working on the computer so i can look it up for you.
- 11 C: Oh yeah.

Jiro's "Hello?" in line 9 shows his understanding that participants in conversations on the phone usually do not become silent for a while without saying anything. Therefore, he implicitly requested the receiver to respond to him.

Similarly, when the receivers became silent for a while in other exchanges, Hanako sometimes used "Excuse me?" and Taro said, "OK?" to implicitly check the receivers' participation. Thus, all three learners knew the fundamental participation structures of speaking on the telephone. On the other hand, the fact that the learners checked the store clerks' participation when they were looking up information about the books shows that they probably did not fully understand the intended context of the

[Excerpt 4]

- Taro 02 list 1
- 14 R: oh okay, e:r hold on, i need a second to check it, HOLD on.
- 15 C: (1.0) /e/
- 16 R: ((music))

However, in his third call, Taro did not use this expression any more (Excerpt 5). He just said, "Okay" (line 17), instead, and the communication continued smoothly. Although it is possible that he still could not

[Excerpt 5]

- Taro 03 list 1
- 14 R: I can check.
- 15 C: yes.
- 16 R: (3.0) hold on just a second.
- 17 C: okay.
- 18 R: ((music))

In the tenth call, Taro showed a different reaction when the receiver asked him to wait:

study. That is, they did not seem to understand that silence during these phone calls might be expected since the store clerk needed to locate the requested information.

Related to this, the receivers occasionally asked the callers to wait or hold as they looked for the information. When the receiver asked Jean to hold, she accepted it saying "Okay, thank you" (first call) and "Okay" (third call) without any problems. In contrast, Taro had trouble in understanding this request as shown in Excerpt 4 of his second call. When the receiver asked him to hold on, Taro said "/e/" (line 15) which in Japanese is used by a speaker to express that s/he cannot understand what the other person has just said.

understand what the receiver said in line 16, his reaction may suggest that his previous experience, in the second call, had enabled him to better understand the roles of a receiver and a caller in this situated practice.

## [Excerpt 6]

- Taro 10 list 1  
 4 R: okay, i'm gonna put you through to the desk. can you hold on a second?  
 5 C: (2.0).  
 6 R: hold on.  
 7 C: what?  
 8 R: (( music ))  
 9 C: oh.

These data show that he still had difficulty understanding the receiver's utterance; however, his way of saying "Oh" (line 9) implies that he just realized what was going on, i.e., the receiver had just put him on hold to find the book. In other words, the data seem to indicate that with repeated participation, Taro had come to a new understanding about the expected roles for the caller and receiver in this situation—the receiver may need to ask a caller to wait for a

while, and the caller usually accepts this request. In other words, in one aspect, Taro came to understand the participation structures of a telephone conversation in English more clearly by participating in the practice and became a more experienced member of the community.

However, in some other aspects, Taro remained a novice. The following data show that he frequently conducted himself as a non-native speaker in the phone calls:

## [Excerpt 7]

- Taro 01 list 1  
 9 C: er (.) author is (2.0) Nicholas sparks.  
 10 R: (2.0) could you spell it out for me, the last name?  
 11 C: (1.0) e:r (.) hh i i can't speak english very well. so please speak slowly.  
 12 R: oh could you spell out the last name for me, please.  
 13 C: (2.0) do you have *dear john*?  
 14 R: (2.0) er i can't understand what you're saying sorry one more time please?  
 15 C: *dear john*.  
 16 R: can you spell out the last name?  
 17 C: last name? ah okay. Nicholas.

In his first call, Taro indicated that he could not understand what the receiver had said (line 11), perhaps because it was too fast and he was nervous. Up to this point in the conversation, the receiver and Taro could be said to assume the participation structures between native or fluent speakers of English. In line 11, Taro explicitly invoked his non-native speaker status by saying "I can't speak English very well, so please speak slowly" (line 11). In the next

exchange, the receiver showed his understanding of Taro's identity and repeated the previous utterance a bit slowly without sounding irritated (line 12). Although this did not work immediately and their miscommunication continued up to line 15, they continued talking on the phone and were able to solve their problem in line 17.

