การศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบลักษณะทางภาษาจากแบบทดสอบทักษะการสนทนากับเพื่อน และการสนทนาแบบสัมภาษณ์ ของนักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

A Comparative Study of Features of Talk Elicited by Two-Party Peer Interaction and Oral Interview Tests Implemented with Thai EFL Learners

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Abstract

Although producing similar results with a traditional scoring rubric, oral interviews and peer interaction reportedly differ in their ability to assess candidates' ability to participate in normal conversation. Through close analyses of talk elicited from Thai high school students' participating, this paper aims at delineating interactional features contributing to the difference between the two test tasks in assessing conversation abilities. The participants of the study were ten English-program students at Pimanpittayasan School, Satun who were engaged in 5-minute interview and two-party peer interactions. The conversations obtained were videotaped, transcribed and analyzed according to Conversation Analysis (CA) principles. The findings revealed that the two test tasks induced different interactional features some of which were related to learners' conversational problems. The main ones illustrated in the paper are sequence opening, extending and closing, sequence abandonment, turn size, gesture-only turns, overlap and repair initiation. It was suggested that based on the different interactional features elicited, the interview interaction may not be appropriate for assessing students' conversational competencies.

Keywords: *Conversation competency assessment; interview interaction; two-party peer interaction; Conversation Analysis (CA); Thai EFL learners*

บทคัดย่อ

การประเมินทักษะการพูดโดยใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์ กับวิธีการจับคู่สนทนาระหว่างเพื่อนนักเรียนไม่แตกต่างกัน อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ เมื่อใช้ทดสอบความสามารถในการสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษ โดยใช้ประเด็นการประเมินรูปแบบเก่า แต่เมื่อ วิเคราะห์ลักษณะการโต้ตอบของผู้พูดในบทสนทนา ที่ปรากฏจากทั้งสองรูปแบบการประเมิน พบว่ามีความแตกต่างกัน บทความฉบับนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อชี้ให้เห็นความแตกต่างดังกล่าว โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้เก็บข้อมูลเพื่อการวิจัยในครั้งนี้ คือนักเรียนที่เรียนหลักสูตรการจัดการเรียนการสอนเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 โรงเรียนพิมานพิทยาสรรค์ จังหวัดสตูล จำนวน 10 คน นักเรียนกลุ่มดังกล่าวเข้ารับการประเมินทักษะการพูดทั้งสองรูปแบบตามหัวข้อที่ครูกำหนดให้ โดยในแบบแรกนักเรียนถูกสัมภาษณ์โดยครูผู้สอนชาวต่างชาติ และแบบที่สองนักเรียนคุยโต้ตอบกับเพื่อนในหัวข้อเดียวกัน กับแบบสัมภาษณ์ โดยใช้เวลาในการทดสอบอย่างละ 5 นาที โดยการทดสอบทั้งสองรูปแบบถูกบันทึกเทปเสียงบทสนทนา เพื่อการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลตามหลัก Conversation Analysis (CA) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ลักษณะการโต้ตอบในบทสนทนาสอง รูปแบบมีความแตกต่างกัน ในประเด็นดังต่อไปนี้ **sequence opening, extending and closing, sequence abandonment, turn size, gesture-only turns, overlap** และ **repair initiation** ซึ่งความแตกต่างกันดังกล่าวชี้ให้เห็นว่าการประเมินทักษะ การพูดสนทนาแบบวิธีการสัมภาษณ์ อาจไม่เหมาะที่จะนำมาใช้ทดสอบความสามารถในการสนทนาของผู้เรียน

คำสำคัญ: *การประเมินความสามารถการสนทนา, การโต้ตอบแบบสัมภาษณ์, การโต้ตอบแบบจับคู่กับเพื่อน, การ วิเคราะห์บทสนทนา, นักเรียนหลักสูตรภาษาต่างประเทศ*

Introduction

As an essential part of any English language teaching curriculum, speaking skill is an important object of assessment. The purposes of a speaking assessment typically are to measure language proficiency; to assess achievement of the objective of a course; to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses; to identify what they do and do not know; and to assist in the placement of learners in a teaching program (Hughes, 2003). When assessing conversing ability, it is important to design a test that allows candidates to demonstrate their ability to use language in ways which are characteristic of their interactional competence. To test whether learners can converse, it is therefore necessary to get them to take part directly in speaking activities.

In an EFL classroom, there are several types of speaking test tasks that are commonly used to assess learners' speaking ability. An interview is one of the most popular means of testing speaking skills (Underhill, 1998; Weir, 1993). It is a direct, face-to-face exchange between a learner and interviewer in which a learner's performance is evaluated. There is sometimes an assessor present who does not take part in the spoken interaction but listens, watches, and evaluates the abilities of the learner (Weir, 1993).

