

# Developing Student's Communication Skills through the Use of Communication Strategies and Writing: Part 3

Karl Koisegg

The materials reported in this paper are part of an MA dissertation in TESOL submitted to the University of Foreign Studies in Nagoya Japan. This study that was conducted over a period of two years attempts to examine the relationship between the use of conversation strategies (CS) and lengths of pauses students make in conversation, as well as the connection between writing paragraphs on conversation topics and oral output. Furthermore, it explores how structured support for students' speaking development affects students' motivation to study English. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through recordings of students' conversations, transcriptions of recorded conversations, CS data sheets to record the use of CS, videotaping of focus groups, questionnaires and focus group student interviews. As the space in this journal does not allow for the entire dissertation of 168 pages, including action research reports, worksheets, transcriptions and appendixes, the present report is focused on the result of the study that was conducted between September 2016 and July 2017 at a woman's university in Nagoya, Japan.

## **Results**

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

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

Table 1

Rating of CS difficulty (November 2017) n=12

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

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

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

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

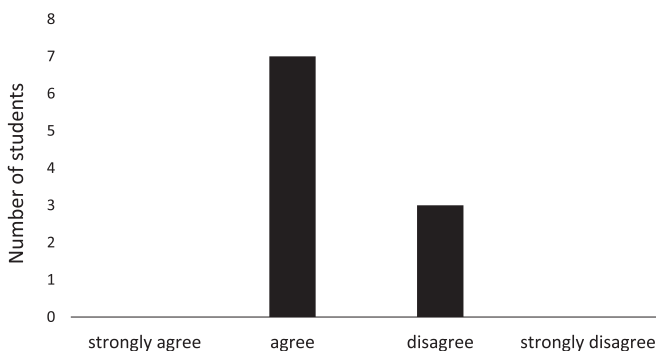


Figure 3. n=12 The pauses I make during a conversation are shorter because I use communication strategies.

Table 2

Communication strategies (Nov. 2017) n=12

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

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

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

Table 3

*Communication strategies (July 2017)* n=10

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

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

Table 4

*Length and frequency of pauses*

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

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

Table 5

*Number of CS used per minute*

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

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

Table 6

*Use of CSs in November (Nene)*

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

Table 7

*Use of CSs in July (Nene)*

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

Table 6 and 7 shows the CS used by Nene in her conversations conducted in July (Table 7) and November (Table 6) (see. page 103-107). The frequent use of shadowing in the conversation done in November, may be a good indicator why she could reduce the lengths and number of pauses in November (see Table 4, page. 89)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Writing

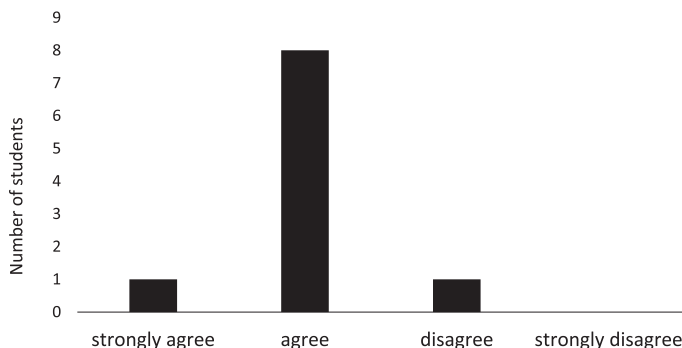


Figure 4. The writing activities help me with speaking.

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

Table 8

*Impact of Writing (Nov. 2017)*

n=12

	Mean	SD
a) I can write about a topic easier than I could last semester.	2.8	0.39
b) The writing activities help me speak more smoothly.	2.8	0.72
c) When I write about a topic it is easier to talk about.	2.9	0.45

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

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

Table 9

*Impact of writing (July 2017)*

n=10

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

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

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

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

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

(分からない単語を事前に知ることができる)

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

(先に紙に書くと、会話がスムーズにできる)

Because I could select vocabulary beforehand my conversations became 'wider'

(関連ワードを事前に書く事で、会話を広げやすくなった)

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

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

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

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

**Yuki:** "Writing on the conversation topics helped to arrange the conversation better. Because I wrote about the conversation, I could imagine the actual conversation better."