Similarly, Taro invoked his identity as a non-native speaker of English in the beginning of his second call:

[Excerpt 8]

- Taro 02 list 1
- 5 C: er do you have (.) *the innocent man*
- 6 R: excuse me?
- 7 C: uh, i'm japanese so i can't speak english very well. [sorry.]
- 8 R: [uh-huh.]
- 9 C: i'm looking for (.) a book.
- 10 R: okay.

In the second call, right after the first indication by the receiver that he had not been understood (line 6), Taro immediately revealed his identity as a new member of the community (a Japanese who “can’t speak English very well.” line 7). By overtly informing the receiver of his language deficiency, Taro successfully changed the participation structures. In this new participation framework, Taro was not obliged to speak well or fluently, and he could request

language help. The bookseller was now requested to speak slowly and try to help a non-native speaking customer. This shift enabled Taro to complete the task more easily. From his third to seventh calls, he did not clearly state his identity as a foreigner. However, when he encountered a serious communication breakdown in his eighth call, he employed this strategic shifting of the participation framework again:

[Excerpt 9]

- Taro 08 list 3
- 12 R: the book is called alice walker or the author is alice walker?
- 13 C: yes yes yes yes. and title is
- 14 R: wait, a book is called alice walker?
- 15 C: alice walker, yes.
- 16 R: the book.
- 17 C: the book (.) is
- 18 R: not the author?
- 19 C: no no. (1.0) *we are the ones we have been waiting for.*
- 20 R: did you order the book?
- 21 C: yes? yes? i wanna i wanna borrow borrow, this book.
- 22 R: (1.0) no, we don't let you borrow books but we sell it
- 23 C: yes hm?
- 24 R: (1.0) hello?
- 25 C: hello.
- 26 R: (1.0) yes?
- 27 C: er, i, i can't speak english very well, so (1.0) i'm sorry (.) and (1.0) title okay?
- 28 R: the title is alice walker?
- 29 C: NO. (.) this is (1.0) not author author.
- 30 R: the author [is, alice walker, right?
- 31 C: [yes yes.]
- 32 R: what is the title.

- 33 C: title is *we are the ones we have been waiting for*.  
 34 R: *we are the ones we have been waiting for?*  
 35 C: yes.

In his eighth turn, he needed to find a book from List 3, which had not been published and thus might be unfamiliar to the store clerk. Here, Taro failed to reply to the receiver's question correctly. When the receiver asked Taro to clarify if "Alice Walker" was the book title or the author (in line 12-14), Taro told the receiver that it was the author by saying "Yes (line 15)." What is worse, Taro used the word *borrow* again in this context (line 21). This made the receiver more confused and unable to continue to solve the title vs. author problem (in line 22-26). At exactly this point of double confusion, Taro shifted the participation structures by invoking his non-native speaker status, "I can't speak English very well, so I'm sorry. And title OK?" (line 27). Due to this shift, Taro was able to provide an explanation for the confusion and implicitly request language accommodation by the receiver. Also, in the same turn, he returned to the problem of title vs. author, thus succeeding in bypassing the problem with the word *borrow* and refocusing the conversation on the key issue in the conversation. It is important to note that Taro did not use the strategy of invoking his non-native status in all of his calls. The data seem to show that he selectively shifted the

participation structures as an interactional resource to solve communication problems.

### Use of Linguistic Pattern to Achieve Goals

This third component of interactional competence includes the ability to use or acquire the appropriate linguistic patterns such as discourse routines, grammatical structures, and lexical items specific to a given situated practice.

As Bowles and Pallotti (2004) indicated, in telephone conversations at workplaces, the "pre-request and initial enquiry sequence" occurs instead of the "how are you' sequence" in ordinary conversations (pp. 83-84). In telephone calls to bookstores, in order to conduct the pre-request or initial enquiry, the caller tends to use expressions such as "I'd like some information," "I'd like to know," "I was wondering," and "could you tell me" (Bowles & Pallotti, 2004, p. 83). Jean's opening data were consistent with these features. She used similar expressions with little variation: "I'm looking for [the book's title]" (first call, line 3), "I'm trying to find a (text) book, it's called [the book's title]" (second call, line 3), "I'm looking for a book called [the book's title]" (third call, line 3) (Excerpts 10-12).