While widely practiced, there has been mounting criticism against the use of interviews in speaking assessment. Many researchers have come to agree that the oral exchange that occurs between an interviewer and a test taker does not reflect or even closely replicate natural or real-life conversation (e.g. Bachman, 1990; Lazaraton, 1992; Van Lier, 1989; Young, 1995). Interview tests often result in a *test discourse* or an *institutional*

talk that neither represents normal conversation nor provides candidates with the opportunity to show their ability to participate in interaction other than as an *interviewee* responding to questions.

Consequently, since the late 1980s, as one of the most common practices in classroom activities, pair or group tasks have increasingly been used to assess speaking ability (Egyud and Glover, 2001). From a pragmatic perspective, pair or group assessment is typically also more time- and cost-efficient as learners are being tested together, and raters assess two or more candidates simultaneously. When assessing students' oral performance in paired or group tasks, raters are oriented towards interactional or conversational management, recognizing the manner in which turns are verbally and nonverbally organized as an important feature contributing to successful interaction (Ducassse and Brown , 2009). It was argued that the paired test format makes possible the assessment of several salient features of talk and provides the potential for a wider range of interactional moves apparently reflecting genuine features of ordinary conversation.

Despite the argument that the interview was not as appropriate as paired peer interaction for measuring conversation skills in oral tests, it was too early to claim that either the interview interaction or the two-party peer interaction can better assess Thai EFL learners' oral performance. Given only few studies directly comparing the results of both oral proficiency test tasks, in the early phase of our research on Thai EFL learners, we attempted to determine whether the two test types produce different results when assessing the learners' oral performance with the traditional rubric oriented to features such as fluency, vocabulary, appropriateness, comprehensibility and grammar. The results revealed that both interview and two-party peer interactions produced similar score results when used in assessing the overall oral English performance of the learners with the traditional linguistic-oriented rubric.

However, close analysis of the recorded talks elicited from the Thai EFL learners investigated apparently revealed different interactional features emerging in the two-party peer interaction and oral interview tests. In this paper, we, therefore, examine those distinct features shaped by the two test tasks in detail.

Background

Traditionally, in an EFL classroom, oral tests, or tests to measure speaking ability, were focused largely on linguistic proficiency. However, recently, there has been an increase in the inclusion of conversation skills and strategies, as well as features of talk.

Clark (1979, as cited in O'Loughlin, 2001) provided the basis for distinguishing three types of speaking tests, namely, indirect, semi-direct and direct tests. *Indirect* tests generally refer to those tests which do not require the test taker to speak in language testing. Direct speaking tests, on the other hand, are those tests in which the test taker is asked to engage in a face-to-face communicative exchange with one or more interlocutors. The term *semi-direct* is additionally employed to describe those tests which elicit active speech from the test

taker by means of tape recordings, printed test booklets, or other *"non-human"* elicitation procedures, rather than through face-to-face conversation with a live interlocutor.

Of the three speaking test types, i.e., direct, semi-direct, and indirect tests of oral proficiency, direct tests are generally the most valid procedures for measuring global speaking proficiency because of the close relationship between the test context and *"real life"* communication or face-to-face interaction. Nowadays, in EFL classrooms, direct speaking tests, therefore, seem to be preferred in assessing students' oral performance.

While the interview test format is often chosen in order to assess the overall oral proficiency of candidates, peer interaction in the form of role-play is a popular choice in most Thai EFL classrooms. Each test format in fact has its strengths and weaknesses. Interview tests are widely practiced since they are not only easy to conduct but also able to elicit the language that displays what individual speakers can do with what have learnt, and how effectively they can communicate with native or near-native speakers (Peace Crops, 2005). However, according to many scholars (e.g. Bachman, 1990; Lazaraton, 1992; Van Lier, 1989; Young, 1995), the interview test does not reflect or even closely replicate natural or real-life conversation. It often results in a test discourse or an institutional talk that neither represents normal conversation nor provides candidates with the opportunity to show their ability to participate in interaction other than as an interviewee responding to questions. Consequently, pair or group tasks have increasingly been used to assess speaking ability (Egyud and Glover, 2001). In classroom contexts, they are typically more time- and cost-efficient as learners are being tested and assessed simultaneously.

Research Procedures

The participants in this study were ten high-proficiency students sampled from the population of 32 students in the M.3 English Program at Pimanpittayasan School, Satun Province. The students attended a

Listening and Speaking course in the first semester of the academic year 2011 and took the oral tests which were part of their end-of-the year examination. Only high proficiency students were chosen for the investigation because they were believed to produce more talk to be assessed when working with partners (Iwashita, 1996).

