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The basic interactional competence of language learners

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Abstract

This study has a theoretical and an empirical part. In the theoretical part, we focus on an issue underlying studies of what language learners must learn to interact competently in L2. These studies do not consider what learners already know that we refer to as *basic interactional competence* (BIC), a putative universal that begins developing in pre-linguistic infancy as part of human rationality. BIC is knowledge of the way successive utterances/actions can be substantively interconnected that forms them into an interaction and not a random collection. We regard BIC as the basis on which learners infer and adopt the practices and norms of native speakers in a host culture, as well as interact competently with other learners in L2 as a lingua franca. In the empirical part of this study, we examine naturally occurring interactions between learners of English and native speakers to identify some aspects of learners' participation that rest directly on BIC. We assigned participants a topic they could discuss without asymmetries of knowledge of the topic, or of culture- and institution-specific norms, techniques, practices, and roles. We found that learners took an active part in making their interactions succeed in ways that have gone unnoticed and unheralded. Their responses to questions, self-editing of word choices, and detecting and remedying understanding troubles, are attributable to their having tacitly analyzed the substantive interactions among utterance/actions.

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1. Introduction

The interest that has arisen in the interactional competence of non-native speakers¹ is an outgrowth of the general shift that has taken place in studies of NNS–NS interactions away from an early focus on difference and difficulty to a focus on success. That early focus on difference and difficulty presupposes that language learners are helpless to overcome whatever deficits they have in specific L2 interactions. But this tacit presumption of helplessness overlooks that language learners, no less than anyone else, have agency, and have been active participants in L1 interactions. Crediting NNSs with agency is congruent with Kidwell's (2000) proposal that we use a "success approach" in the study of intercultural communication that has as its aim explicating the resources that enable participants (especially NNSs) to accomplish their communicative tasks. On that basis, we should expect NNSs to actively work to make L2 interactions succeed, drawing on whatever resources they can draw on to make that happen. It is with the expectation of NNS agency, through that lens,

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¹ We are aware of the debate about who a "native speaker" is. However, for this study we will be using the term in its traditional sense without taking a stand in the debate.

that we examined the talk of NNSs in interactions they had with native speakers (NSs) of English, as detailed in the second, empirical part of this report.

NNSs' participation in L2 interactions has garnered considerable attention in recent years. Some of this has involved an interest in L2 (often English) as a lingua franca in interactions between NNSs and other NNSs (House, 2014; Mauranen, 2006, 2009, 2012; Seidhofer, 2001, 2011; see also Gardner and Wagner, 2004; Swan, 2012). But our interest here is NNSs' interactions with NSs in L2, which has also been of interest in the context of studies of second language acquisition (e.g., Cadierno and Eskildsen, 2015; Hall, 1999; Hall et al., 2011; Hall and Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Kramsch, 1986; Pallotti and Wagner, 2011; Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger, 2015; Walsh, 2012; Young, 2011; Young and Miller, 2004).

The focus in much of the work on NNS–NS interactions associated with the study of second language acquisition is on interactional abilities that NNSs *acquire* to interact in a new language in a new (host) culture with NSs—generally referred to as “L2 interactional competence.” However, our focus is on interactional capabilities that NNSs *already have* as they enter into L2 learning, which we refer to as *basic interactional competence* (BIC).² BIC comprises knowledge of the principled ways in which utterances/actions can be discursively linked, or fitted to each other, to achieve *interaction*. We consider that the empirical reality of BIC has been demonstrated by Bruner's (1975, 1983) findings that in pre-linguistic infancy and early childhood, children quickly develop a recognition of linkages between their own actions and the (re) actions of others. Through BIC, speakers—both NSs and NNSs—can (tacitly) analyze ways in which successive utterances/actions are linked, whether linkages of prior utterances/actions to each other, of present utterances/actions to prior ones, or present utterances/actions to wanted or unwanted future ones. These linkages are constraining of what is said next, and of the situated meaning of specific utterances/actions based on how they are fitted to what has been said, is now being said, or may yet be said.

We posit that as people interact in their native language and native culture, they rely on this basic knowledge of the way interactional components can be sequentially linked, and also on knowledge of routinized procedures and practices built on that basic knowledge. When learners acquire a new language and interact in L2 in a new culture, they have to learn how to adapt the routinized procedures and practices of their native culture to their counterparts in the host culture. To do this, they must detect, analyze, and adjust to whatever the differences are, and for this they have—and must have—BIC to draw on.

In the theoretical part of our study we contrast BIC that learners already have with the culture-specific knowledge learners acquire to interact effectively in a host culture, which we refer to as *applied interactional competence* (AIC). We do not claim that BIC supplants the various ways in which the interconnectedness of a succession of utterances has been analyzed, but rather that BIC is a foundational competence that underlies those. For example, Grice's (1975) concept of particularized conversational implicatures presupposes the ability of speakers and hearers to tacitly analyze the connections between utterances, but Grice (1975) does not specify the basis for making such analyses. For that, we turn to BIC.

We consider that BIC is also the foundation for the formation of the culture-specific procedures and practices of interaction in one's native culture and those of other cultures one may move into. BIC differs from what Hymes (1974) called “communicative competence”. Hymes defined communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations, thus overlaying a sociolinguistic perspective on Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence. There have been several attempts to clarify what Hymes' concept includes (e.g. Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Cazden, 2011). But none of them attend to the underlying knowledge of principled ways that utterance/actions can be linked to form an interaction (BIC), from which come the concrete and observable ways utterances/actions are linked in culture-specific, routinized, procedures and practices.

In the empirical part of our study we report specific instances we found in NNS–NS interactions in which NNS took an active part in making the interaction work that depended on their (tacit) analysis of linkages between utterances/actions, not knowledge of specific procedures and practices, roles, status relations, norms and the like in the host culture. In some instances, NNS answered a question on the basis of an inference based on those linkages of the question's purpose, not what was directly asked (Examples 1–2). In some instances, having detected that a question incorrectly presumed they had certain knowledge or experience, NNS answered in a way that was responsive to the question, based on those linkages, without endorsing the incorrect presumption (Examples 3–4). In some instances, NNS self-edited or checked on a word choice that, based on a tacit analysis of those linkages, was consequential for what could or did come next (Examples 4–7). In other instances, based on a tacit analysis that revealed anomalies in the way specific utterances/actions were linked, NNS detected an understanding trouble and created remedies (Examples 8–10).

² The acronym BIC should not be confused with the acronym BICS, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, in Cummins (1979), a construct he introduced to distinguish his primary focus on Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

There are two main points we should make about these data. First, the tacit analyses of linkages among utterances/actions that NNSs seem to have made do not depend on BIC alone. They depend also on NNSs having a sufficient knowledge of the language involved to be able to understand the meaning of the utterance or what the action is, and on that basis tacitly analyze the linkages among specific utterances/actions. The basis for understanding each utterance/action depends on a different knowledge from knowledge of the ways utterances/actions can be or are being linked. While these two types of knowledge interact in performance, as much of our data shows, our interest and the focus of our analyses is on the latter alone.

Second, what we observed cannot be attributed to NNSs prior experience or habits of interaction, except in the most general sense, or knowledge of specific procedures and practices. It has to be attributed to NNSs having tacitly analyzed and responded to the specific linkages between those utterance/actions just then. While we cannot know this with perfect certainty (any more than Chomsky could know that “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously” was entirely novel), it would be remarkable if any of the NNSs in our sample, let alone all of them, had previously encountered those questions asked with that purpose or with that presumption on that topic; or (with one possible exception) those lexical issues in that context; or those understanding troubles embedded in the talk in those ways.

It is important to keep in mind that there is a line between our claims about analytically distinct influences on participation in interaction and claims about the cognitive processing involved. Chomsky (1965) drew this line in emphasizing that his distinction between competence and performance does not involve claims about the actual cognitive processing of speakers as they produce sentences. He considered that cognitively, actual speaking (performance) draws on but is not determined by competence (knowledge of the language system). It is determined by cognitive focus, habit, experience, culture, situation, emotion, and the like as well as competence that enters into cognitive processing concurrently. Similarly, we do not claim that in any instance producing utterances/actions within interactions is determined by either cross-cultural, cross-linguistic knowledge of interactions (BIC) or culture-specific knowledge of interactional procedures and practices (AIC). We assume that generally, in the cognitive processing involved, these influence performance concurrently. But we do claim that certain *aspects* of participation in interactions draw on one or the other, and can be analytically distinguished. Our empirical goal is to identify some that draw on BIC, ones that we found in our data that are easy to miss unless one goes looking for them.