[Excerpt 10]

- Jean 01 list 1  
 1 C: (( ring ))  
 2 R: thank you for calling (the store's name), how may i direct your call?  
 3 C: (1.0) um, I'm looking for a book title?

[Excerpt 11]

- Jean 02 list 2  
 1 C: (( ring ))  
 2 R: (the store's name) how can i help you.  
 3 C: yes, um I'm trying to find a textbook? (1.0) it's called, it's called *making communicative (. ) language teaching teaching happen?*

[Excerpt 12]

- Jean 03 list 3  
 1 C: (( ring ))

- 2 R: (the store's name) (the name of the clerk) speaking.  
 3 C: hi, um, I'm looking for a book called *mistral's kiss*?

Among the learners, Hanako also used the expected linguistic patterns, saying "I'm looking for [the book's title]." Jiro on the other hand used different expressions and often caused miscommunication. In his first call, when he used "I wanna buy a *Cross* (the book's title)," the receiver did not show signs of misunderstanding or confusion. However, in his second call, when Jiro said "I wanna buy *Dear John* (the book's title)," the receiver could not understand him. This seems to have triggered Jiro's use of a different expression in his third call: "Does this shop have *The Innocent Man* (a book's title)?" It caused a serious communication breakdown: the receiver could not understand what he meant, showed a reluctant attitude, and quickly hung up by saying, "I

can't understand you." After this problematic call, he went back to the expression which he used in his first call and which did not lead to any trouble, "I wanna buy [the book's title]" and continued to use this expression to the end. It seems that repeated participation in this activity allowed Jiro to discover what worked and what did not work, and to return to the successful linguistic expression to achieve his goals.

Interesting changes can also be seen in Taro's telephone calls. In his first call (line 5 and 7, Excerpt 13), he said, "Do you have [the book's title]," using the same linguistic structure as Jiro did in his third call, and similarly to Jiro, Taro ran into communication problems.

[Excerpt 13]

- Taro 01 list 1  
 1 C: ( (ring) )  
 2 R: (the store's name) can i help you?  
 3 C: hello.  
 4 R: hello.  
 5 C: do you have (.) *dear john*?  
 6 R: (1.0) again?  
 7 C: do you have *dear john*?  
 8 R: (1.0) mmm, i can't understand what you're saying. could you repeat that, please?

The problem that both Jiro and Taro had with this particular book title seems to stem from the combination of *have* and the title *Dear John* and the students' failure to use prosodic cues (such as intonation, emphasis, and pauses) to indicate that *Dear John* was a book title. What was meaningful,

however, was that, in Taro's second call (Excerpt 14), once he realized that his initial request was problematic (line 5 and 6), he rephrased his request to use the expression, "I'm looking for a book" (line 9), which is very similar to Jean's expressions.

[Excerpt 14]

- Taro 02 list 1  
 1 C: ( (rings) )  
 2 R: (the store's name) can i help you?  
 3 C: hello.  
 4 R: Yes  
 5 C: er do you have (.) *the innocent man*  
 6 R: excuse me?  
 7 C: er, i'm japanese so i can't english very well. [sorry.]

- 8 R: [uh-huh.]  
 9 C: i'm looking for (.) a book.  
 10 R: okay.