As part of an achievement test to assess their oral performance during the course, the learners were first engaged in an oral interview interaction and at a later date in a two-party peer interaction on the same topic. Each interaction test was conducted three times over the course of three months. Prior to the interview interaction, the students were allowed to do research on the topic assigned by the teacher. The interviewer started the questions by discussing everyday topics and subsequently inquiring about the information the students had prepared. Each interview took approximately 5 minutes. In the two-party interaction assessment, on the other hand, the student peers were matched by the teacher. The interaction was assessed on the same criteria as the interview interaction. And just as in the interview, the students were asked to discuss the prepared topic for about 5 minutes. Both of the

oral test tasks were video-recorded and transcribed following the Conversation Analysis (CA) convention for subsequent close analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Although both interview interaction and two-party peer interaction produce similar results overall when used for assessing the learners' conversational performance with the traditional linguistic-competency oriented rubric, close analysis of the talks elicited from the two test tasks indeed unveiled different interactional features some of which were related to learners' conversational problems. These features are illustrated and discussed in detail below.

Close comparative analysis of the conversations obtained from interview and peer interaction revealed differences in the following interactional features: sequence opening, extending and closing, sequence abandonment, turn size, gesture-only turns, overlap, and repair initiation.

Sequence opening, extension, and closing

In the interview interaction, since it was the interviewer who had rights to open, extend and close the dialogue and to ask questions and introduce new topics, the students did not get to perform any of these actions. As seen in Excerpt (1), the student was mostly prompted to answer the questions asked by the interviewer (her teacher), apparently not acknowledging the role as a conversation partner but a question-responder being assessed.

(1)

1	T:	<u>what</u> do you like about Thailand,
2	FS:	e:r I like food (.) Thai food (0.1) because it's delicious
3 →	T:	what is your favorite Thai food,
4	FS:	em tom yum kung
5 →	T:	what is the ingredient, do you know?
6 →	FS:	no ((shaking her head))
7 →	T:	= tom yum is spicy soup an::d kung i:s what is kung in English e:::r?
8	FS:	I'm forget ((laugh))
8	T:	praw:n it's ok,
9	FS:	(.)
10 →	T:	what else do you like in Thai food
11	FS	((confused face))

In this excerpt, the teacher initiated the talk through the opening question asking about the student's likes about Thailand. The student, in turn, responded with "food" and the reasoning increment "Thai food is delicious". Expanding the question-answer sequence, the teacher further asked about her favorite food and the ingredients used to make it. The questions were responded to with a single phrase in line 3 and a dispreferred response in line 6. Having difficulty with the teacher's question at line 5, the student did not try to fix the problem but yielded the turn, letting the teacher continue with hers. Through the extended turn in line 7, the teacher apparently was hinting at the answer and herself having a problem finding the English word for the Thai one, "kung". Receiving no help from the student, she completed the repair herself, resulting in self-initiated self-repair, and continued with a new question in line 10 given no further uptake from her student. Accordingly, just as in any typical interview interaction the interviewer or the teacher ended up playing a dominant role, doing most of the talk.

The students in two-party peer interaction, on the other hand, were on equal footing when taking turns. They opened, extended, and closed the sequences all by themselves. As seen in (2), the speakers reciprocally conducted the greetings, lines 1-2, and initiated the question-answering sequence, lines 3 and 8. No dispreferred responses were observed; the uptakes were promptly provided, as seen through the latching turns in lines 2 and 5. They made a collaborative effort to maintain the ongoing sequence till it came to a consensual close despite apparent problems, as seen in lines 11-15. In line with Kormos (1999), through these interactional features, the students were obviously able to exercise their most basic rights in conversation, and their rights and duties were apparently equally distributed in their turns.

(2) (So=female), (Pim= female)

1 →	So:	er::m good- good afternoon Suprawee =
2 →	Pim:	= good afternoon Soraida
3	So:	erm: what do you like in:: in Thailand
4	Pim:	I like actor! =
5 →	So:	= actor. wow:: wo:o
6	Pim:	new::s girl ((clap her hands))
7	So:	wo::w
8	Pim:	and you?
9	So:	erm: I like singer
10	Pim:	why!
11	So:	because Thai- because Thai singer is (.) I think- somebody is perfect, somebody is °not°
12	Pim:	°yeah° ((nods))

13   So: yeah

14   Pim: I think that too

15   So: yes:: erm:: what do you like- where do you like erm: *mai chai* ((no it's not))

erm::   what do

16   you like Tourism, in Thailand,

Sequence abandonment

As previously seen in (1), while interacting with their teacher in the interview interaction, the students mostly proffered minimal verbal and non-verbal responses, e.g. "yes", "no", a nod, or simply waiting for the teacher's move. Taking the dominant role, the teacher completely controled the direction of the sequence. As seen below in excerpt (3), in line 5, instead of accepting the student's response in line 4 and asking her to elaborate on it, the teacher chose to abandon it for a new question-answer sequence, starting at line 5.

