



CA-informed Conversation Teaching: Helping Thai Students Unpack English Conversations to Become Conversationally Competent

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Despite Thai students having studied English from the primary to tertiary level, Thais continue to have the lowest English proficiency levels among their ASEAN neighbors. This fact has raised serious concerns about Thailand's capacity to viably compete in the globalized economy. This paper reports findings of a quasi-experimental study designed to determine the effectiveness of employing CA-informed instruction in a Thai university English conversation classroom. Based on these findings and those found in two previous studies undertaken in the same institutional context, the authors provide an argument for the integration of CA within the CLT-centered university-level EFL classroom. This integration, the paper argues, raises learners' awareness of the genuine nature of naturally occurring conversation and, in doing so, can have a positive impact on their oral proficiency in English.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis (CA), CA-informed language instruction, EFL learners, teaching English conversation, Thai university students

Introduction

Today English serves a vital role as a language of global communication and a vehicle for economic advancement for countries throughout the world. As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an economic alliance which has designated English as the lingua franca, proficiency in English has become even more critical to Thailand's economic well-being. However, Thais continue to struggle with acquiring English. The Education First's annual English Proficiency Index ranked Thailand 62 out of 70 nations and the mean scores of Thai students from English proficiency tests such as TOEFL continue to be well below acceptable proficiency levels (see ETS, 2017). Mala (2016), in a *Bangkok Post* special report, expressed the fears of many Thais when he argued that a lack of proficiency in English will prove to be a formidable obstacle in business transactions and, as a result, Thai citizens will not be able to sufficiently prosper within the ASEAN community.

One area of particular concern has been Thais' challenges in acquiring oral fluency in English. This concern has led to a number of educational policy reforms and a nationwide pedagogical shift away from the use of teacher-fronted approaches in language teaching and toward the use of the Communicative

Language Teaching approach (CLT). A central goal of CLT is the development of communicative competence, something teacher-fronted approaches are thought to be remiss in effectively addressing (Brown, 1994, 2000; Richards, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

CLT advocates have argued that the approach can help learners to communicate more effectively in real-life situations by making genuine communication the central goal of lessons. In adopting this approach, teachers are instructed to tolerate students' errors and shift their role as instructors to that of facilitators. Shifting away from direct instruction, the facilitator's responsibilities are to create interactive activities (e.g., role -plays, information gaps, jigsaws) that promote communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman, 1986) and involve students in the authentic use of language for meaningful purposes (Brown, 2000). Encouraging communication through student-centered classrooms, CLT has been widely promoted in Thai EFL contexts for over two decades (Kustati, 2013; Kwangsawad & Yawongsa, 2009; Saengboon, 2002), becoming the most popular and widely endorsed ELT approach in Thailand (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Darasawang, 2007; Methitham & Chamcharasti, 2011; ThaiLIS, 2017).

However, the effectiveness of CLT remains in question (Atagi, 2011; Bruner, Shimray, & Sinwongsuwat, 2014; Khamkhien, 2010; Kongkerd, 2013; Noom-ura, 2013). Teng and Sinwongsuwat (2015a) reported problems with CLT implementation, highlighting a mismatch between theory and practice in EFL contexts like Thailand. According to Saengboon (2002), Thai students have expressed negative attitudes towards CLT, stating a preference for assuming a more passive role as a learner. Therefore, a more contextualized teaching framework was recommended which would enable Thai EFL teachers to look for approaches that might better address the challenges presented in their particular context. Similarly, Bax (2003) argued that those implementing CLT in an EFL context often neglect to account for factors within the local context that can render the approach problematic, thereby also suggesting a contextualized approach to language teaching. Additionally, teachers' lack of adequate training, heavy workload, large class sizes, and inadequate resources are among other critiques of the implementation of CLT in Thailand (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Bax, 2003; Hayes, 2010; Methitham & Chamcharasti, 2011; Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015a).

Despite its problems, however, CLT continues to be promoted in Thailand. Acknowledging that every approach to teaching English has its limitations, many Thai researchers and educators argued along the same line as Saville-Troike (2006) that there is no best method that fits all, and it is probably the wisest to opt for a combination of different methods. As a result, researchers have begun to consider other instructional approaches to supplement current CLT-based instructional materials and strategies. Teng and Sinwongsuwat (2015a), in particular, suggested that CLT could be more effective if aspects of Conversation Analysis (CA) could be integrated into many standard Thai communicative lessons.

CA is a sociological approach to uncovering social order in everyday naturally-occurring interaction. Unveiling order in naturally occurring conversation, it can provide a firm direction in teaching L2 conversation. In addition to uncovering interactional skills that shape social interaction, the implementation of CA could enhance the quality of CLT teaching by raising teachers' awareness of the social nature of the language they teach and allowing them to assess not only their learners' behavior but their own teaching practices and materials. A number of scholars have concurred that CA can be an effective instructional tool for developing students' English conversational skills (Barraja-Rohan, 1997, 2011; Markee, 2009; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010). According to Markee (2009), by offering a clearer picture of the structure of conversation, CA provides scaffolding that can make input and output more comprehensible to learners. Barraja-Rohan (2011) has argued that CA provides an approach to teaching the norms of interaction, thus helping enhance learners' interactional competence. Finally, Martin (2000) has posited that CA can be used as a diagnostic tool, allowing teachers to better assess students' linguistic challenges.

The growing body of both research articles and monographs in EFL countries such as Japan (see, e.g., Fujii, 2012) and China (see, e.g., Quan & Zhen, 2012) suggests that CA has been making inroads into L2 teaching for over a decade. However, in Thailand, there have been few empirical studies of the adoption of CA to improve students' proficiency in English conversation. Of the 107 Thai studies found in the Thai

Library Integrated System (ThaiLIS) (2017) that are related to teaching English speaking, none has investigated the use of CA to help improve Thai students' English conversation skills.

