

Applying Conversation Analysis to Second Language Speaker's E-mail Requests

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Abstract

The current study investigates the design of requests in e-mail messages by a Japanese second language (L2) speaker of English. This study draws mainly on the studies by Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) on request sequence organization, and Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) on request sequence organization in Internet chats. Using the method of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) to analyze the requests in e-mail messages, I demonstrate not only the applicability of the method to e-mail interactions but also how the participant sequence the pre-request in the interaction and display her orientation towards “preference organization” (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984). This study contributes to the field of interlanguage pragmatic studies on the speech act of requesting by L2 speakers and suggests an alternative methodological approach to speech act research.

Key terms: conversation analysis, preference organization, speech acts, request, e-mail

1. Introduction

This study examines the speech act of requests in e-mail interaction within the university context by a Japanese second language (L2) speaker of English. The aim of this study is two fold: (a) to seek the possibility of applying the method of conversation analysis (CA) to e-mail interactions, and (b) to find how the requesting features of L2 speakers understood from the CA perspective is different from the result found in previous studies.

Speech acts are one of the most frequently studied objects of interlanguage pragmatics. Among the various speech acts, requests have received much attention. Cross-cultural studies in interlanguage pragmatics of requests have attracted many researchers in many languages such as English (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Leech, 1983), German (House, 1989; House & Kasper, 1981), Hebrew (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), and Japanese (Fukushima, 1996). Majority of these studies in interlanguage pragmatics have focused on requests from the approach proposed by the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

The data in these studies from the CCSARP approach are collected isolated or experimentally elicited using methods such as the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), multiple choice tests, or role-plays. The most frequently used method is found being the DCT (Jeon & Kaya, 2006), where participants are given a situation designed to elicit a certain speech act and are asked to write what they would say. However, these data collecting methods do not capture the naturally occurring use of language. In addition, the data analysis has been limited to the isolated requesting sentence only, focusing on the semantic features and the directness of the request (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). As a result, the interactional aspect of requests has been neglected in many of the studies.

Furthermore, many cross-cultural interlanguage pragmatic request studies have compared the language

use by nonnative speakers (NNS) to native speaker (NS) intuitions, that is, what the NS would say in the given situation rather than what the natives actually did say. This NS and NNS comparison model is problematic because it renders assumptions of the target language community and its language use (Firth, 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997). These methodological difficulties and shortcomings have limited research of requests from understanding their natural occurrences and how requests are constructed in the interaction.

In comparison, the methodological approach of CA enables us to examine naturally occurring discourse within the context of social interaction, and does not rely on intuitions of the participants. From the CA perspective, data is analyzed in sequences of turns rather than single isolated sentences and utterances (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), allowing researcher to investigate the ways in which speakers construct their utterances and understand others.

Golato (2003) conducted an empirical study comparing the two different methodological perspectives of DCT and natural occurring conversation through CA on compliment responses. She found 27 appreciation responses, such as thank you, out of the 217 responses in the DCTs while none were found in the naturally occurring talk. Golato mentions how DCTs seem to reflect what the speakers believe they should say as a response to a complement rather than the actual use. She therefore concludes that DCTs are “clearly inappropriate” (p. 110) if the researcher is interested in finding out how speakers react to complements in real-time interactions, or “wished to discern the underlying interactional ‘rules’ and patterns of actual language use” (Golato, 2003, p. 110).

Although researchers have questioned the proposed research method by the CCSARP in analyzing speech acts (Golato, 2003; Kasper, 2000), and despite the interest in L2 speakers by many researchers, especially those with a L1 Japanese background (Fukuya, 2002; Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Hill, 1997; Rose, 1992a; Shimamura, 1993; S. Takahashi & DuFon, 1989; T. Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), only a handful of studies has focused on requests from the conversation analytic perspective (Dersley & Wootton, 2000; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Robinson, 2004) and little on L2 speakers. Therefore, there is a need for a better understanding of requesting features by L2 speakers of English using the method of CA.

