

Developing Interactional Competence through Conversational Narratives

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Abstract

This study explores the possibilities of using conversational narratives and their participation structures to help second language (L2) learners develop their interactional competence. Helping L2 learners develop their interactional competence has been a challenge due to the social and interpersonal complexity as well as heavy cognitive and linguistic demands on the learners to be able to participate in an extended talk like a conversational narrative (Cameron, 2001). In this study, a total of twelve conversational narratives co-constructed by two learners of English as a second language (ESL) and their instructor during an informal speech event were examined. Different narrative roles of protagonist, introducer, primary recipient, problematizer and problematizee (Ochs & Taylor, 2001) distributed among the three participants were identified and discussed to understand the kind of interactional work each participant was doing as they assumed certain narrative roles. In particular, the narrative roles assumed by the instructor while creating opportunities for the learners to participate effectively in the on-going conversation were highlighted. The findings have implications for developing L2 learners' interactional competence, such as explicit teaching of narrative roles and dynamics of a conversational narrative to L2 learners, and the instructor's sensitivity to the learner's cultural background in giving the responsibility to meet the social demands of the interaction at hand.

Key words: Interactional competence, conversational narratives, narrative roles, second language learners

Introduction

Studies have claimed that developing interactional competence is a necessary part of becoming a competent speaker of a language (e.g. Hall, 1993, 1999; He & Young, 1998; Johnson, 2001). Based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and its emphasis on co-construction or joint creation of social events by participants, these studies have specified interactional competence as a type of communicative ability one must acquire in order to participate effectively in a dynamic interaction such as a naturally occurring conversation. Especially in the second language (L2) learning context, the ability to use the target language appropriately in social interaction, or more specifically, to use the language in the context of interpersonal exchange through conversation is often regarded as an important aspect of effective oral communication (Bygate, 1987; Ishida, 2009). However, helping L2 learners develop their interactional competence has been a challenge due to various factors which include the social and interpersonal complexity of conversation and heavy cognitive as well as linguistic demands on the learner to be able to participate in an extended talk, such as a conversational narrative (Cameron, 2001). The fact that it has been an important and challenging task has underlined a need to explore more possible ways of helping L2 learners develop skills and strategies which may contribute to this aspect of interactional competence.

Thus far, there have been studies on L2 pragmatic development which focuses on speech acts that can be performed within an utterance or two in a conversation (e.g. Ishida, 2009; Kasper, 2001). Although pragmatic competence and interactional competence are related, they are not identical. While pragmatic competence can be illustrated by the appropriate use of language to perform speech acts that usually involve one or two utterances, interactional competence is concerned with one's ability to participate meaningfully and effectively in dynamic interactions that involve many utterances. Moreover, interactional competence stresses on the notion of co-construction and views knowledge of language "not as a cognitive property of a single individual, but as jointly created by all participants in interaction" (Johnson, 2001, p. 176). Although several studies have used this notion of co-construction

to examine the structure and dynamics of co-constructed interactions, such as conversational narratives (e.g. Norrick, 2000, 2008, 2010; Ochs & Capps, 2001), few have explored the application of these structure and dynamics to help L2 learners develop interactional competence. Thus, in this paper, I will examine the participation structures in dynamic conversational narratives (i.e. various narrative roles available for interlocutors during the process of producing a narrative which is interleaved with an ongoing conversation), and discuss the possibilities of explicit teaching of these roles and dynamics of conversational narrative to L2 learners to help them develop interactional competence.

Literature review

Conversational narratives focus on ordinary social exchanges in which interlocutors tell their conversational partners about their life events. Narratives are often co-constructed by the interlocutors as they chip in with comments which, in turn, help to shape and reshape the narrative in the course of a conversation (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Very often conversational narratives fulfil multiple simultaneous interactional functions: revealing attitudes, constructing identity, inviting counter-disclosure and so on (Norrick, 2000). These characteristics have made conversational narrative a locus of socialization among the participants (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Ochs (1996) also claims that part of such exchange is "a socialization to use language meaningfully, appropriately, and effectively" by participating with other speakers (p. 408). In this light, producing a conversational narrative is seen as an interactive process in which the interlocutors take on various roles to create the dynamics required for the production of a narrative while, in the process, they learn the social and pragmatic norms of participating in the interaction in culturally appropriate ways. It also implies that when narratives are told during a conversation, interaction among the interlocutors is central to the development of a story.

