Making Conversations for EFL Materials[1]

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Contents

Ⅰ．Introduction

　　Conversations have long been introduced in EFL[2] textbooks as useful components of activities, and it is not difficult to find conversations in EFL textbooks.　A textbook approved by the Ministry of Education and published in the 1950s presents a conversation:

　　　Teacher to Jack

　　　　Are you a pupil?

　　　　　　Yes, I am a pupil.

　　　　Are you a teacher?

　　　　　　No, I am not a teacher. (Hagiwara, et al., 1953/1992, 15)

This conversation is concocted to explain a grammatical feature of *be* verbs rather than showing interactions between a teacher and a student.　The second question *Are you a teacher?* is meaningless if asked in the classroom.　The teacher should know that he/she is the only teacher in class.　Moreover, Jack's first response is positive, and it cannot be true in a typical classroom context that the same person is a teacher.　Even if this is an example of a display question which a teacher often asks in the classroom, it is less meaningful to ask if the pupil is a teacher or not, after the same person had already identified himself. Teaching communicative features of the dialog is yielded to teaching simple grammar.[3]

There have been numerous arguments about conversations constructed by authors in EFL/ESL textbooks since technology has made it possible to analyze real data and compare them to author-constructed ones. McCarthy and Carter (1994, 194–195) quote an example of a conversation which looks like an interview. In the quoted conversation, Japanese pupils take turns asking questions to a native speaker of English in the classroom. The native speaker has no occasion to develop her response or to interact with the pupils but gives short responses with simple lexico-grammatical terms.

Taborn (1983) examines textbook dialogues by comparing them with 250 authentic dialogs he collected in several common transactional situations. The distinguishing features he finds in textbook dialogs are that they are too long with complex grammar and elaborate phrases. Moreover, those dialogs are unpredictable comparing to the genuine ones. He also discusses some abnormality in textbook dialogs such as over-use of elements, cultural gaps in exchanges, and levels of formality. He proposes materials which are not only genuine, but simple and of practical value to the learner.

Gilmore (2004) did research on transactions in textbook conversations written for listening and published in the 1980s, in order to demonstrate the authenticity of the conversations from the points of 1) lexical density, 2) false starts, 3) repetition, 4) pauses, 5) terminal overlap, 6) latching, 7) hesitation devices and 8) back-channels. He concludes that the textbook conversations are fundamentally not similar to the genuine conversations, attributing the reason to the fact that they were written mainly for teaching structure and function and vocabulary in the form of conversations.

Myers-Scotton and Bernsten (1988) present arguments based on data from actual dialogs of two types in conversational exchanges in American English. Those two types of exchanges are 1) asking for directions on the street and 2) making requests in service encounters. Their findings regarding actual dialogs involving direction-seeking/giving exchanges are summarized as follows.

1. Exchanges are more complicated than the textbook conversations in length. Frequent use of fillers and hedges is characteristic of natural exchanges.

2. Direction-seekers have more to say for opening and pre-closing than just phatic expressions of enquiry and appreciation.

3. Direction-givers use directives such as *and you want to go . . .* and *you probably should . . .* more than imperatives such as *Go straight ahead* and *Turn right at the next corner*.

Both seekers and givers manipulate more complicated structures than simply asking a question and responding in an imperative. Likewise, Myers-Scotton and Bernsten recognize that service encounters show unique discourse features. Different types of discourse are adopted to services depending on the type of service. In a post office conversation, for instance, bold imperatives such as *Three 50p stamps* are used, while at a dormitory reception, permission directives such as *Can I . . . ?* or *May I . . . ?* are used. Moreover, even in food service situations, a different discourse is adopted in ordering food. In a fast-food shop where a customer is not waited on, ordering is conducted in elliptical form, while in a

restaurant where a customer is waited on, ordering is frequently conducted in need directives such as *I want . . .* or *I would like . . . .* Finally, they advocate the necessity of applying these findings to TESOL instructions and textbooks.

In the above-mentioned research projects, the authors took genuine data and compared them to textbook conversations. In so doing, they recognized differences between genuine conversations and author-constructed conversations. In conclusion these authors assert the necessity of applying more spoken features to textbook conversations in order to teach communicative language use.