E-mail is chosen as a research focus here since e-mail use has become a frequently used communication medium, especially in the institutional university context (Angell & Heslop, 1994; Baron, 2000). Chen (2001) found her Taiwanese participant having difficulties communicating through e-mail with her professors at a U.S. university using the appropriate and effective language, though she was familiar with writing e-mails. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) also note that by performing actions through e-mail that imposes on university faculties, students “may put themselves in some jeopardy” (p. 55), therefore L2 speakers in the university settings would need to be familiar with the use of e-mail and the appropriate language.

I begin this study by a description of the previous speech act research based on the CCSARP coding scheme, CA, and speech act studies of e-mails. The literature review is then followed by the analysis of my data. I conclude my study with a discussion of the findings and any implication for future studies on speech acts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions

Request in this study refers to the same concept used in Taleghani-Nikazm’s (2006) study, that is, “a type of social action in which the interactional goal of the first speaker is to get his or her co-participant to perform an action (i.e., transferring something of value, for example an object, service, or information) that is for the benefit of the first speaker or a third party” (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006, p. 1).

In addition, pre-request in this study is referred to as a type of “pre-sequence” (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1980, 1988, 1990) where sequences “initiated by turn-types built to be specifically preliminary of some other turn-type, whose subsequent occurrence is projected to occur contingent on the response which the interlocutor gives to the presequence’s first pair part” (Schegloff, 1990, p. 60). In other words, by placing pre-requests before the first pair part as “preliminaries” (Schegloff, 1980), they provide a way explore the likelihood of the request will not be responded to in a dispreferred way (Schegloff, 1990). Furthermore, pre-requests “can make possible an offer by interlocutor before the actual request need be spoken” (Schegloff, 1990, p. 61). However, Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) argues that a speaker’s turn is not recognized as a pre-request until the interlocutor orients to it as an utterance that projects a request (p. 18). Therefore, I take a similar approach of Taleghani-Nikazm’s on pre-request in this study.

2.2 Requests by L2 Speakers

Grounded in the methodological perspective of the CCSARP on speech acts, much research has been done on interlanguage pragmatic of English L2 speakers, especially with those with a Japanese L1 background. Many of the early studies focused on learners’ comprehension of requests and perception of politeness of requests (Kitao, 1990; Shimamura, 1993; S. Tanaka & Kawade, 1982). Other researchers investigated on Japanese learners’ interlanguage development of requesting (Achiba, 2003; Hill, 1997; Schmidt, 1983; S. Takahashi & DuFon, 1989), cross-cultural politeness of requesting (Rose, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1996; N. Tanaka, 1988), transferability of the L1 to the L2 requesting (S. Takahashi, 1996), and effectiveness of instruction on learners’ use of requesting strategies and politeness (Fukuya, 2002; Fukuya & Zhang, 2002).

In his study, Hill (1997) conducted a study on 60 male Japanese undergraduate students and 10 NS of English using the DCT to elicit requests. Hill found that the Japanese participants’ use of directness strategies and the use of internal and external modification of requests developed towards NS norms with proficiency level. However, he also found that the macro analysis of requests deviated from the microanalysis of requests. In other words, although the Japanese participants’ requesting strategies became closer to the NS group as their language proficiency improved, the participants failed to develop their requesting strategies in the individual categories. These individual categories include hints, downtoners, subjective opinion, negation or continuous aspect, anticipatory gratitude, and ability and willingness strategies. Moreover, the Japanese participants overused speaker-based strategies, interrogative and conditional, and overused pre-pre-strategies, checking availability, and apology (Hill, 1997). This research raised the weakness of the CCSARP coding scheme, and raised the need for the macro classification to reflect the micro strategies. Hill also notes the limitation to the research using the DCT, reflecting only the competence and not the performance, thus not allowing “the investigation of discursal elements in the overall request event, which might stretch over a number of turns” (Hill, 1997, p. 178).