While most of the speech acts that occur in a conversation can be performed within an utterance or two, narrative interleaved with an ongoing conversation typically contains many utterances (Goodwin, 1990; Norrick, 2000). Such utterances can be either reporting a sequence of events or providing the current speaker's evaluation of those events (Goodwin, 1990; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Norrick, 2000). It is also noted that the narrative roles available for the interlocutors in producing a narrative may not always be equally distributed among all participants. Nor the contribution from conversational partners can always be seen as supportive. Contribution can be supportive/collaborative or competitive/antagonistic. Conversational partners may be drawn into questioning the significance of the events in the narrative, which may turn into a force behind the narrator's effort in presenting more details and perspectives in the course of the conversation.

Given that producing a conversational narrative is an interactive process, its dynamics are determined not only by the narrative competence of an individual speaker but also the interactional skills of all conversational partners. In other words, narrative competence and interactional competence of the participants can be regarded as the two key factors for a successful production of a conversational narrative. Between the two key factors, a number of studies have been done on the development of narrative competence, e.g. in children (Bamberg, 1987; Berman, 1995), across cultures (Chafe, 1980) and in L2 learners (Pavlenko, 2006). While these studies have given useful insights into development of narrative competence and implications for teaching narrative skills in a foreign language and L2 curricula, little has been mentioned about the roles of conversational partners and their interactional skills, which is the other key factor for producing a dynamic conversational narrative. Moreover, in most cases, studies of narrative competence have focused on narratives elicited with a pre-planned question in a fairly non-spontaneous setting such as in an interview format, rather than on spontaneous conversational narratives.

Unlike elicited narrative, narrative embedded in or interleaved with ongoing conversations in ordinary social exchanges involves more than one participant and its dynamics depend not only on an individual's language competence. Several studies, e.g. Norrick (2000, 2008, 2010) and Liddicoat (2007), have examined narratives embedded in spontaneous conversations. However, these studies have focused on the teller and explored the strategies used by the teller to increase listeners' responses to their narrative (Norrick, 2000, 2008) or to create an interactional space in which the extended story turn can be told (Liddicoat, 2007). Thus far, the various roles of the other participant(s) in the interaction and the significance of their participation in creating and maintaining the dynamics required for the successful execution of conversational narratives have remained a relatively under-explored area.

This study attempts to fill the gap by examining the narrative roles, which are not limited to those for the narrator but include those for the recipients and which are distributed among the participants of a conversational narrative. Awareness of different narrative roles and understanding of their distribution

patterns among the participants of co-constructed conversational narratives could be a useful way to help L2 learners develop interactional competence, i.e. the knowledge about how to use the target language in socially appropriate ways and how to participate appropriately and effectively in a dynamic conversational extended talk (Hall, 1993, 1999; He & Young, 1998; Johnson, 2001). With this aim, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. How were different narrative roles distributed among the two ESL learners and their instructor as they co-constructed conversational narratives during an informal speech event?
2. How did such a distribution of narrative roles help to create the dynamics required for the production of co-constructed conversational narratives?

Methodology

Analytical framework

The study will adapt the analytical framework used by Ochs and Taylor (2001) in their study of conversational narratives produced by family members during dinner-table talk. The following narrative roles are identified in Ochs and Taylor's (2001) study:

- *Protagonist*: Leading or principal character in a narrated event
- *Introducer*: Co-narrator who makes the first move to open a narrative, either by elicitation or by direct initiation
- *Primary recipient*: Co-narrator(s) whom a narrative is predominantly oriented
- *Problematizer*: Co-narrator who renders an action, condition, thought, or feeling of a protagonist or a co-narrator problematic, or possibly so
- *Problematizee*: Co-narrator whose action, condition, thought, or feeling is rendered problematic, or a possible problem