1.1. Theoretical framework

The central premise of much of the work in the development of what is being referred to as “L2 interactional competence” (e.g. Hall et al., 2011; Hall and Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Pallotti and Wagner, 2011; Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger, 2015) is that learning a language is not enough for successful communication with native speakers; language learners must also be able to *interact competently* with native speakers. We regard this as indisputable. But then it is posited that this comes about in the course of learning L2, that this is a matter of also learning “L2 interactional competence”—which has generally been conceptualized in a way that equates it with knowledge of how to *perform* in interactions *competently* (effectively and appropriately) with native speakers of L2 in the (new) host culture.

But much work on “L2 interactional competence” has some key shortcomings in common. One is that it ties interactional competence to the language being spoken (e.g., the phrase “L2 interactional competence” itself, and its being contrasted with “L1 interactional competence”). Our position is that this overlooks BIC, and that BIC is not tied to any specific language (see Bruner, 1975, 1983; Sanders, 1987, 1997; Levinson, 2006; Schegloff, 2007). Again, BIC comprises knowledge of principled ways across languages in which a succession of utterances/actions by alternating speakers are substantively interconnected to form an *interaction*, not a random collection. Bruner’s (1975, 1983) evidence that the inference even by infants of such interconnections between actions indicates that BIC is a product of the human rationality we are born with and apply as we begin to interact with others.

BIC *underlies* interactional performance but does not determine it. Learners bring BIC with them into the language learning situation and into L2 interactions. We posit that it is this basic knowledge of how interactions work that L2 learners already have that enables NNS to interact with other NNSs in L2 as a lingua franca, without shared knowledge of the interactional procedures and practices of a (dominant) host culture to guide them. And we posit that it is also this basic knowledge of the workings of interaction that enables NNSs to recognize and learn what studies of “L2 interactional competence” focus on: culture- and language-specific interactional routines among natives of the host culture and language NNSs are learning.

A second shortcoming of the “L2 interactional competence” research is a tendency to have focused primarily on one main influence on how competently NNSs *perform* in L2 interactions (AIC), and not others. The one that has gotten the most attention is knowledge of the procedures and practices of a host culture (e.g., Cekaite, 2007; Hall et al., 2011; Hall and Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger, 2015; Young, 2011). But AIC is also influenced by

language processing, social comfort and confidence, individual differences, and several others that Cekaite (2007:45) enumerates:

Interactional competence involves a range of skills for using language to accomplish social actions, including social aspects of language use such as knowing when, how, and with whom to engage in conversational activities. . . . In this study it is defined as participants' knowledge of the interactional architecture of a specific discursive practice, including knowing how to configure a range of resources through which this practice is created. . . . It entails knowledge of linguistic resources (lexis and syntactic structures) constituting particular activities. . . .; pragmatic skills, such as topic introduction and maintenance. . . .; turn-taking and sequential organization of talk. . . .; and the communicative roles associated with the practice.

1.1.1. The routinized procedures and practices of a host culture

The influence on how competently NNSs perform in interactions that has gotten the most attention in studies of second language acquisition is the extent of NNSs having learned specifics of routinized procedures and practices in the host culture. As Young (2011:427) put it, L2 interactional competence is a matter of learning "recurring episodes of social interaction in context, episodes that are of social and cultural significance to a community of speakers." Hall and Pekarek Doehler's (2011:2–3) formulation is that it is a matter of learning "routinized yet context sensitive procedures with which we reason our way through the moment-to-moment unfolding of our interactions."

We see attention to some specifics of AIC in Cekaite's (2007) study of the development of "L2 interactional competence" by a 7 year old Kurdish girl, Fusi, in a Swedish classroom. Cekaite notes Fusi's progressive modulation of her disagreement turns as indicative of learning certain social norms in a Swedish classroom. She also regards Fusi's progress in turn-taking practices as having a (socio)linguistic basis: "her self-selection [as next speaker] is also more verbally elaborate and syntactically close to Swedish language norms" (Cekaite, 2007:57).

Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger (2015:233) pose the question of whether "interactional competence [is] simply transferred from the L1 to the L2 or is it re-elaborated in the L2?" And their answer, based on their survey of research to date, is:

[W]e start to have empirical evidence testifying to the fact that interactional competence is not simply transferred from the L1 to the L2, but is recalibrated, adapted in the course of L2 development. (235)

From the way the concept of "recalibration" was described, the idea seems to be that learners have to *adapt* their interactional competence that they already have to the routines and norms of a new culture. On the face of it, we do not dispute that for NNSs to *perform competently* in the tasks and activities of a new culture, they have to adapt the routinized procedures and practices of their native culture to those of the host culture. But Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger (2015) refer to the interactional competence learners already have as "L1 interactional competence." This terminology indicates that they take a theoretical stance contrary to ours, that all interactional competence is language- and culture-specific. They describe learners as starting with "a highly limited set of techniques for accomplishing a given action (such as taking a turn, initiating repair, proffering a disagreement)" (262) and "Over time, these techniques become *diversified*, allowing participants to deploy more **locally adapted and interactionally accepted** conduct" [our emphasis] (262), resulting in "a growing ability to recipient design talk and to deploy context-sensitive conduct" [emphasis in original] (262).

But if L2 interactional competence is tied to the acquisition of the "locally adapted and interactionally accepted conduct" of a host culture, then we cannot account for the fact that NNSs from different cultures and different native languages can interact with each other competently in L2 as a lingua franca. Again, to account for that, there has to be more basic knowledge of how interaction works—BIC—underlying whatever repertoire of "techniques for accomplishing a specific action" persons learn that are culture- and language-specific, both in their native culture and then those of any other culture(s) they move into.

As we think that Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger would agree, the learning they have described is not a matter of having to learn that turns should be taken, repair initiated as needed, or that talk should achieve recipient design and be context-sensitive. From our perspective, these are aspects of interaction that language users must already know from infancy to have ever linked utterances/actions together into an interaction, no matter what L1 and their native culture is—what we attribute to BIC. What has to be learned is *how to achieve* turn-taking, the initiation of repair, and so forth *in L2, in the host culture*, which would only confront NNSs when it comes to learning language- and culture-specific interactional procedures and practices, resulting in AIC.

1.1.2. Language processing

Cekaite (2007) identifies knowledge of L2 and language processing as an influence on how *competently* NNSs interact. In her study of the 7 year old Kurdish girl, Fusi, in a Swedish classroom, Cekaite attributes Fusi's improved ability

to participate competently in part to improved mastery of Swedish, including an expanded lexicon, and improved tense markings. An aspect of Fusi's growing linguistic resources that Cekaite ties directly to interaction involves turn-taking: "the timing of Fusi's self-selections may be seen to indicate her emerging competencies, in that precision timing involves the speaker's language processing skills. . . which allow her to produce a novel and relevant contribution in a split second" (Cekaite, 2007:58). These observations underscore that, as we noted, knowledge of the language is needed for learners to apply BIC to a tacit analysis of the ways utterances/actions in L2 are being linked, and from there to learn routinized procedures and practices in the host culture.

1.1.3. Social confidence and comfort

Cekaite (2007) describes the symptoms of an influence on how competently Fusi interacted in L2, her lack of social confidence and comfort as a conspicuous outsider. Early on, Fusi did not participate, she avoided it and hid, followed by limited speaking that was overly aggressive, overly loud. While Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger (2015) attribute this to Fusi's not yet having learned more native-like ways of participating in classroom interactions, we should not overlook an ancillary basis for the ways she initially interacted that involves Fusi's subjective sense of not knowing how, not necessarily its objective reality. She seemed to be exhibiting the emotional stresses of, and childish reaction to, being an outsider among peers, especially in the performance-oriented environment of the Swedish classroom.

1.1.4. Individual differences

Another influence on how competently people perform in interactions is individual differences. As Kecskes (2013) has elaborated in some detail, there are differences between people psychologically and experientially that diminish their common ground. This has a direct bearing on the extent of troubles people may have with pragmatic understandings, and what they must work on to interact *with each other* more competently over time. These individual differences will be most substantial between NNSs interacting in L2 as a lingua franca who are native speakers of different languages and natives of different cultures, but can be expected to diminish over time with repeated interactions through the learning that reduces their differences and expands their common ground.