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

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

Those comments suggest that their oral output is affected when students discuss topics, they have written paragraphs on. Some students believe that because of writing, their conversations became smoother, and they could reduce pauses in their speech as well (see figure 4, table 8 and 9, pp. 92-93).

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

Table 10

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

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

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

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

**Miki:** “I am more motivated in studying English now. In high school the GTM was used, but in this class, I have a chance to form opinions of what I want to say and speak about it. The structured support for speaking helped my motivation, but lately there was too much scaffolding and I got tired of it.”

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

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

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

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

## Discussion

The results show a rather positive outcome of this study. It indicates that both the CS and writings on the conversation topics could support students’ oral output. The students’ conversations have become smoother. Whether the length and frequency of pauses is directly connected to the use of CS is difficult to prove. The number of CS used in student’s conversations increased, but not by much (see figure 3, table 2-5, pp. 88-89).

Both, the quantitative data gathered and open questions from the questionnaires and focus group students indicate a positive relationship (see page 91). On the other hand, by looking at the transcriptions and places where pauses were made it shows that especially pausing (with the use of CS) natural pauses occur. These pauses are wanted because they indicate that students learned to converse more naturally. However, too many CS introduced at once, can confuse students of a lower level and can be overwhelming for some students. When I consider the acquisition of my students CS and the usage of it, I realized that I could have even more simplified the teaching of CS. In the text I used, there are 30 different kind of CS introduced and many variations of it. In my teaching context, the limited amount of CS taught, already caused confusion (see appendix page 101-102).

Considering the relationship between writing and speaking, and whether writing of paragraphs affects students' oral output, when they write about the conversation topics, seems to be true (see figure 4, table 8 and 9, pp. 92-93). Some students in this class were reluctant to write, but even those, found the writing exercises beneficial. The student's comments on writing suggest that especially, if writing is about the conversation question, or closely related to it, can support students' oral output (see page.93-94). All data collected on writing hints to a positive relationship between writing and speaking.

The last issue was motivation. By looking at the data analyzed, it is suggested that structured support for student's speaking development can be a motivating factor for the reason that especially low-level students are able to follow the lessons, and see progress made. On the other hand, too much structure can be demotivating because the progression of is too slow (see table 10 and pp.95-96).

## Conclusion

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

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

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

My AR clearly shows that CSs are extremely useful tools for supporting conversations. They can give a conversation structure, (opening a conversation, ending a conversation, leading into a question) help



students formulate their utterances (pausing), overcome comprehension issues (if they do not understand), and support their partner (showing interest). By using follow-up questions, conversations can be extended and more information, that leads to a deeper understanding of the speaking partner can be gathered. Transcripts of my students' conversations revealed the benefits of CS in action.

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

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

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

In these two years of conducting AR, I came not only to understand how important it is to constantly improve upon teaching and making adjustments. I also learned that is essential to gather data from various angles to be able to provide data that can support what had happened in a classroom. I came to realize that only by one's own observations and feelings one is subjective and valuable to only a small degree.

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

Appendices: 1

Conversation strategies

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

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

Appendix 2

CS Data Sheet Two

Comparison of CS in terms of knowledge and usage between Sept. and Nov. 2017

12 students	September			November		
	didn't know	knew	used	didn't know	knew	used
<b>Opening a conversation</b>	0	0	12	0	0	12
<b>Ending a conversation</b>	0	0	12	0	0	12
<b>Asking the same question</b>						
<i>How about you?</i>	0	0	12	0	0	12
<i>What about you?</i>	0	2	10	0	0	12
<b>If you don't understand</b>						
<i>Pardon?</i>	0	3	9	0	0	12
<i>Sorry, I didn't understand</i>	0	8	4	0	4	8
<i>Could you repeat that please?</i>	3	8	1	0	10	2
<b>Pausing</b>						
<i>Hmm, let me think...</i>	0	3	9	0	2	10
<i>Let me see...</i>	0	3	9	0	0	12
<i>Well...</i>	0	3	9	0	0	12