To elaborate, being a protagonist puts one's narrative actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings as a focus of attention, and exposes them to praise as well as scrutiny, irony, challenge and critique. The role of an introducer is pivotal in controlling narrative activity as it initiates or nominates narrative topics besides proposing who is to be the focus of attention, what aspects of their lives are to be narrated and so on. The role of a primary recipient implicitly entitles the participant who assumes it to evaluate the protagonist's actions, thoughts, feelings, etc. The introducer may designate herself/himself or another participant to be the primary recipient. For the roles of problematizer and problematizee, problematizing may be done on several grounds, such as treating the narrated action, condition, thought, or feeling as untrue, incredible or doubtful; or showing negative ramification. It can be done on someone's actions, thoughts, or feelings (in the past) as a protagonist or someone's comments (in the present) as a co-narrator. In their study, an examination of family narrative-activity interactions during meal times reveals how narrative roles were distributed asymmetrically among family members and what kind of interactional work each member was doing by taking certain narrative roles (Ochs & Taylor, 2001). Their analysis of these narrative roles helped to uncover the management of gender and power asymmetries by the family members during such narrative activities. Although the present study involves all female participants and its focus is not on examining gender or power hierarchy, through an analysis of narrative roles it hopes to shed some light on how L2 learners could participate effectively in this kind of socially and interpersonally complex speech events and how an instructor could help them develop interactional competence through participation in such narrative-activity interactions.

Data

The data for this study were twelve conversational narratives co-constructed by two ESL learners and their instructor during an informal speech event that took place in Singapore – specifically, when the three participants were having lunch at one of the participants' home. Their conversation was audio-recorded throughout the ninety-minute lunch event. The instructor participated in this study regularly recorded her interactions with people at various settings so that she could use them in her lessons as examples to explain her students different purposes of talk. This particular speech event was selected from her collection of recordings mainly because it was her interaction with two ESL learners at an informal speech event (i.e. out-of-the-classroom setting, which is likely to be more conducive to production of extended conversation and narratives). Although all three participants were informed about the recording, none of them were aware that their talk was going to be analysed for the distribution of

narrative roles at the time of recording; thus, there was little possibility of the participants altering their behaviour for the recording in the way they engaged in these conversational narratives. All three participants gave their consents to use their recorded interaction for research purpose, and strict ethical guidelines have been followed in using the recording as the data. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality of participants' information.

The conversation was in English, which was not the first language for all three participants – Wang, Qun and May. Wang invited May and Qun to have lunch at her place. Wang and Qun were from China and they had been in Singapore for more than two years at the time of data collection. Both of them had finished their tertiary education in China, and were continuing with their professional training courses in Singapore. They had passed Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) and were attending a Pre-school Teachers Training course conducted in English. Thus their proficiency level was justifiably considered to be sufficient for a causal conversation with May, who was their English language instructor. May was from Myanmar and had been working as an English language instructor at a language centre in Singapore for more than three years. Although her first language was not English, she had a degree in English language studies and an IELTS band 8 (very good user) score for speaking. The three participants had known each other for about two years and regularly met at the language centre.

Findings and discussion

Emergence of narratives

Since the focus of this study is on conversational narrative, transcription was done for the interactions in which narratives were embedded, i.e. utterances either reporting a sequence of events or providing evaluation of those events. Altogether twelve narratives were identified in the course of their ninety-minute conversation – starting from the time Qun and May arrived Wang's home and helped Wang prepare lunch until they finished eating and talking. For ease of discussion, each narrative has been given a title. Table 1 summarizes the roles assumed by the three for the narratives that emerged in sequence during their conversation.

Table 1 Narratives and distribution of roles

| Narrative | Protagonist | Introducer | Primary recipient | Problematizer | Problematizee |
|--------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. <i>Project</i> | Wang | Wang | May | May | Wang |
| 2. <i>Memoires of a Geisha</i> | Qun | Qun | May | May | Qun |
| 3. <i>Language Class</i> | Wang | May | May | May | Wang |
| 4. <i>Funding</i> | Wang | Wang | May | May | Wang |
| 5. <i>Role Play</i> | Qun | May | May | May | Qun |
| 6. <i>Stage Fright</i> | May | May | Qun | Qun | May |
| 7. <i>First New Year</i> | Wang | May | May | May | Wang |
| 8. <i>My New Year</i> | Qun | May | May | May | Qun |
| 9. <i>My Third New Year</i> | May | May | Wang & Qun | Wang & Qun | May |
| 10. <i>Valentine</i> | Wang | Wang | May | May | Wang |
| 11. <i>Pizza Valentine</i> | Qun | Qun | May | May | Qun |
| 12. <i>I Love You</i> | Wang & Qun | Wang | May | May | Wang & Qun |

Narratives, when they appeared, emerged from turn-by-turn talk preceded by a turn with an introduction of a topic (e.g. line 4 in Excerpt 1) or a request to hear a story.