Similar findings were presented in a research by Iwai and Rinnert (2001) in a cross-cultural study of requesting behavior by English learners from Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and NS from the U.S. using the DCT. The researchers found the Japanese the only group using a direct strategy (“Please lend me your notes”) or want-statements (“I would like you to lend me your notes”), which were the two most popular requesting strategies for the Japanese group. The Japanese group used “please” much more frequently than any other group, and used less other strategies of mitigation than the other three groups.

Summarizing what we learned from these previous research listed above on requesting, English L2 speakers with a background of L1 Japanese seem to be more direct compared to NSs, despite the stereotype of Japanese that they are indirect with their utterances (Rose, 1992a, 1996). Japanese participants were found to lack in the use and development of hints, downtoners, and overuse want-statements (Hill, 1997; Iwai & Rinnert, 2001; N.

Tanaka, 1988).

2.3 Conversation Analysis of Requests

In contrast, only a few studies have used CA to analyze speech acts (Kasper, 2006; Kasper & Dahl, 1991). However, as discussed in Kasper (2006), CA studies of agreement and disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984), compliment responses (Golato, 2003; Pomerantz, 1978), apologies (Robinson, 2004), complaints (Dersley & Wootton, 2000) have shown that CA enables “value-added” (Kasper, 2006) analyses of speech acts.

Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) studied requests in German of a telephone conversation also from a CA approach. She demonstrated how “it is not only the linguistic composition of a turn but also its sequential placement that makes a turn recognizable as a pre-request” (p. 18). She displayed three forms of pre-requests; (a) pre-requests designed as a questions that explores the possibility of a projected request being granted, (b) pre-requests having the shape of an account of an action or lack of access to an object, and (c) pre-requests taking the form of mentioning of likes (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006, p. 43). For example, after Markus expresses his likes towards the apricot cake (Example 1, line 3), his grandmother regrets that she cannot send it to him (Example 1, line 8). Thus, this grandmother’s turn in line 8 shows her understanding of Markus’ turn in line 3 as a pre-request.

Example 1 (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006, p. 28)

05 Oma: da mach ich dann morgen nen aprokosenkuchen :hh die
there I make then tomorrow and apricot cake :hh the
I'll bake then tomorrow and apricot cake :hh nicki likes

06 Oma: nicki isst ja so gerne aprikosenkuchen=
nicki eat yea so like apricot cake=
eating that so much=

07 →Markus: =ja ich auch.
=yes me too.
=yes me too.

08 →Oma: du auch?=
you too? =
you too? =

09 →Oma: =ja
=yes
=yes

10 → (0.2)

11 →Markus: [hehe-
[hehe
[hehe
[

- 12 →Oma: [hehe(.) ja den kann ich dir leider nicht
[hehe(.) yes that can I you unfortunately not
[hehe(.) yes I unfortunately can't mail that to
- 13 →Oma: schicken=
send=
you=

Taleghani-Nikazm (2005; 2006) also found that by inserting conditional *wenn*-clause (if-clause) initial and mid position of the request turn, “speakers delay the delivery of the object or service they wish to request” (p. 44), as a result, requests were found to be done through long stretches of talk.

2.4 E-mail Requests by L2 Speakers

Recently in the field of interlanguage pragmatics, researchers have given attention to L2 speakers and their production of speech acts through the medium of e-mails. Many of these studies examined at how L2 speakers' e-mail discourse differs from their oral discourse (Chapman, 1997) or written text (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2001). Other researchers investigated how e-mail exchange can facilitate L2 learning (Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Li, 2000; Liaw, 1998; Singhal, 1998). Furthermore, much research have investigated L2 speakers' e-mails in terms of communication strategies, discourse styles, and use of linguistic features (Chen, 2001; González-Bueno, 1998; Liaw, 1996).