Concerning teaching communicative English, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1992) challenge the pedagogic uses of spoken discourse in action. They propose various dialog types, give useful phrases of the target type and then present sample dialogs. At the end of each lesson, the authors demonstrate a modified version of the sample dialog, in which spoken features are implied. So the modified conversations include uncompleted sentences, fillers, discourse markers and a question followed by another question instead of a question and a response. Learners are exposed to an author-manufactured, structure-based conversation at the beginning, but before concluding the target lesson, they are exposed to a more natural conversation.

Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994) raise precise issues requisite for teaching conversation in an EFL context. They outline a new approach to teaching conversation skills. The wide-ranging list of teaching points they propose includes 1) conversational rules and structure (e. g. openings, turn-taking, interrupting, topic-shift, adjacency pairs, closings), 2) conversational strategies (e. g. message adjustment/avoidance, paraphrase, approximation, appeal for help, asking for repetition, asking for clarification, interpretive summary, checking, use of fillers/hesitation devices), 3) functions and meaning in conversation (e. g. language functions, indirect speech acts, same-meaning-different-meaning), and 4) social and cultural contexts (e. g. participant variables in office and status, the social context, the social norms of appropriate language use, cross-cultural differences). After proposing this list, Dörnyei and Thurrell state their belief that this should not be applied only to the teaching of conversation but be extended to the teaching of communicative competence in general.

In tandem with the improvement of technology, linguists and researchers have analyzed spoken data which had been surreptitiously recorded. Corpora provide those researchers with abundant authentic data. Spoken discourse such as that introduced above in this section needs to be involved in textbook conversations for EFL learners. It is time we teachers and textbook editors listen to McCarthy and Carter (1994, 195).

> We simply wish to demonstrate how a discourse analysis of the text can illuminate its qualities and enable the users of the textbook to evaluate the dialogue more rigorously.

II. The Current Study

As a part of the group project "Developing self-access English materials for the CALL", the authors worked on making conversations based on spoken discourse theory. The goal of this sub-project was to make conversations accessible to the students of the university using the CALL system. For information on how the program was operated, see Eguchi, et al. (2009). The topics were limited to the campus and its neighbourhood so that the students would be more likely to use in real life the conversations they practiced while they studied at the university.

Definition

For the current study, a conversation is briefly defined as exchanges between two people or more in order to achieve a transactional or interactional goal.

Method

The authors worked on making EFL materials for teaching conversation. The focus was mainly on their own students' enhancement of their aural/oral skills. This means that one of the speakers in the dialog or conversation is supposed to be the authors' students. More precisely, the field of the conversation is limited to the university and its neighborhood. Contextualizing the materials in this way, the authors expected their students to enhance their aural/oral skills through conversations set in familiar situations.

In making conversations, teachers first gave consideration to the participants. Avoiding anonymous names for speakers like A or B, they identified participants by giving them brief names to make their relationships to each other clear. This helps in deciding which register is applied to the conversation. If the participants know each other, their intimateness must be shown in their use of the lexicons or vocatives, for example. In addition, in a conversation in a service sector-related context, the register varies depending on the service given. In a fast-food shop, the service is completed without many exchanges between the clerk and the customer, while in a shoe shop, the conversation is longer and both the clerk and the customer make many exchanges (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, 24-25).

Results of previous studies were also considered in making the conversations for the current study. Myers-Scotton and Bernsten (1988) explore what is exchanged between direction-seekers and -givers in a direction-giving/seeking context. They find that seekers' use of language is more complicated than simply asking directions, and givers often use directives rather than imperatives.

Context

The target group for the learning materials written here is the students of the university. For their benefit, all the conversations take place on campus or in the neighborhood of the university. In each dialog, one of the speakers is supposed to be a student who studies at the

university.   He/she is the person who shows the campus to another speaker, which is a probable situation for the learners to use in real life.   The relationships between the student and other participants are explained so that the prosody of the conversation becomes clear to the learners when they practice it.   To make the conversations natural, some spoken features such as discourse markers and ellipsis are implemented in appropriate contexts. Conversations of this genre do not go beyond what may happen on campus or in its neighborhood.   In other words, the settings are limited to the library, subway station, cafeteria and gym.