The new structure in line 9 successfully communicated to the receiver that the caller was inquiring about a book, and implied that the next turn by the caller will contain the information about that book. Thus, this structure functioned to prepare the receiver for what the caller would say next in the conversation, and could have helped to re-

duce the chance for miscommunication. With the success with this expression, Taro consistently used it from the third call to the tenth call. The reason why he came up with this expression may have been that he had already known and remembered this expression. However, the data in his first call suggest another possible explanation:

[Excerpt 15]

- Taro 01 list 1  
 38 R: oh, nicholas sparks.  
 39 C: yes yes yes.  
 40 R: okay yes (2.0) what book are you looking for?  
 41 C: *dear john.*  
 42 R: oh *dear john.*

In the process of meaning negotiation, the receiver asked, "What book are you looking for?" (line 40). According to Toohey, in the learning process, "learners try other people's utterances; they take words from other people's mouths" (cited in Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 42). Here, Taro may have picked up the expression "looking for a book" from the receiver. This is particularly in line with Ochs's (2002) observation that language socialization is facilitated by reactions from others in social interactions. In both Jiro's and Taro's cases, they were in situations in which the receiver indicated that they had trouble understanding

what the learners had said. It is probable that these responses from the receiver influenced the learners' choice of linguistic expressions in their attempts to achieve their goals more effectively in their subsequent interactions.

Another interesting phenomenon surfaced in Taro's openings. While Jiro and Hanako consistently separated the greeting sequence from the pre-request and initial enquiry sequence, Taro performed both of these two sequences in his first turn in his third (line 3, Excerpt 16) and tenth (line 3, Excerpt 17) calls, and the interaction went smoothly.

Excerpt 16]

- Taro 03 list 1  
 1 C: ((ring))  
 2 R: (the name of the clerk) speaking, how may i help you today?  
 3 C: hello (1.0) I'm looking for (.) a book  
 4 R: (2.0) okay. uh,

[Excerpt 17]

- Taro 10 list 1  
 1 C: ((ring))  
 2 R: (a store's name) can i help you.  
 3 C: hello i'm looking for a james patterson's book.  
 4 R: okay, i'm gonna put you through to the desk. can you hold on a second?

Although he did so only twice out of ten times, this sequence structure was similar to Jean's utterances (see Excerpts 10-12 above) and data from native speakers reported by Bowles and Pallotti (2004). It was possible that Taro had become familiar with telephone conversation openings through continuous practice and was able to use a more effective opening sequence structure.

Another example of using linguistic patterns to achieve goals can be seen in lexical choices made by Hanako. While she was engaged in the second task of this study—asking for the store hours—her choice of lexical items changed. Before looking at her words, it is useful to look at the utterances of the other participants. The native speaker, Jean, used expressions such as “What are your hours,” “Could you tell

me your hours anyways,” or “Could you tell me your store hours please.” Taro and Jiro on the other hand used the following expressions throughout their calls: “What time do you open (and close),” or “What time does this shop open (and close).” Some of the receivers did not understand what they meant at first, but they did understand when the expressions were repeated. As for Hanako, she asked for the store hours by using the words “open hour” in her early calls. The source of this expression was perhaps the worksheet provided to the learners by the researcher (see Appendix A). In her first call, she picked up this expression from the worksheet and used it in the conversation (line 28 and 30). However, the receiver could not understand what she meant by “open hour” (Excerpt 18).

[Excerpt 18]

Hanako 01

list 1

28 C:

[e:r]

a thank you

and (.) and when is the open hour, (1.0) so, I wanna buy the, the book? (2.0) I wanna [buy.

29 R:

[what] hours are we open, is what you are asking?

30 C:

uh, open hour.

31 R:

yes. nine o'clock in the morning till eleven o'clock at night everyday.

32 C:

oh, really? thank you. e:r.

33 R:

uh-huh.

In her third call, she again used this expression, “open hour” in line 17 (Excerpt 19). (She could not ask the receiver about the store hours in her second call.) However, the receiver again could not understand it (line 18). Hanako then repeated the expression in line 19, and the receiver failed to catch it, this time indicating that the trouble source was the expression “open hour,” as can be seen in the receiver's echo question, “when is what” (line 20). Now recognizing the source of the problem, Hanako repeated the expression “open

hour” and offered a paraphrase “from what time?” (line 21). This turned out to help the receiver to finally understand her utterance. Before the receiver started to answer Hanako's question, the receiver confirmed her understanding by rephrasing Hanako's utterance saying, “Oh, store hours” (line 22). This turn by the receiver thus provided Hanako with the formulaic and appropriate expression in this social practice, “store hours.”

