“Ask-Talk-Ask”
Introducing English Discussion Skills as “Whole” Speech Turn-Taking through Graphic Organizers
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ABSTRACT
This study utilized a discussion graphic (cognitive) organizer (DGO) to introduce discussion language and skills as a distinct genre of spoken English with “whole” speech turn-taking (Petrin, 2011b). The goal: to determine if the DGO could serve as a structural tool to enhance learners’ declarative and procedural knowledge (DK & PK) of the language and skills needed to more “naturally” interact in a small group discussion starting in first weeks of the course. The results indicate that the DGO was an effective incidental learning tool for building DK & PK of discussion turn-taking; thereby fast-tracking learners to achieving a key end of semester learning outcome.

INTRODUCTION
As soon as freshmen at this Tokyo area university walk through the classroom door they are introduced to and expected to perform a “new” kind of English…Discussion English. The English Discussion Class (EDC) curriculum differentiates itself from the ubiquitous casual conversation English classes found throughout Japan, by presenting learners with weekly sets of more formal linguistic expressions and behaviors (discourse functions) in order to facilitate interactive small group discussions (EDC, 2012). However, due to the learners’ lack of previous (declarative) knowledge of discussion skills and experience (procedural use) with more formal group interaction, learners may actually be “pushed” into substituting less than formal conversation English and/or have less than “natural sounding” group discussion interaction. More specifically, during the 2010 inaugural year/semester of the EDC program the author noted that the small group discussion context created a learner need for more wholistic turn-taking language and strategies; which the learners themselves filled with one or more of the following approaches to managing their discussion (adapted from Petrin, 2011a & 2011b):

- **The English Speaker Senpai (“Senior”):** group deference to a learner with “returnee” level conversation English proficiency to manage the discussion.
- **The Discussion Emcee:** one learner (regardless of level) assumes control.
- **The Turn-taking Spotlight (ready or not):** speaking turn completed by quickly asking another member for their opinion (“What do you think…Ryo!”)
- **The Board Game:** turn-taking rotates to the left of the speaker(s).
- **The “Finished!” Turn:** speaking turn completed by declaring “Finished!” or in some cases using the Japanese equivalent phrase “ijou desu!”
- **Turn-taking Dissonance:** learners use mismatched weekly target phrases:
  - Alex: “In my opinion… What do you think about face-to-face communication, Bob?” (Connecting Ideas)
  - Bob: “Can I make a comment? …In my opinion…” (Joining the Discussion)

Turn-taking is often described as “a process by which interactants allocate the right or obligation to participate in an interactional activity” (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and as such serves as a key ingredient for ensuring each group member has an equal opportunity to...
collaboratively explore the topic-questions presented to them. Therefore in order to help each learner (regardless of English Discussion knowledge and language proficiency) to more interactively participate and manage their group discussion, the author designed a Discussion Graphic Organizer (DGO) based on key discussion phrases targeted in the program’s syllabus, along with the view that discussion skills were a distinct genre of spoken English (Petrin, 2011b; Appendices A & B). The underlying assumption being that the DGO would provide the learners with the necessary structural knowledge to fast track declarative knowledge (DK) of discussion language and strategies into procedural (use) knowledge (PK) so as to facilitate more “naturally sounding” discussions starting in first introductory lesson. The following sections will begin with a brief introduction to graphic organizers as a tool for second language acquisition (SLA) and as a structural link for building both DK and PK.

**Graphic (Cognitive) Organizers and SLA:** In the field of education, Hall and Strangman point out that graphic organizers are often used across curriculums and subjects as “a visual display that depicts relationships between facts, terms, and or ideas within a learning task”, they further conclude that “there is solid evidence for the effectiveness of graphic organizers in facilitating learning” (2002). In other words, for learners being introduced to and expected to perform a new genre of English discourse (discussion), it might be reasonable to conclude that they too might benefit from a visual display that provides the “means for organizing and presenting information [discussion language and strategies] so that it can be understood, remembered, and applied” (Crandall, 1992). Moreover, if the graphic organizer presents language forms as meaningful chunks (Ellis, 1996), as does the DGO’s whole speech turn-taking, we may actually be enhancing the process of acquiring the new language skills by providing learners with a more context embedded approach (Cummins, 2000) that can reduce their learning burden.

**Graphic Organizers and Knowledge Building:** Introducing learners to a new kind of English (discussion class) can create a discussion knowledge zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) as learners are consciously or unconsciously positioned to consider the accuracy and appropriateness of their current English communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) in the context of a formal face-to-face group discussion. This in turn can create the need for instruction to go beyond that of the typical EFL classroom that may simply seek to extend previous learning, to instruction that can scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978) a more genre based approach in order to build a framework for developing the learners’ awareness of – use of discussion language and skills.