In addition, because there are such individual differences, we need to be cautious about over-generalizing the result in performance in interactions to the interplay between learning L2, and adapting its use in interaction to the norms, standards and expectations of its native speakers in the host culture. There is variation in individual willingness, preference and choice to make these adaptations that play an important role (e.g. Ortactepe, 2012; Kecskes, 2013, 2015).

1.2. Basic interactional competence

In a recent newsletter, Young (2014) proposes that interactional competence is "an individual's knowledge and employment of these resources [that] is contingent on what other participants do; that is, [interactional competence] is distributed across participants and varies across different interactional practices." From our perspective, this overlooks that there is a difference between the knowledge needed to *perform* in interactions *competently* (AIC)—and we agree with Young (2014) that such knowledge does vary, and is distributed when people interact—and the knowledge needed to *interact at all, coherently* (BIC), which does not and could not vary in those ways. Eliding these has been a vulnerability of the concept of "competence" that has dogged it since Chomsky (1965) first introduced it. It surfaces whenever his distinction between a theory of competence and a theory of performance is disregarded or its importance overlooked. This is arguably what happened when work on second language acquisition expanded to include a concern with learners' ability to *perform* competently in interactions with native speakers of L2 in a host culture, and came to refer to that as "L2 interactional competence."

We have already referred to the basic knowledge of how interactions work (BIC) that we contend learners bring with them into the L2 learning situation. We consider that BIC underlies the development of routinized procedures and practices in learners' native culture, and the learning and adaptations of those that NNSs make to interact competently in L2 with native speakers in their host culture. We find attention to this basic knowledge in the study of child development and language pragmatics. Bruner (1975, 1983; see also Sperber and Wilson, 1986) has shown that infants start to develop such knowledge by inferring the interconnection within action-reaction pairs, such that what is done, vocalized, or said "now" (by self or other) has consequences for what comes "next" (by self or other). Such interconnections entail relevancies and constraints between utterances/actions that apply across tasks and activities, and most importantly here, languages. When an utterance/action is interconnected with ones that precede and follow it in mutually constraining ways, it is *interactionally* meaningful, *which is not the same as culturally or linguistically meaningful*.

The implication of Bruner's (1975, 1983) findings is that this basic knowledge of how interaction works is not language- or culture-specific; it involves universals. Sanders (1986, 1987) presents evidence to this effect, that even when persons of maximal differences of language and culture interact, they can improvise ways to make themselves understood well enough to supply what is interactionally needed "next" to achieve coherence and incrementally proceed toward a

resolution of the matter at hand. Levinson (2006) addresses the issue of whether there are “basic principles of interaction” that all speakers know in common. He contends that there are. He refers to such knowledge of the workings of interaction as an “interaction engine” that involves a basis for achieving a coherent interaction that is not tied to the parties having a shared language and culture, and gives a variety of examples. Beyond the most basic knowledge of the way utterances/actions can be interconnected, there seem to be narrower principles that have the same cross-linguistic, cross-cultural generality, e.g., principles of minimization, recipient design, and repair (Dingemans and Enfield, 2015; Dingemans et al., 2015; Gardner and Wagner, 2004).

Of course, even though BIC (knowledge of the way *interaction* works) is not language-specific, the extent of the tacit analysis NNSs make of interconnections between utterances/actions does depend on the extent of their knowledge of L2, given that interconnections between utterances/actions such as Sanders (1987, 1997) formulated are based on their linguistic/pragmatic meanings. In that case, interacting competently in L2 depends primarily on learning L2 well enough to be able to discern and construct interconnections between specific utterances/actions based on principles of such interconnection learners already know. The extent and variety of such interconnections one is able to recognize goes up in proportion to one's knowledge of the language being uttered.

For example, Young and Miller (2004) reported the progress of a Vietnamese learner of English toward taking an active part in interactions with an ESL writing instructor who provided feedback to guide his revisions of an essay. In early conferences, the non-native speaker (NNS) was almost entirely passive, responding with “okay” and “yeah” to points that the instructor made. But after several such conferences, the NNS started to take a more active role. Young and Miller's focus was the progress this student made in becoming more able to actively participate and perform competently in the revision work that these conferences were about.

But Young and Miller's (2004) analysis focuses on the difficulties NNS was having at first, as studies of the development of L2 interactional competence typically do, and not NNS's successes from the outset. We note that even the relatively passive responses the student uttered at first were nonetheless produced in turn slots where a response was called for. Moreover those utterances/actions achieved responsiveness in those slots even though they were not efficacious, and arguably they were the “right” response to avoid over-reaching in an activity and role he had not yet learned. In that way, this NNS was taking an active part in making these interactions succeed, within the limited understanding he had of that task and his role in it.

Our premise is that for language learners to discern, thereby learn, how to participate efficaciously in culture-specific practices and activities (L2 interactional competence), they need to have a framework for tacitly analyzing the turn by turn unfolding of interactions in which they participate for the interconnections between utterances/actions that form an interaction. We consider that BIC is that framework. Without that, it would only be within known (or newly learned) interactional routines that they could produce utterances/actions responsive to what came before, or anticipatory of what might follow, could initiate or make repairs, could detect and remedy possible understanding troubles based on a bad “fit” between an utterance/action and what preceded or followed it. But people, including NNSs in the recorded interactions we analyze below, are not limited regarding such basics of interaction to a repertoire of interactional routines.

Besides the theoretical importance of taking BIC into account, it is empirically important. It seems that there are aspects of active ways NNSs participate in interaction to make them succeed that will be overlooked if we just focus on their learning of procedures and practices specific to a host culture. Our goal in the empirical part of this study was to identify some of the active ways NNSs participate in L2 interactions with native speakers that depend on BIC.

2. Methods

Our data are video-recordings of face-to-face interactions between NNSs and NSs who were asked to discuss an assigned topic. Each conversation lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. While it was not natural or spontaneous to *become* engaged in these interactions, once started, the ensuing *interactions* were naturally occurring and spontaneous. It was up to the participants in these discussions to work out for themselves, turn by turn, what it was warranted and relevant (coherent) for them to say, what topics to talk about and how many, in what order, and so forth.

2.1. Task

Our goal was to engage NNSs in interactions with NSs that would necessarily draw on BIC without also drawing on AIC—on what they might have learned about participating in “episodes that are of social and cultural significance to a community of speakers” (Young, 2011:427) or might have learned about “routinized yet context sensitive procedures” (Hall and Pekarek Doehler, 2011:2–3). We achieved this by assigning NNS–NS pairs the task of engaging in a discussion of a specified topic that was not structured by any assigned goal (as in classroom interactions) nor designated roles, such that neither participant was responsible for contributing in any particular way. In addition, the topic we asked participants to

discuss is generic, not specific to any society or culture, and moreover one on which both NNS and NS could be expected to have roughly equal knowledge and experience. Specifically, we asked participants to “Discuss what you and other people in Albany can do to keep yourselves healthy.” While they may have had culture-specific ideas on this topic, and indeed their personal, acultural, ideas, which would expectably emerge in discussing it, this does not make discussing the topic a culturally biased task.

While we consider that this task did not draw on NNSs’ AIC, we could not know in advance whether individual NNSs may have found the *task* culturally biased (e.g., if it touched on what would be regarded as private matters to not be discussed with anyone but intimates, or if discussing it across gender differences would be troublesome). But we considered that if individuals did find the task culturally biased, we would be able to detect it in their interaction, for example in displays of discomfort and reluctance, or anomalies of participation such as those cited by Pekarék Doehler and Poehon-Berger (2015), and these did not occur. Most of the interactions ended up being about the subtopics of exercise or diet, and opportunities regarding such matters, with expansions and digressions having to do with personal circumstances and preferences, and so forth (e.g., one NNS talked about walking to church as a source of exercise, and that led to talk about her church and her religion).