Conversations
1 In the library

1-1
Yumi: Excuse me.   Could you tell me where I can find the DVDs?
Librarian: They are on this floor, in that corner.   Can you see the shelves?
Yumi: Yes.   May I check out some and watch them at home?
Librarian: I'm afraid you may not.   You are requested to watch the DVDs here in the library.
Yumi: I see.   Is it difficult to operate the DVD player?
Librarian: No.   It's very simple.   Check out the key from a staff member here, insert it into the player and put the DVD in the slot.   That's it.
Yumi: OK.   I will try it later and see what happens.   Thank you very much.
Librarian: You're welcome.

This is a transactional exchange between Yumi, a student, and a librarian.   Many of their exchanges are adjacency pairs (question-response).   Unlike an interview, each participant's response is followed by a question.   In line 2, for example, the librarian answers Yumi's question, then asks one back to her to confirm the location of the shelves.   The librarian's role is to give information and instruction on using the DVD player.   As a matter of fact, he/she is ready to answer any question of the student.   The librarian responds in a rather formal register but the formality is an appropriate one for speaking to a student of the university.   The librarian and Yumi may have encountered each other here for the first time, but they are not totally strangers in this particular situation.

1-2
[A person from the general public tries to get access to the library.]
Librarian: Good morning.   May I help you?
Citizen: Good morning.   I live in the neighborhood.   May I use this library in your open hours?
Librarian: Of course you may.   But there are some papers we'd like you to fill out, and we'll need your photo and an ID.

Citizen:　　Will you accept my passport as the ID?

Librarian: Certainly.　Your driver's license will also do.

Citizen:　　I see.　Uh, what hours are you open?

Librarian: We are open from 8:45 to 10 p.m. on weekdays, from 8:45 to 8 p.m. on Saturday and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Citizen:　　You are open on weekends.　How nice!　I will come back soon with my ID and a photo.　Thank you.

Librarian: You are welcome.

　　The librarian is more formal in his/her language in waiting on a person from the general public.　They are strangers to each other, and the citizen is not familiar with the library.　So it is the librarian that speaks to the citizen with a phatic phrase of offering help, *May I help you?*　The rest of the conversation is the librarian's giving information how to register at the library and get access to it.　Occasionally the librarian says more than simple answers to the question (lines 4, 7).　At the end of his/her turn, the person from the general public evaluates the service, suggesting he/she is getting familiar with the situation.　Closing remarks before departing are also phatic.

1-3

[Keiko is a student of the university, and Susan is an exchange student from the U. K.　She has just come to the university.　They know each other.]

Keiko: Susan, you look worried.　What happened?

Susan: Something terrible happened at home.　It seems the tube was attacked by terrorists in London.　I'd like to know more about it.　Do you know any place that I can find a British newspaper to read, Keiko?

Keiko: Our library has some, I guess.　Do you know how to get into the library?　You need your ID to get in.　Oh, I happen to be on my way to the library.　Do you want to walk with me?

Susan: Thanks.

[They arrive at the library.]

Keiko: English newspapers here.

Susan: Let's see.　*The Times* only.　It's conservative, they say.　I want *The Guardian*.　I'm used to it.

Keiko: Why don't you check some Websites on the Internet?　You can use one of those computers for searching, if you'd like.

Susan: That's nice.　Thanks for your help, Keiko.

Keiko: No problem.

　　Example 1-3 is also a conversation in which someone explains how to use the library, but here exchanges are conducted in a different way from Examples 1-1 and 1-2 above.　First,

the participants' closeness is expressed by the names they use in addressing each other (lines 1, 4, 15).　Then questions with some different meanings are used.　Keiko's question (line 5) is not exactly a question to Susan because the question is followed by a response by Keiko herself.　So this is rather a self-confirmation by Keiko.　The words, *Do you want to walk with me?* (lines 6-7) are not a question but an invitation to Susan.　So Susan's response is not yes/no but a phrase of appreciation (Carter & McCarthy, 2006).　A discourse marker *Oh* (line 6) works as a filler to introduce a new idea that hits Keiko's mind.　An elliptic expression (line 10) is also an example of spoken features.　This dialog is definitely transactional as well as interactional.

1-4

[Matthew and Ryo happen to be at the entrance to the library's reading rooms.　They do not know each other.]