This paper therefore aims to explore the effectiveness of explicit CA-informed instruction in boosting the English conversation performance of Thai undergraduates in CLT classroom settings. Hoping to strengthen the findings of two related empirical studies previously conducted (Sitthikoson & Sinwongsuwat, 2017; Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015b), it especially attempts to address the following questions: Does explicit CA-informed instruction help to improve the students' English conversation performance and, if so, in what aspects?

Literature Review

To provide a conceptual framework for the study, a review of pertinent literature is provided below on the following topics: Conversation Analysis (CA) and its fundamental principles, pivotal CA concepts, and CA as a teaching and diagnostic tool.

Conversation Analysis (CA) and its Fundamental Principles

Originating in the mid-1960s in the work of sociologist Harvey Sacks and his colleagues, CA, a sociological approach to the study of talk-in-interaction, uses conversation materials to investigate how human beings construct their social world, establish social order, and accomplish purposeful social interaction through talk. Viewing ordinary, everyday talk as a highly organized phenomenon, the principal focus of CA is to discover the machinery, rules, or structures that produce and constitute its orderliness and meaningfulness (Duranti, 1997; Heap, 1997; Hutchby & Wooffit, 1998; Psathas, 1995, cited in Sinwongsuwat, 2007; ten Have, 2007).

Through the influences of Erving Goffman's studies of face-to-face interaction and Harold Garfinkel's studies of social members' methods of constructing and understanding social reality, CA has come to concentrate on the analysis of recorded data of naturally occurring talks to make the commonsense world visible. Its approach to investigating these talks relies on a number of fundamental principles. First, ordinary, natural conversation is the primary object of the analysis as it is the predominant form of human interaction through which we organize our social world, learn about our society and become exposed to social order. Second, to fully understand social phenomena through talk, CA considers it essential to audio/video record these observables, naturally occurring data, and transcribe them as closely as possible so as to obtain the most possibly accurate picture of the talk for analysis, reanalysis, and verifying the claims made based on these analyses. Third, seeing talk-in-interaction as structurally organized and highly ordered, CA views such orderliness as being indicative of talk participants' orientation towards a common set of interactional practices and their structural organization. Believed to be fundamentally independent of participants' social and personal characteristics, these practices or resources which CA aims at discovering are the medium through which these characteristics are constructed, enacted, and maintained.

Finally, CA views language as action or an instrument of action and takes an emic perspective on data analysis. Namely, in interpreting what talk participants are doing with a given utterance or a turn at talk, CA relies on a next-turn proof procedure as a major support strategy. This strategy lies in the interactional essence of conversation itself which obliges talk participants to display in their turns their understanding of each other's turns. Therefore, when organizing their action in a given turn, participants not only orient to the overall structural organization of the talk, but also display the result of their analysis of an (oft-immediate) prior turn's conduct on the basis of such orientation. CA argues that such a display of an understanding or analysis in a next turn of a prior turn is not only available to participants themselves, but also to anyone who witnessed it, including analysts, being a proof procedure of their analysis of what a given turn's talk in question is occupied with.

CA Concepts

Via these analytical principles, CA has uncovered a number of important concepts that help us understand the genuine nature of talk-in-interaction and normative practices involved in its organization. Some of the major ones which can enhance our understanding of everyday conversation are discussed below.

Adjacency pairs and conversation structure

An adjacency pair is a type of utterance that conventionally comes in pairs. For example, questions are followed by answers; greetings are returned with greetings, and invitations are followed by acceptances/declinations (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). In adjacency pairs, there is often a choice of two possible answers (e.g., a response to a blame might be a denial or an acceptance), and if there are not any answers, it can be interpreted as imprudence, lack of attention or deafness (Cook, 1989). However, adjacency pairs do not always occur in such an orderly two-part fashion. There might be an expansion such as an insertion sequence as shown below (see also Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010).

For example, *A: Did you enjoy the meal?*

B: (Did you?)

A: Yes.)

B: So did I.

(Cook, 1989, p. 54)

According to Wong and Waring (2010), an understanding of such an adjacency-pair organization of turns normally by two different speakers can facilitate learners' conversational communication especially by enabling them to provide appropriate responses anticipated by different first pair-part turns. It also allows them to see a variety of options to expand the base adjacency-pair sequence to keep conversation going so that they can fully realize their interactional goals.

Aside from adjacency-pair sequences, conversation also has structural organization that learners need to be aware of with an opening (usually some form of greeting), a centering (usually one or more topics being introduced and talked about) and a closing sequence (usually a form of leave taking or saying goodbye). Openings and closings in particular are two segments found in all naturally-occurring conversations. While opening or striking up a conversation might be easy to do with simple greetings, expanding and especially closing or getting out of a conversation could prove to be challenging for second language learners.

Turn-taking

Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) discussed three basic facts about conversation: "(1) turn-taking occurs; (2) one speaker tends to talk at a time; and (3) turns are taken with as little gap or overlap between them as possible" (p.47). Turn-taking in particular is the core interactional practice that has been unveiled via CA. It is argued that the turn-taking system relies on two important components: turn-constructive and turn-allocational components. The turn-constructive component consists of the building blocks of turns called turn-constructive units (TCUs), each of which has a transition relevance place (TRP) which makes speaker transition relevant (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004). The latter, on the other hand, entails speakers' rights to take turn at a TRP via current-speaker-selects-next, next speaker self-selection, or current speaker continues (see Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010).