<b>Answering a difficult question</b>						
<i>It's really hard to say...</i>	3	8	1	0	7	5
<i>It's really hard to explain...</i>	2	9	1	0	8	4
<b>Leading in to a conversation</b>						
<i>By the way...</i>	0	0	12	0	0	12
<b>Shadowing</b>	9	0	3	0	3	9
<b>Showing interest pos. neg</b>						
<i>Wow! (nice, great...)</i>	1	2	9	0	2	10
<i>Really?</i>	0	1	11	0	0	12
<i>That sounds (great...)</i>	3	7	1	0	5	7
<i>That's too bad!</i>	5	6	1	0	6	8
<i>I'm sorry to hear that!</i>	3	8	1	0	6	8

## Appendix 3

**CS data sheet one.**
**Communication strategies used when students recorded conversation.**

November 13th 2017

No. of students:10

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

Appendix 4

**Length: 2.31 Date: July, 2017**

Nene: Hi

Yuna: Hallo

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

Yuna: Great. How about you?

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

Yuna: Where are you from?

Nene: I am from Nagoya city Aichi

Yuna: Where are you from in Nagoya?

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

Yuna: My hometown Oharu town

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

Yuna: Tell me about your hometown?

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

Yuna: Hmm

Nene: **And you?**

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

Nene: How do you eat red shiso?

Yuna: Tofu or shiso it's really yummy

Nene: What do like doing?

Yuna: I like Karaoke

Nene: **3.5** Who's song do you like?

Yuna: I also like Ahese? Jump to the Janis

Nene: Tell me about his group

Yuna: His group ninth member, very cool

Nene: Whom do you like most in this group?

Yuna: I love Yamada Ryoske

Nene: Ahh

Yuna: What do you like doing?

Nene: I like playing music

Yuna: What do you play?

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

Yuna: A-mazing

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

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

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

Nene: I'm scout (?)

Yuna: Why?

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

Yuna: Haha cheer up

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

Yuna: To you too

Nene: Bye

Yuna: Bye

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

**Frequency of pauses:** Total 15 times 6 times per minute

**CS used per minute:** 2

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

Appendix 5

**Length: 5:35 Date: November 2017**

Nene: Hallo

Mai: Hallo, how are you?

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

Mai: I'm good

Nene: **Oh, good**

Mai: What movie genres do you like?

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

Mai: Oh, animation movies. Why?

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

Mai: Nice

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

Mai: I really likes comedies

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

Mai: Because I can relax when watching one.

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

Mai: I don't you like a science fiction

Nene: **Science fiction?**

Mai: Yes, I

Nene: Why

Mai: Because I cannot sleepy

Nene: **Not sleepy? oh**

Mai: And you

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

Mai: Nothing Why?

Nene: All genres have good point

Mai: Please tell me one your favorite movies?

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

Mai: I know

Nene: **Oh**

Mai: Why do you like it

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

Mai: Yes

Nene: He is very cool

Mai: I like Jonny Depp.

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

Mai: My favorite movie is human drama called Tatcha

Nene: **Tacha?**

Mai: Do you know Tacha?

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

Mai: This story is gamble story

Nene: Its movie its danger

Mai: Yes

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

Mai: take (Japanese)

Nene: Why?

Mai: Ah Because this movie is ??? love and interesting

Nene: **Hmm**

Mai: And my favorite actor is in it.

Nene: **Favorite actor?** Who is it in this movie?

Mai: Is Top

Nene: **Oh Top?**

Mai: Do you know top?