Matthew: Oh, no.　It doesn't work.　What's wrong?

Ryo:　　　Insert it slowly like this.　See?　Try it again.

Matthew: It worked!　Thank you.

Ryo:　　　My pleasure.

　　　This short dialog is an example of language in action.　The two participants do not need to know each other.　They happen to be at the entrance of the reading rooms, and one of them has trouble inserting the card to enter.　It is not necessary to know what the deictic phrases such as *it* (line 1) and *this* (line 2) refer to because this happens with action and the participants know what they mean.　*What's wrong?* in line 1 is not a question Matthew asks Ryo, expecting his answer.　Fortunately, however, Matthew learns how to get into the library with the help of Ryo.　The dialog is closed with a typical adjacency pair of appreciation and acceptance.

2　The subway station and on campus

　　　The following conversations are examples of direction-seeking/giving.

2-1

[At Oyachi Subway Station, underground.　Daisuke, a student, talks to a stranger.]

Daisuke: Excuse me, you look lost.　May I help you?

Stranger: Well, I'm trying to find Exit 1.　Do you know where it is?

Daisuke: Sure.　Go straight that way and you'll see an escalator on your right.　Take it to the top.　Then you'll find Exit 1 right in front of you.

Stranger: Oh, I see.　My friend told me Hokusei Gakuen University is about a five-minute walk from there.

Daisuke: So you want to go there?

Stranger: Yes.　Can you tell me the way?

Daisuke: It's a bit difficult to explain.　Well, let me see.　Yes, there is a map sign put up by the university just outside Exit 1.　You probably should find how to get to the campus if you look at it.

Stranger: Oh, sounds helpful.　Thanks a lot for the information.

Daisuke:　No problem.

　　Although Daisuke is a student at the university and knows well how to get there, explanation is complicated.　It takes time for him to give instructions from Exit 1 to the university.　He gives up giving directions but tells the stranger where he/she can find the map.　Myers-Scotton and Bersten (1988) suggest that direction-givers are not always ready for giving the right direction.　So Daisuke's reaction in the above conversation is quite a probable example.

2-2

[On campus.　Midori shows her American friend Sally the campus.]

Sally:　I feel hungry.　Is there any place where I can get something to eat?

Midori: Of course.　Why don't we go to the student union?　Right over there.　They have a nice cafeteria on the third floor.

Sally:　Is it wheelchair accessible?

Midori: Of course.　There is no elevator that takes you straight up to the cafeteria.　But you can use the elevator in the next building.　Both the second and the third floors are connected to the student union building.

Sally:　Oh, that's neat.　What do they have on the first floor of the student union?

Midori: Well, that's where the university bookstore is.　You can buy some snacks there too.

Sally:　That's very convenient.　Now shall we go and check if we can find something to eat?

Midori: OK.　Let's go.

　　This conversation takes place between friends and the information-seeking and -giving is both transactional and interactional.　At the end, the participants give suggestions for a further plan.

2-3

[On campus.　A young American Cindy talks to Hiro.]

Cindy: Excuse me.　Are you a student here?

Hiro:　Yes.

Cindy: Can you tell me where the international student dormitory is?

Hiro:　Oh, you mean "Kirari"?

Cindy: Kirari?　Is that the name of the dormitory?

Hiro:　Well, that's the nickname for the building.　It means brilliance.

Cindy: What a cute name! Well, my friend from Portland, Oregon, lives there. And I've come to see him.

Hiro: I see. Look, Kirari is that way. Can you see the four-story building near the main gate? That's our library, and the dormitory is the first building up the street from it. I'm heading that way. You want to come with me?

Cindy: Thanks a lot.

Hiro: No problem.

This is a typical direction-seeking/giving conversation. It opens with an inquiry and closes with an exchange of appreciation. Hiro knows the campus well and is ready to give the right instruction, while Cindy interrogates the direction giver. Adjacency pairs of a question-answer are frequently found through the conversation.

3 On campus and at the cafeteria

Conversations in this section include the same participants, a Japanese student who shows around the student union building an American student who has just started her study at the university. The Japanese student's role is that of a guide rather than a friend.

3-1

Yoko: This is the student union building.

Kevin: What can we do here?