While germane to any conversation encountered, turn-taking however may vary from culture to culture, and unintentional mistakes in cross-cultural interactions can arise if L2 learners do not fully realize these

differences (Wong & Waring, 2010). For these learners, turn-taking is therefore an important skill of knowing not only how to construct but when to appropriately start and finish a turn in conversation. They especially need to be able to recognize when a change of speakers becomes relevant in talk via various combinations of both linguistic and non-linguistic cues such as grammar, prosody, pacing of talk, eye contact, gestures, and posture.

Repairs

Repairs are problem-preempting mechanisms used by speakers in talk-in-interaction when they encounter and address problems of understanding such as incorrect word selection, mishearing, misunderstanding, and slips of the tongue. Wong and Waring (2010) suggest that there are many mistakes in everyday conversation such as errors, imperfections, and Freudian slips, so repairs are brought into play to address all types of errors and keep conversation going. According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), there are four types of repairs: (1) self-initiated self-repair (the speaker of the trouble source prompts and repairs the trouble); (2) other-initiated self-repair (the speaker of the trouble source carries out the repair, but the trouble is prompted by the recipient.); (3) self-initiated other repair (the speaker of a trouble source has the recipient clear the trouble) and (4) other-initiated other-repair (the recipient of a trouble source prompts and repairs the trouble).

Since repair is an essential mechanism that allows participants to deal with problems in talk, without being aware of the repair process, one could hardly imagine how learners can effectively engage in talk-in-interaction and how they could achieve mutual understanding with their interlocutors given the fact that real-time conversation is often full of errors and imperfections.

CA as a Teaching and a Diagnostic Tool

A number of researchers and teachers have utilized CA both as a research tool and an instructional tool to develop interactional competence (IC) (See, *Inter alia*, Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Martin, 2000; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010).

From a CA perspective, language learning takes place as learners develop their IC through social participation. IC, often overlooked in CLT (Wong & Waring, 2010), is defined as the ability to appropriately use different interactional resources such as turn taking, sequence organization, overlap and repair mechanisms to deal with problems in interactions and accomplish interactional goals. Barraja-Rohan (2011) argues that CA can be employed to help teach L2 IC and enhance interaction-based learning. Wu (2013) adds that CA can be used to develop learners' interactional competence through the investigation of transcriptions of native speakers' (NSs) or nonnative speakers' (NNSs) interactions, the sequences of a conversation, and various aspects of conversation organization including the way people take turns, open, continue, and close a conversation.

CA can be used to uncover and capture all the natural features of conversation and make explicit the underlying sociocultural norms (Barraja-Rohan, 1997, 2011; Wong & Waring, 2010). In doing so, CA can provide direction in teaching conversation by disclosing to learners the features of everyday conversation that often go unnoticed (Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010). Martin (2000), particularly, argues that through analysis of transcriptions of audio or video-recorded spoken interactions, CA can be used to inductively teach learners language structures that naturally occur in spoken interactions. Wong and Waring (2010) additionally note that ESL and EFL textbooks do not usually contain authentic language features found in naturally occurring conversations and instructors themselves often do not know how to make authentic conversations teachable because they do not have a good command of the interactional practices (IP), particularly the systematic verbal and nonverbal strategies participants use in social interactions. Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) posit that CA-based materials can serve as blueprints of sequences of social interaction (e.g. greetings: hello-hello; invitation – acceptance/declination) and as key resources for teaching and raising learners' L2 pragmatic awareness.

Similar to Goh and Burns (2012), they suggest that L2 teachers should have knowledge of basic CA concepts, so that they can develop activities that help students manage different features and functions of talk-in-interaction and more effectively teach conversation to their students.

CA can also be used to diagnose and reveal communication problems participants encounter when they try to make sense of each other's contribution during an interaction (Martin, 2000). In their studies, both Barraja-Rohan (2011) and Fujii (2012) showed that CA was a powerful tool for analyzing L2 interactions and identifying causes for interactional problems. Clifton (2011), additionally, recommended an integration of CA into the language classroom as his students who, guided by CA principles, were asked to reflect upon their own business-simulated talks via transcription and analysis. In doing so, the students were reportedly able to suggest strategies for improving their business interactional skills. It was asserted that CA can therefore be used not only as an instructional tool to help enhance learners' communicative performance but also to analyze their interactions so as to more precisely determine and target specific areas of challenges.

Despite the growing body of CA-informed ELT research in other contexts, in Thailand there have only been a handful of studies that started to explore the benefits of applying CA principles and concepts to teaching English conversations. Getting introduced to CA principles and concepts as well as their practical benefits, a number of Thai teaching practitioners have begun to apply these principles and concepts to their English conversation classrooms hoping to better understand their learners' language use, to assess the effectiveness of classroom activities implemented such as scripted and unscripted roleplays, and to evaluate methods of assessing and developing their learners' conversation competence (see Chotirat & Sinwongsuwat, 2011; Kongnin & Sinwongsuwat, 2016; Makeh & Singwongsuwat, 2014; Nakseevee & Sinwongsuwat, 2013; Nookam & Sinwongsuwat, 2010; Rodpradit & Singwongsuwat, 2012; Saniboo & Sinwongsuwat, 2016; Ussama & Singwongsuwat, 2014). The most recent ones are the two studies conducted by Siththikoson and Sinwongsuwat (2017) and Teng and Sinwongsuwat (2015b), whose findings are consolidated in this paper. Investigating the effectiveness of explicit CA-informed instruction in enhancing students' conversation performance, Teng and Sinwongsuwat (2015b) in particular integrated CA concepts into their regular English conversation class and discovered that students receiving such explicit conversation teaching performed significantly better in face-to-face conversation than those without it especially in the areas of appropriacy and grammar. The students were particularly able to use a wider range of expressions and interact more appropriately and effectively according to the target language norms. However, in other areas such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehensibility, significant improvement needs verification in further studies. Siththikoson and Sinwongsuwat (2017), on the other hand, examined the effectiveness of CA-informed telephone conversation teaching; the study also reported similarly positive results. Engaging similar groups of university students in 15 one-hour CA-informed telephone conversation lessons over the course of a semester, the study revealed significant improvements in the students' telephone conversation performance after the training and their positive attitudes towards telephone conversation instruction. The students stressed that such an explicit CA-informed instruction allowed them to think systematically about conversation and to learn useful telephone expressions. It was suggested that although the instruction dealt with CA concepts which might initially be difficult to grasp especially for low-level students, it is still worthwhile for teachers to acquire these concepts and incorporate them into the classroom so as to make their conversation instruction more effective in enhancing their students' conversation abilities in the long run.