Cognitive psychologists often refer to this awareness – use duality as: declarative knowledge which “enables learners to come to know, or define [in this case discussion language and skills]” and procedural knowledge which “describes how learners use or apply their declarative knowledge” (Jonassen, Beissner, & Yacci, 1993). But is knowing that discussion English is different from conversation English enough for knowing how to have a more pragmatically appropriate small group discussion? According to Jonassen et al., a third type of knowledge (structural) is necessary to mediate “the translation of declarative into procedural knowledge” and to facilitate “the application of procedural knowledge”. In other words, “structural knowledge provides the conceptual basis for [knowing] why; it describes how the declarative knowledge is interconnected” (Jonassen, Beissner, & Yacci, 1993). Moreover, Jonassen points out that “graphic representation (e.g. diagrams, illustrations, and concept maps) of knowledge shows relationships among concepts or of cause-effect relationship in a content domain...[and] this helps learners [to] build their own understanding of information [language] they study” (as cited in Kim, McGee, & Shin, 2003). As such, this research projects seeks to
determine if the DGO can enhance DK and PK of Discussion language and skills by provided
the scaffolding (structural knowledge) to more “natural sounding” whole speech turn-taking in
the learners group discussions. To facilitate analysis and reporting of the “Ask-Talk-Ask” data
collected, the research questions and results are separated into discourse functions related to
“Talk(ing)” about one’s own ideas (e.g. “In my opinion…”) and “Ask-(Talk)-Ask” phrases used
to begin and end a speaking turn (e.g. “Can I go first?” “Does anyone…?”)

**Research Questions:** Did the DGO enhance DK and PK of the…

- RQ#1: “Talk” phrases used by speakers to present and support their ideas.
- RQ#2: “Ask-(Talk)-Ask” whole speech turn-taking phrases.

**METHOD**

**Participants:** The test group consisted of 11 classes of eight to nine students grouped together
by academic major and English proficiency (n=83, levels 2 & 3). A control group (one class, n=8,
level 2) was added in week five (discussion test day) when the author was requested to cover-teach
for a colleague’s unexpected absence.

**Instructional Treatment:** During the four weeks leading up to the learners’ first discussion test,
each class in the test group received the same supplementary instructional treatment
(materials/activities) based on the DGO (Petrin, 2011b). Teacher feedback using the DGO was
limited to demonstrating how the program’s weekly sets of discussion phrases could be used in
the context of “whole” speech turn taking (Appendices A & B). The learners received no
indication that the ATA framework was a part of their weekly and/or discussion test assessment.

**Data collection for DK:** For the “Talk” phrases, both groups completed the same gap fill activity
listing the discourse markers (phrases) to be assessed during their discussion test. Only the test
group completed a contextualized DGO gap fill activity for the “ATA” turn-taking phrases.

**Data collection for PK:** For both groups, an assessment form was used to record the learners’
use of EDC target phrases as well as their approach to turn-taking. Each small group discussion
test (12-16 minutes) consisted of 3-4 students exchanging ideas on topic-questions provided in
the previous week.

Note: Due to EDC Journal space (page) limitations, figures and tables related to lesson materials,
data collection instruments, and the extended analysis performed on data collected have not been
included in this paper.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results for RQ#1 DK and PK of “Talk” phrases:** Table 1 shows that 94-100% of the test group
and the entire control group knew (DK) at least one target “Talk” phrase for each discourse
function that would be assessed in learners’ first discussion test.

**Table 1. Results for DK of “Talk” Phrases (Gap Fill Activity, Appendix C)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>GO</th>
<th>Ag</th>
<th>Dg</th>
<th>GR</th>
<th>AO</th>
<th>AR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code: C=Learner accurately completed at least one target phrase for Discourse Function.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Furthermore, as can been seen in Table 2, the rates of use (PK) for the target phrases for Giving
Opinions and Reasons (94-100%) and Agreeing/Disagreeing (43-75%) are similar enough
between the test and control group to suggest that the DGO treatment did not enhance DK and/or PK of the “Talk” phrases assessed during the learners’ group discussion test.

Table 2. Results for PK (Use) of “Talk” Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Function (phrase) used but not taught or assessed</th>
<th>Test Group (n=83 learners)</th>
<th>Control Group (n=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CodeAGO Ag Dg GR GEGX IFPOVPARAI &amp; BUT SO SOSFQRQ</td>
<td>CodeAGO Ag Dg GR GEGX IFPOVPARAI &amp; BUT SO SOSFQRQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 82 56 36 79 48 29 50 17 2 6 34 42 49 72 35 43</td>
<td>C 8 6 5 8 5 6 5 3 0 1 4 5 8 1 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 99% 67% 43% 95% 58% 35% 60% 20% 2% 7% 41% 51% 59% 87% 42% 52%</td>
<td>% 100% 75% 63% 100% 63% 75% 63% 38% 0% 13% 50% 63% 63% 100% 13% 13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GO=give opinion; agree; disagree; reasons; examples; experiences; IF=possibilities; POV=different point of view; report information; &=and; but; so; SOS= “So” to summarize own idea; FQ= ask follow-up question; RQ=respond to question.