One of the first studies on requests through e-mail by L2 speakers was done by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996). This research also investigates how requesting behavior of L2 speakers differ from NS norms. The study investigates e-mail requests written to the university faculty in English by a mixed group of international students, including L1 Japanese, and a group of NSs. Grounded in the “politeness theory” (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig compared the negative and positive reactions towards the e-mails by the faculty. Then they examined at the linguistic forms that were used in the e-mails that affected the negative or positive reaction. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig reported four important findings on international students' requesting behavior. International students; (a) used fewer mitigating forms that produced a negative impact, (b) used institutional explanations less frequently, (c) mentioned their personal needs and time frames more often, and (d) acknowledged imposition on the faculty members less often than U.S. students. The researchers concluded that “those requests which had negative affect generally demonstrated a different interpretation of the rights and obligations of the parties involved than the positive affect request: the negative affect requests frequently assumed a greater obligation to comply by the faculty than did the faculty member” (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, p.55).

Chen (2006) also found similar results with a Taiwanese student, Ling, writing e-mails to American university professors. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, Chen analyzed e-mails written by Ling over the course of two and a half years, and conducted interviews to understand the reason why she used such linguistic recourses in writing her e-mails. Chen found that before arriving to the U.S. Ling would express the professors' obligation to help students, and overused want-statements. For example, Ling wrote, “This is Ling Wang from Taiwan. Because you are my initial academic advisor, I need you to help me about the questions of my required credits” (p. 47). However, after arriving to the target language context, Ling gradually changed her way of requesting and used less want-statements and more query-preparatory forms in her e-mail requests, which is considered to be less direct (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) and in this case more polite (Blum-Kulka,

1987). Chen also found Ling writing a long explanation before her request, delaying the dispreferred action of requesting.

Chen (2001) did another study with 31 Taiwanese students and found again Taiwanese students tending to delay their request sentences in their e-mails. As for the directness of the requests, query-preparatory were found to be used most frequently, followed by want-statements.

However, again, these studies were analyzed from a CCSARP coding scheme perspective, and analyses focused on the degree of directness and the frequency of the mitigation strategies used in the speakers' utterances. Therefore, the analysis did not include the actual reply to the requests. In addition, the analysis focused on the requesting sentence only and did not analyze how pre-requests or accounts for requests were structured or sequenced in the e-mail requests.

2.5 Conversation Analysis of Computer Mediated Communication

Then arises the question if CA is applicable to analyze e-mails. Yates (2001) studies Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), including Internet chats and e-mails, from the CA perspective. He mentions although e-mail is a hybrid form of communication of oral and written, it is still an interaction, and therefore CA can be used for analyses.

Harrison (2002) demonstrates how CA is applicable to e-mail interactions by focusing on turn organization, and finding e-mail interactions being "locally managed and interactionally managed" (Harrison, 2002, p. 240). This refers to e-mail interaction where the speakers can self-select themselves, hearers can reply whenever they choose to, and more than one speaker can write an e-mail simultaneously.

CA is also applicable also to Internet chats. Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) applied the CA approach to Internet chat conversations by German speakers. Similar to Taleghani-Nikazm's (2006) research, they found speakers using pre-requests to avoid the production of requests and to promote affiliative actions such as offers.

In their research, Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) exemplifies technical features of Internet chats that do not exist in face-to-face interaction that had impact on preference organization. The following three features can be shared with e-mails, thus may influence the analysis of the sequential organization. First, Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm raise the point that when examining turn-taking, "no participant can actually come in and produce an offer when the pre-request and request are expressed in the same message" (p. 18). Second, participants can use emoticons or smiley faces as a "mitigative strategy" (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006, p. 29) to soften the imposition of the request or "express and intensify friendliness towards the co-participant" (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006, p. 29).

2.6 Research Questions

Despite of these research, it is still unclear how L2 speakers use requests in interaction. Therefore, this study aims to (a) demonstrate the applicability of conversation analysis to e-mail interactions, and to (b) identify the pattern of requests in the discourse of L2 speakers. The research questions are:

1. Is the method of conversation analysis applicable to e-mail interactions?
2. How are the requesting features of L2 speakers found from a conversation analytic perspective different from the results found in previous research?

3. The Study

3.1 Participants

The e-mails in this paper were collected from a Japanese female graduate student, Tomoko, enrolled in a university in the U.S.. The participant had a TOEFL score over 600 on the paper-based test. At the time of data

collection, Tomoko had been the U.S. for 3 years. In addition, she had experienced living in the U.S. for five years during her childhood. She was also comfortable using e-mails for communication in both Japanese and English.