(3)

1   T: as a local person living in Satun which places would you like to take a tourist to visit and why.

2   FS: Tarutao

3   T: why.

4   FS: near em:: kho lipe

5   T: what part is near th::e er:: kho tarutao

6   FS: (0.6)

7   T: do you know? which place in satun

8   FS: °langu°

9   T: langu? have you been in langu before?

Illustrated in excerpt (4), no such abandonment was found.

(4) (Toon=male), (Amp= female)

4   Toon: er:: I –I will ask you (.) as you are a er: local people

5   which place you er::: you would like to- to take tourist to visit

6   Amp: em::: I think the Phupa cave is the best to visit

7   Toon: why? ((smile))

8   Amp: because (.) it's (.) the famous in Thailand (.) it's a biggest

9   cave in Thailand (.) have many things to [learn

10   Toon: [yeah] em:: (0.3)

11   I would like to go there

Turn size

Concerning turn size, as previously seen in (1), since the abilities to initiate, extend or close a sequence were controlled by the interviewer, the students' turns seemed to be smaller and less complex than the interviewer's. In the interview interaction, the teacher, who is more proficient in the target language, obviously emerged as the more dominating speaker as she spoke more, took longer turns, made all the initiation moves, and was the only speaker to expand on her ideas. In contrast, the quantity of talk was balanced between the two participants in the peer tasks, as in (4).

Gesture-only turns

The students in the interview interaction also employed more gesture-only turns. Particularly, when they were confronted with difficult questions, they tried to respond to the question first with gestures and later with words, often through the help of the conversation partner. The students, however, often failed to produce a complete turn, ending up with yet another gesture-only turn, as illustrated in (5).

(5)

1	T:	as a local person living in Satun which places would
2		you take a tourist to visit and why.
3	FS:	Wangsaithong er:: waterfall
4	T:	where is wangsaithong
5	FS:	er:: is in La-ngu (.)
6	T:	what can you see the::
7	FS:	er:: em::
8		(0.3)
9	T:	can you describe it wangsaithong.
10		(.)
11	FS:	I don't °understand°
12	T:	what dose wangsaithong look like
13	FS:	er:: ((extending her hand out and smile))
14	T:	river?
15	FS:	yes.
16	T:	it has the river in that waterfall ((laugh))
17	FS:	((laugh)) yes yes ((nods))
18	T:	((laugh)) are you sure

19	FS:	((smile and nods))
20	T:	ok? wangsaithong how many level does it have.

As shown in Excerpt (5), through the dispreferred responses and the micropauses in lines 7-8, the student apparently did not understand the teacher's question in line (6), leading the latter to rephrase the question in line 9, which yet failed to elicit a preferred response. Eventually at line 13, she responded to the teacher's reformulated question in line 12 with gesture, miming the waterfall. A gesture-only turn was also produced in line 19 as a response to the teacher's confirmation-seeking question.

Overlap

The talks elicited from the two test tasks also differ as far as overlaps are concerned. As seen in Excerpt (1), lines 4 and 6, and Excerpt (3), the students mostly proffered minimal responses with no overlap. However, in two-party peer interaction, frequent overlaps are observable showing alignment between speakers. Similar to Excerpt (4), lines 9 and 10, in Excerpt (6), lines 24 and 25, Chon overlapped Ta to offer her agreement with the idea of HIV being a negative consequence of sex tourism. Such an action was not found at all in the interview interaction.

(6) (Chon= female), (Ta= female)

18	Chon:	erm:: the business of polity to entertain for people who are holiday,
19		come to other country or in country twelve
20		that play the places ((extending her hands out))
21		what do you think about (0.1) sex tourism.
22	Ta:	erm: bad very bad
23	Chon:	why,
24 →	Ta:	will be have er:: HIV [in country
25 →	Chon:	[yes very bad erm:: do you think tourism
26		help people understand each other

Repair initiation

Another different salient feature of the interaction elicited from the two test tasks lies in repair organization. The data transcribed showed that the important type of repair organization occurred in both test tasks was repair for meaning. Repair initiation takes different forms in the two tasks. Collaborative completion and seeking confirmation were not found at all in the students' turns in the interview task. In peer-interaction, the students resorted to a wider range of repair-initiation strategies, not only seeking confirmation but also asking for repetition and clarification.