Also noteworthy in the analysis of “Talk” phrases in Table 2, is the learners’ use of discourse functions scheduled to be taught later in the spring semester (e.g. Giving Examples & Experiences) and in the fall semester (e.g. If, Different Points of View…). This may suggest that many learners’ may already have a repertoire of discourse markers that are waiting to be actualized in terms of DK and PK. Finally, it should be explained that the data for FQ represents follow-up questions asked by the learners other than Asking for Opinions (used by the learners for turn-taking) and Asking for Reasons (used “gratuitously” by the learners). As such, the results show the test group asking more FQs than the control group which may in part be due to the introduction of FQs as a part of “whole” speech turn-taking (Appendices A & B).

Results for RQ#2 DK and PK of ATA Turn-taking phrases: As mentioned previously, the ATA phrases were only provided (incidentally) to contextualize the weekly sets of “Talk” phrases presented and assessed in lessons 1-4.

Table 3. Results for DK of "ATA" Turn-taking phrases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Intent</th>
<th>Discourse Marker</th>
<th>CP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce Discussion Topic/Question</td>
<td>&quot;Let's Begin…&quot;</td>
<td>80 96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read Test Question</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;What does…?&quot;</td>
<td>80 96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Speaker</td>
<td>&quot;Can I go first?&quot;</td>
<td>79 95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Does anyone…?&quot;</td>
<td>63 76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Speaker(s)</td>
<td>&quot;Can I say something?&quot;</td>
<td>63 76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Does anyone…?&quot;</td>
<td>60 72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request more Information</td>
<td>&quot;Can I ask a question?&quot;</td>
<td>63 76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up Question</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Does anyone…?&quot;</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Topic/Question</td>
<td>&quot;let's go to the next…?&quot;</td>
<td>77 93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read Next Question</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;What does…?&quot;</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code: CP= Learner completed gap fill item accurately or with partially correct ATA phrase (e.g. “What does anyone think?”).

However, as Table 3 shows, the majority of learners (72-96%) were able to accurately recall the phrases which could assist them with managing their group discussion; phrases that would eventually be considered a key end of semester learning outcome. As for using (PK) the ATA phrases, shows that most learners were not able to use each turn-taking phrase at least once during their group discussion test. This may reflect the group level dynamic of a real time discussion rather than learners’ ability to use their DK. Therefore the analysis in Tables 4 & 5 look at how at the discussion group level, turn-taking was managed for the 12-16 minutes.

As can be seen in Table 4, for the test group (n=22 small group discussions) the initial turn-
taking phrases (e.g. Can I go first? Can I say…?) were used at a much higher rate than the ending turn-phrases (e.g. Does anyone…?). This appears to be partly due to interference from the Turn-taking Spotlight approach and some learners’ preference for ending their turn by simply using intonation and “So, I think…” to summarize their ideas.

CONCLUSION
The results indicate that as soon as learners walk through the EDC classroom door they may already have considerable DK of the introductory “Talk” discourse markers (phrases) and are ready to use that knowledge (PK) in small group discussions (e.g. Giving Opinions +
Reasons/Examples). However, what they may need early on is instruction that develops their DK & PK of turn-taking language and strategies. Otherwise, the evaluation criteria may lead to an “over reliance on phrases and participation [that] may create a false atmosphere in the group” (Brown, 1996). For example, the fossilization of less than natural turn-taking (e.g. the Turn-taking Spotlight) and/or the “gratuitous” Asking for Reason both of which could be observed with some learners and groups up until the final discussion test of the fall semester.

Finally, an approach that introduces discussion language as wholistic “chunks” (e.g. Idea + Support for Idea) might provide for a more wholistic assessment of what the learners can naturally do. For example, Discussion Test #1 scoring could be expanded to include supporting ideas with discourse markers that many learners used but did not receive points for (e.g. Giving Examples/Experiences/IF). Moreover, this approach might even facilitate transferring/integrating discussion skills with other required English courses (e.g. Academic Writing, Presentation…); as the ability to clearly present one’s idea and support that idea is expected across curriculums and in the real world.

REFERENCES
Appendix A: Discussion Graphic Organizer Highlighting Turn-taking Behaviors for Lessons 1-5  
(Adapted from Petrin, 2011b)

Appendix B: Discussion Graphic Organizer Highlighting Turn-taking Phrases for Lessons 1-5  
(Adapted from Petrin, 2011b)