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants were taken from two sections of two-fourth-year undergraduates of varying majors (excluding English) taking an elective English course (890-212 English Conversation I) during the

summer of 2016 at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand (PSU). One section contained 46 students and the other 40 students. All the students had completed two fundamental English courses (i.e., 890-101 Fundamental English Listening and Speaking and 890-102 Fundamental English Reading and Writing). To assure their homogeneity, all of the 86 students from the two sections were required to take a 60-item quick placement test (version 1) of University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate 2001 (UCLES, 2001), designed to test students' general knowledge of English. Student scores were then interpreted according to the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). The five ALTE levels range from A1 (beginner) through C1 (advanced). Only 66 students with the same average level of A2 (elementary) English proficiency were chosen as focal participants. Thirty-five out of forty-six students from one section previously mentioned were assigned to an experimental group and 31 out of 40 students from the other section to a control group.

Control group

The control group was taught using a CLT-oriented method prescribed in the teacher's manual of *Speak Now 3* (Richards & Bohlke, 2012). The students were taught the same conversations as the experimental group but without CA insights. Designed based on suggestions given in the teachers' manual of *Speak Now 3*, each of the lessons was structured following the textbook's format: (a) thinking about the topic and introducing the lesson's *vocabulary*, (b) presenting a model *conversation*, (c) highlighting *featured expressions*, (d) focusing on *pronunciation*, and (e) making *conversation* with the language learned.

Following this structure, vocabulary from the lesson's topic was first introduced. A recording of a model conversation and an accompanying transcript was then presented. The students had to listen to this conversation and answer comprehension-based questions. After the listening, main ideas and details were pointed out and some linguistic features such as pronunciation and intonation were emphasized. Lastly, in pairs or small groups, students practiced the target language by both replicating the model conversations and creating new conversations using the target language.

Experimental group

In the experimental group, students were taught using the same model conversations used in the control group. However, the teacher directed students' attention to the structure and features of the model conversations explicitly pointing out how talk participants employed both verbal and non-verbal language to construct turns in these conversations. The CA transcription convention was also introduced at the initial stage, so students could understand the symbols used in the transcripts given in the class handouts. Next, the teacher-researcher introduced the CA concepts of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and repairs. Other conversation-related topics, the role of listeners, conversation maintenance, topic initiation and topic shift as well as sequences in telephone conversations, were included in separate lessons. The participants were asked to practice each newly introduced CA-informed conversation in each lesson through role-play activities. After each lesson with CA concepts or conversation-related topics, students were asked to write a short CA-concept-based conversation for homework.

Instructional Materials

Over the course of the 15 classes, each group of the participants received 15 handouts containing the same model conversations primarily provided by the commercial text *Speak Now 3* (Richards & Bohlke, 2012) as well as a few conversations from English movies and IELTS tests. However, the handouts given to the experimental group also contained CA transcription symbols, and additional class handouts were provided to introduce students in this group to basic CA concepts such as turn-taking, sequences of actions (e.g., adjacency pairs) and repairs. These CA-informed handouts were prepared following *Beyond Talk* by Barraja-Rohan and Pritchard (1997) as well as *Conversation Analysis and Second Language*

Pedagogy by Wong and Waring (2010) (see Appendix A for a sample lesson plan and Appendix B for a CA-based handout).

Data Collection

In order to assess their English conversational abilities, all the participants were interviewed by a native English teacher with extensive experience teaching English. The first oral interview was conducted before the course began and referred to as a pre-test. The second, a post-test, was conducted after the participants completed the course. In the pre- and post-course interviews, each of which lasted 1-2 minutes, the interviewer engaged the students in a conversation using the same general questions about family, hobbies, personality traits and future plans. All the interviews were video recorded and then scored by two raters. A scoring criteria and descriptors for the assessment (adapted from those set out by Barraja-Rohan (2011), Luoma (2004) and O'Loughlin (2001) were employed with a focus on five different aspects of speaking: fluency (F), vocabulary (V), appropriacy (A), comprehensibility (C) and grammar (G) (see Appendix C).

An evaluation sheet was given to the two raters to rate each student's performance (see Appendix D). The raters included a non-native speaker and a native speaker of English. Both were English teachers with over 10 years of experience teaching English speaking skills. The non-native rater also had substantial exposure to English in a native-speaking context. The evaluation sheet used by the raters was composed of a 5-point scale: 1= very poor/unacceptable; 2= poor; 3= average; 4= good and 5= excellent.

The participants' scores from rater 1 and rater 2 were added up, averaged, and considered the real score. To guarantee the reliability of the rating process, the scores of the pretest and posttest given by the two raters were compared, and inter-rater reliability was computed. The results obtained from the two tests were 0.95 and 0.96 respectively and considered highly acceptable.

Based on an independent *t*-test run on the pretest interview scores, the two groups of students were also found to be homogenous in terms of their conversation ability from the start.