- [Excerpt 19]  
Hanako 03
- 16 R: (25.0) yeah we do have that.  
17 C: oh thank you (.) and (1.0) when is (.) when is your (.) open hour.  
18 R: (.) pardon?  
19 C: when is your open hour?  
20 R: (1.0) i'm sorry, when is what?  
21 C: Open hour. from what time?  
22 R: oh, our store hours. (1.0) oh nine to ten, from monday to saturday and nine to nine on sunday.  
23 C: uh, ok. thank you.  
24 R: uh-huh.

In her fourth call (Excerpt 20), Hanako still used the expression “open hour” (line 13) and again, the receiver could

not understand her immediately (line 14). This prompted Hanako to repeat her utterance (line 15).

- [Excerpt 20]  
Hanako 04
- 13 C: e:r no thank you and (.) and when is your open hour?  
14 R: (1.0) sorry?  
15 C: when is your open hour?  
16 C: (1.0) er we close at eleven  
17 R: Close eleven?

The problems that Hanako had in her fourth phone call and the previous ones perhaps had indicated to her that the expression “open hour” was problematic in this social practice and often required extra

interactional work. In her fifth phone call (Excerpt 21), she started to use “store hour” (line 15), the expression provided by the receiver in her third call. This time, no communication breakdown occurred.

- [Excerpt 21]  
Hanako 05
- 13 C: oh thank you. and when is your [when is]  
14 R: [thank you.]  
15 C: uh, sorry sorry, er when is your store hour?  
16 R: (.) we're open until eleven o'clock every night.  
17 C: e:r (1.0) until (.) when?  
18 R: uh, eleven pm?  
19 C: ah, okay thank you.

Since this successful experience using the new form, Hanako started to use this phrase in her following phone call. In the sixth call (Excerpt 22), she used “store

hour” first (but with some hesitation) and added the other expression, “open hour,” perhaps as an additional support

for the receiver to understand her utterance (line 30). This may also indicate a transitional phase in her learning in which she

had not quite sorted out which form was the correct one to use.

[Excerpt 22]

- Hanako 06 list 2
- 28 C: e:r, okay, no thank you. it's ok.
- 29 R: no?
- 30 C: yeah (.) and (.) and when is your (.) store (.) hour? open hour?
- 31 R: our store hours is nine am to eleven pm seven days a week except closed on thanks giving
- 32 C: uh, okay.

In the rest of the phone calls, Hanako consistently used “store hour” and was able to communicate with the receiver more smoothly. Although her linguistic form still contained some grammatical errors—it was not in the plural form and was combined with “when,” not with “what”—It was functional enough to enable her to communicate effectively with the receivers. It is important to note that Hanako picked this expression up from the receiver’s utterance in her third call and tested this expression in her later calls. These data thus demonstrate that learners could change their linguistic patterns through social interaction to achieve their goals more effectively.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This exploratory study has shown that ESL students were able to learn through their repeated participation in the same situated practice, even with no explicit feedback from the researcher or an instructor. This finding is consistent with situated learning theory as discussed above. In this study, language learning was made possible by the opportunities for the learners to interact with more competent participants (the booksellers). However, the degree of competence and learning varied from student to student. It is possible that some forms or structures had been studied before the recorded interactions, but it was through these moments of meaning negotiation that these forms were brought to use in order to achieve specific goals, and thus their interactional competence could be improved.

This small-scale study provides important implications for language teaching practices. First, as Wong (2000) suggested, one way to improve students’ interactional competence might be to ask students to transcribe and discuss their telephone conversations in the classroom in order to help draw their attention to the mechanisms and the details of such interactions. This sort of reflection will help learners to develop their interactional competence more efficiently and meaningfully. Second, in order to learn language more effectively, learners need situated practice with opportunities to see responses from more competent participants, which can serve as implicit feedback for their language use. Teachers, then, should create more opportunities for learners to systematically interact in and reflect on real-life situations to improve their interactional competence. I am absolutely in agreement with Hall (1999) that “engaging in a prosaics of interaction *cannot* be considered an activity that is peripheral to, and thus less important than, the traditional grammar and vocabulary lessons of language classrooms” (p. 151, emphasis added). Hence, providing learners opportunities to experience a wide variety of situated activities with feedback will accelerate their development of inter-actional competence.