3.2 Data Collection

The participant was asked to submit e-mails in which she had written a request in the university context. Any personal information was asked to be deleted. A total of 20 e-mail threads with 65 messages were collected and analyzed.

3.3 Method of Analysis

The analysis of this study will draw on the methodological approach of CA (Sacks et al., 1974) and concepts of preference organization (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984) to analyze the sequential organization of requests. I analyze by first identifying the action that is being accomplished, next the resources that is being used to perform the action, and then observe how the request orients to preference organization. Finally, I analyze how the uniqueness of the e-mail medium may influence the interaction.

3.4 Data Presentation

As for the data presentation, all names of participants, institutions, and locations are pseudo names. E-mails are displayed to replicate as much as possible how the e-mail appeared when it was sent and received. Therefore, e-mails are presented with the information of the sender and receiver, including the date and time the e-mail was sent. Furthermore, numbered lines with spaces in the transcription are made intentionally and spelling mistakes are left as it was in the original e-mail. Finally, arrows are used to highlight the important points in the transcript.

3.5 Analysis

Through the analysis, it was observed that the participant's articulation of a like or interest is formed in a way so that it could be understood as a pre-request. It was also observed that the participant orients to "preference organization" (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984). The following e-mail is a transaction between Matt and Tomoko regarding a job at the Language Program (LP). In this e-mail thread, Tomoko's expression of a like is produced in a way that it serves as a pre-request.

1. From: "Matt" Matt@email.com
2. To: "Atsuko" Atsuko@e-mail.com, "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
3. Sent: 2006/01/05 9:35
4. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP

5. Hi Atsuko & Tomoko,
- 6.
7. →Due to an unexpectedly large enrollment at LP for Spring Term 1 (1/17-3/10), I am looking
8. →for a few extra teachers either for a LP class or for Friday workshops. Laura recommended
9. that I contact you two to see about your interest and availability.
- 10.
11. If you are in Portland now, please call me at LP (xxx-xxxx) as soon as possible. If you are
12. away, please let me know when you will be back so we can meet.
- 13.
14. Thanks,

15. Matt
16.
17. Matt Brown
18. Assistant Director
19. Language Program
20. From: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
21. To: "Matt" Matt@email.com
22. Sent: 2006/01/08 4:26
23. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
24. Hi Matt,
25.
26. →I'm sorry I couldn't get to you sooner. I just came back from Japan yesterday. About the
27. →teaching positions, I'm not sorry I'm not sure about my schedule since I'm writing my thesis
28. →this semester. But I'm interested in helping Friday workshops. Are they something similar to
29. →the ones you had before (Friday lessons)?
30.
31. Thank you,
32.
33. Tomoko
34. From: "Matt" Matt@email.com
35. To: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
36. Sent: 2006/01/10 3:04
37. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
38. Hi Tomoko,
39.
40. →Can you come and see me today or Wednesday?
41.
42. Matt
43.
44.
45. Matt Brown
46. Assistant Director
47. Language Program (LP)
48. 1111 University Ave.
49. www.university.edu/lp
50. From: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
51. To: "Matt" Matt@email.com
52. Sent: 2006/01/10 6:35

53. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
54. Hi Matt,
55.
56. →I left a message on your answering machine, but just in case you didn't have chance to hear it.
57.
58. →Not only about Friday workshops, I'd also like to know about teaching a LP class. And I was
59. wondering if I could meet you on Wednesday if you're not available today.
60.
61. My phone number is xxx-xxxx
62.
63. Thank you very much!
64.
65. Tomoko
66. From: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
67. To: "Matt" Matt@email.com
68. Sent: 2006/01/11 6:20
69. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
70. Hi Matt,
71.
72. →I've been thinking about the teaching opportunity since yesterday, but I'm very sorry to tell
73. →you that it's rather difficult for me this semester. My schedule and budget are really tight
74. because I will probably have to return to Japan to find a job as soon as I graduate. That is, I
75. need to graduate and return to Japan before this fall.
76.
77. →Also, about Friday workshops, I completely forgot that I'm taking 301 (Laura's class) from
78. →9:30-12:20 on Friday.. I'm very sorry about that.
79.
80. →But I'd really like to teach Friday workshops if they are offered after 12:30PM.
81.
82. Thank you!
83.
84. Tomoko
85. From: "Matt" Matt@email.com
86. To: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
87. Sent: 2006/01/11 6:27
88. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
89. Hi Tomoko,