Nene: I don't know

Mai: Top is Korean idol

Nene: **Korean idol?**

Mai: Big bang

Nene: Ah Big Bang **I see I see.** [1] who is an actor that you really like?

Mai: Ah I like actress is Nagano Mei

Nene: **Nagano Mei**. I don't know

Mai: She is a high school student.

Nene: **Highschool student?** Very young! What is special about her?

Mai: Hmm She is very cute

Nene: **Oh cute**

Mai: I thought that she played very well in that movie and she is loved by everyone

Nene: **Hmm** what first saw her?

Mai: I am first saw her in a movie called Oremono Gatari

Nene: **Oremono Gatari?**

Mai: Do you know Oremono Gatari

Nene: Yes, I also saw her saw the movie

Mai: Nice

Nene: What character does sh.. [0.5] her play?

Mai: She plays Yamato Rinko

Nene: **Yamato Rinko? Ah I know I know.** [0.5] She is so cute.

Mai: And you?

Nene: I like I really like actor is Miya Rurika 1 She is stage actor and member of Takarazuka. Do you know Takarazuka?

Mai: Yes. What is special about her?

Nene: She is popular as a male actor. She is very cool and beautiful and sexy and cute

Mai: What first saw her?

Nene: [2] I first saw her musical "Mei Chan no Shitugi". Do you know "Mei Chan Shitugi"?

Mai: Yes. What character does her play?

Nene: She plays Shibata Kento. [2] She play is very cute!

Mai: Nice.

Nene: Yes, bye!

Mai: Bye

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

**Frequency of pauses:** Total 14 times 2.5 times per minute

**CS used per minute:** 4.3

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

Appendix 6

List of conversation topics and questions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of 2017

<b>Music</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What music genre do you like? Why?</li> <li>2. Tell me about an artist or band that you like. What is good about him/her/they?</li> <li>3. What music or artist don't you like? Why?</li> </ol>
<b>Travel</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me about a place you have visited.</li> <li>2. Would you be interested in visiting a foreign country? Why or why not?</li> <li>3. Where do you want to travel in the future?</li> </ol>
<b>Movies</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What movie genres do you like and what don't you like? Why?</li> <li>2. Please tell me about one of favorite movies. Why do you like it?</li> <li>3. Who is an actor/actress that you really like? What is special about him/her?</li> </ol>
<b>Free topics</b>	Questions were made with the help of the teacher

Appendix 7

Questions for semi-structured interview with focus group students

<b>1. CSs and speaking</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Did using CSs help you with speaking? Why?</li> <li>b) Could you overcome problems during the conversations because you used CSs?</li> <li>c) Do you think your conversations became smoother because of the use of CSs?</li> <li>d) Do you think the CSs helped you reduce the number of pauses during conversations? If so were your pauses shorter?</li> <li>e) What CSs were most helpful?</li> <li>f) How do you feel about CSs in general?</li> <li>g) Do you feel more comfortable speaking English now? Why?</li> </ol>
<b>2. Writing</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Did the writing activities help you with speaking? In what way?</li> <li>b) Was it easier to talk about the conversation topics because you wrote about them?</li> <li>c) Did you find a connection between writing and speaking? Explain.</li> </ol>
<b>3. Motivation and structured support</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Are you more motivated to study English now? Why or why not?</li> <li>b) What did you think of scaffolding and structured support for speaking? Did it help you in learning English? Explain.</li> <li>c) What in these classes if at all motivated you most?</li> <li>d) What did you think about the model writings and model dialogs? Were they helpful?</li> <li>e) In general, what do you think could motivate students in learning a language?</li> </ol>

*Note: These were prepared questions for the interview with the focus group students. Some of the questions were restated, so that students could understand them better. Some answers were in Japanese and were translated by me/or with the help of other students present. Some of the questions were not asked.*



## Appendix 8

### ***Final questionnaire***

#### **Introduction:**

*Hi everyone,*

*First, I would like to thank you for your support this year.*

*With this questionnaire, I would like to understand how you felt about my classes and what you have learned.*