Excerpt 1 *Project*

- 1 May : do you have to cook everyday?
- 2 Wang : ah no (.) before last week (.) I cook only a few days a week
- 3 May : oh I see
- 4 Wang : because I start my I have started my course project
- 5 May : oh, really?
- 6 Wang : yes and Qun told me this morning (.) another teacher her teacher //praise me//
- 7 Qun : //praise//
- 8 May : praised you?
- 9 Wang : yes praised my composition
- 10 May : wow
- 11 Wang : yeah my teacher likes my composition (.) then she asked me if I could do the project
- 12 (.) she also asked the two boy two students to do the project
(Wang's narrative about how she met and worked with the two students on their project continues.)

Norrick (2000) has stressed that producing a narrative embedded in an on-going conversation requires effort and skill. Participants need to have not only the linguistic resources but also the skill to use interaction strategies to initiate story openings, mark transitions, elicit appropriate responses, and so on. In this regard, the kind of interactional work each participant was doing when these narratives were produced needs to be examined more closely by looking at the narrative roles assumed by the three participants. One may argue that the social role relation of the learners and the instructor has contributed to the ways narratives emerged in this speech event. While such learner-instructor role relation cannot be ignored, it is also not impossible to examine their participation structures as a way to uncover their interactional management strategies, rather than as a mere result of the social role differential. The facts that it was an informal out-of-the-classroom context and that the participants had met regularly and known each other for about two years support the viability of examining their participation structures in terms of their interactional management while carrying out a casual conversation. The narrative roles assumed by each participant will be discussed in the following section. First, Table 2 summarizes the total instances of each participant taking a particular narrative role.

Table 2 Total instances of each participant in a narrative role

| Participant | Protagonist | Introducer | Primary recipient | Problematizer | Problematizee |
|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Wang | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Qun | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| May | 2 | 6 | 10 | 10 | 2 |

Narrative roles

The findings summarized in Table 2 clearly show an asymmetrical distribution of narrative roles among the three participants. In most narratives, either Wang or Qun was in the protagonist role (i.e. a total of six and five instances for Wang and Qun respectively, compared to only two instances for May in this role). The asymmetrical distribution of protagonist role can be seen as a reflection of the learner-instructor social role differential, since it suggests that the two learners' narrative actions were more exposed to evaluation by the instructor even though it was an out-of-the-classroom context. As pointed out by Ochs and Taylor (2001), being a protagonist puts one's narrative actions as a focus of attention and opens them to praise as well as scrutiny, challenge and critique. However, further examination of the introducer role, i.e. who made the first move to open a narrative, reveals the interactional work that Wang was doing by assuming the protagonist role most of the time. Most of the narratives with Wang as the protagonist were found to be introduced by her own initiation (as in Excerpt 1 *Project*) rather than through elicitations of other participants. More instances of Wang's direct initiation were found in other narratives with Wang as the protagonist, e.g. lines 6 and 1 of Excerpts 2 and 3 respectively.

Excerpt 2 *Funding*

- 1 Wang : are you free are you free today?
 - 2 May : yes I give myself one day off ((laugh)) I want to see you both (.) haven't seen you for
 - 3 a while
 - 4 Wang : //yes//
 - 5 Qun : //yes//
 - 6 Wang : actually ah (.) two weeks before
 - 7 May : two weeks ago?
 - 8 Wang : two weeks ago (.) I I think I was not very happy because um the NTUC gave me
 - 9 funding (.) they gave me the funding but then (.) I applied for change the time
 - 10 May : why you wanna change the time?
- ((Wang's narrative about her plan to start a family as the reason for her request for a change of time and how happy she was to receive the news about the approval after a few days of anxious waiting continues.))

Excerpt 3 Valentine

- 1 Wang : um although my new year was very simple um but the Valentine's day was very um
 - 2 multicolored
 - 3 May : multicoloured? how?
 - 4 Wang : yeah I learned this word multicoloured
- ((Wang's narrative about how she celebrated Valentine's Day with her husband by watching a multiracial cultural show and meeting the Prime Minister at the event continues.))