- 90.
91. →Thanks for the reply. If I move one of the Grammar workshops to Friday, 1:15-3:15 would
92. →you be interested in teaching it? I could easily do that, and since Laura's class will be held
93. down here at LP, you would already be here, right? If you are interested, would you like
94. to do the Intermediate (100 + 200) level or the Advanced (300 + 400) level? Can you let me
95. know asap?
- 96.
97. Thanks again,
98. Matt
- 99.
100. Matt Brown
101. Assistant Director
102. Language Program (LP)
103. 1111 University Ave.
104. www.university.edu/lp
105. From: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
106. To: "Matt" Matt@email.com
107. Sent: 2006/01/11 6:36
108. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
109. Hi Matt,
- 110.
111. →Yes, it'd be great! I'm interested in the Intermediate level, if that is possible.
- 112.
113. Thank you so much for your consideration.
- 114.
115. Tomoko
116. From: "Matt" Matt@email.com
117. To: "Tomoko" Tomoko@email.com
118. CC: "Laura" Laura@email.com
119. Sent: 2006/01/11 6:52
120. Subject: Teaching Opportunities at LP
121. OK – it's a deal. You start next Friday, 1/20, at 1:15pm. Please meet with Laura at some
122. point to get her ideas/plans/materials for the workshop
- 123.
124. Thanks,
125. Matt
- 126.
127. Matt Brown

- 128. Assistant Director
- 129. Language Program (LP)
- 130. 1111 University Ave.
- 131. www.university.edu/lp

This e-mail thread starts with a message from Matt to Tomoko and Atsuko to seek their interest and to offer a teaching job at his institution (line 7-8). Matt uses the wording “Due to an unexpectedly large enrollment” from which one can imagine the interaction taking place at an institutional setting.

Three days later, Tomoko replies to Matt's message starting with an apology, “I'm sorry” (line 26), for her delayed response. Tomoko again apologizes and then writes an “account”(Antaki, 1994; Heritage, 1988) that her schedule is uncertain (line 27). This follows the pattern of “preference organization”(Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984) where dispreferred actions are delayed by hesitations and accounts. Tomoko avoids any clear language such as “I cannot teach.” However, from the apology and account, it could be assumed that she is rejecting Matt's offer, although leaving space for any interpretation. In addition, using the word “help” (line 28), Tomoko accepts Matt's offer to the Friday workshops clearly stating that she is interested. Tomoko then requests for more information in a question form “Are they something similar to the ones you had before?” (line 28-29).

Two days later, Matt replies to Tomoko with a request to meet (line 40). However, he does not respond to Tomoko's question in line 28-29. In response, Tomoko writes to Matt to confirm her phone message (line 56), and shows interest to Matt' offer of the LP classes made in his first e-mail (line 7-8). She uses does this by writing, “I'd also like to know about teaching a LP class,” and requests for additional information (line 58). Tomoko then asks if they could meet either that day or Wednesday (line 58-59). When doing this, she uses modals such as “would” and “could” as well as conditionals “I was wondering if.” This contradicts with previous studies where the L1 Japanese participants were found to be lacking the use of these features (Hill, 1997; Iwai & Rinnert, 2001; N. Tanaka, 1988).

Tomoko the next day, without waiting for Matt's response, rejects Matt's offer for the LP class (line 72-73). Tomoko then accounts for the rejection by raising her tight schedule and budget, and that she will need to graduate this semester and return to Japan (line 73-74). Following this, in line 77-78, Tomoko mentions that her schedule is conflicting with the Friday workshop schedule and apologizes. This line could be understood as a rejection of the offer for the Friday workshops. However, Tomoko still shows her interest towards the position. Changing her wording from “help” (line 28) to “teach,” Tomoko states, “But I'd really like to teach Friday workshops if they are offered after 12:30PM” (line 80).