(7) (collaborative completion)

18	Ta:	what you dislike in Thailand? [about Tahiland
19	Chon:	[em::
20		I:: I dislike some some locate many garbage
21 →		Thailand to- too garbage em:: [pla:: plastic?
22 →	Ta:	[plastic? Yes
23	Chon:	yeah for for in river yeah

In Excerpt (7), an instance of collaborative completion was observable. At line 21, Chon's search for the word "plastic" is collaboratively completed by her conversation partner in line 22. Such cases were not found in the interview interaction with the teacher.

Likewise, confirmation seeking was also found in the students' talk only in peer interaction. Shown in excerpt (8), at line 30, So repeated "all rock is black" by putting emphasis and raising the intonation on the rock's color in order to seek the confirmation of Pim's talk in line 26.

(8) (seeking confirmation)

24	Pim:	em:: is a- I would like to (0.4) oh? kho hin ngam? kho hin ngam has er:: rock=
25	So:	=rock wow how about rock
26 →	Pim:	the rock is old the rock is black- black rock that's not [sand
27	So:	[oh? em::
28	Pim:	=it has er:: rock
29 →	So:	er:: all rock is <u>black</u>?
30	Pim:	=yes and you as you are a- a local people which place wo- would you like to take the tourist to visit

Besides collaborative completion and confirmation seeking of a turn, the students in peer-interaction also resorted to such repair-initiation strategies as asking for clarification and repetition. Seen in Excerpt (9), in line 39 Chon requested an example from Ta to clarify the answer given in line 38 regarding the food she likes, after which she started to list the examples, completing the other-initiated self-repair.

 (9) (asking for clarification)

36	Chon:	food what [what what do you like food
37	Ta:	[what food do you like
38 →		many. many [food I like,

39 →   Chon: [example example

40 →   Ta: em:: I like I like em Som Tum, =

41   Chon: = ahh:: Tomyum Kung ((pointing to her friend)) =

40   Ta   = yeah: Tomyum Kung

Asking for repetition also occurred when the students talked with their peers and could not hear or understand their utterances properly. As can be seen in Excerpt (10), Jing in line 30 asked Rose to repeat the question asked in lines 27 and 29. Such an instance occurred less frequently in the interview interaction with the teacher, only 3 out of 30 excerpts.

(10) (asking for repetition) (Rose=Female), (Jing=Female)

24   Rose: would you like to work in tourism.

25   Jing: no I wouldn't because it's work hard to me (0.1)

26   I'm lazy::

27   Rose: why. why it's work hard (.) what- what work is it

28   Jing: ah:: sometimes it's different (difficult) to me

29   Rose: what work

30 →   Jing: again please,

31 →   Rose: <u>wha</u>t work

32   Jing: work [another

33 →   Rose: [fisher or:: seller

34 →   Jing: seller seller

Conclusion

The different interactional features found in the talks elicited from the two types of assessment apparently suggested that the interview interaction may not be appropriate for assessing conversational competencies. Due to the unequal distribution of power and the imbalanced language ability, test candidates played a subordinate role in sequence organization, thus less talk being produced for the assessment and the interaction being more like a question-answering session. When facing problems in the interview, the students also resorted to fewer repair strategies. In contrast, the students in peer interaction produced more balanced talk and drew on a greater range of interactional strategies. Thus the latter should be a better means of assessing conversational competence especially of low-proficiency students.

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Appendix

Transcription convention adopted by Seedhouse (2004) and Schegloff (2007)

[	Point of overlap onset
]	Point of overlap termination
=	(a) Turn continues below, at the next identical symbol
	(b) If inserted at the end of one speaker's adjacent turn, indicates that there is no gap at all between the two turns
	(c) Indicates that there is no interval between adjacent utterances
(0.5)	Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second; what is given here indicates 0.5 second of silence
(.)	Very short untimed pause; ordinarily less than 0.2 second

<u>word</u>	Speaker emphasis
-	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption
?	Rising intonation, not necessarily a question
.	Low-rising intonation, or final, not necessarily the end of a sentence
( )	A stretch of unclear or unintelligible speech
wo:rd	Colons show that speaker has stretched the preceding sound
°word°	Material between "degree signs" is quieter than the surrounding talk
((word))	Transcriber's comments
[gibee]	In the case of inaccurate pronunciation of an English word, an approximation of the sound is given in square brackets
ja ((tr.: yes))	Non-English words are italicized and followed by an English translation in double parentheses
→	Mark features of special interest