Yoko: There're three floors. The first floor is like a convenience store. You can buy things, such as school stuff and food. The second floor is a lounge. You can just hang out there. The third floor is a cafeteria. I usually eat lunch there.

Kevin: I'm going to spend a lot of time there, I guess. Let's check out the inside.

Yoko: Sure. Follow me.

Exchanges are transactional. Yoko shows Kevin around the building and he inquires and gives comments. The amount of utterance is imbalanced in such a situation. The guide talks much while the inquirer asks brief questions occasionally. The inquirer may interrogate to confirm what the guide says, which does not occur in the above conversation.

3-2

Yoko: Let's check what you can buy on the first floor.

Kevin: I see what I can buy here. Food, drinks, stationery, floppy discs, books, magazines, recordable CDs and DVDs.

Yoko: Very good. You can also get plane tickets, and they will help you to find an apartment. You can order computers, and they provide dry cleaning service too.

Kevin: This is much more convenient than convenience stores.

Yoko: Right.

3-3

Yoko: Here is the second floor.

Kevin: Oh, lots of tables and chairs.

Yoko: Students hang out here if they don't have a class.

Kevin: A nice place to kill some time.   I can get food downstairs and eat it here chitchatting with my friends.

Yoko: You may spend a lot of time here.

Kevin: Yes.   This will be an important place for me.

Again in the above two conversations, Yoko plays a role of information-giver while Kevin comments on her explanation.   Not much personal exchange is done between the participants.

3-4

Yoko: I'm hungry.   Let's go to the cafeteria before it gets crowded.

Kevin: OK.

Yoko: What do you feel like eating today?

Kevin: Anything will be fine since this is my first time to eat here.   I'm curious.

Yoko: Right.   Then, I'll show you how to use the cafeteria.

Kevin: Thank you.

Yoko: First, find a tray and take the food you like.   Would you like to see our salad bar section?

Kevin: Uh-huh.   Wow!   There are many kinds of vegetables and salads.   I'd like to try some.

Yoko: Good.   It's quite cheap and convenient to have a healthy meal.

Kevin: Now, what else are you going to get for your lunch?

Yoko: I'll have chicken tatsuta don, rice with deep fried chicken.   It is my favorite.

Kevin: I'll also try it then.

Yoko: Now, let's go to the cash register.

Kevin: OK.

Clerk: Place your salad on the scale, please.   420 yen.

Kevin: Here it is.

Clerk: Here is your change, 80 yen.

Kevin: Uh, where can I get the eating utensils and salad dressing?

Clerk: On the counter over there.   You'll find chopsticks, spoons and forks and a variety of toppings and dressings.

Kevin: Thank you.

Clerk: You are welcome.

[Yoko waves to Kevin.]

Yoko: Over here, I found good seats.   We can have a beautiful view from here.

Kevin: Thank you.

Yoko: Tea or water?　They're free.

Kevin: Tea sounds good.　Thanks.

　　　Yoko and Kevin have gradually become closer to each other by this time, and as a matter of fact, informal expressions are found in the above conversation: ellipsis *(Tea or water?)* and discourse markers (*Right, Good, Uh, OK,* and so forth).

　　　This conversation presents a service situation of buying food.　The register here is rather informal because it takes place at a cash register of a cafeteria.　The clerk need not talk much.　So the exchanges between the clerk and the customers are simple and short throughout the dialog.　The clerk's request is presented in an imperative form *Place your salad* followed by *please*.

4　At the gym

　　　Section 4 is a continuous conversation at the gym.　Akio shows Tony around the gym and explains how to use the equipment in the gym.

4-1

[At the front door]

Tony: This is the first time I've come to the gym.　Have you been here before?

Akio: Yeah, would you like me to show you around?　It'll only take a few minutes.

Tony: Sure.

[In front of the manager's window, then training room, offices, dressing room entrances, and drink areas]

Akio: On this floor are the training room, offices, and dressing rooms.　There also are some drink machines and places to sit.

[At the foot of the first floor stairs]

Tony: What's up these stairs?

[On the second floor]

Akio: On the second floor, there is a large, open area used for many sports, for example basketball, volleyball, and handball.　Then on the third floor, there are places from which you can watch the games below.　[in the martial arts training area] The gym also has rooms for martial arts like aikido and judo, as well as areas for ballet and running.