*This questionnaire is voluntary, and that means that you don't have to answer it if you don't want to. In that case, please hand it in blank.*

*Thank you,*

*Karl*

#### **Instructions:**

*This questionnaire has three sections. The first is about what you have learned.*

*The second is about our class and the third will include a few more open questions.*

*Please try to answer every question. Please think about each one before you answer it. Use a pencil, so that you can change your answers if necessary.*

#### **Section one** Communication strategies and writing

*This section explores what you have learned so far in this class and whether you enjoy speaking or writing more now than before the semester begun.*

*Please circle what is true for you now.*

#### **1. Speaking**

- a) I know how to start and end a conversation better.  
strongly agree   agree   disagree   strongly disagree
- b) I can speak longer with my partner.  
strongly agree   agree   disagree   strongly disagree
- c) I can ask more questions.  
strongly agree   agree   disagree   strongly disagree
- d) The pauses I make during a conversation are shorter because I use communication strategies.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

e) The communication strategies help me to communicate better than before

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

f) In your own words, what was the most important thing that you have learned about speaking in English this year? Why?

---



---



---

## 2. Writing

a) I can write about a topic is easier than I could last semester.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

b) The writing activities help me speak more smoothly

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

c) When I write about a topic it is easier to talk about.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

d) In your own words, write about how writing practice on the conversation topics was useful or not useful for you this semester.

---



---

## Section 2 About motivation

### 1. Motivation

a) I am more interested in speaking English now because I received structured support for conversations.

※structured support 文章の構造に関するサポート

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

b) I am more eager to continue learning English than before.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

## Section 3 Final questions

1. What was the most important thing you have learned this year?

---



---



---

2. Did the writing activities help you with speaking? Why or why not?

---



---



---

3. Do you think that using communication strategies helps you make fewer and shorter pauses during the

conversations? Explain.

---

---

---

4. What could we have done this semester that would have helped me improve my speaking more?

---

---

---

*Thank you for answering these questions.*

*Karl*

### **Conclusion**

In this conclusion, I will summarize the period of AR conducted between 2016 and 2017. First, I will talk about my goals of this study and whether I could achieve them, and then I will share my general observations during that period, followed by difficulties that I had encountered. Next, I will describe what I could have done differently. I will also talk about how this study can have an impact on other teacher's curriculum and issues in my teaching that I plan to continue to work on. Lastly, I will suggest some future directions and possible improvements in my teaching.

Depending on how goals are defined, I would like to start by looking at some positive achievements during my two years of AR. I believe that after I failed to improve my students speaking ability in the first semester of 2016, through AR I was later able to make adjustments in my teaching so that my students could carry on rather fluent conversations on various topics using CSs. Spada (2007) refers to certain features that are included in CLT. Those are that CLT is a meaning-based and learner centered approach to second language teaching, where fluency, not accuracy, is given priority. (p. 272) I tried to base the writings solely on meaning and gave students enough time to discuss their conversation questions with various partners. The questions of the conversations were personalized, so that they were based on meaning.

When teaching I tried to take into account Richards (2006) key points for CLT as follows:

1. Real communication should be the focus of language learning.
2. Learners should be given opportunities to experiment and try out what they know.
3. Educators should be tolerant of student's errors as they indicate that the learners are building up their communicative competence.
4. Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
5. The different skills such as speaking, writing, reading and listening should be linked together, since they usually occur in the real world.
6. Let students deduce or discover grammar rules. (p.13)

However, because I was so focused on actual teaching, I neglected to collect data to demonstrate the

interrelation between writing and speaking. Over these two years, I learned that it is essential to document our research in order to know conclusively how and why various teaching approaches work or not. In my second year of AR, I seemed to be unsuccessful raising my student's motivation; however, my data shows that their ability to converse in English increased. For me, even my students' ability in speaking English became better. Unfortunately, it took me a long time to focus my AR and design my plan and method, so I lost a lot of time when I could have been collecting data.