In not having to contribute to the interaction in any particular way or in any particular role, or be accountable for reaching any particular end result, the activity we asked NNSs to engage in does not raise issues of interactional efficacy. Nor does it call on NNSs to know and employ any procedures or techniques in particular. Accordingly, the task in which we engaged NNSs is one that warrants our focusing analytically on what is of particular interest in this study—what, if anything, NNSs contributed that drew on their basic knowledge of the way utterances/actions may be “fitted” to what was said before and what may be said next to add up to an interaction and not a random collection of utterances/actions.

2.2. The data

In that the focus of our study was evidence of BIC in NNSs’ participation in the interactions we recorded, we searched the interactions in our corpus for instances in which we judged that NNSs’ participation just then depended on their tacit analysis of the “fit” between current, prior, and/or anticipated utterances/actions.^{3,4} The instances we selected were: NNS answered NS’s prior question in terms of its inferred purpose rather than what it directly asked (section 3.1); and NNS countered a faulty assumption in NS’s prior question while providing an answer (section 3.2). NNS self-corrected a word choice that was consequential for subsequent talk (section 4.1); NNS launched a word search in a way that enlisted NS’s subsequent help (section 4.2); NNS detected and initiated remedies of understanding troubles (section 4.3); and NNS attempted to head off an understanding trouble in referring to a phenomenon for which there is no L2 word, and when it occurred anyway, she adopted a series of remedies for it (section 4.4).

2.3. Participants

Data were collected in the “clinic class” that is an essential part of the TESOL MSc program at SUNY, Albany. In that class TESOL students organize an intensive English Language Institute for non-native speakers from the community. The syllabus for the TESOL class, and reciprocally, for classes in the English Language Institute, included a requirement that all students would participate in NNS–NS interactions in order to “provide English learners with the chance to apply their knowledge of L2 in an actual conversation with a more experienced speaker of English.” The syllabi also advised students that “The conversations will be video-recorded, and kept in an archive for possible use as a resource for instruction or research.”

We paired language learners randomly with native speakers who were TESOL graduate students, some of whom were instructors in the program. However, no student was paired with his or her own instructor. We recognize that there was a built-in asymmetry of status in these pairings that could and sometimes did affect these interactions, but in those interactions where this happened—usually when the NS/instructor launched an interview rather than a discussion—we dropped the interaction from our corpus.

³ We have transcribed those interactional segments using the notational conventions developed by conversation analysts. Although this gives our study the outward trappings of conversation analysis, ours is not a conversation analytic study. CA aims to explicate the methods or practices people employ to assemble the actions and activities of everyday life (Pomerantz and Fehr, 2011). But it is not our goal to identify any particular, recurring, method or practice that NNSs have adopted.

⁴ It is important to emphasize that this search of interactions did not involve a coding scheme, and that its objective was not to create categories of ways NNSs take an active part in interactions. The authors independently searched our corpus for specific instances in which each judged that NNS’s utterance just then was based on a tacit analysis of “fit” between current, prior, and/or anticipated utterances. We then pooled our candidate instances, and selected the ones we agreed could be analyzed most succinctly to show this.

We examined only those interactions involving NNSs who had been placed in intermediate and advanced intermediate classes. We did this considering that, as noted, the extent of NNSs' ability to tacitly analyze the interconnections between utterances/actions is proportional to the extent of their knowledge of the *language* being spoken.

We then had a corpus of eight interactions, all with Asian NNSs (Chinese, Thai, and Korean), whose ages ranged from the mid-20s to the mid-30s. We report analyses of one or more segments from five of them. For speaker designations, we used NNS1, NNS2, and so on for non-native speakers, and NS1, NS2, and so on for their respective native speaker partners. The same speaker always has the same speaker ID across examples.

3. Responses to information-seeking questions

Recipients of information-seeking questions understand that the relevant action in response is, if possible, to provide the requested information. This is one of the upshots of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, especially the quantity maxim (provide as much information as needed). What is of interest to us is that the information a question was asked to get—what information is needed in the response—is not always directly stated, it has to be inferred. Pomerantz (1988) has shown that to determine what information to offer, recipients of questions infer the purpose of the question—what interest the questioner has just then in getting information about the matter referred to in the question.

With reference to BIC, we consider that such inferences are based on the interactional linkages, or “fit,” among factors Pomerantz cites, specifically, linkages between the formulation of the question and/or the context (task, topic, aspects of the scene, etc.), including the typical motives and activities of the categories of persons involved. Conversely, if the recipient cannot infer a questioner's purpose in asking (because it is unapparent how the question “fits” what was said before and the larger context) he or she would not know how to answer.

In addition to selecting information that relates to the inferred purpose of asking the question, recipients also counter incorrect or unwanted assumptions that are built into the question. When a recipient provides just the information sought by the semantics of the question, the recipient implicitly ratifies the assumptions in the question (Raymond, 2003; Stivers and Hayashi, 2010). While a question's assumption is discernible from the question itself, rather than its “fit” in the larger sequence, countering a faulty assumption involves BIC. Countering a faulty assumption is a matter of responding with information that “fits” the question's topic and the questioner's inferred purpose without also “fitting” (and ratifying) its faulty assumption.

We found that these complex ways of responding to a question are things NNSs do in L2 interactions with NSs. In section 3.1, we discuss examples in which NS asks NNS a fixed choice question, where an answer that provides the information directly requested would be uninformative, and NNS instead answers with information that was not directly requested but does “fit” the inferred purpose. In section 3.2 we discuss examples in which NNSs infer background assumptions that are faulty and answer in a way that counters the presumption while also fitting their response to the question.

3.1. NNS responds to the inferred purpose of a question

3.1.1. NNS provides more information than NS directly requested

In Example 1, NS1 (an American man) asks a question that follows up on NNS1 (a Korean woman) having said that a way she has of making her life healthier is by walking, and she does this by walking to church. NS1 asks whether the church is far away (line 1), and NNS1 answers “yes,” but her answer does not end there.

Example 1, *walks far*. NNS1 (Korean woman)-NS1 (American man), mov 007-12

- 1 NS1: Is church far away?
- 2 NNS1: (Ye::as/l'is::). It takes about- (0.5) forty minutes? It's- (.) eh
- 3 near: (0.2) It's eh close to (.) <Clark Street>?

Our interest here is in NNS1's elaboration of her response to NS1's question, rather than stop with “Yes.” We attribute this to NNS1's tacit analysis, through BIC, of the link between NS1's question (about how far the church was) to NNS1 having previously said that she walked to church as a method of exercise. On that basis, NNS1 evidently inferred that the purpose of his question was to find out how much exercise this walk provided, in that the extent of the exercise would depend on how far she had to walk. Accordingly, she elaborates her response with information that is directly about that. First she adds a temporal measure (line 2: “It takes about- (0.5) forty minutes?”). Second, she adds a geographical measure (“close to (.) <Clark Street>”). The temporal measure indicates that this walk provides good exercise. Adding this geographical measure of the distance walked implies additional, relevant, information about the rate of her walking: Assuming that NS1 has local knowledge that this destination is a downtown street approximately 2–3 miles from most rental housing where students live, NNS1 would have to walk at a brisk pace to go that distance in 40 minutes.

3.1.2. NNS provides other information than NS directly requested

Example 2 is from an interaction between NNS2 (a Korean man) and NS2 (an American man). Early on, NS2 asked NNS2 why he thinks people do not eat healthier food. NNS2 provided several reasons, one of which was that healthy food takes more time to prepare, using as illustration the amount of time it takes his wife to cook a healthy Korean meal. NS2 then asks the question of interest here, whether NNS2's wife has a job or stays at home (lines 1–2).