As can be seen in the above excerpts, Wang's assumption of protagonist role was mostly through her own initiative. By proposing a narrative topic, Wang appeared to have "appropriated" the introducer and protagonist roles and used conversational narrative as a way of socialization through talk with her two house guests, apparently with May in particular. Her ability to initiate story openings could be noted as her competence in using language appropriately and effectively to participate in the on-going conversation. Qun, on the other hand, appeared to be less initiative and more implicit in her participation. Although the instances of Qun in the protagonist role were nearly as high as Wang's, there were fewer instances of Qun in the introducer role. A closer examination of the transcript also showed that most of Qun's participation came in the form of brief contribution as she helped Wang in the process of co-constructing a narrative (as in line 7 of Excerpt 1 *Project*).

With more instances of May in the introducer role, she appeared to be pivotal in controlling the narrative activity. This finding may not be surprising; however, it is noted that the interactional work which May was doing as the introducer was different from that of Wang discussed earlier. Unlike Wang whose assumption of the introducer role was mainly for direct initiation of her own narrative actions, May's assumption of the role was through her elicitations which would lead to development of narratives from Wang and/or Qun, except for the two narratives *Stage fright* and *My Third New Year* for which May made direct initiation for her own narrative actions. Thus, May's assumption of the introducer role through her eliciting questions (as in line 1 of Excerpt 4, and lines 1 and 3 of Excerpt 5) can be noted as an interactional strategy that she used to create opportunities for Wang and Qun to participate meaningfully in the conversation which in turn would lead them to production of a conversational narrative.

Excerpt 4 First New Year

- 1 May : that's okay yeah (.) so this is your first time first new year in Singapore?
- 2 Wang : yes
- 3 May : so how do you find? (.) new year in Singapore (.) did you go somewhere?
- 4 Wang : um no (.) um just in Singapore because (.) because um I was planning to invite you
- 5 and some friends to my house for the during the new year but my mother-in-law called
- 6 me um and said you couldn't visit friends' house
- 7 May : oh why you couldn't?
- 8 Wang : yeah couldn't visit friends' house she said you should um because my father-in-law
- 9 passed away and she said (.) this is the first year (.) she said for three years or five
- 10 years you cannot celebrate

- 11 May : three years or five years?
12 Qun : //yes//
13 Wang : //yes// we should um we should stay at home just maybe miss her I mean miss him
14 Qun : custom
15 May : oh
16 Wang : yes it's a kind of custom in in my husband's town (.) when family member pass away
17 we mourn for a few years (.) I don't know why mother-in-law called me but she
18 called me very specially and she was very serious so um I cancel we cancelled our
19 plan to invite people and we cancelled to go out to others' house (.) we just stayed at
20 home
21 May : I see

Excerpt 5 Role Play

- 1 May: have you started the the pre-school teacher course?
2 Qun: yes I have started, but I'm only doing it part-time
3 May: so so what do you do in class?
4 Qun: yesterday I performed as a student
5 May: you mean role play? you? always so shy can't imagine you doing role play
6 ((laugh))
7 Qun: yeah yeah role play and also talk like parents and xiao zhan I mean principals
8 May: you also pretend you are the parent?
9 Wang: we perform like this when the students they argue fight qua qua
10 May: quarrel?
11 Qun: yeah quarrel it's mine it's mine but the other child also grabbing the toy I want this one
12 Wang: //yeah//
13 Qun: //grabbing// the toy and they hurt themselves then the parents come to complain
14 May: so how do you solve the problem?
15 Qun: when I performed as a student I cried ((laugh)) it's easy but when I pretended to be the
16 parent I had to look serious ((laugh)) could not laugh (.) then talk to the principal it's
17 not easy to handle and some parents they are very rude

It is also interesting to note that the instances of May being in the roles of primary recipient and problematizer are strikingly high. Since the data came from an audio recording which did not capture non-verbal cues (such as eye-contact) that could be helpful to identify primary recipient, the identity of the participant assuming the primary recipient role was identified by examining their turns and contribution to the narrative. More importantly, besides higher instances of May in the primary recipient role, she appeared predominantly in the problematizer role while Wang or Qun was in the problematizee role. Lines 7 and 11 in Excerpts 4, and line 5 in Excerpts 5 provide examples of May assuming the problematizer role. As noted in these excerpts, Wang's narrative about her new year and Qun's narrative about her role play developed further only when May problematized their responses by treating them as incredible or doubtful. A closer examination of the functions of problematizer role taken by May showed that by rendering Wang's or Qun's initial responses as incredible or doubtful, she might not be merely signalling her disbelief, but rather was trying to enhance the reportability of the events (Norrick, 2010) and create the dynamics required to move the narrative forward. Similarly, in the two self-introduced narratives by May, it was the problematizing responses from Wang and/or Qun that helped to develop May's narrative further. An example is found in line 2 of Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6 Stage Fright

- 1 May: if you ask me, I have stage fright too
2 Qun: why? but you are a teacher
3 May: yes but it's different, in the classroom, it's different (.) once I attended a seminar on
4 public speaking, and at the end of the seminar everybody must give a short speech (.)
5 on the topic that they chose for you

- 6 Qun: what is you topic?
7 May: Beckham David Beckham the football star ((laugh))
((May's narrative about how she mumbled a few things about David Beckham and how she was evaluated by the audience continues.))