Since this is only an exploratory study, it has several limitations that I hope future research can overcome. First, the situated activity that the learners experienced in this study was rather controlled and limited. In the future, more naturalistic situations

should be introduced. Second, this study only investigated one situated practice. More situated activities would enrich the findings and reveal more information about how learning takes place through interaction. Finally, a higher number of subjects would also strengthen the findings. For example, in this study, I found some clear indications of learning in changes in the participants' use of linguistic forms but signs of learning were less visible in other aspects of interactional competence, namely, the ability to understand and express the goals, topics, and participation frameworks. Investigation of more situated practices with more subjects may tell us more about how other aspects of interactional competence are developed.

Regardless of these shortcomings, I hope that this exploratory paper can help to add some insights on how second language is learned and to provide some practical suggestions for second language instruction.

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## Appendix A

### Worksheet

Taro

	Name bookstore	The Book to find	Do they have it or not?	Open hour
1	A			
2	B			
3	C			
4	D			
5	E			
6	F			
7	G			
8	H			
9	I			
10	J			

Jiro

	Name bookstore	The Book to find	Do they have it or not?	Open hour
1	K			
2	L			
3	M			
4	N			
5	O			
6	P			
7	Q			
8	R			
9	S			
10	T			

Hanako

	Name bookstore	The Book to find	Do they have it or not?	Open hour
1	U			
2	A			
3	B			
4	C			
5	D			
6	E			
7	F			
8	G			
9	H			
10	I			

## Appendix B

### Book Lists

#### List 1

*Dear John*

Author: Nicholas Sparks

*The audacity of hope: Thoughts on reclaiming the American dream*

Author: Barack Obama

*The innocent man: Murder and injustice in a small town*

Author: John Grisham

*Valley of silence*

Author: Nora Roberts

*For one more day*

Author: Mitch Albom

*Lisey's Story*

Author: Stephen King

*The Joy of Cooking: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*

Author: Irma S. Rombauer

*You, on a diet: The owner's manual for waist management*

Author: Michael F. Roizen

*Conspiracy game*

Author: Christine Feehan

*Cross*

Author: James Patterson

#### List 2

*Making it happen: Interaction in the second language classroom from theory to practice*

Author: Patricia A. Richard-Amato.

*Second language acquisition: An introductory course*

Author: Lawrence Earlbaum (This information was wrong, but provided to the participants in this way.)

*Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.*

Author: Lave, J., & Wenger, E.

*Second language practice: Classroom strategies for developing communicative competence.*

Author: Duquette, G.

*Making communicative language teaching happen.*

Author: Lee, J. F., & Patten, B.V.

*Communicative language teaching: An introduction.*

Author: Littlewood, W.

### List 3

*Brother odd*

Author: Dean Koontz

*The Boleyn inheritance*

Author: Philippa Gregory

*Mistral's kiss*

Author: Laurell K. Hamilton

*We are the ones we have been waiting for: Inner light in a time of darkness*

Author: Alice Walker

## Appendix C

### Questionnaire

Please answer in Japanese.

Q1. How long have you studied English? What kind of English lessons have you taken? (If you have studied English outside the school, please let me know.)

Q2. How you ever studied abroad?

Q3. How long have you been in the U.S?

Q4. Have you been to a book store in the U.S?

Q5. Have you bought a book in the U.S? If so, how did it go and how did you feel?

Q6. Have you called a bookstore in the U.S?

Q7. Do you call bookstore in Japan?

Q8. Have you learned anything after making telephone calls today? Please write anything you felt (the improvement of your English, cultural difference, and so on). Please answer it concretely.

<sup>1</sup> All of the names in this paper are pseudonyms to protect the participants' privacy.