Data Analysis

The scores obtained from the two raters in the pretest and posttest interviews were statistically computed to arrive at mean and standard deviation, and independent *t*-tests were run to determine significant differences in the students' conversation performance before and after the course. At the end of the semester, the posttest scores of both groups were also compared, and Cohen's *d* effect size was calculated to assess the impact of the CA-informed instruction. Additionally, a close CA analysis of the video recorded interview interactions was conducted to verify performance differences between the two groups. The interactions were transcribed following the transcription convention below, adapted from Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), Seedhouse (2004), and Schegloff (2007).

| <i>Symbols</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|----------------|---|
| [| Point of overlap onset |
| [[| Starting a simultaneous turn |
|] | Point of overlap termination |
| = | a) Turn continues below, at the next identical symbol b) If inserted at the end of one speaker's adjacency turn, indicates that there is no gap at all between the two turns c) Indicates that there is no interval between adjacency utterances. |
| (0.5) | Numbers in parenthesis indicate silence, represented in tenth of a second; what is given here indicates 0.5 second of silence. |
| (.) | A dot in parentheses indicates a "micropause", hearable but not readily measurable; ordinary less than 0.2 second |
| hh ; .hh | hh for exhalation whereas .hh for inhalation |
| <u>Word</u> | Speaker emphasis |
| — | Abrupt cutoff |
| . | Falling (final) intonation |
| , | Low-rising intonation, suggesting continuation |
| ? | Rising intonation, not necessarily a question |
| ! | Animated or emphatic tone |
| (guess) | Indicates the transcriber's doubt about a word |
| [gibe] | In the case of inaccurate pronunciation of an English word, an approximation of the sound is given in square brackets |
| Ja ((tr.: es)) | Non-English words are italicized and are followed by an English translation in double parentheses |
| → | Marks features of special interest |

Findings and Discussion

Conversation Improvement Based on Statistical Analysis

After receiving CA-informed teaching over the course of 15 weeks without any extra conversation training outside the classroom, the students' performance was significantly improved overall and in all of the aspects assessed. As shown in Table 1 below, the instruction helped to enhance their fluency, vocabulary, appropriacy, and comprehensibility with a significant degree of difference between pre- and post-test scores at a level of 0.01 and grammar at a level of 0.05 (see Appendix C for descriptors).

TABLE 1
Performance Differences Before and After CA-informed Teaching

| <i>Items</i> | <i>Pre-test</i> | | <i>Post-test</i> | | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> | <i>Effect size</i> | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| | <i>Mean</i> | <i>S.D.</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>S.D.</i> | | | | | |
| Fluency (F) | 3.71 | 0.75 | 4.47 | 0.61 | 7.809 | ** | 34 | 0.00 | 1.117 |
| Vocabulary (V) | 3.83 | 0.62 | 4.23 | 0.43 | 4.761 | ** | 34 | 0.00 | 0.766 |
| Appropriacy (A) | 3.83 | 0.62 | 4.09 | 0.45 | 3.431 | ** | 34 | 0.00 | 0.484 |
| Comprehensibility (C) | 3.86 | 0.60 | 4.11 | 0.40 | 3.431 | ** | 34 | 0.00 | 0.512 |
| Grammar (G) | 3.69 | 0.63 | 3.89 | 0.63 | 2.026 | * | 34 | 0.05 | 0.317 |
| All | 18.91 | 3.01 | 20.79 | 2.00 | 6.434 | ** | 34 | 0.00 | 0.747 |

The statistical results thus confirmed that explicit CA-informed conversation teaching can really enhance English language learners' conversation abilities. However, in such areas as grammar, it is suggested that further improvement could be achieved if the students were not only engaged in analyzing conversations learned based on CA principles and concepts, but also made aware of a wider range of structures they could use to accomplish each interactional goal through their turns at talk.

Aside from the significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores, the comparison between post-test scores after one-semester treatment also indicates that despite being similar in their conversational performance before the training, the students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in all aspects of the conversational performance assessed as shown in table 2.

This aligns with the results obtained from Teng and Sinwongsuwat (2015) as well as Sitthikoson and Sinwongsuwat (2017).

TABLE 2
Post-treatment Performance Differences between Two Groups

| Items | Experiment Group (n=35) | | Control Group (n=31) | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Effect size | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|-------|----|-----------------|-------------|------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | | | | |
| Fluency (F) | 4.47 | 0.61 | 3.45 | 0.68 | 6.469 | ** | 64 | 0.00 | 1.62 |
| Vocabulary (V) | 4.23 | 0.43 | 3.61 | 0.62 | 4.668 | ** | 53 | 0.00 | 1.29 |
| Appropriacy (A) | 4.09 | 0.45 | 3.55 | 0.62 | 3.980 | ** | 54 | 0.00 | 1.09 |
| Comprehensibility (C) | 4.11 | 0.40 | 3.58 | 0.62 | 4.084 | ** | 50 | 0.00 | 1.15 |
| Grammar (G) | 3.89 | 0.63 | 3.58 | 0.62 | 1.975 | * | 64 | 0.05 | 0.49 |
| All | 20.79 | 2.00 | 17.77 | 2.97 | 4.765 | ** | 52 | 0.00 | 1.33 |

As the students were engaged in the analysis of a model conversation explicitly taught through each CA-informed lesson, they demonstrated an understanding of how a conversation is sequentially organized, how different social actions are constructed through turns, and how they can use different resources available to accomplish their interactional goals. Through frequent CA-informed practice, they were able to manoeuvre through L2 conversation more naturally, appropriately respond to their interlocutors' turns with a wide range of vocabulary and structures, and make themselves understood more accurately. While the statistical results show highly significant difference in conversation improvement between the two groups overall (with the Cohen's d effect size of 1.33) and in all the aspects assessed, noticeable improvement in the performance of the experimental group became even more noticeable after conducting the close analysis.