Thus it can be deduced that, apart from backchannelling (e.g. yah, oh, uh-huh), which have been discussed in several studies as important interactional response tokens (e.g. McCarthy, 2003), participants of a conversational narrative can take on such roles as the problematizer and make explicit responses to help create a dynamic interactional context for the narrative to develop further. Through the analysis of narrative roles and participation structures in these conversational narratives, this study proposes the possibilities of explicitly teaching these narrative roles to L2 learners. According to Hall (1999), interactional competence is acquired in three steps – observation, reflection and creation. By observing others' and self-participatory moves and responses to these moves, learners' awareness can be raised on how certain narrative roles are assumed by the participants to invite their conversational partners into active narrative involvement. Learners who are skilful at grammar, vocabulary and listening skills may still fail to participate effectively in the co-construction of dynamic conversational narratives as studies have claimed that this aspect of competence does not fully correlate with one's syntactic complexity and vocabulary size (e.g. McCabe and Bliss, 2003). Thus it is important to help learners understand different narrative roles available for the interlocutors during the process of co-constructing a dynamic conversational narrative as they learn the linguistic resources that can be used to take up such roles as introducer and problematizer.

Conclusion and implications

It is acknowledged that the study has examined only twelve conversational narratives produced by three participants. Nevertheless, the findings have shed some light on the importance of understanding how the dynamics of conversational narratives are created. The findings have implications for language teaching in two aspects: (1) raising the awareness through explicit teaching of narrative roles and dynamics of a conversational narrative to L2 learners, and (2) the instructor's sensitivity to the learner's culture in giving responsibility to meet the social demands of the interaction at hand.

The instructor's assumption of the introducer and the problematizer roles to solicit and co-construct narratives during an on-going conversation should be understood as to how opportunities for learners to participate effectively in the interaction can be created, and by extension how the learners can be helped to develop their interactional competence through their participation in such speech events. If learning how to engage in a conversational extended talk in a range of contexts including real-life informal settings outside the classroom is one of the important goals in language learning and teaching, this study has encouraged language educators to raise the awareness of learners about the various narrative roles and participation structures available for the interlocutors in co-constructing a conversational narrative. Awareness can be raised about the significance of every narrative role available for the participants. Such awareness can help learners understand that conversational narrative not as a solo performance but a joint construction by the participating individuals. Earlier studies have pointed out that interactional skills involve the abilities to speak clearly, respond to questions, present ideas and opinions with confidence, frame and ask questions in socially appropriate ways and respond with alternative points. This study has taken a step further and underlined the importance, especially for L2 learners, of being able to participate effectively in the co-construction of narratives interleaved with an ongoing conversation.

Equally significant is the implications for the instructor's sensitivity to the learner's culture in giving responsibility to meet the social demands of the interaction at hand. The participants in this study are learners of English who came from a culture (Chinese) where most often teachers are regarded as someone who knows best and where students look up to teachers as authority figures and respect them by not challenging them (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Peng, 2007; Tan, 2007). It is most likely that learners who came from such culture tend not to compete for certain narrative roles such as the problematizer in their conversation with the instructor, even in out-of-the-classroom context. Thus social and cultural analysis of the learners, such as their individual characteristics, cultural beliefs and the possibilities of transferring such characteristics and beliefs to the interaction in the target language need to be acknowledged by the instructor when giving their learners responsibilities to meet the social demands of the interaction at hand. If effective oral communication requires the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in social practices that involve extended talk and dynamic interaction, helping L2 learners develop their interactional competence through participation in co-constructed

conversational narratives could be one way of preparing them for their real-world target language needs.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

- // // speech overlap
- (.) a short pause of less than (0.5) second
- (()) descriptive information
- ? the end of a chunk of talk that can be analysed as a question