Tony: This looks like a well-built gym.

Akio: Yeah, it is supposed to be the second-best gym in Hokkaido.　Some professional athletes train here.

Tony: O. K.　Thanks for the tour.　I think I'll try working out here.

4-2

Akio: So you think you'd like to use the gym sometime?

Tony: Yeah, I'll give it a try. Do I have to check in at the front office before using it?

Akio: No, not if you are going to use the training room. If you want to use a whole area, for example the court for a badminton club practice, then you have to sign up and get a place in the schedule.

Tony: Here is where I change clothes, right?

Akio: Yes. You can leave your clothes in any of these lockers that is open. You have to put in a 100 yen coin, then take the key with you. But when you open the locker again, the coin comes back. See?

Tony: All right. Well, are there showers I can use?

Akio: There are. You can use them, but you have to bring your own towel, soap, and so on.

Tony: O. K., I see. Thanks.

4-3

Tony: I want to try the training room, but I don't know how to use the machines. Will the teachers help me if I ask them?

Akio: Yes, they will. But I can teach you a little now. How about that?

Tony: Sounds good. How do you use that sit-up machine?

Akio: Well, sit down, then pull out the gray metal pin and put it in a hole between these black plates. That way, you choose how difficult this is to do. Then you pull these handles down to your shoulders. Now you are ready. All you do is bend down until your head is down by your knees. Then sit up again. Keep going more, and you'll exercise your stomach muscles more. That's it.

All the three conversations above are taking place continuously with the same participants. Tony is a stranger at the gym, and Akio, who knows this place, gives instructions how to use the machines. It is no wonder that this leads to the imbalance of utterance and question-answer adjacency pairs.

III. Conclusion

Previous studies of the spoken discourse have shown its features in relation to lexico-grammar, pragmatics and social factors. Then conversations written for teaching materials focusing on teaching specific lessons such as grammar or key phrases have been argued against and criticized. In so doing the researchers of these studies have advocated the necessity of applying spoken features to conversations for EFL materials, and their voices have been heard by materials writers. Gilmore (2002) compared conversations in some textbooks published in the 1980s and some published in the new century and found that the latter ones have more spoken features. He asserts that publishers and editors have been

paying more attention to making textbook conversations which are not far from the data collected from genuine conversations.

The authors of the current study have tried to create conversations specifically for their students. The conversations demonstrated in the above section are some examples of their products. Spoken discourses discussed and argued in these decades were carefully examined and utilized for those conversations. It is believed that learners can acquire communicative skills through these conversations concerned with authentic contexts.

Ⅳ. Limitation in Practical Application

The target students of the current study are limited to those whom the authors teach regularly, which necessitates a limitation in genre and context. In the future, the genre need to be expanded to a greater variety of service encounters, telephone conversations, and other areas, depending on the students' needs. At that time, more principles of discourse theory and conversation analysis will be taken into consideration.

Notes
(1) This paper is part of the group project "Developing self-access English materials for the CALL" funded by Tokutei Kenkyu 2007, Hokusei Gakuen University. For an overview of the project, see Eguchi, H. et al, (2009).
(2) The term EFL is adopted because the target subjects of the current study are EFL students. However, this can also be applied to ESL, especially the discussion of the literature reviewed.
(3) *Suggested Course of Study in English for Lower and Upper Secondary Schools I* (revised 1951) expresses "the significance of developing a practical basic knowledge of English as 'speech' with primary emphasis on aural-oral skills . . . ." (213)

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Conversations have long been introduced in EFL textbooks as useful components of activities. Some studies argued that conversations are useful for teaching vocabulary and grammar. Spoken discourse and cultural aspects were not considered much. Later research revealed that the conversations found in EFL textbooks were not very close to authentic conversations. Corpus-based spoken discourse analysis has shown the difference between the textbook conversations and authentic conversations. The authors of the current study propose conversations which include spoken features such as ellipsis, discourse markers, extended coupling of adjacency pairs and others. The relationships of the participants are clarified in order for the learners to be exposed to a variety of language usages appropriate to their particular contexts. For the learners' benefit, the situations of the conversations are limited to the learners' environment. The authors believe that learners acquire aural/oral skills through authenticity-concerned conversations which are probable to occur in their daily life.