One positive insight I gained by observing my students and my teaching approach was in my first year of AR. While my teaching goals were the same for both groups of students, I used different approaches with them, and I could see very different outcomes. The two main reasons for that were, I tried out different things and was flexible in teaching, responding to the needs of my students instead of strictly following my lesson plan, and giving students ample time to practice and use their target language in conversation. Burns (2010) states that "the central idea of the action part of AR is to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice" (p.2)

To step back and make room for that was very difficult for me, but after teachers and fellow students at NUFSS encouraged me to do so, I could let go and give students more control in the classroom. In the past I had struggled with the so called "Atlas Complex", "in which teachers assume all the responsibility for what happens in the classroom" (Lee & Van Patten, 2003, p. 6). Brown (2007) found that the teachers' role is that of a facilitator and guide and not an all-knowing fount of knowledge. He also proposes a learner-centered classroom where students are encouraged to be co-operative and collaborative (p. 46-47). I tried to give my students more independence and encouraged it by working with partners or in small groups to solve problems or prepare for tasks. If questions arose that the pair or group could not solve, I tried to step in and help out.

In my second year of AR, I had the freedom to use the so called 'trial and error' approach, and it was a good learning opportunity because I found that at times, I could make learning easier for my students. Another thing I learned was that it is necessary to constantly try to improve our teaching, which is, of course, the heart of AR itself. However, sometimes it is difficult to do, in a real classroom because of the fear of possible failure. The fact that I conducted AR build my confidence and has motivated me to experiment more and that lead to grow in my teaching.

Besides some teaching issues I had, I had some challenges with the practical side of AR. One challenge was using the computer, and it was very difficult for me at first. On the other hand, I have gained valuable knowledge. Furthermore, by writing monthly reports, reading and communicating with other students in the course my English improved.

As for teaching itself, I faced a few difficulties. In the first semester of 2016, I tried to do too many things at the same time in the classroom and conduct research on top of that as well. I felt I was juggling many important and fragile objects and could not let go of any of them so it was overwhelming, and I could not do any of the things I attempted to my full potential, but things improved over time as I worked through several cycles of AR.

In 2017, my research was challenging because the group of students that I taught were not motivated

at all, and while I tried to keep a positive attitude in the classroom, I found I still could not motivate them, and many of my ideas were unsuccessful because the student were uninterested in almost everything I tried, like to provide additional handouts to address some issued like follow-up questions and so on. Nevertheless, they did show improvement in their speaking and perhaps over time, their motivation could improve.

When I do AR again, I will make sure to use a textbook that is suitable for teaching CLT and design my lessons around it. Furthermore, I will define my research and teaching focus more clearly and integrate the two better, being sure to find ways to more clearly tell what happened in my classroom. As mentioned above, because of my experience with AR, I am a braver teacher and am ready to try out new things and provide more opportunities for the students to speak. I will certainly teach timed-conversations and CSs with the integration of writing on the conversation topics because from my AR experience, I believe them to be worthwhile.

Prior to entering NUFS, I tried to teach communicatively but realized that my abilities and knowledge about CLT were limited. With the knowledge that I have gained, I plan to help redesigning the curriculum for German students at the university I teach. The head of the German department, at that university has already talked to me about this, and I believe that this will be a chance for me to introduce CLT in that context.

From April 2018, I want to start restructuring my lesson plans for German and start to implement CLT. I believe, I have a great responsibility to my students to teach them communicatively. Many German classes focus mostly on form. Students are tested exclusively on paper, and there are no speaking tests. From my studies at NUFS and my AR for this MA program, I have learned how to make real communication in the classroom happen and I want to continue to teach communicatively in the future.

## References

- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing Action Research in Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners*. NY: Routledge. Pp. 196.
- Lee, J.F., & VanPatten, P. (2003). *Making communicative Language Teaching Happen*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Richards, J.C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Spada, N. (2007). *International handbook of English language teaching*. Springer US