Matt instantly replies to Tomoko, providing an offer to change the schedule. Using the if-clause he writes, “If I move one of the Grammar workshops to Friday, 1:15-2:15 would you be interested in teaching it?” (line 91-92). From this offer, Matt reveals his understanding of Tomoko's statement in line 80 as a pre-request. This is similar to what Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) found in her research where “the speaker's expression of likes is produced such that it serves as a pre-request” (p. 27).

Furthermore, by first expressing the interest in the position of the Friday workshop from her initial e-mail Matt (line 28), then mentioning the lack of availability due to her course work (line 77-78), and finally stating her likes towards the position if provided at a different time, Tomoko succeeds in eliciting an offer to change the workshop time and thus achieves the teaching position at the LP. In this interaction, it seems that Tomoko's turn (message) is understood by Matt as a pre-request not only because of the sentence itself but also through the sequence of the statement in the interaction. This is also consistent with Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) finding where

she states, “it is not only the linguistic composition of a turn but also its sequential placement that make a turn recognizable as a pre-request” (p. 18). Moreover, this follows the pattern of preference organization (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984) where dispreferred actions are avoided or delayed. Tomoko, by utilizing a pre-request, she seeks her chances of a possibly difficult request to be granted.

Few minutes later Tomoko accepts Matt’s offer in a short sentence of “Yes, it would be great” with an exclamation mark (line 111). This also follows the pattern of the preference organization (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984) where preferred actions are frequently structurally simple and projected immediately after the first pair part sometimes overlapping with the other speaker. Moreover, preferred responses usually do not have any hesitations, delays, or accounts. In the final e-mail, Matt confirms Tomoko’s acceptance and teaching schedule (line 121).

4. Discussion

In previous research grounded in the CCSARP research method, we were unable to observe how L2 speakers actually use requesting features of the language in conversational interaction. By employing Sacks et al.’s (1974) method of CA and Taleghani-Nikazm’s (2005, 2006) approach to discourse, this paper focused on the design of requests by L2 speakers in e-mail interactions.

The analysis demonstrated how CA can be applied to e-mails interactions and observe “pre-requests” (Schegloff, 1990; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006) and “adjacency pairs” (Sacks et al., 1974). In addition, the analysis supported Taleghani-Nikazm’s (2006) findings of pre-requests being understood not only from its semantic and syntactic composition but also from its sequential placement in the interaction. Moreover, the analysis showed that in e-mail correspondence, L2 speakers orient to preference organization as people are said to do in co-present interaction (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984). By analyzing the pre-request and the response to the pre-request, I demonstrated how a L2 speaker orients to preference organization as they adapt their interaction to the specific environment of e-mail interactions.

Furthermore, despite of the previous research results which indicate L2 speakers known to be direct with their requests (Hill, 1997; Iwai & Rinnert, 2001; N. Tanaka, 1988), Tomoko demonstrated how L2 speakers could actually project a non-direct request. By utilizing a pre-request, she succeed in eliciting an offer from the recipient, thus succeeds in achieving her goals of working at the LP.

However, this study has limitations due to the limited number of examples and the method of CA evolving based on oral conversation and lack of research of L2 speakers using CA. Therefore, for our further understanding, more research is needed on how CA could be applied to e-mail interaction. In addition, to have a fruitful discussion of L2 speakers’ requesting features in e-mail interaction, I believe there is a need to conduct a CA study on ordinary face-to-face conversation by L2 speakers with a Japanese L1 background, speakers of different target language proficiency levels, and requesting in Japanese. Furthermore, when making any comparisons of these results with previous research, we must consider the participants’ language proficiency levels and any other factors that may affect the participant’s use of their language. Moreover, I believe multiple research methods are needed in order to identify and understand the sequence and development patterns of L2 speech act of requesting.

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