Example 2, *wife's occupation*: NNS2 (Korean man)-NS2 (American man), mov 004-11

- 1 NS2: Does your wife (0.2) ah, stay- does your wife have a job? or does she
- 2 stay at home?
- 3 NNS2: Ah:::, yeah. My wife who- my wife a graduate student (0.2) in (.)
- 4 SUNY [(Albany). Ah::
- 5 NS2: [Oh:: Yeh?
- 6 (0.5)
- 7 NNS2: So ss mm she has her (0.5) she has (a lot of) wo- (0.2) hm
- 8 ho:mework,
- 9 NS2: >mm hm<
- 10 NNS2: so:: (0.2) she has heh she has no time to cook?
- 11 NS2: She has no time to cook?
- 12 NNS2: Ya::h

Our interest here is in NNS2's not having responded immediately and directly to NS2's question (whether NNS2's wife has a job or stays home). Through a tacit analysis, based on BIC, of the link between NS2's question and NNS2's prior assertions that cooking healthy food takes his wife a lot of time, NNS2 evidently inferred the purpose of NS2's question. He seems to have inferred that NS2 wanted to find out if NNS2's wife had the time to regularly cook healthy food, where she would have time if she stays at home and would not have time if she has a job. Had NNS2 been able to report that his wife had a job or that she stayed at home, he would thereby have responded to both what the question directly asked and what NS2's purpose was in asking it. But she had neither status, and so NNS2 could not respond to what the question directly asked or its inferred purpose without first identifying what his wife did do with her time. He thus responds first by informing NS2 about what his wife is engaged in doing that is neither of the above, that she is a graduate student (lines 3–4). But that in itself is not informative regarding the inferred purpose of finding out whether she has time to cook healthy food. For that, NNS2 adds the information that as a graduate student his wife has a lot of homework (lines 7–8). Evidently considering that this was sufficient groundwork, he then responds to the inferred purpose of NS2's question, and reports that (therefore) she has no time to cook (line 10).

3.2. NNS links a response to a question so as to counter its faulty presumption

When a recipient of a question discerns a faulty assumption in the question, the challenge is to answer in a way that counters the faulty assumption while “fitting” the response to the question and possibly anticipating subsequent talk. In fitting a response to a query and anticipating upcoming talk, NNS makes use of BIC.

In the following two examples, NS3 (an American woman) asks NNS3 (a Korean woman) to provide an assessment (the first one of avocados, the second of restaurants). To ask someone for an assessment assumes that the recipient has sufficient experience of the referent that he or she can assess it (Pomerantz, 1984). If the recipient is asked for an assessment and does not have the needed experience, he or she is in the position of having to counter the faulty assumption while still fitting the response to the question. The two cases differ in that in the first, NNS3 has no experience at all with what she is asked to assess and so cannot provide any assessment, whereas in the second she has very limited experience and so can provide a highly qualified assessment. The responses NNS3 made to each of those requests differ correspondingly.

3.2.1. NNS provides an account for not providing a requested assessment

In Example 3, our focus is on NS3's question, “Do you like avocado?” (line 1). NS3's question assumes that NNS3 has eaten, or at least tasted, avocados.

Example 3, *avocado*: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 1 NS3: Do you like avocado?
- 2 NNS3: I never eat
- 3 NS3: They're really good [for you.
- 4 NNS3: [Are they really?
- 5 NS3: Yeah.
- 6 NNS3: †Oh:::

As has been stated, making an assessment of a referent presupposes having experience with that referent. Through BIC, NNS3 evidently understands that a response to the request for her assessment of avocados is to provide an assessment, which could have been done by responding with “yes” or “no” to what the question directly asked, whether she likes avocados, but only if she had actually eaten avocados. It seems NNS3 does not have the experience needed and so cannot make an assessment. But it is not as straightforward a matter as it might seem that a response needs to be made to such a request, and what that response should be. We consider that it is through a tacit analysis based on BIC that NNS3 recognized that it would leave an unfilled slot to not provide an assessment, and recognizing this, she filled the slot with an account for not providing one (line 2: “I never eat”). Moreover, unlike other possible accounts for not complying such as “I don’t know” or “I can’t say,” her account is fitted to NS3’s request by directly claiming a lack of experience

3.2.2. NNS provides an account of her limited experience before providing an assessment

Examples 4a and 4b are from the interaction between NNS3 and NS3 from which Example 3 (avocado) was taken. In an earlier part of their interaction, NS3 asks “have you found a restaurant (0.2) in Albany that you like (0.2) that serves ↑healthy food?” Again, a precondition for identifying restaurants that NNS3 likes that serve healthy food is that NNS3 has eaten at a variety of such restaurants in the local area, and again, it turns out that this is a faulty assumption. But unlike Example 3 in which the precondition for assessing avocados is unmet, in this case it is a matter of degree. NNS3’s response is therefore more extended and complex. The first part of her response, in Example 4a, is a narrative that implicates and accounts for her not having much experience dining at area restaurants. The second part, in Example 4b, then provides the requested assessment, but now qualified by the limited experience on which it is based.

We should note that we consider it unknowable whether NNS3 produced her narrative in Example 4a as a necessary preliminary to contextualizing, then providing, the requested assessment. Or whether NNS3 initially produced the narrative as an account for not providing the requested assessment at all, as in Example 3, but then opted to go ahead and provide one instead of ending her response with that account.

In Example 4a, NNS3 responds to the faulty assumption in NS3’s question (lines 1–2) of whether she has found a restaurant she likes that serve healthy food by establishing that she has, and why she has, little experience eating in area restaurants.

Example 4a, *restaurant*: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 1 NS3: ... Um:, (0.2) have you found a restaurant (0.2) in Albany that
- 2 you like (0.2) that serves ↑healthy food?
- 3 (1.5)
- 4 NNS3: Um::: (1.2) I’m a Korean, so I usually: eat rice? and veg- many
- 5 vegetables?=
6 NS3: =When you cook (it/at)- =
7 NNS3: =Yeah:::
8 NS3: mm hm
9 NNS3: So::: (0.7) to me, s- uh: when I first came in here, ·hh when I
10 <eat some::> (0.2) when I ate some bagels?
11 (1.2)
12 NNS3: ·hhBa(h)gels (though/so) (1.0) ah, give me a pressure h-h-
13 [to eat [because there is so many=
14 NS3: [hh [h-h-
15 NNS3: =cream cheese in [(there)
16 NS3: [I know:::, the <cream chee[:::se>
17 NNS3: [Yē:::s (.) Now I
18 can (.) eat but- at that time? (0.2) at that point I can’t, I couldn’t
19 ea::t (0.5) cuz it’s- a little bit burden, it was a little burden (0.2)
20 to ea::t?

In this instance, NNS3 is asked to assess area restaurants in terms of whether it/they serve food she likes that is healthy. As noted in discussing Example 3, making such an assessment presupposes having the experience needed to do so. Through BIC, the response that would expectably be linked to NS3's question (lines 1–2) of whether NNS3 had found a restaurant she liked is either “yes” plus the identification of the restaurant(s) she liked, or “no.” But responding with “no” would be ambiguous as to whether she had not found any in her sampling of restaurants that served healthy food she liked, or whether she had not sampled any. As in Example 3, it seems from her immediate response to NS3's question that NNS3 has not had the experience dining at area restaurants she would need to provide an assessment, and so she instead provides an account. But in this case, the account for not having experience dining in area restaurants is protracted. She explains that she “usually” eats rice and vegetables, implying that she generally eats food she prepares at home, and that when she departed from this when she “first came in here” (line 9) by eating bagels and cream cheese, she did not enjoy it, it created digestive discomfort. Based on its link to NS3's question, NNS3's narrative of a bad experience eating at a “restaurant” early on implicates that she was discouraged from going to restaurants and so cannot say that there were any that served food she liked that was healthy.⁵

As noted, NNS3's narrative in Example 4a could have accounted for not providing the requested assessment at all, but NNS3 goes on to provide one. Based on BIC, she evidently recognized that her narrative could have ended the matter, so that she needed to somehow index that there was more to it, that she was continuing on to provide the requested assessment. She did this with a linking connective (line 33: “A:::nd), and going on to indicate that her narrative was not the end of the story, that she had made a second visit to the city's commercial district (line 33: “I went to um: (1.2) Albany downtown? second time?”). She then identifies two restaurants she sampled then, what they were, and whether she found the food to be healthy.