Conversation Improvement through Explicit CA-Informed Instruction Based on Close Analysis

To verify the statistical findings of the students' improvement in conversational abilities, the interview interactions of the two groups of students with a native speaker were closely examined after finishing the course. In the talk excerpts shown below, Ann (a pseudonym) represents students in the experimental group given explicit CA-informed instruction and Yoon (a pseudonym) represents those in the control group taught with the CLT-oriented approach prescribed in the teacher's manual of the textbook. The close analysis of their post-course interview interactions revealed noticeable differences between the two.

Students receiving CA-informed instruction were able to construct extended turns in response to a question with greater fluency and substance. In the excerpts below, Ann not only spoke with fewer fillers such as *uh* but better integrated new vocabulary she learned from the class into her answer, as shown by the italicized words in lines 7 and 9.

EXCERPT 1

Post-interview: NS-Ann, Experimental Group (EG)

- 3 NS: Would you please tell me a little bit about yourself?
 4 Ann: OK ((nodding))
 5 Uhm Good afternoon. My name is Kanlayana Saetiow, call me Ann.
 6 I'm twenty years old. I'm (...) studying in faculty of science, my major
 7→ is chemistry. I'm a *middle* child. I have (.) one (.) older sister, her
 8 name's On, and (.) one younger brother, his name An.
 9→ I'm a (.) I'm a *considerate*, I'm uh (.) *optimist*, and not *judgmental*.
 10 I want to become a good scientist.

Similarly, as reported in Teng (2015), students in the experimental group could promptly reciprocate their interlocutor's turns. An example of this can be seen in lines 2, 17, 26. Students in the experimental

group were also able to appropriately initiate a different action sequence. Evidence of this can be seen in line 3 where Ha (a pseudonym) started a request sequence, and then again in line 11, a confirmation-seeking sequence. Additionally, like Ann in excerpt 1, Ha's responses to the interlocutor's question about his personality were also delivered in a complex turn (see lines 13-14).

EXCERPT 2

Post-Interview: NS-Ha, EG

- 1 NS: Hello.
 2→ Ha: Hello=
 3→ Ha: = Can I please sit here?
 4 NS: Yes, sure.
 5 NS: = Do you have any brothers and sisters?
 6 Ha: Yes. I have two brothers and sisters.
 7 NS: What's your father's job?
 8 Ha: Father job. Ah, my father job is a business(man). A little
 9 business.
 10 NS: OK. How would you describe your personality?
 11→ Ha: My personality?=
 12→ NS: =(Nodding)
 13→ Ha: Ah, I am a student who is lazy but sometime(s) I think I (am)
 14→ hardworking for my exam ((laugh)).
 15 NS: What's your favorite hobby?
 16 Ha: Oh, my favorite hobby; I like to play game (.only the game.
 17→ And you?
 18 NS: Ah, (.) I like to (.)travel.=
 19→ Ha: =Oh, travel is good!
 20 NS: = and walk.
 21→ Ha: (laugh)
 22 NS: Do you have er .hh what is your plan for future? What do you
 23 want to do?
 24 Ha: Oh, I think my future I will be (.) a lecturer in university.
 25 NS: Good luck to you. Thank you.
 26→ Ha: Umm, may I ask some question(s)?
 27 NS: Of course; Yes?
 28 Ha: Er, where are you come from?
 29 NS: I come from Canada.
 30→ Ha: Oh, good. ((smile))
 31 NS: ((Nodding)).
 32 Ha: Ah, are you like Thailand?
 33→ NS: I love Thailand ((smile)).
 34→ Ha: ((laugh)). Yes, see you [later. ((shaking hands with NS))
 35 NS: [OK. Thank you.=
 36 Ha: =Thank you.
 37 NS: Bye.

After receiving one semester of CA-informed instruction, Ha apparently became more confident and fluent; he could respond to his interlocutor's turns without the use of long pauses or delays, as shown in lines 2 through 36. He was able not only to effectively use a wide range of structures and expressions in his turn construction, but to deploy such discourse markers as *oh*, *ah*, and *umm* to acknowledge new information, to reserve turn space, and to keep the interaction going smoothly. Interestingly, he was also able to produce assessment tokens, for instance, *oh*, *good* as in lines 19 and 30, to show his interest and attentive listening to his conversation partner. Ha, in fact, used both verbal and non-verbal feedback to display his heightened involvement in an ongoing sequence, as in lines 12, 21, 30, 33 and 34. He was an example of a student who was able to effectively put the CA knowledge gained from the course into practice, allowing him to appropriately say and do what he wanted through his turns.

In contrast, despite appearing more confident in the post-course interview, Yoon, representing students in the control group, mostly reproduced the responses given in the pre-course interview without any improvement in content. No turns reciprocating the interlocutor's actions were found. The conversation was simply structured with only basic question-answer sequences most of which were inappropriately terminated with her *yes* tokens (i.e., lines 12, 16, and 20).

EXCERPT 3

Post-interview, NS-Yoon, Control Group (CG)

- 1 NS: Would you please tell me a little bit about yourself?
 2 Yoon: Okay, my name i::s Suppajit Jarktee, .hhh
 3 You can call me Yoon,
 4 I come from Trang,
 5 I'm twenty-one years old,
 6 U::h I am a sophomore,
 7 umm.. stu-study in faculty management science,
 8 U::h my major i::s u:h marketing
 9 NS: What does your father do?
 10 Yoon: Fater ((father)) my parent, he is dead.
 11 NS: Oh I'm sorry.
 12→ Yoon: Yes, ((nodding))
 13 NS: U::h what's your favorite hobby?
 14 Yoon: Hobby umm playing badminton and swimming
 15 NS: That's great.
 16→ Yoon: Yes,
 17 NS: What are you most proud of in your life?
 18 Yoon: Uh (.) I (...) I was born to my parent.
 19 NS: Uh, that's great. Thank you so much.
 20→ Yoon: Yes, uh ((nodding)) thank you very much.
 21 NS: Bye-bye,

This finding is also in line with Teng (2015). In Excerpt 4 below, Da (a pseudonym), representing students in the control group without CA-informed instruction, interacted with a native English speaker with little improvement in the post-course interview. Similar to his pre-course interview, Da still failed to promptly provide a relevant response to the question asked about his personality. Only after the use of a number of repairs (i.e., lines 10, 12, 13), could he appropriately respond to the NS's turn in line 8, and the turns he produced were mainly of the single-unit type. Like Yoon, he did not use any discourse markers to facilitate his interactions but resorted to fillers such as *u::h* and micro pauses to delay his turn delivery. Turns were initiated only when prompted. A limited range of structures and vocabulary were used to express ideas. The answers were short and often needed clarification during the interaction. Da's pre- and post-course interview interactions were almost identical.

EXCERPT 4

Post-interview: NS-Da, CG

- 8 NS: How would you describe your personality?
 9 (0.5)
 10→ NS: = What kind of personality are you?
 11 Da: My (.)? ((pointing to himself)).
 12→ NS: Are you?
 13→ Da: I'm (.5) I'm so shy.
 14 NS: =Shy.
 15 NS: Do you have any hobbies?
 16 Da: My hobby is (0.5) hh play computer game and (0.4) read (0.3)
 17 cartoon book.
 18 NS: What would you like to do in the future?
 19 Da: U::h (0.6) I want to be a businessman.

- 20 NS: Good luck to you. Thank you.
21 Da: Thank you.

Similar to the findings of Teng (2015), after one semester of no explicit CA-informed instruction, close analysis showed that students' speaking skills did not seem to improve much. Responses from the pre-course interview were often recycled in the post-course interview. The same range of vocabulary was used in turn construction, and the same comprehension problems recurred, requiring the interlocutor to seek clarification in several turns.

The results of this research as evidenced by the statistically and observationally significant performance differences between the experimental and control groups therefore strongly suggest that teachers consider integrating explicit CA-informed instruction as well as the use of recorded non-scripted conversations into their classrooms to facilitate the development of students' conversation skills. Further studies can in fact incorporate natural or near-natural conversations from such sources as corpora of English conversations and TV sitcoms into the classroom and engage students in awareness-raising activities based on these conversations. As suggested by Sert (2010), while enabling teachers to become more aware of their own classroom language use and language teaching, CA-informed instruction can also empower learners to become more active and take better control of their own learning by being analytical of language they learn and the language they use.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the effectiveness of using explicit CA-informed conversation instruction with Thai university students. Findings from the statistical analysis strengthens the supposition arrived at in previous studies conducted at a Thai university that the use of CA-informed conversation lessons can help students improve their overall conversational performance. The experimental group outperformed those students given no CA-informed instruction in all aspects, particularly when their interactions were closely analyzed. The control group, on the other hand, improved little, if at all after the treatment. The results strongly suggest that language teachers reexamine their exclusive use of the non-CA-informed approach as prescribed in many CLT-oriented conversation textbooks and consider the addition of CA insights in their English language teaching. Knowledge of CA will provide teachers with a deeper understanding of the complexities of naturally-occurring conversation, thereby equipping them with the tools that can result in an increase in students' English conversation skills.

Despite the positive results reported in this paper, there however were certain limitations that need to be overcome in further studies. In the assessment, in addition to casual interview interaction with NSs, students should also be asked to engage in peer interactions. The latter would allow them to produce more balanced talk and draw on a greater range of interactional resources employed in natural conversation as in peer interactions they would be the ones to maneuver the talk themselves. The students would have more freedom to open a sequence, introduce or shift a topic, and expand or terminate the talk such that more natural features of conversation could be elicited which better manifest their conversational competence (Ussama & Sinwongsuwat, 2014). The rating rubric used should also be revised to accommodate the assessment of more interactional features elucidated in the close analysis.

With these limitations to be handled, the paper still strongly encourages EFL teachers to acquire CA knowledge and join forces in developing CA-informed language lessons to enhance conversation performance of students with different levels of English proficiency. After closely examining classroom interactions, they will be in a better position to diagnose learners' specific language difficulties as well as assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies. CA can therefore serve not just as a teaching and diagnostic tool but a useful tool for exploring the interactional architecture of their language classroom and identifying their learners' language learning problems.

Further studies can also investigate such issues as how well-received CA-informed conversation

teaching like this is among language teachers and learners of different proficiency levels, what problems learners really have when using language in real-time spoken interaction, and how their conversational competence is developed through classroom interaction.

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Appendix A

CA Based Lesson Plan (Sample)

Lesson one

Duration: 60 minutes

Topic: Stages of conversation

Goal: To teach the following:

- 1) adjacency pairs: utterances of the same type and different types
- 2) techniques to make small talks
- 3) Pre-closing conversation expressions

Terminal Objectives: By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- 1) identify adjacency pairs: utterances of the same type and different types
- 2) use techniques to engage actively in conversation
- 3) politely indicate when they should stop talking