Example 4b, *restaurant*: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 33 NNS3: A:::nd (.) I- I went to um: (1.2) Albany downtown? second time?
34 A:::nd I ate some Thailand food?
35 NS3: ↑Mm hm
36 NNS3: And Mexican food?
37 (1.2)
38 NNS3: A' -Yeah:: that's all. ((laughs in a demure way)) But- (0.2) I
39 thi::nk (0.2) Thailand food? was (1.0) best healthy::
40 NS3: mmhm [mmhm
41 NNS3: [I think (0.2) in he::re (1.2) 'cause (0.2) in Mexican
42 foo::d? (0.7) I: (.) order some (0.5) um (0.2) I order some, (0.2)
43 how can I say? (1.0) um:: (0.7) What is- (0.7) >°Mexican food?°<
44 NS3: Ah::, like taco::s, [burrito::s
45 NNS3: [yeah, tac- yeah:: (0.2) burrito?
46 NS3: >mmhm<
47 NNS3: A:nd (0.2) that was (0.2) a >little bit salty?<
48 NS3: Yeah:: [I know::
49 NNS3: [So I fe::lt that, “aw:: (0.2) it's too salty to ea:t” ((a little
50 singsong quality))

⁵ Many Americans would not include under the heading of “restaurant” a business that only sells bagels and toppings such as cream cheese, making it seem that NNS3 misunderstood the question. But not necessarily. She may categorize as a “restaurant” any establishment that sells prepared food instead of food one cooks at home, or she may have had the bagel and cream cheese at a diner (a restaurant). Regardless, that NNS3 goes on in Example 4b to report her limited experience at what are unambiguously “restaurants” indicates that she understood the question and also its assumption that she had the knowledge and experience needed to answer it.

By reporting that there was a second occasion when she had gone downtown and eaten in restaurants, NNS3 creates a link to NS3's non-contiguous question about whether she had found a restaurant she likes that serves healthy food, and a slot in which to respond to it. She then specifies that on that occasion she ate in a Thai restaurant and a Mexican restaurant (lines 33–36) and goes on to assess the food at the Thai restaurant as “best healthy” (line 39), and the food at the Mexican restaurant as “too salty to ea:t” (line 49).

It makes a difference that the assessments NNS3 provided in response to NS3's request were not given right away, that they were preceded by her narrative about her experience with eating bagels and cream cheese. If the assessments had been made right away, they would presuppose that she had enough prior experience to make them, probably more experience than she actually had. Her narrative about her experience eating bagels and cheese, and then identifying eating at these two restaurants as her “second” and presumably only other relevant experience, cancels that presupposition.

4. Remediating understanding and production troubles

4.1. NNS attends to anticipated troubles of a word choice

We observed instances in which NNS checked NS's understanding of an L3 word she used (Example 5), or initiated self-correction of an L2 lexical item she used (Example 6). In both cases, her check for understanding, or edit, of the word, was consequential for the linkage it achieved to what followed in the interaction (Example 5), or what could follow (Example 6). This also exhibits what Kecskes (2013) terms a “not sure” approach in that NNSs exhibit uncertainty or caution about their ability to communicate what they want.⁶

4.1.1. NNS makes sure NS understands a word before going on

Later in the conversation between NNS4 (a Thai woman) and NS4 (an American woman), they turned to the topic of a healthy diet, and NS4 asked whether NNS4 eats healthy food. NNS4's answer is that she does not, that she loves junk food. NS4 responds by offering a dictum that would excuse eating junk food (line 2: “you can eat junk food if you exercise”).

Example 5, “*au pair*”: NNS4 (Thai woman)-NS4 (American woman), mov 005-12

- 1 NS4: Well, if you: (.) exercise, it doesn't matter (.) if you::
2 (.) you can eat junk food if you exercise.
3 (0.7)
4 NNS4: Ah:: I'm au pair, do you know::? down here, (all [])
5 NS4: [Yeah,] I
6 know [au pair
7 NNS4: [Yeah. (0.2) I have five kid. [This mean I play wit dem:
8 NS4: [Oh my goodness
9 (0.5)
10 NNS4: all day:

Our interest here is in the check NNS4 makes of NS4's understanding of “*au pair*” (line 4: “I'm au pair, do you know:?”). She may not have taken it for granted that NS4 would know the term, based on knowledge that “*au pair*” is an imported term, and that it refers to a specialized role. But the question is what led NNS4 to introduce the term at all, as well as check on its being understood, just then. We note that the substance of NNS4's response in lines 4–10 to NS4's dictum that “you can eat junk food if you exercise” (lines 1–2) is that she does exercise, and therefore has a license to eat junk food. However, it turns out that her exercise is not through such conventional means as a fitness regimen. Rather her exercise

⁶ Mauranen (2006) makes a similar point about NNSs in ELF situations.

comes from playing with five children all day, as an au pair. But this prevents making a link to NS4's dictum in a direct response, the groundwork for it has to be laid—similar to NS2 having laid groundwork in Example 2 to link NS2's question about whether NNS2's wife had a job to the response that she did not have time to cook. NNS4 evidently considered, based on a tacit analysis through BIC, that the link between NS4's dictum about getting exercise and NNS4's report that she plays with children all day rests on her job as an au pair. First, it creates a link between NS4's dictum and what she will go on to say to start her response by naming her occupation—one that involves caring for young children, therefore being active, in contrast to working in an office or being a student. Second, if she had not first identified herself as an au pair before reporting that she “have five kid” and plays with them all day, it would not be clear that this occurs regularly, whereas as an au pair it is obligatory that it do so and is therefore a constant source of exercise.

4.1.2. NNS recognizes a word may not have the intended referent for NS and replaces it

NS4 (an American woman) starts the interaction on their assigned topic of what people can do to stay healthy by asking NNS4 (a Thai woman) what she does to stay healthy, and then after a pause, replaces that with the question of whether NNS4 likes sports. NNS4 initially says she loves “football” and then immediately replaces “football” with the local term, “soccer.”

Example 6, “soccer”: NNS4 (Thai woman)-NS4 (American woman), mov 005-12

- 1 NS4: So:: (1.2) the question, is *what* do you do: to stay healthy? in alb-
- 2 in the Albany area? Like- (0.7) So do you like sports?
- 3 NNS4: °I love sports.°
- 4 NS4: What sports do you love?
- 5 NNS4: I love football: (0.5) op- in here we call soccer.
- 6 NS4: ↑Oh okay.

What we find noteworthy is that NNS4 made this lexical self-correction at all. We cannot attribute this to her being unsure of the “right” word, in that she clearly knows both words, and has opted to replace one with the other. Hence, we have to consider that she regarded it as consequential which word she used. It is a matter of speculation what consequence she sought to avoid or bring about, but for our purposes, what matters is that a consequence for what follows occurred to her that had to arise from her tacit analysis of the word she used and what response NS4 might make. She may have been motivated to replace the word simply to give NS4 an accurate identification of what sport she “loved,” but even that has a consequence for the talk that might follow. The word “football” creates a link to further talk about the game of American “football” and what NNS4 “loved” about it, talk that NNS4 may have been unwilling or unable to engage in. NNS4 preempted that further talk interactionally, by replacing “football” with “soccer.” She also created a link to further talk about the game of soccer, which she “loved.”

4.2. NNS attends to currently emerging troubles in searching for a word

Much attention has been given to word searches in NNS–NS interactions (e.g. Brouwer, 2003; Hosoda, 2006; Kurhila, 2006), including attention to practices of displaying uncertainty with the use of rising inflection or even overtly asking NS for help (e.g. Brouwer, 2003; Koshik and Seo, 2012). Our focus is on the role of BIC in motivating a word search.

Example 7 is from the same interaction as Example 1 (walks far) between NNS1 (a Korean woman) and NS 1 (an American man). In Example 7, NNS1 is continuing an effort already underway to comply with NS1's request that she should teach him “how to make a simple Korean dish.” NNS1 had previously retracted a word in her instructions as being wrong, and NS1's response was to tease her about her competence to prepare such food (“Are you really Korean?”). After some byplay following this tease during which NNS1 disclaims that “usually I don't cook,” she starts again in Example 7.⁷

⁷ It is noteworthy that in line 1 of Example 7, NNS1 marks the end of that byplay and the resumption of her effort to give instruction with the discourse marker “Anyway.” We regard this as direct evidence of her tacit analysis through BIC of the interconnections among her successive utterances, and boundaries between interactional segments.

Example 7, *cooking lesson*: NNS1 (Korean woman)-NS1 (American man), mov 007-12

- 1 NNS1: Anyway. (0.7) ↑First of all, you need- (0.7) fry? (0.2) I- (.)
2 No fry. ·hh
3 (0.5)
4 NNS1: eh
5 (0.5)
6 NNS1: Put some oil?
7 NS1: Hm mm?
8 NNS1: (to) kim chi? An:d, (0.2) how can you say?
9 NS1: In the in the pot?
10 NNS1: In the pot.
11 NS1: So put oil, and then: [(0.2) the kim chi], it's like-
12 NNS1: [(in the kim chi)]
13 NS1: ((makes sizzling sound, fingers fluttering over an invisible
14 surface))
15 NNS1: Yeah right right. [(How can)
16 NS1: [like fry? sort['ve
17 NNS1: [Fry? Fry? [(C'n) I say fry?
18 NS1: [Yeah
19 NS1: I think so.
20 NNS1: Okay, fry.

Our interest here is NNS1's having used the word "fry" as she resumes her instruction, and then having immediately displayed uncertainty about it (lines 1–2), articulating it with a rising intonation, then retracted it. NNS1 goes on to launch, and enlist NS1's help with, a search for the "right" L2 word, which turns out to be "fry" after all. The question is what led NNS1 to retract the word in the first place, and embark on a word search to fill that slot. As was the case for Example 6, we cannot know with certainty what led to that, but it suggests an answer that when she previously made a lexical error in giving these instructions, NS1 responded by teasing her about it. Hence, perhaps now having been reminded, or having just learned, of the interactional linkage, based on BIC, between lexical errors and being subject to being teased and her competence being questioned (at least by NS1), it creates less risk of that happening again to retract the word "fry" in lines 1–2 and seek NS1's help to find the "right" word.

4.3. *NNS detects troubles after they occur*

Where we see that BIC gives non-native speakers a basis for anticipating troubles before the fact and attending to troubles as they emerge, we also see that BIC gives NNSs a basis for identifying possible troubles after the fact. In Example 8, NNS5 (a Chinese woman) detected that she, herself, had a possible understanding trouble. In that case, she used an understanding check to create a slot for NS5 to affirm and remedy the trouble. In Example 9, NNS1 (a Korean woman) detected that NS1 had a possible understanding trouble and undertook to remedy it.⁸

4.3.1. *NNS detects a trouble in her own understanding of NS' L2 word*

In an interaction between NNS5 (Chinese woman) and NS5 (American woman), NNS5 says that to make life healthier "we can (0.5) do some (.) exerci:se." She adds shortly afterward that if she does not exercise and stays home too much

⁸ In these two examples, there is a progression from "error-finding" to "repair" that resembles what has been referred to as "scaffolding" in the sociocultural theory (e.g., Wood et al., 1976; Donato, 1994; Lantolf, 2000). But the "scaffolding" found in learning activities is generally led by an expert/teacher, or interactively engaged in by peers. Here the progression is launched and led by the novice (NNS) whose competence to do this is of central interest in our study.

she gets a headache. NS5 refers back to this a minute or two later, in Example 9, asking for confirmation that NNS5 gets a headache from being “cooped up too much.” NNS5 answers this on the basis of an evident mishearing of NS5’s question as being about *cooking* too much.

Example 8, “*cooped up*”: NNS5 (Chinese woman)-NS5 (American woman), mov 001-12;

- 1 NS5: Would you- do you get a headache from being, (0.5) eh, cooped up
- 2 too much?
- 3 (0.5)
- 4 NNS5: Yeah:: ss::: (0.5) I cooked (0.5) (evr thing). Is that what you mean,
(0.2) cooked?
- 5 NS5: Oh no, I said cooped up.
- 6 NNS5: Ah, coo[ped].
- 7 NS5: [Coo::ped up.
- 8 NNS5: Ah.
- 9 NS5: I mean, like eh, do you know, with
- 10 (1.2)
- 11 NNS5: [Ah- ah-
- 12 NS5: [Cooped. Like eh::m, (0.5) kept in a small area.
- 13 NNS5: A::h::, Yah!

What is noteworthy here is that immediately after responding to the question she understood she had been asked, NNS5 checks whether she got it right that NS5 had asked about cooking. While it is a linguistic matter that NNS5 mistook “cooped” for “cooked,” presumably because she did not know the L2 word “cooped,” what is of interest is the basis of her recognition, without being prompted by NS5, that NS5 may not have said “cooked.” Previously NNS5 had attributed getting headaches to staying home too much, whereas now NNS5 understood NS5 as attributing headaches to cooking, not staying home. But if NS5 had actually asked about cooking, it would have been a breach of the BIC presumption (in the spirit of Grice’s, 1975, Cooperative Principle) that what is said now is linked to what was said before—in this case, what NNS5 had said brought about her headaches (staying home, not cooking too much). Hence, even though NNS5 evidently “heard” NS5 say “cook,” it would have been anomalous if she had actually said that. On that basis, NNS5 could (tacitly) reason through BIC that NS5 may not have attributed headaches to cooking after all, and so she questioned her understanding or hearing of what was said. As it turns out, rightly so. Note also that her query about this launched a brief vocabulary lesson, suggestive of a role that BIC may play in usage-based learning of L2 itself.

4.3.2. NNS detects and remedies troubles in NS’ understanding of NNS’ L2 word

In the same conversation as in Example 1 (walks far) and Example 7 (cooking lesson) NNS1 (a Korean woman) reports that the church she goes to is the “First Presbyterian church.” NS1 (an American man) asks whether another woman whom they evidently both know goes there too, and NNS1 says no, that the friend is Catholic, and that that “iss eh di::fere::nt.” NS1 then asks “What’re you?” and NNS1 replies “I’m a (0.7) Protestahnt” and adds “‘ts a little different?” NS1 replies with the question (Example 8, line 1) “they’re both (0.5) Ca::tholic, right?” and NNS1 answers (Example 8, lines 2–6) by telling NS1 that people who attend a Presbyterian church are distinct from Catholics, and are in fact Protestants.

Example 9, “*Protestahnt*”: NNS1 (Korean woman)-NS1 (American man), mov 007-12

- 1 NS1: Are they both like (0.7) they’re both (0.5) Ca::tholic, right?
- 2 NNS1: Catholic ((places left hand on table)) a::nd (0.5) Presbyterian
- 3 ((places right hand a moderate distance from left)) (0.7) a::nd
- 4 (0.5) Presbyterian bring (.) (e::rican) ((American?)) h- h- We
- 5 call the- (0.5) people hh who go to the Presbyterian church?
- 6 (1.0) Pres- (.) Protestahnt. (0.7) °Protestahnt°
- 7 NS1: Awright, I’ll try to remember that.
- 8 NNS1: Okay::.
- 9 NS1: U[h-
- 10 NNS1: [I- iss English, not Korean.
- 11 NS1: Really?
- 12 NNS1: Yes, it’s English. Protestahnt.

What is of interest here is that in lines 10 and 12 NNS1 seems to be undertaking to remedy an understanding trouble based on her pronunciation of the word “Protestant.” The question is, what led her to consider that there had been a trouble, in that NS1 did not indicate it. NNS1 seems to be responding to NS1’s having said “Awright, I’ll try to remember that” (line 7) following NNS1’s explanation of the distinctions between Catholic, Presbyterian, and Protestant. We consider that saying “I’ll try to remember that” presupposes that something new has been found out. In that case, if NNS1 considered that NS1 (or any native of this culture) should already have known the main distinctions she was making, at least between Protestant and Catholic, then she could reason through a tacit analysis based on BIC that NS1’s response could only be linked to her explanation if he had a wrong understanding. From the remedy she goes on to provide, she seems to have attributed the wrong understanding she inferred to her pronunciation of “Protesant” (“Protestahnt”—/prətɛstənt/ instead of /prətɛstənt/), perhaps something she had been sensitized to in previous interactions. Hence, she offers clarifications in lines 10 (that the word she used was English, not Korean) and line 12 (that it was the English word “Protestahnt”).

4.4. NNS addresses a trouble both before and after it occurs

Examples 10a–10d are segments from the interaction of NNS3 (a Korean woman) and NS3 (an American woman), the same speakers as in Example 3 (avocado), and Example 4, (restaurant). Leading up to Example 10a, NS3 was asking about air pollution in Korea. In line 1 she asks whether NNS3 has to wear a mask. It seems that the answer is “yes,” but not simply “yes” because she does not have to wear a mask all the time. It is only in the spring, as she tries to explain, because of a naturally occurring seasonal phenomenon unique to that region of the world. There is a Korean word for this phenomenon and no corresponding word in English. “Hwangsa” (황사), commonly called “yellow sand,” refers to inhalable particles that originate from China, carried by a seasonal wind, spreading through the atmosphere, covering the sky and slowly descending to the ground in Korea. This example comprises a succession of segments that start with NNS3’s effort to coin a word that will head off an understanding trouble, and when an understanding trouble comes about despite that, NNS3 develops several ways to remedy it, and finally succeeds. It is noteworthy how elaborate this sequence is; we consider that it demonstrates how creative NNSs can be in tacitly analyzing the source of and remedies for a persistent understanding trouble.