Enabling Objectives: Students will

- 1) learn adjacency pairs and practice utterances of the same types
- 2) talk about and change a topic in conversation
- 3) practice stages of conversation
- 4) listen to a recording consisting of a three-stage conversation

| Sequence | Minutes | Activities | Material/Resource |
|----------------------------|---------|---|----------------------------|
| Warm up | 5 | Give students a jumbled conversation and get them to rearrange a conversation. (a three-stage conversation). | Marker Board |
| Vocabulary Adjacency pairs | 10 | 1) Introduce adjacency pairs (utterance of the same type: Greeting and Leave-taking) - Greeting (A: <i>Hello</i> B: <i>Hello</i>) - Leave-taking (A: <i>Goodbye</i> B: <i>Goodbye</i>) 2) Introduce adjacency pairs (utterance of the different type) Questions and answers (A: <i>How are you?</i> B: <i>I'm fine.</i>) 3) Get students to practice the utterances of the two types in pairs. | Marker Board |
| Structure of conversation | 20 | 1) Hand out a CA-based handout 2) Explain the handout with demonstrations. 3) Have students practice each stage in pairs. 4) Have students practice the three-stage conversation | Marker Board Handout |
| Listening | 10 | 1) Have students listen to a full conversation recording and ask them to notice stages of conversation 2) Have students work in pairs to figure out what is said in each stage. 3) Elicit their answers. | CD Marker Board |
| Exercises | 7 | 1) Direct students' attention to exercises 1 and 2 2) Have students match parts of conversation in exercise 1 in pairs. 3) Have students determine stages of conversation and practice the conversation. 4) Have students complete exercise 3. 5) Check the answers. | Book CD Marker Board |
| Wrap-up | 3 | Recap the important points in the lesson. | Marker Board |
| Homework | 5 | Assign students to practice short three-stage conversations. | Marker Board |

Appendix B

CA-Based Handouts (Sample)

Handout (1)

Stages of conversation

❖ Any conversation has a stage with **the opening, the centring and the closing**. In the opening, participants usually say something like **“hello and sometimes add health inquiry like how are you?”** to each other. In the centring, participants talk about something which is called **the topic**. And in the closing, participants show that they want to finish the conversation, then they usually say something like **“goodbye (leave-taking)”** to each other.

1. Opening

| Greeting | | Inquiry into health | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Speaker 1 | Speaker 2 | Speaker 1 | Speaker 2 |
| Good morning / Hello / Hi | Good morning / Hello / Hi | How are you? How's it going? | I'm fine. I'm good, thanks. |

2. Centring

Topic:

We can introduce a topic and talk about and change the topic. Read the following topics and add some more ideas.

| Topics | |
|--------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Have you had lunch yet? |
| 2 | What can I do for you? |
| 3 | Did you enjoy the weekend? |
| 4 | How was your English class? |
| 5 | I have some good news. |
| 6 | You know I just... |
| 7 | Did you come to the class on Friday? |

3. Closing

3.1 Pre Closing:

❖ Pre Closing Signal:

Before you say goodbye, you should say one of these sentences to show that you want to finish speaking.

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| <i>OK</i> | <i>OK then</i> | <i>Alright</i> | <i>Alright then</i> | <i>Well</i> | <i>So</i> | <i>Anyway</i> |
| <i>I'm running late.</i> | | <i>Oh, I've got to go now.</i> | | <i>Well, nice talking to you.</i> | | |
| <i>Alright, what time is it now?</i> | | | <i>OK, I'll talk to you later.</i> | | | |

3.2 Closing

| Leave-taking: saying goodbye | |
|---|--|
| Speaker 1 | Speaker 2 |
| <i>Goodbye/ Bye; Bye-bye</i> | <i>Goodbye / Bye / bye-bye</i> |
| <i>See you later / See you on... / Catch you later. (+ Have a</i> | <i>See you soon / See you around / Catch you later. (+</i> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>nice day) Thank you. You too.</i> | <i>Have a good day) Thank you. You too.</i> |
|---|---|

Exercises

1. Match parts of the conversation and name the stages of conversation below.
2. Identify the stages of conversation and then practice it with your partner.

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | Hello | A | Thank you. You too. Bye-bye. |
| 2 | My name is Ceta. | B | I'm a student, too. |
| 3 | Nice to meet you. | C | Nice talking to you, too. |
| 4 | Where are you from? | D | I'm Chou. |
| 5 | Songkla. | E | Hello. |
| 6 | I'm a student. And how about you? | F | Bangkok. And you? |
| 7 | Well, nice talking to you. | G | Nice to meet you, too. |
| 8 | Bye. Have a nice day. | H | What do you do? |

Read the conversation above and fill in the missing turns. Practice the conversation with your partner.

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| A | Hello. |
| B | |
| A | My name is Ceta. |
| B | |
| A | Nice to meet you. |
| B | |
| A | Where are you from? |
| B | |
| A | Songkla. |
| B | |
| A | I'm a student. And how about you? |
| B | |
| A | Well, nice talking to you. |
| B | |
| A | Bye. |
| B | |

Appendix C

Scoring criteria and descriptors adapted from O'Loughlin (2001), Luoma (2004) and Barraja-Rohan (2011)

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Fluency | Students can speak fluently with only occasional hesitation and manage to keep the conversation going smoothly without making long pauses or causing communication breakdown even though they may speak rather slowly than a native speaker. |
| Vocabulary | Students has a large command of vocabulary and can use a wide range of vocabulary precisely, appropriately and effectively to express most ideas. |
| Appropriacy | Students can appropriately respond to their interlocutor's turns. First- and second-pair-part turns or even unpredictable questions in conversation were returned with relevant responses. |
| Comprehensibility | Students can produce speech which can be understood effortlessly by the interlocutor or the interlocutor may occasionally seek clarification. |
| Grammar | Students can interact effectively by employing a wide range of structures or expressions with only minor mistakes. |

Appendix D

Evaluation Form for Pre-test and Post-test

Name: _____ Score: _____

| Score Aspect | Excellent | Good | Satisfactory | Poor | Very poor/ unacceptable |
|-------------------|-----------|------|--------------|------|----------------------------|
| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Fluency | | | | | |
| Vocabulary | | | | | |
| Appropriacy | | | | | |
| Comprehensibility | | | | | |
| Intelligibility | | | | | |
| Grammar | | | | | |