4.4.1. NNS addresses the trouble before it occurs

NNS3 responds to NS3’s question of whether she has to wear a mask with “Yeah:” (line 5) but does not stop there. She qualifies that this is not constant, but seasonal, in the spring. But in the absence of an L2 word for the “yellow sand” phenomenon, NNS3 has to coin one. The term she coins is “sand wind.”

Example 10a, “sand wind”: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 1 NS3: Did you wear the mask? ((moving hand back and forth in front
- 2 of mouth))
- 3 (0.5)
- 4 NS3: In Korea? =
- 5 NNS3: =Yeah:: In (0.2) in ↑spring?
- 6 NS3: Hm mm
- 7 NNS3: There is a (0.5) um (0.7) how- how can I ‘spl- ah:: how can I
- 8 say::? (0.5) Send wind? (“sand wind”)
- 9 (1.7) ((NS3 facially displaying mental effort))
- 10 NS3: Uh:::m

We note that NNS3 does not simply go on to produce the coined term “sand wind.” She first makes a display of searching for a word (lines 7–8: “how can I ‘spl- ah:: how can I say::?”). When she does produce “sand wind,” it is linked (through BIC) to the word search, as its solution. NS3 makes several displays of not understanding (a facial display of mental effort, a notable silence before she responds, and then just a vocalized filler, “Uh:::m”) that are evidently recognizable to NNS3 in that she goes on to attempt a remedy. However, the complicating factor is that her pronunciation of “sand” as “send” (/send/) goes undetected.

4.4.2. NNS addresses the trouble after it occurs

Based on BIC, NNS3 undertakes a succession of remedies evidently aimed at getting NS3 to understand the seasonal phenomenon of “yellow sand.” We attribute the first of these to her tacit analysis that the problem is one of hearing, in that she can expect both “sand” and “wind” to be understandable to natives.

Example 10b, “sand wind”: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 10 NS3: Uh::m
11 NNS3: Sen::d (“sand”) (0.2) the wind?
12 NS3: ((nodding)) Yeah::, it would blow around [the pollen?
13 NNS3: [Yes.
14 NNS3: Yeah yeah [yeah (0.2) yeah.
15 NS3: [(from) the trees?
16 NNS3: Ye[ah
17 NS3: [Yeah::
18 NS3: Oh, ↑yeah:::

On the premise that the problem is a hearing one, NNS3 attempts to remedy that by repeating “sand wind” in a slowed down and slightly more expanded form (line 11: “Sen::d (“sand”) (0.2) the wind?”). NNS3’s remedy meets with partial success, in that NS3 responds with a display of understanding that “wind” is the matter in line 12: “Yeah::, it would blow around the pollen?”), but at the same time she disregards the word “sand.” Upon hearing NS3’s display of understanding (“it would blow around”) and in overlap of “the pollen”, NNS3 enthusiastically endorses NS3’s response.

NNS3 then attempts to build on NS3’s recognition that the matter involves wind, by linking more information to that recognition. She undertakes to narrow her reference, from wind in general to a particular wind phenomenon.

Example 10c, “sand wind”: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 19 NNS3: Ah, the:: (0.7) the wind came from China?
20 (0.7)
21 NNS3: Do you know that wind?
22 (0.2)
23 NS3: ↑No::.

NNS3 localizes the wind phenomenon as (line 19) a particular wind that comes from China, perhaps having reasoned through BIC that if NS3 understands that she is referring to a particular wind phenomenon, she can link to that an explanation of what is special about that particular wind phenomenon. When NS3 gives no indication of understanding the referent of “the wind came from China?” (line 19), NNS3 does an understanding check, “Do you know that wind?” (line 21). When the answer is “no,” NNS3 abandons this approach and undertakes a third remedy.

NNS3’s third remedy is to revert to her original approach of building her explanation on the coined term “sand wind,” and so she undertakes to get NS3 to recognize the other word, “sand,” she has been using.

Example 10d, “sand wind”: NNS3 (Korean woman)-NS3 (American woman), mov 002-11

- 24 NNS3: The the:: (0.7) the- many send? ((= “sand”))
25 NS3: (0.5) ((flashes little smile))
26 NNS3: Sen:d in a: (0.5) desert?
27 NS3: Oh, (.) sa:nd.
28 NNS3: Yeah, [sand ((shifts pronunciation to match NS3’s))
29 NS3: [Oh:::, [god, yeah
30 NNS3: [in deser::t. We’ve had- (0.2) wi:nd (0.2) go to-
31 uh lan- (0.5) come- (0.2) over to Korea: also. (0.5) So in
32 spri:ng, it’s very difficult to (0.5) little bit difficult to (0.7)
33 ·hhh um:: (0.5) have a contact lenses?

NNS3 first tries directing NS3’s attention to sand as a topic, possibly implicating sand particles through quantifying it as “many sand,” (line 24: “The the:: (0.7) the- many send?”). NNS3 evidently detected from NS3’s response (line 5: silence, flashing a smile) that she has again not understood. But apparently expecting that the L2 word “sand” is known to NSs, NNS3 tried again by tying the word “sand” to what she might reasonably presume is also a known referent, “desert” (line

26: “Sen:d in a: (0.5) *de:zert?*”). And this remedy succeeds (line 27 “Oh, (.) *sa:nd.*”). This clears the way for NNS3 to now explain (lines 30–33) that this wind from China, from the desert (where there is sand) makes it hard to wear contact lenses (and presumably creates a need to wear a mask in Korea that NS3 asked about).

5. Conclusion

Our study has shown that the success of NNSs in interacting with NSs depends on something in addition to, and more basic than, their repertoire of socio-culturally appropriate practices and techniques (AIC, or L2 interactional competence). It also depends on their having a knowledge of how interactions per se work (BIC) that is the basis for tacitly analyzing and contributing to the coherence of current talk *in situ*. We consider that BIC is the foundation for the formation of the culture-specific procedures and practices of interaction in one's native culture and those of other cultures one may move into. It is the basis for the development of the more specific and diverse repertoire of socio-culturally appropriate procedures and practices that learners acquire (AIC), as they become more proficient in a language. But at the same time greater proficiency in a language enables more subtle and complex tacit analyses of linkages among utterances/actions based on BIC, through which speakers make situational adaptations in the moment of routinized procedures and practices. We see this in our examples, in the ways NNSs responded to questions, self-edited word choices, and detected and undertook to remedy understanding troubles. Hence, even though analytically, BIC plays a more visible role in interactions between speakers who are less proficient in L2, and/or lingua franca speakers without a common culture, we have shown the essential, though more subtle, role it plays in the interactions of more proficient speakers.

Our data are samples of active ways in which NNSs participate in making their interactions with NSs work that we attribute to their tacit analyses of the “fit” (or “misfit”) between a succession of utterances/actions based on BIC (what was said before, what is anticipated to be said or sayable next). Such tacit analyses provide ways for NNSs to infer and respond to the purpose of a question, through taking into account its “fit” with prior talk (as in Examples 1, “walks far,” and 2, “wife's occupation”). It also provides ways for NNSs to counter assumptions in questions while still fitting their responses to them (as in Examples 3, “avocado,” and 4, “restaurant”). These analyses also serve to reveal whether such techniques as repair or understanding checks are warranted just then (as in Example 5, “au pair,” 6, “soccer,” 7, “Fry,” 8, “cooped” and 9, “Protestahnt”). And they provide a basis for reworking and improving on means of achieving understandings (as in Examples 10a–10d, “sand wind”).

Such knowledge certainly pertains to and must be drawn on in NNS–NNS interactions in a lingua franca, especially when they are natives of different languages and cultures, as well as the NNS–NS interactions our study examines. That NNSs enter into language learning and L2 use with BIC as a resource warrants greater pedagogical recognition, appreciation, and attention to—and more investigation of and theorizing about—the diverse ways NNSs already have, and sometimes may improve, for understanding, anticipating, and coping with interactional demands before and during the learning that results in AIC.

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